

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 85-21

(Voting Units: Academic)

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

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I. Introduction

This proposal seeks to create more effective means for resolving student concerns about teaching effectiveness, while simultaneously addressing potential misuse of Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys (TEES). It ensures instructors and administrators avoid potential 'dead ending' of student comments and supports instructors, by way of instructor-to-instructor conversations with the proposed University Teaching-Facilitator and Teaching-Facilitators Group, to address struggles with teaching effectiveness, and/or spurious student complaints rooted in bias, discrimination, harassment, or threatening language. Instructors are defined for purposes of this policy as anyone who receives teaching evaluation: instructors at ranks including tenured, tenure track, non-tenure track and graduate teaching assistants. This policy preserves academic freedom by creating a pathway for complaints about teaching effectiveness that will not be conflated with instructor misconduct.

In summary, this policy mitigates three separate but related problems: 1) the dead-ending of student written complaints about instructor teaching effectiveness; 2) the negative impacts of harassing, threatening or biased comments targeted at instructors using survey instruments, which are empirically [linked to bias](#) (c.f. Senate Policy 504.1); and 3) the conflation between the delivery of challenging curricula and instructor misconduct, which threatens academic freedom.

II. Rationale

Two broad categories of student concern exist:

- Teaching
- Conduct of Instructors

Differentiation between these two categories when reporting concerns will:

- Increase teaching effectiveness
- Address misconduct
- Preserve academic freedom

Failure to differentiate between ineffective teaching and misconduct can conflate an instructor's presentation of challenging course material with misconduct. The line between these two categories can appear blurred, however, the University Teaching-Facilitator, who plays a key role in this proposed policy, is positioned to recognize [IE/Title IX](#) violations and discrimination and refer complaints to the Office of Institutional Equity (IE/Title IX).

Teaching Effectiveness, The Status Quo: Multiple Non-Survey Instruments for Evaluation of Teaching Are Employed

Currently there exist many tools for the annual review of evaluation of teaching. Senate [Proposal 41-19](#) specifies that *"The appropriate academic administrator will list on the Senate website their evaluation instruments and processes (peer evaluation form, self-evaluation forms, etc.) in sufficient detail for new instructor to understand the basis on which their teaching is being evaluated, and the percentage weight given to each*

instrument.” The wide variety of [evaluation methods used by each department to review instructor teaching effectiveness](#) is listed on the Senate Website. These methods constitute at least 50% of the overall evaluation of teaching effectiveness. Currently, in the event an instructor’s mean score on the TEES falls below 3.2, the Provost contacts the instructor and their supervisor to address the concern.

MTU’s Existing Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys (TEES)

TEES are administered by the Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning as dictated by [Senate Procedure 504.1.1](#) and [Faculty Handbook Policy 3.2.13](#). The surveys were initially created as a tool for instructor to use for improvement of teaching. The numerical student ratings on the TEES are provided to supervisors. Students’ written comments are released exclusively to instructors unless the instructor opts to release comments to their supervisor. Many students understandably assume both their written comments and numerical ratings and will be read by supervisors.

III. Proposal to Create a System for Improving Teaching Effectiveness

Complaints Regarding Teaching Effectiveness

It is proposed the University Senate require clarifying language on syllabi to inform students of pathways for communicating their concerns regarding instructor teaching. Students may communicate concerns using the existing Teaching Evaluation Effectiveness Survey (TEES) for general comments or the newly proposed Resolve a Concern: Teaching (RCT) form for more substantive complaints. RCT form comments will be directed to the University Teaching-Facilitator and processed as described below. Students may also contact the University Teaching-Facilitator directly (via an email address provided in the syllabus), or any number of support offices, where administrators

will direct them to use the RCT or to contact the University Teaching Facilitator to begin the complaint process.

Creation of a University Teaching-Facilitator, and Teaching-Facilitators Group

A newly created group of Teaching-Facilitators (TF) coordinated by a University Teaching-Facilitator (UTF) will be charged with serving as neutral third parties tasked with relaying student complaints regarding teaching effectiveness to the Instructor of Concern (IC). Their second charge is to take action in the event of repeated or unsubstantiated concerns, including notifying the IC, the IC's supervisor, and the TFG to organize a meeting to discuss repeated or unsubstantiated concerns. The rank of full professor will be considered as preferred for the UTF and the TFs, who will be full time faculty not currently serving as administrators.

Creation, Election, and Duties of the University Teaching-Facilitator and Teaching-Facilitators

1. It is proposed that a University Teaching-Facilitator (UTF) position be created.
 - a. Selection & Term Length
 - i. Academic Senate constituents will nominate individuals via a Senate distributed ballot according to Senate elections procedures to serve as the UTF.
 - ii. Final election of the UTF will occur using a ballot distributed to the Academic Senators and the group of Teaching-Facilitators (TFs).
 - b. Training: UTF will receive training with an outside facilitator training group such as the International Facilitators Association, and orientation with the Michigan Technological University Ombuds, IE/Title IX Director and Director of the Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning.

- c. Duties of UTF:
 - i. Coordinate lottery for assignment of slate of TF's to Instructor of Concern and the IC's selection of a TF.
 - ii. Serve as contact person for communication among the group of TFs and the Senate, Administrative Offices, Board of Trustees.
 - iii. Facilitates communication within the group of TFs.
 - iv. Organizes orientation, training and meetings of TFs.
- d. Remuneration for the UTF will be comparable to that of the University Ombuds and will be allocated as part of the University Senate budget, or a 50% course release.
- e. The UTF term will be for three years.

2. It is proposed that a group of Teaching-Facilitators (TF) will be elected by Senate academic constituents according to Senate election procedures.

- a. The TF term will be for three years.
- b. The number of TFs, at a minimum, will be equivalent to the number of colleges within the university and will be expanded as demand requires.
- c. TF service shall be recognized as a significant factor in merit evaluations.
- d. The TFs will receive training with an outside facilitator training group such as the International Facilitators Association and an orientation with the Michigan Technological University Ombuds and the Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning.

Functions of the Teaching-Facilitators Group

All complaints filed via the Resolve a Concern: Teaching form or directly with the University Teaching-Facilitator will initiate the following process. Instructors who receive repeated complaints (as defined below) or who receive a TEES mean score below 3.2 (Policy XXX) will move to STAGE 2: Repeated Complaints/TEES Policy XXX (see below).

1. Unsubstantiated Comments or Contested Complaints

- a. It will be at the IC's discretion to forward unsubstantiated and repeated comments from students to OIE or other units with support from the Teaching-Facilitators Group (TFG).
- b. Instructors contesting complaints will file a letter with the TFG and the UTF for future reference in the event of repeated complaints.
- c. Complaints judged to be unsubstantiated by the UTF and TFG will be fully dismissed.

2. The UTF will maintain a list of trained TFs. The UTF will select via a blind lottery a slate of three TFs. The IC will choose one individual from among the slate to work with them, provided there is no conflict of interest. (The lottery will be repeated a second time should the IC find the first slate of TF's unacceptable).

3. The fact of the complaint and the meetings between the TF and IC will remain confidential unless the instructor chooses otherwise, or in the case of repeated complaints (see STAGE 2: Repeated Complaints/Policy XXX on Mean Scores)

4. Complaints made regarding teaching effectiveness misdirected to offices other than the TFG will be routed to the UTF.

5. The UTF will forward complaints potentially demanding attention by IE/Title IX to that office.

6. The IC has the opportunity to forward unsubstantiated complaints, repeated complaints, or complaints believed to contain language targeted at the instructor and violating university or federal policies to the OIE, and other appropriate university units, with support from the TFG. The fact of the complaint and instructor's identity will be released only with permission of the instructor, or in accordance with Federal and state laws.

STAGE 2: Repeated Complaints / TEES Policy XXX

The following Stage 2 actions will occur upon any 3 semesters of complaints within a period of six active teaching semesters, or in the event of a TEES mean score below 3.2:

1. Given substantiated complaints, the IC, their supervisor, the UTF, and the two previously assigned TFs will meet to develop a plan for improvement, which the IC's supervisor will be responsible for monitoring.
2. Instructors contesting student's complaints at Stage 2 will file a letter with the TFG for future reference in the event of repeated complaints.

Revisions Necessary to Properly Route Teaching Effectiveness Complaints

To create greater clarity, any language on the *Report A Concern* webpage, or any other University webpage, inviting students to report on the generalized category of "experiences in or out of the classroom" to the Dean of Students will be removed.

Points of Information for Students and Instructors

1. At the end of the term, Teaching Evaluations of Effectiveness Surveys (TEES) are administered. Student's numerical ratings are provided to the instructor and are shared with the instructor's supervisor. These scores may be used for no more than 50% of the annual evaluation of the instructor's teaching effectiveness as per [Faculty Handbook Policy 3.2.13](#).
2. Student comments written on the TEES are made available exclusively to the instructor, unless the instructor voluntarily shares the written comments with others as per [Faculty Handbook Policy 3.2.13](#).
3. Students may submit concerns regarding teaching effectiveness, which they wish to pursue with the assistance of the TFG, using the Resolve a Concern: Teaching (RCT) form. The RCT will be administered at the end of the semester

alongside the Teaching Evaluation Effectiveness Survey (TEES). RCT forms will be received by the UTF with the student identified. The UTF will then route the RCT form to the IC via a trained Teaching-Facilitator, with the name of the student removed. In cases where complaints of misconduct are mistakenly reported using the RCT form, the TFG will redirect the student to the appropriate office(s). In the event a student makes a comment that contains language that violates IE/Title IX or other University policies on conduct, discrimination, harassment, violent or threatening behavior, the student comment will be referred to the targeted instructor, who may contact the Office of Institutional Equity, Office of Academic and Community Conduct, Public Safety and Police Services, their supervisor, Provost, VP for Diversity and Inclusion, and/or other appropriate offices. In this case, student anonymity will be determined by the relevant laws and policies, including Senate Policy 43-21. In the absence of violations of IE/Title IX or University policies related to student conduct, the student making the complaint will remain anonymous to persons other than the UTF, unless the student chooses to be identified.

- 5) Students using the RCT form have the option to request a meeting with the UTF to express their concerns in person.
- 6) The UTF will nominate a slate of three Teaching-Facilitators using a lottery system and a single TF will be assigned to attend to the complaint.
- 7) The fact of the student complaint regarding teaching effectiveness will remain in confidence among the student, UTF, TFs, and the IC until a precipitous drop in the mean scores on the TEES below 3.2, or a pattern of repeated complaints spanning three semesters within a period of six active teaching semesters comes to the attention of the TFG, or in the event the instructor member chooses to disclose the complaint.

Proposed Language Regarding Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation for Inclusion in University Syllabi

No threatening, harassing, discriminatory, or biased comments will be tolerated on either the Teaching Evaluation Effectiveness Survey (TEES) or on the Report a Teaching Concern form (RTC). Such comments will be subject to reporting to the appropriate University authorities for investigation. Anonymous general comments made on the TEES and numerical ratings are reported directly to instructors, and only TEES numerical ratings are sent to an instructor's supervisor. In the case of Graduate Teaching Assistants, both comments and numerical ratings are sent to a designated departmental supervisor. See Faculty Handbook Section 3.2.13 for more information on Teaching Evaluations. Student complaints submitted via the RTC are sent directly to the University Teaching Facilitator, who initiates a review process by assigning the concern to a Teaching-Facilitator (see Senate Policy XXX). RTC complaints are not anonymous to the University Teaching-Facilitator, but anonymity is upheld with relation to the assigned Teaching-Facilitator and the instructor, unless otherwise required by University policy or if a student elects to waive their right to anonymity. Students can contact the University Teaching-Facilitator at any time using the following email: tfg@mtu.edu. Students may discuss concerns related to teaching with any unit or individual on campus. However, the Teaching-Facilitation Group process will apply for addressing and resolving concerns regarding teaching effectiveness.