Resolution on Chancellors’ Student Evaluation of Teaching Awards

The Chancellor has proposed a program whereby Student Evaluations of Teachers (SET) will be used to make monetary awards to the 3 percent of instructors who receive the highest scores on a twenty-item questionnaire. According to the current plan, five questions will be collected from each system school’s faculty senate, student advisory committee and administration and will be combined with five questions posed by the system office. Participation by individual faculty in the award program will be voluntary. Instructors of record will be eligible only if the class size is fifteen or greater.

While we applaud and support the Chancellor’s desire to identify and reward exceptional instruction, the proposal for using a single twenty-question questionnaire to evaluate teaching excellence does not acknowledge the established literature on scholarship and learning. Consequently, we believe the proposed mechanism is seriously flawed and could actually harm the quality of instruction at TAMU. Therefore, in the spirit of cooperation and to foster our mutual goal to enhance the teaching mission at TAMU, we offer the following resolution:

WHEREAS, Numerous studies have shown that well-constructed student evaluation can provide information to serve as one component for evaluating teaching effectiveness when combined with other measures; and

WHEREAS, All teaching should be valued, courses meeting for fewer than three hours per week should not be disqualified; and

WHEREAS, Effective teaching evaluation must also include assessment of actual student learning for validation and credibility; and

WHEREAS, The proposed system, while identifying some deserving instructors, will miss others, especially those who teach small sections e.g. honors and graduate classes who will not be eligible even though small classes are generally considered optimal for learning; and

WHEREAS, Many studies have shown (1) that quantitative scores of faculty performance vary significantly among academic disciplines, (2) that graduates and undergraduates may score faculty very differently, and (3) that class size and course content influence student perceptions concerning teaching as well as learning, and the proposed plan does not address these influences; and

WHEREAS, Awards based solely on questionnaire total scores will undermine the value of other recognized teaching awards, such as the Association of Former Students Awards that, in addition to SET scores, take into account information from former students, peers, and other methods of assessing effective teaching; and

WHEREAS, TAMU already administers SET questionnaires designed to provide feedback to instructors for self-improvement via written student comments, as well as to
provide one measure of teaching effectiveness for use in salary, tenure, and promotion
decisions; and

WHEREAS, TAMU provides feedback of historic grade distributions for students to use
in choosing among classes or among instructors in multiple section classes; and

WHEREAS, Students, in general, express dismay at the concept of another SET
questionnaire, and many fill them in without due deliberation; and

WHEREAS, The perception persists that questionnaire-based SETs are popularity
contests that can be manipulated by lenient course requirements and easy grading; and

WHEREAS, The possibility of awards of unearned grades, prompted by an attempt to
improve SET scores, could cause grade inflation and diminish the value of a degree from
TAMU; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Teaching Excellence and other learning assessment experts
on campus are available for designing a valid SET process; and

WHEREAS, Alternative expenditures of the funds required to administer another SET
could produce greater impact on improving the quality of teaching at TAMU;

THEREFORE, be it RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate of Texas A&M University,
while in total agreement with the goal of financial rewards for those who excel in
teaching, requests the Chancellor to reconsider the proposed plan in favor of a system of
awarding teaching excellence that includes evidence of student learning in order to
provide validity and credibility to the evaluation process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate requests that President Murano
and Provost Vitter, on behalf of Texas A&M University, decline to participate in the
System Teaching Excellence Award Program until such time that the Program truly
assesses teaching and learning in a multidimensional manner based on documented best
practices.