

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, to address struggles with teaching effectiveness, and/or support them in the face of 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 complaints rooted in bias
- 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 potential Title IX violations and discrimination and refer complaints to Title IX / Institutional Equity.

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, given the status quo, in the event an instructor's score on the Teaching Evaluation of Effectiveness Survey administered by the Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning falls below a mean score of 3.2, the Provost contacts the instructor and their supervisor to address the concern.

MTU's Existing Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Surveys (TEES)

Teaching Evaluation of Effectiveness Surveys are administered as dictated by [Senate Procedure 504.1.1](#) and [Faculty Handbook Policy 3.2.13](#). The surveys were initially created as a tool for instructors' use for improvement of teaching. The numerical student ratings on the Teaching Evaluation of Effectiveness Survey are provided to supervisors. Students' written comments are released exclusively to instructors unless the instructor opts to release comments to their supervisor, or the instructor is a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). GTA scores and comments are released to their supervisors. Please see [Faculty Handbook 3.2.13](#) for more detail. 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 teaching effectiveness. Students may communicate concerns directly to their instructor, or by using the existing Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Survey for comments, or the newly proposed Resolve a Teaching Concern (RTC) form for more substantive complaints. The Resolve Teaching Concern 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 Resolve Teaching Concern Form, or to contact the University Teaching Facilitator to begin the complaint process.

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

A newly created group of Teaching-Facilitators coordinated by a University Teaching Facilitator will be charged with serving as neutral third parties tasked with relaying student complaints regarding teaching effectiveness to the Instructor of Concern.

1. Though it is possible a mentorship relationship may naturally develop between the Teaching Facilitator and Instructor of Concern, the Teaching Facilitators are not charged with evaluation of teaching or mentoring. Instead, they may identify support resources, including existing centers and administrative offices on campus where instructors may find support. Teaching Facilitators serve the process as an observer.
2. The Teaching Facilitators' second charge is to take action in the event of repeated concerns. This includes notifying the Instructor of Concern and their supervisor, and the previously assigned Teaching Facilitators to organize a meeting to discuss repeated concerns.
3. The University Teaching Facilitator and Teaching Facilitators shall not be serving as administrators. The rank of tenured Assistant or Associate Professor will be considered as preferred for the University Teaching Facilitator and the Teaching Facilitators, who will be full time faculty.
4. A cohort of instructors who are Senior or Principal Lecturers, or Professors of Practice will be elected to serve as Teaching Facilitators to represent each college.

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

1. It is proposed that a University Teaching-Facilitator position be created.

a. Selection & Term Length

i. Academic Senate constituents will nominate individuals via a Senate distributed ballot according to Senate elections procedures (section K) to serve as the University Teaching Facilitator.

Final election of the University Teaching Facilitator will occur using a ballot distributed to the Academic Senators and the group of Teaching-Facilitators as per Senate Bylaws Section K.

b. Training: University Teaching Facilitator will receive training with an outside facilitator training group such as the International Facilitators Association on skills for communication and facilitation (not pedagogy). They will participate in orientation with the Michigan Technological University Ombud, IE/Title IX Director and Director of the Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning to: learn what each center offers as resources; and to become aware of how to flag and route comments potentially rooted in bias.

c. Duties of University Teaching Facilitator:

i. Coordinate lottery for assignment of slate of Teaching Facilitators to Instructor of Concern's selection of a Teaching Facilitator.

ii. Serve as contact person for communication among the group of Teaching Facilitators and the Senate, Administrative Offices, Board of Trustees.

iii. Facilitate communication within the group of Teaching Facilitators.

- iv. Organize orientation, training and meetings of Teaching Facilitators.
 - d. Remuneration for the University Teaching Facilitator will be comparable to that of the University Ombud and will be allocated as part of the University Senate budget, or provided in the form of a 50% course release.
 - e. The University Teaching Facilitator's term will be for three years.
- 2. It is proposed that a group of Teaching Facilitators will be elected by Senate academic constituents according to Senate election procedures.
 - a. The Teaching Facilitator term will be for three years.
 - b. The number of Teaching Facilitators, at a minimum, will be equivalent to two per college within the university and will be expanded as demand requires.
 - c. Teaching Facilitators service shall be recognized as a significant factor in merit evaluations.
 - d. Training: University Teaching Facilitator will receive training with an outside facilitator training group such as the International Facilitators Association on skills for communication and facilitation (not pedagogy). They will participate in orientation with the Michigan Technological University Ombud, IE/Title IX Director and Director of the Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning to: learn what each center offers as resources; and to become aware of how to flag and route comments potentially rooted in bias.

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 Teaching Effectiveness

Evaluation Survey (TEES) mean score below 3.2 for two out of six active teaching semesters will move to STAGE 2: Repeated Complaints/TEES Score Drop (see below).

1. Unsubstantiated Comments or Contested Complaints

- a. It will be at the Instructor of Concern's discretion to forward unsubstantiated and repeated comments from students to Title IX/Institutional Equity, or other units, with support from the University Teaching Facilitator or independently.
 - b. Should the Instructor of Concern choose to forward the complaint to Title IX/Institutional Equity through the University Teaching Facilitator and to remain anonymous, the Title IX/Institutional Equity administrators will communicate through the University Teaching Facilitator to the Instructor of Concern the pros and cons of anonymity and limits to Title IX/IE's ability to protect the Instructor of Concern's identity in cases where a complaint is highly specific, or targeted at only one instructor.
 - c. Instructors contesting complaints will file a letter with the University Teaching Facilitator for future reference in the event of repeated complaints.
 - d. Complaints judged to be unsubstantiated by the University Teaching Facilitator and Teaching Facilitator will be fully dismissed.
2. The University Teaching Facilitator will maintain a list of Teaching Facilitators. The University Teaching Facilitator will select via a blind lottery a slate of three Teaching Facilitators. The Instructor of Concern 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 Instructor of Concern find the first slate of Teaching Facilitators unacceptable).

3. The fact of the complaint and the meetings between the Teaching Facilitator and Instructor of Concern will remain confidential unless the instructor chooses otherwise, or in the case of repeated complaints or two semesters of mean score drops below 3.2 within a period of six active teaching semesters. (see STAGE 2: Repeated Complaints/Drop in Mean Scores)
4. Complaints made regarding teaching effectiveness directed to offices other than the University Teaching Facilitator will be routed to the University Teaching Facilitator.
5. The University Teaching Facilitator will forward complaints potentially demanding of the attention by Title IX/Institutional Equity to that office only with the Instructor of Concern's permission (see 1a above)
6. The Instructor of Concern 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 Title IX/Institutional Equity, and other university units, with support from the University Teaching Facilitator. 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 and Drops in Mean Scores below 3.2

The following Stage 2 actions will occur after any three semesters of complaints within a period of six active teaching semesters, or in the event of two semesters of Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation Survey mean score below 3.2 within six active teaching semesters:

1. Given substantiated complaints, the Instructor of Concern, their supervisor, the University Teaching Facilitator, and the two previously assigned Teaching Facilitators will meet. The Instructor of Concern and their Supervisor will develop a plan for improvement, which the Instructor of Concern's supervisor will be responsible for monitoring.

2. Instructors contesting student's complaints at Stage 2 will file a letter with the University Teaching Facilitator for future reference in the event of repeated complaints.

Points of Information for Students and Instructors

1. The domain of this proposal is Teaching Effectiveness, rather than concerns about faculty misconduct. Policies and definitions of faculty misconduct may be found on the University Senate website (consider policies under [200.0 Conduct](#)). Language describing Teaching Effectiveness may be found at the Senate website (consider policies [12-03](#); [22-13](#); [22-18](#); [41-19](#); 3.2.13) and the [Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning](#) website. At the end of the term, Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation 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 (with the exception of Graduate Teaching Assistants), unless the instructor voluntarily shares the written comments with others as per Faculty Handbook Policy 3.2.13. In the case of Graduate Teaching Assistants, student comments are also provided to their supervisors as per [Faculty Handbook section 3.2.13](#).
3. Students may submit concerns regarding teaching effectiveness, which they wish to pursue with the assistance of the University Teaching Facilitator. They may reach the University Teaching Facilitator using the Resolve Teaching Concerns form; a Resolve Teaching Concerns button on the Report a Concern page linking the student directly to the University Teaching Facilitator; via email

to the University Teaching Facilitator; or by contacting administrators who will connect them with the University Teaching Facilitator.

The Report Teaching Concerns Form (RTC) will be administered at the end of the semester alongside the Teaching Evaluation Effectiveness Survey (TEES). RTC forms will be received by the University Teaching Facilitator with the student identified. The University Teaching Facilitator will route the RTC form to the Instructor of Concern via a trained Teaching Facilitator, with the name of the student removed. In cases where complaints of misconduct are mistakenly reported using the RTC form, the University Teaching Facilitator will redirect the student to the appropriate office(s). In the event a student makes a comment that contains language that violates 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 choose to 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 Title IX or University policies related to conduct, the student making the complaint will remain anonymous to persons other than the University Teaching Facilitator, unless the student chooses to be identified.

- 5) Students using the RTC Form have the option to request a meeting with the University Teaching Facilitator to express their concerns in person.
- 6) The University Teaching Facilitator will nominate a slate of three Teaching-Facilitators using a lottery system and a single Teaching Facilitator will be assigned to attend to the complaint. The student will be notified upon the timely communication of the concern to the instructor, which commences the RCT process outlined in Proposal 85-21.
- 7) The fact of the student complaint regarding teaching effectiveness will remain in confidence among the student, University Teaching Facilitator, Teaching Facilitator, and the Instructor of Concern until: a precipitous drop in the mean

scores on the TEES below 3.2 occurs on two occasions, within six active teaching semesters; a pattern of repeated complaint spanning three semesters, and within a period of six active teaching semesters, comes to the attention of the University Teaching Facilitator; or in the event the instructor member chooses to disclose the complaint.

Proposed Language Regarding Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation for Inclusion in University Syllabi

Students are encouraged to first speak to their instructor to make them aware of their concerns as a first step in the process of communicating concerns about teaching. Anonymous student comments made on the TEES and numerical ratings are reported directly to instructors. Only TEES numerical ratings are sent to an instructor's supervisor unless the instructor opts to share the comments with their 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 Form are sent directly to the University Teaching Facilitator, who initiates a review process by assigning the concern to a Teaching Facilitator (see Senate Policy 85-21). RTC complaints are not anonymous to the University Teaching Facilitator, but anonymity is upheld with relation to the assigned Teaching Facilitator and the instructor and all others, unless otherwise required by University policies, or if a student elects to waive their right to anonymity. Please note: threatening, harassing, discriminatory, or biased comments have no place 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. Students can contact the University Teaching-Facilitator at any time using the following email: Teaching Facilitator@mtu.edu. Students may discuss concerns related to teaching with any unit or individual on campus. Comments received by the University Teaching Facilitator will be transmitted to your instructor in a timely manner and the Teaching Facilitation Resolution

process outlined in Senate Proposal 85-21 will be applied to addressing and resolving concerns regarding teaching effectiveness.