COMMITTEE REPORT – ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

February 7, 2012

To: Michael Benedik, Speaker, Faculty Senate
Executive Committee, Faculty Senate

From: Brian Perkins, Chair, Academic Affairs Committee

Subject: Recommendation on adoption of Student Evaluation Instrument

Background:
On December 5, 2011, the Executive Committee (EC) of the Faculty Senate charged the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) to review alternative student evaluation systems to possibly replace PICA. According to various sources, the PICA system is set for renewal and Provost Watson was interesting in exploring what other options exist. On December 19, 2011, AAC met with the Dean of Faculties (DoF) to discuss the various options under consideration by the administration and the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). The DoF informed AAC that Provost Watson was interested in a standardized instrument that could go beyond simple student satisfaction surveys and also include formative questions on teaching methodology. Two commercial assessment systems were identified as alternatives to PICA – the IDEA Center SRI (Student Ratings of Instruction) and the SIR II Student Instructional Report (Education Testing Services). Both systems use standardized questions that have been written to provide both summative and formative information. Alternatively, a completely re-write of PICA was also considered. This would require development of all new questions for PICA. The DoF also expressed interest in having AAC recommend whether a common evaluation system be used across campus, whether each college/department develop their own tool, or a hybrid model (i.e. core questions for everyone with some customization options). On January 9, 2012, AAC met to discuss all options.

Recommendation:
1. The administration adopt the IDEA Center tool for future student evaluations, under the following conditions:
   a. TAMU be allowed to run a Pilot program with IDEA
   b. That the ability to conduct mid-term evaluations (using formative questions) be verified.
2. Each evaluation must include a subset of standardized questions for ALL courses, regardless of unit, but that additional questions may be added by a college or department.
3. Both summative and formative questions be included on evaluations.

Rationale:
AAC chose the IDEA Center system over SIR II and an upgraded PICA system for a number of reasons. The assessment instrument(s) utilized by IDEA system were developed by academics and the questions are based on several years of assessment research on question design and validation. The standard evaluation forms include both summative and formative questions and are applicable to almost any course format. Extensive analysis has been done to verify the correlation between student ratings and instructor expectations as well as designing questions that match student progress ratings with instructor ratings of importance. Thus, the questions go beyond student opinion ratings and move toward assessment of pedagogy. The IDEA Center system is currently in use by several large research universities (e.g. University of Oklahoma, Kansas State, University of New Mexico, Johns Hopkins
University). The SIR II system, which is offered by Education Testing Services (ETS), utilized primarily summative questions but focused on eight dimensions of instruction. Based on initial cost estimates, SIR II was far more expensive than either IDEA Center or the costs to upgrade PICA. AAC was not enthusiastic about upgrading the PICA system. The cost differential was negligible between PICA and the IDEA Center software. Furthermore, upgrading PICA would also require a thorough review of all questions in the PICA database. Most questions have not been validated to utility and there is negligible research into the quality of most questions currently in use. It was anticipated that a full committee trained in assessment research would still require 6-12 months to draft an adequate assessment instrument. AAC had doubts that any such instrument would be significantly better than the IDEA Center instrument. Finally, the IDEA Center should be compatible with the new version of Blackboard Learn which will be implemented next year. This will provide the option of a direct interface with the Blackboard system and assessments can be accessed directly through the course website. This should improve participation by students.

TAMU wants better discrimination between truly excellent, good, and average instructors. The current PICA system is far too flexible to permit rigorous comparisons between individual faculty members within departments, much less across departments. The current system fails to provide instructors with formative information regarding pedagogy and relies primarily on student opinion. As such, a standardized form using both summative and formative questions will benefit all instructors. Finally, the outcome of any measurement becomes suspect when different instruments are utilized during the assessment. Identification of outstanding instructors across units and across the university requires a standardized tool to assess teaching. It is recognized, however, that certain units may wish to address outcomes specific to their unit and some customization of the instrument should be permitted.