

February 6, 2025

FAO: Salisbury University Faculty Senate

Last Friday (January 31), the Promotions Committee came together to discuss the current motion on the Senate floor with regard to the usage of Student Evaluations becoming optional for tenure and promotion purposes. With regard to the latest version of this motion, we see no notes with regard to its anticipated impact. Since we have a vested interest in the outcome as it would directly impact our processes of assessing faculty portfolios, we respectfully submit that the motion is therefore incomplete and worthy of further discussion before being voted upon.

We recognize the significance of the ad hoc committee's report on the bias that is often found in student evaluations. That said, in the absence of a consistent alternative to the current student evaluations we use at SU, we urge the Senate to pause the conversation until such time as all interested parties can come together for a long-term solution that is workable and as equitable as possible to all. To that end, we make the following recommendations:

1. Bring people together to devise guidelines for best practices with regard to disseminating student evaluations (such as, consistent methods of giving out evaluations in class or virtually, or with incentives or not). We strongly recommend that these guidelines be published in the Faculty Handbook, as recommended in many publications such as "Best Practices in Using Aggregate Course Evaluation Data," by Hanover Research (2014): https://library.highline.edu/ld.php?content_id=53377220
2. Pull in more faculty and students into a fuller conversation on the potential impact of the motion, including the Deans Council, Chairs across campus, SGA reps, and any other relevant parties whose work and/or study would be directly impacted by any change to the current usage of student evaluations.
3. Check on Middle States requirements with regard to ensuring that students' evaluative voices are registered by some means, whether through standard student evaluations and/or other documents that may be used in applications toward tenure and promotion.
4. Call two all-faculty meetings, which would ideally be online as well as in person, so that all faculty can feel part of this important conversation.
5. Conduct an all-faculty vote on the current motion or a revised version of it, depending on how the wider conversation goes.

Please be sure that we do not wish to create more work for the already-burdened Faculty Senate. Instead, we advocate for using this moment for a timely, campus-wide, and inclusive conversation after which we hope student evaluations can be used more consistently, with much greater awareness of the potential bias, and with more consciousness about how best to use them as but one significant part of our aspirational pedagogical practice at Salisbury University.

Yours sincerely,
Alex Halperin, Chair of Promotions Committee