

## Proposed Approach to Student Evaluations for Spring Semester, 2020

**Working Group:** Ann Austin (AAN and College of Education) and Jeff Grabill (Hub and College of Arts and Letters), Co-Chairs; Kevin Bird (GEU); Kate Birdsall (WRAC and UNTF); Michelle Carlson (ITS); Sarah Gretter (Hub); Greg Harris (Human Resources); Melissa Sortman (Academic Human Resources); Patti Stewart (AAN).

### **MSU Faculty Handbook Policy, established March 6, 1979:**

The policy below currently guides the use of student evaluations:

<https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/5Section-Instruction.html>

*The purpose of this system is to provide student input toward assessing and improving course design and teaching performance. The University and individual departments are responsible for designing and administering their respective survey forms to obtain such evaluations. The results of these surveys are made available to the instructor and to persons involved in personnel decisions, but are not made public.*

### **Proposed Policy for Spring Semester, 2020:**

Pursuant to the MSU Faculty Handbook Policy, all courses will administer evaluation forms to obtain student ratings. As is usual, for all departments that use the Student Instructional Ratings System Online (SIRS Online), instructors and department chairs will continue to receive the results of the SIRS. Instructors may decide whether they wish to have the results of student ratings from spring semester, 2020, used in personnel decisions (including annual review, tenure, and promotion processes). Students in courses that transitioned from in-person to remote learning and that use the online SIRS will simultaneously receive a Supplemental Evaluation Survey, consisting of several questions that focus on the course experience after the transition to remote learning. If a department does not currently use the SIRS Online System, but an individual instructor or department will like to share this supplemental survey with students, contact Michelle Carlson at mcarlson@msu.edu for instructions. Consistent with usual policy, the responses to the questions in the Supplemental Evaluation Form will be provided to the course instructor and the Department Chair. Responses to the Supplemental Evaluation Form will also be aggregated at the university, college, and department levels.

### **Rationale:**

- The proposal is guided by the principle of “doing no harm” with spring semester evaluations, while also ensuring that student evaluation data is available for those instructors who wish to have such data. The proposed policy will ensure that instructors receive student feedback about their courses, which is consistent with MSU Faculty Handbook policy and useful to instructors as they seek continuous improvement in their teaching. However, the move to remote teaching and learning in a sudden, emergency context has been unusual and, in some cases, may result in lower-than-usual student ratings. In order to ensure that instructors are not penalized for this

unexpected situation, each instructor may decide whether to share their results in personnel matters.

- Instructors and the university as a whole should strive to learn from the teaching experiences during the situation this semester. The Supplemental Evaluation Survey provides a means to gather formative data which can be informative for the future in terms of support for students' learning in the remote environment. Aggregated data provide results from which the broad MSU instructional community can learn from the unusual "experiment" in remote learning transition.
- The recommendations are all in line with current policy as indicated in the Faculty Handbook. The SIRS evaluations and the Supplemental Evaluations will both follow Faculty Handbook guidelines concerning distribution of results.
- The recommendations are informed by logistical and technical details concerning how SIRS are distributed to students. As described below, certain technological constraints about the computer system that controls the distribution of communication about the SIRS constrain the timeline.

### **Process Issues:**

Instructor Choice regarding Use of SIRS: Currently SIRS responses are provided to instructors and the department chairs, in those departments that use them. Under the new policy, the instructor and the department chair will continue to receive SIRS Online results. However, the instructor will have the option of whether to report SIRS data in annual review, promotion, and tenure processes. Any instructor who chooses not to include student rating data from spring semester, 2020 will not suffer negative effects.

Assurances: The Provost will provide official communication indicating that in every case, the decision of an instructor (in any appointment type, including graduate students and post-doctoral scholars in teaching assistant roles) to omit SIRS data from spring, 2020 in any personnel matters will not negatively impact the instructor.

Distribution of Supplemental Evaluation: The Supplemental Evaluation will be a separate instrument from the online SIRS. However, both will be administered simultaneously.

Students will receive a link to a Qualtrics survey in the email(s) they receive regarding the SIRS Online surveys. The link will require Single Sign On (SSO) login and will have measures in place to prevent multiple responses. NetIDs will be captured upon login only for use if there are responses that seem questionable or duplicated, but otherwise all responses will be anonymous. The Qualtrics survey link will allow students to provide feedback about the online transition for up to 6 courses, regardless whether those courses participate in the SIRS Online system.

The data gathered by this Supplemental Evaluation Survey will be distributed to the instructor of the course and the chairperson of the relevant department. Dr. Mark Largent of the Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education will be considered the final owner of the data, as is usual. The data will be treated the same as that of the SIRS Online system. No data gathered, whether for an individual course or at a University aggregated level, will be distributed to any person or department other than the course instructor and chair without Dr. Largent's explicit, written permission.

Voluntary Participation: Student participation in the Supplemental Evaluation Survey is voluntary and not linked to any other actions (e.g. release of grades).

Note about Information gathered for courses in departments not using the SIRS Online system: Because the Supplemental Survey will not be able to differentiate between departments that participate in the SIRS Online system and those that do not, data will be gathered for any course for which a student chooses to provide feedback. These data for non-participating departments will also be provided to instructors and chairs, but will fall under the same policy for data management as the SIRS Online data.

Contractual Issues (See Appendix to this document also):

There is mutual understanding by the GEU and UNTF that this deviation is non-precedent setting, Academic Human Resources and Employee Relations are comfortable with the proposed direction of the Student Evaluation Proposal. As the process proceeds, AHR and OER will continue to communicate and work with both the GEU and the UNTF as appropriate and appreciate any of their feedback. If formal agreements are necessary, AHR and OER will work with UNTF and GEU leadership to formalize the mutual understanding of how SIRS will be used for Spring 2020 classes.

**Related Issues for the Provost's Information and Consideration:**

Discussion of process for adoption and communication of the policy: In this case, no policy has been changed, however some faculty are expressing concern about any changes to the typical student evaluation process. Finding ways to involve the Faculty Governance would be relevant to the process.

Timing issues and deadline to make recommended changes: Michelle Carlson, who works with the SIRS Online System, has indicated that the SIRS surveys will be open for students to respond to on Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>. A reminder email will go out to faculty on Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup> (next Wednesday). Michelle spoke with Josh Price who manages the team that runs the SIRS Online system to alert him that the Provost may want to adjust the student emails to explain the additional opportunity to respond to the Supplemental Evaluation. Approval to send the Supplemental Evaluation Survey with additional text inserted in the student emails would be needed by Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Because the SIRS Online System is old, sufficient time is needed to make changes. Michelle Carlson has indicated that changing the dates for these emails would be extremely difficult and possibly not possible after April 1.

Suggestion for other data collection: We recommend that other relevant units on campus gather data concerning the overall student experience in this unusual semester.

**Appendix:**

## AHR/OER Information

### Contractual Issues:

Both the GEU and UNTF contracts do reference either student evaluations or student ratings in the context of performance reviews. Both contracts make it clear that the student evaluations are appropriate to use in the context of evaluating instructors' performance. Allowing individual instructors to choose whether or not they wish to have student evaluations considered for the purpose of their evaluation deviates from the current contract language. Given the current health emergency and the subsequent change to the delivery method of instruction, however, this deviation will not be viewed as precedent setting.

The appropriate academic administrators will still be provided the student evaluation data as is current practice and where appropriate, by policy.

### Relevant Contract Language:

GEU: <http://geuatmsu.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/GEU-2019-2023-FINAL-1-1.pdf>

#### Article 16

- III. Student evaluation of Employees (or summaries thereof), formal written evaluations, and any supplementary information shall be placed in the Employee's personnel record for use by the employing unit and the Employee in accordance with Section IV. This material shall remain on active file until the Employee's teaching role ends after which a copy of the record shall be provided to the Employee upon written request.

See UNTF policy language on the subsequent page.

UNTF: <https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/documents/UNTFContract.pdf>

## Article 18

### Annual Performance Review

- I. Procedure and Criteria Each academic unit is responsible for establishing and communicating current procedures and criteria for annual reviews to evaluate teaching performance of Employees for purposes of merit and reappointment consideration. If an academic unit adds or amends established performance criteria, the employees shall only be evaluated on those additions or amendments from the date of the change forward.

An academic unit may use an advisory committee for annual reviews. The employing unit will determine the criteria for, the manner of, and the Employee's responsibilities in the review process.

These must be consistent with commonly accepted standards within the employing unit for evaluating these categories of work. Documentation of teaching performance may include, but is not limited to: teaching portfolios; student ratings and commentary; syllabi; course materials; personal narrative; and classroom observation. Units are encouraged to use multiple sources of information in the review process when multiple sources are available.