

Informal Sheet on FAQ's Proposal 85-21:

Create a University Teaching-Facilitators Group for Support of Teaching Effectiveness to Resolve Student Concerns

Note: simply put, Proposal 85-21 introduces instructor-to-instructor support to the teaching evaluation process via conversations and clear policies for assessing and addressing student concerns. Currently, no such instructor-to-instructor system exists. The lack of policies to guide how student complaints about teaching effectiveness are moved through our University system of administrative offices leaves students, instructors and administrators to improvise based upon as little information as one complaint. 85-21 suggests that after repeated, substantiated complaints, or precipitous drops in Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Survey (our current form) mean scores, instructors will be asked to create a formal improvement plan, monitored by their supervisor. Most instructors will course correct before reaching a point of crisis requiring a formal, supervisory improvement plan.

Origins

- All members of the Senate Executive Committee, including the AIPC Chair, were invited to join efforts to address questions regarding complaints about teaching effectiveness on Feb. 24, 2021 as Proposal 43-21 came near to completion. Carlos Amador, Anne Beffel, Robert Hutchinson, and Sam Sweitz volunteered our time and we began working on what has become Proposal 85-21. We asked for a special Senate Executive Meeting on March 24 to begin introducing our proposed ideas. We have made ourselves available to the AIPC to answer questions as we updated and developed the proposal. We made an informal presentation on April 7 at the Senate meeting, and held a campus wide forum on April 14 that was well attended with representatives from faculty, staff, administration and student government.
- This proposal arose in response to near completion of 43-21, which is tightly focused on responses to harassing comments made on the current Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Survey at end of term. 43-21 does not address the questions of focus in 85-21, such as instructor-to-instructor support, and creation of a faculty controlled space of inquiry about teaching effectiveness.

Faculty Autonomy Remains High with 85-21 while Encouraging Community

- Instructors of Concern (IC) are guaranteed to learn of complaints about their teaching in a timely manner.
- Instructors of Concern choose from among up to 6 Teaching Facilitators (TF) assigned by lottery.
- Only the University Teaching Facilitator and the Instructor of Concern learns the Instructor of Concern's name (unless policy violation such as harassment or repeated RCT complaints, or drops in mean scores on the TEES).
- Teaching Facilitators are not charged with telling instructors how to teach; nor do they evaluate the instructor's teaching; nor will they determine the content of improvement plans.

- Teaching Facilitators do lend a pair of faculty eyes and ears to the process, with whom the Instructor of Concern may choose to actively engage in conversations or work as a silent observer.
- Teaching Facilitators provide Instructors with a list of offices on campus where resources may be found (Center for Teaching and Learning, Title IX/Institutional Equity, Ombud, Center for Diversity and Inclusion, etc.) but are not told how to teach unless they specifically ask the Teaching Facilitator to provide advice.

Feared Risks to Instructors Addressed

- Some fear instructors targeted with harassing complaints will be exposed
 - Instructors start and or stop process of working with Title IX/Institutional Equity or other offices; instructors choose anonymity or to self-identify
- Some fear Teaching Facilitators will judge, evaluate, advise the instructor on how to teach
 - TFs' charge is to point to resources
 - TFs have no authority over disciplinary activities
 - TF's will be hands on or hands off regarding changes to pedagogy. Instructor of Concern decides.

Is 85-21 More Punitive Than the Status Quo?

- Instructors have three opportunities to address written complaints before their supervisor is looped in to create an improvement plan, though they are free to consult with their supervisor at any time.
- An Improvement Plan is drawn up after 3 semesters of substantiated complaints within a period of 6 active teaching semesters. At that stage there is involvement by the supervisor. Currently, the improvement plan drawn up by a supervisor may happen after a single complaint, or a single drop in Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys below 3.2 as per the established routine of the provost.
- Unsubstantiated complaints that are rooted in bias or discrimination will be flagged with assistance from Title IX/Institutional Equity and completely dismissed. Instructors who receive low scores during the same semester as unsubstantiated complaints will have a letter of dismissal of concurrent, unsubstantiated complaints to refer to should they be questioned regarding low mean scores on the Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys.
- The Resolve Teaching Concerns system adds another dimension to the evaluation of teaching that will mitigate the biases found in tools we currently use. No tool is free of bias. The best strategy is to use a number of different tools, and to observe behaviors over time. 85-21 creates a faculty run space and system, with clear policies, multiple tools for evaluation, and support resources available to the instructor, who may or may not choose to use them.
- 3.2 Rule: currently when the mean score on the existing Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Survey falls below 3.2, the provost is contacted. She contacts the instructor and/or their supervisor and an improvement plan is put in place. 85-21 makes the following change: instead of the provost being contacted after the first drop in scores, the University Teaching Facilitator will flag two such declines in scores and will inform the Instructor of Concern and the assigned Teaching Facilitators, as well as the supervisor. This process adds pairs of faculty eyes and ears to the process as a neutral third party, and de-escalates a first fall in scores while observing policy rooted in inquiry and improvement.

Where is the Pro-Active Educational Piece for Students and Instructors?

- New syllabus language will help students discern differences between ineffective teaching and misconduct.
- References to University policies will help students understand the mission of the various administrative offices and their values and charges. In short, 85-21 encourages students to begin a process of orienting themselves to the professional landscape for administering, transforming and resolving conflicts.
- Already, the positive effects of 85-21 have begun, as we have spoken to administrators, students, and instructors about the policy and synthesize various needs into a policy that clarifies our inter-related efforts throughout campus.
- The Teaching Facilitator Group is designed to create a space for improvement without immediate punishment. Conversations between students and the University Teaching Facilitator, or other appropriate offices, will support students in their roles as community members voicing concerns and complaints to those who can assist them in making things better.
- Education on how to communicate complaints about teaching is needed. The creation of the Teaching Facilitator Group provides people and resources for developing those educational tools.

Added Bureaucracy

- Some Fear Added Complexity for Reporting and No Real Gain
 - Currently zero policies exist, which instructors can rely upon to navigate any number of offices where student complaints may land regarding teaching effectiveness.
 - Lack of policies makes things uncertain, difficult and overly complex for instructors to navigate if the administrator/supervisor and instructor have different points of view.
 - Some may not be familiar with the current unwritten process whereby all instructors are flagged at the first instance that they receive a 3.2 or less on their TEES. This certainly adds a lot of complexity for the instructor of concern, and not always for real gains in classroom instruction. Under the status quo, all instructors who receive a 3.2 or lower must write an action plan of change to the provost and their supervisor. This assumes that there are no mitigating factors. Our proposal understands that not every drop in TEES mean score immediately necessitates such action plans or changes.

Students – What Are Risks and Benefits to Students?

- If Students Must Identify Self to the University Teaching Facilitator, Will they Make Complaints? Students can still make anonymous complaints on the Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys
 - Using the proposed Resolve Teaching Concerns system, students are identified to only one faculty member, the University Teaching Facilitator (coordinator of the Teaching Facilitator group) whom they can trust not to expose their identity to other administrators or instructors (provided they have not broken University policy).

- This small burden of accountability creates a system that won't turn into an anonymous trolling opportunity.
- Comments on the Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys are not revealed to supervisors or other administrators without the permission of the Instructor of Concern, with the exception of Graduate Teaching Assistants as per the current policies.