

TO: The Faculty Senate  
FROM: John D. Longhill  
Vice Chairman, Teaching Effectiveness Committee  
DATE: February 5, 1985  
SUBJECT: *Opinion* A Dissenting Report on Recommendations for New Student Opinion  
Questionnaires and Procedures

In submitting this dissenting report, I want to make it clear, that I respect the intentions, sincerity, and hard work of the Teaching Effectiveness Committee in developing their recommendations. I have stated my reasons for not agreeing with these recommendations in committee meetings, and accept the fact that, following good democratic procedures, I have been thoroughly outvoted (usually a minority of one) in the committee. Nonetheless, we feel that our views should be aired, since we believe (perhaps erroneously) that there are a number of other Senators and faculty at large who share these views concerning student opinion surveys of faculty. Since I am a member of the TEC as well as being a member of the Senate, perhaps the proper vehicle for airing these views would be in the form of this dissenting report rather than speaking against the TEC's recommendations when, and if, they are considered by the Senate.

The basis for our objections to the TEC's recommendations are, pure and simple, that the majority of the full-time teaching faculty (myself included) do not believe that it is good for higher education to have students participating in a formal manner in the evaluation of faculty. This is not because students are unable to evaluate good or bad teaching (the research is mixed on this, but the bulk of it says they can [e.g., see McKeachie, Academe, 1979]); but because of the inevitable and irritating side effects of such evaluation. These side effects take many forms: gradual grade inflation (see



Remmers, School and Society, 1928); more entertaining rather than substantive class sessions (Naftulin, Ware, and Donnelly, Journal of Medical Education, 1973); reduction in numbers of examinations and graded courses (Machlup, Academe, 1979); and other forms of "mickey mouse" too numerous to recount here. The attached article from The Chronicle of Higher Education illustrates what we mean.

The development of a Student Opinion Survey of Instruction to be used for administrative purposes at ECU did not have its genesis among the faculty. The previous Chancellor mandated the survey and the TEC was given the job of developing an instrument for such an evaluation. The TEC Annual Report of May 8, 1980, listed as an accomplishment during the year, the development " . . . of a questionnaire which can be used by faculty for self improvement of teaching." (underlining added) From the inception, it was the intent of the Senate and the Teaching Effectiveness Committee that any survey of student opinion of faculty be used only for the individual faculty member's self improvement. This position is further documented in the deliberations concerning the change in the TEC's charge that became necessary in 1980 to accommodate the TEC's new task of developing a student-survey instrument. The TEC and the Senate approved a revised charge that contained the following sentences:

As a means of encouraging improved teaching effectiveness, the committee is charged with the responsibility of studying, developing and implementing methods and procedures for the identification of teaching effectiveness through programs such as surveys of student and collegial opinion. The Committee is to assure that the data it gathers for faculty self-improvement is confidential, shared only with the instructor who then may make the data available to the unit head and personnel committee. (underlining added)



The proposed revised charge for the TEC was disapproved by Chancellor Brewer on April 1, 1980, because of the underlined portion above. A new charge was eventually approved by the Senate and the Administration and this charge is the one that the TEC operates under today. This charge does not contain the underlined portion quoted above, but it does contain an added sentence as follows:

The Committee shall assist units requesting aid in developing teaching evaluation instruments for personnel decisions and, when requested, shall assist individual faculty members in improving their teaching effectiveness.

It is to be noted that in the finally approved charge of the TEC above, there are no instructions to develop a campus-wide instrument for a student opinion survey that would be used for administrative purposes. The instrument that was eventually developed by the TEC for the student-opinion survey was designed advisedly for use by faculty in their own self-development efforts. It was not designed to provide any single quick and clean measure of faculty teaching performance to be used for administrative purposes.

The first student opinion survey for administrative purposes was mandated by Chancellor Brewer to take place during November, 1981. The Chancellor's initial letter stated, "Reports will be returned confidentially to individual instructors, with copy to the Unit Head." These instructions for the reports to go directly to unit heads were cancelled when the Chair of the Faculty reminded the Chancellor that the use of student opinions in faculty evaluation was a personnel policy matter and would fall under the provisions of Appendix C of the ECU Code which was being revised at that time.

The revised Appendix C requiring the use of student opinion data in evaluating teaching effectiveness was approved by the Senate at their March 16, 1982, meeting. The proposed code, however, as presented to the



Senate by the Ad Hoc Committee on Appendix C did not contain the provision for requiring the use of student opinion data in evaluating teaching. The text that was presented included the following points concerning evaluation of teaching:

(a) Teaching effectiveness:

The quality of teaching must be evaluated in at least one of the following ways:

- (1) peer evaluations . . . .
- (2) data from surveys of student opinion, . . . .
- (3) procedures provided for in unit codes . . . .

The Senator from Philosophy (Department Chairman at the time) moved the following amendment to (a) above:

The quality of teaching must be evaluated by means of:

- (1) Data from surveys of student opinion . . . .

In addition, the following may be used:

- (1) peer evaluation, . . . .
- (2) procedures provided for in unit codes . . . .

The motion was seconded by the Senator from Medicine (also Department Chairman) and lengthy debate followed. Although not mentioned in the minutes of March 16, the new Chancellor stated that he was in favor of the amendment because he did not want to leave department chairpersons "with nothing to hang their hat on" in performing their difficult task of evaluating teaching effectiveness of faculty. Shortly after the Chancellor's statement, the question was called, and the voice vote was too close to call. A show-of-hands approved the amendment 25 to 18. Eventually the entire Appendix C was approved as amended.

We believe that the events recounted above emphasize the real reasons for the drive that has been gathering steam over the last couple of decades for the use of student opinion in faculty evaluation. This drive most certainly has not come from the full-time teaching faculty. It has come from the



administrative side of the house which feels pressures (legal actions, financial accountability, EEOC regulations, etc., etc.) to grasp at any straw which gives promise of adding more substance, more objectivity, more ease to the very difficult and sensitive task of evaluating teaching effectiveness of the faculty.

We wish at this point to emphasize that we do not wish to raise any flag of faculty vs administration feeling in this matter. We are a firm advocate of collegiality in university governance, and believe that at ECU we are uniquely blessed with administrators who appreciate the faculty position. From the Chancellor on down most of the Administration have been faculty and think like faculty. Yet, we do submit that on some issues, and this is one, there is room for honest differences of opinion. It is entirely understandable that administrators who use data from a student opinion survey and full-time teaching faculty who are affected by the use of the student survey data might have widely divergent views about such surveys. Of course, such honest differences of opinion are the reason why the ECU Code exists, and why the Faculty Senate and its committees exist --- to represent the Faculty's viewpoint, and to help resolve differences between the Administration and the Faculty in the best interests of all parties.

In this particular case, the Teaching Effectiveness Committee, in taking the initiative and recommending that a student opinion instrument, specifically designed for the Administration to use in evaluating faculty, runs counter to previously expressed faculty sentiment in this matter, and could well run counter to the long-term best interests of higher education. The whole idea of using student opinion data in evaluating teaching for administrative purposes at ECU was not, as stated previously, the full-time



teaching faculty's idea in the first place and there has been nothing to indicate that this feeling has changed. If there are problems with the current student opinion instrument in using it for administrative purposes, these are to be expected. The form was not designed for such use. If some unit, however, wants to use it for such, there is ample latitude in the way of blank spaces on the form to develop their own tailor-made instrument.

We have never supported the use of student opinion data in the administrative evaluation of teaching, and do not support the TEC's recommendation for a new instrument to make the acquisition of such data more definitive and certain.