

ATTACHMENT A – ACADEMIC SENATE MINUTES – 3-11-09

Report on Second Pilot Implementation of AS-2178-056/FA, Student Evaluations of Teaching in Online Courses

I&IT Web Development
2009-01-06

Introduction

In the spring of 2006, the Senate recommended that a system for online student evaluations be developed. I&IT Web Development took on the task of developing the system. We carried out a pilot of the new system during Winter, 2007, and submitted a report after that.

Our report was referred to the Faculty Affairs Committee, which came up with additional requirements in Spring, 2008, and asked for a new pilot (called “beta test” in their documents). We attempted to pilot the system in Summer 2008, but the combination of the new requirements, the addition of 5-week summer sessions, and the loss of the programmer who originally wrote the application caused us to overlook some inconsistencies, and the pilot never took place.

We successfully piloted the system in Winter, 2008. This document reports on the results of that pilot and recommends next steps.

Requirements

(Taken from the Faculty Affairs Subcommittee memo to the Academic Senate Executive Committee of April 23, 2008)

Q1: Should the students be permitted to fill out the evaluations repeatedly, with only the last one counting (as a way to ensure that a computer glitch at their end or even ours doesn't cause disenfranchisement), or should they be restricted to only one attempt?

A: Students fill out an evaluation only once, during the final week of instruction. Built into the submission phase is an opportunity to review the submission, and either submits or returns and changes the submission.

Response: This was implemented. We took “the final week of instruction” literally, beginning at midnight before the Sunday of the tenth week, and ending at midnight of the following Saturday, giving seven total days.

Q2: Are the data in item (g) aggregate across all courses, or just on a per-course basis? If the former, should the data be public?

A: The data must be treated in exactly the same way as data collected with hard-copy forms in the live classroom situation. This means that data would be available on a need-to-know basis. That might include a department chair, RTPC chair, discipline coordinator, or whoever a department or similar academic unit deems necessary.

Response: The answer did not address our original question, but the application has always met the specifications it presents.

Q3: Should the data from the pilot be left in the system (hence usable for RTP) or should they be erased before the application goes into production?

A: The pilot data must be deleted, but the faculty members involved in the pilot should be given another opportunity to download their data.

Response: This was implemented. There was no indication ever given to us that this second pilot would not count, and at least some of the participating faculty expect it to count.

Q4: Does an evaluation form originate from the department of the instructor or the department of the course when they differ?

A: Evaluation forms should originate from the department of the course, particularly because lecturers are evaluated separately in all departments for which they teach.

Response: This was implemented, and required a major modification of the application. We regret that it was not clear initially.

Q5: Shall a Department Chair designate the person entrusted with inputting the evaluation form for a department? (We are willing to do data input at least for the beta, but we need to be secure that the forms given us are official.)

A: The department chair shall forward the department approved evaluation form to I&IT that will have the responsibility for data input.

Response: We solicited evaluation forms from the department chairs of the departments which had courses identified for evaluation (see Q6, below), and input them ourselves. We have created a user interface so that departments can enter their own forms, should the Senate decide that relying on I&IT is inappropriate.

Q6: Should use of online evaluations for non-online courses be encouraged, allowed, or prohibited?

A: Prohibited.

David Lord clarified, "The committee discussion identified on-line courses as those presented exclusively on-line, i.e., no face-to-face contact whatsoever. Hybrid courses would not, therefore, qualify for online evaluation. Albeit that PeopleSoft may be inaccurate or

incomplete, it is [correct me if I'm wrong] the single, centralized, source for identifying courses as to mode of instruction.”

Response: The pilot only included courses with Instruction Mode of “online” in PeopleSoft (as listed in BroncoDirect), and we further restricted it to lecture courses, since there were a number of sections of online directed study. Only the instructors of these targeted courses were notified of the pilot.

Q7: When is the earliest date at which the results of evaluations should be available to instructors?

A: Results from evaluations of a specific course should be available only after submission of grades for that course.

Response: We have not yet implemented this, but we have a plan for doing so.

Implementation

The successful pilot occurred during the last week of instruction of Fall, 2008, from November 30 through December 6, inclusive. Twenty-nine sections of 21 courses, taught by 20 instructors, were eligible for evaluation. Five instructors chose to be evaluated in eight sections of six courses. The total enrollment of all eight sections was 435 students, from which 135 evaluations were received, for a return of 31%. The lowest return for a section was 1.7%, and the highest was 62.2%. Two sections had very low returns, possibly indicating that the instructors did not encourage students to evaluate; if they are removed, the overall return increases to 46.8%, comparable with the previous pilot (47.8%) and with returns of paper evaluation forms (48.7% for the eleven quarters preceding the first pilot). Full statistics, including the number of returns for each section, are available, but are not included here because of their confidential nature.

Key pieces of automation were not complete by the time of the pilot, so an amount of manual setup was required. I&IT Web Development will complete these pieces once it is clear that the Senate approves continued use of the application.

Recommendations

1. The Senate should approve the application for continued use beginning no later than Spring 2009, for all online courses identified as such in BroncoDirect.
2. The Senate should re-examine the restriction to online courses. The departments and I&IT spend many tens of thousands of dollars every year administering paper evaluation forms. Even after incentivizing the students through a voluntary opportunity drawing for substantial prizes, there would be large cost savings that could be reallocated in ways that directly affect the quality and quantity of instruction.
3. The Senate should consider that further delays in implementation may negatively impact the ability of I&IT Web Development to complete the application in a timely

fashion, because of unforeseen staff turnover, competition from other projects, and loss of momentum.