Open Course Evaluations

"Any Person, Any Study"

As the Columbia Spectator put it at the start of Columbia University's open course evaluation debate three years ago: selecting courses is "currently a shot in the dark". Under the status quo, the information Cornell students have access to through the University is essentially a paragraph-long description of their course. Posted syllabi are rare and feedback on third-party sites is polarized and often uninformative. Finding answers to specific questions about course quality, difficulty, fit within an academic program, etc. is a nontrivial and time-consuming task. Compounding this difficulty is a lack of advisor access to crucial information about courses, and the noted "silo" shape of Cornell's institutional programs. In particular, students seeking to pursue academic interests outside of their network or program face an even greater absence of information with which to make informed decisions.

These problems are not unique to Cornell - they have been noted at countless other institutions that have sought to correct them with open evaluations - but they are magnified by Cornell's size, diversity, and by its dedication to academic innovation. Student Assembly Resolution 29 addresses these issues by calling upon the University to create a Committee composed of key stakeholders to consider the proposal and implementation of an open course evaluation system.

Precedent

Students at many of Cornell's peer institutions have access to a robust set of information about their classes. Prominent examples include Yale's recent acquisition of Blue Book, a student-created project (see Appendix) that brings together course enrollment and evaluation into a single package. Yale undergraduates have access to syllabi, quantitative answers to four questions (e.g. course workload relative to other Yale courses), and an open-ended answer to a qualitative question (Would you recommend this course to other students? Why or why not?).

Columbia University's highly informative 62-page report on the issue reviewed 9 universities with 18 constituent schools and found that 8 out of 9 had some form of open evaluation system.

Cornell's own College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has created a completely open repository of syllabi and evaluations, per a full vote of its faculty. Of note is a very similar system implemented at the University of Southern California, where President-Elect Garrett served as Provost, in the College of Arts, Sciences, Letters over a decade ago (see Appendix.)

Concretizing the Recommendation

Lines 39-55 of Resolution 29 summarize the Student Assembly's specific recommendations to the Committee:
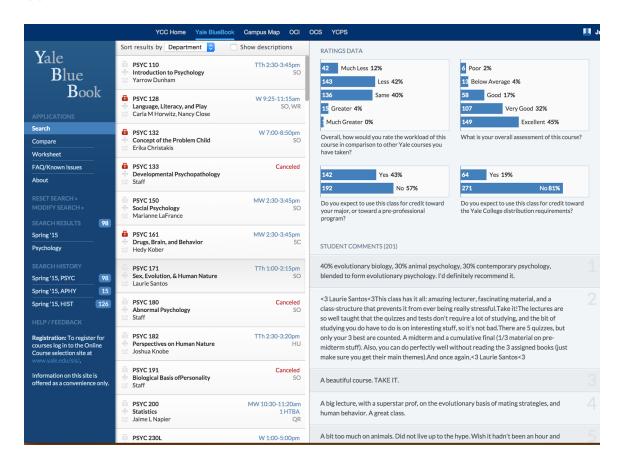
- Preliminary course syllabi are made available for pre-enroll when possible;
- Quantitative results regarding class difficulty (e.g. "Was this class easier or more difficult that the other classes you have taken at Cornell?"), workload, access to resources, etc. are published, as well as qualitative evaluations (e.g. "Would you recommend this course? To whom? Why or why not?") ;
- Course median grades, which are already available on transcripts, should be more readily accessible;
- The Committee should investigate the possibility of leaving retrospective evaluations;
- Concerns regarding the inclusion of student teachers and faculty new to Cornell should be addressed by the Committee;
- Concerns regarding anonymity in small courses should be addressed by the Committee;

Issues for Further Consideration

In addition to the issues noted by the Assembly in its resolution (e.g. regarding small classes or the evaluation of teaching assistants), any implementation of open course evaluations must in its undertaking answer questions that mix logistics and philosophy: how will evaluations be censored or maintained in the event of harassment or misuse? Which unit will be responsible for the maintenance and review of an open course system, working with appropriate vendors and stakeholders?

Other issues might include maintaining a high response rate, something crucial to any evaluation process. Institutions like Stanford University have implemented incentive structures in the form of delayed grade release to ensure high response rates. A committee tasked with this issue would likely ask whether something like this could be feasible at Cornell.

Appendix

CivilWar&Reconstruction1845-77

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PROFESSOR
David Blight

MEETS   Tuesday, Thursday 10:30-11:20am   ⚠ CONFLICTS WITH 1 COURSE
LOCATION   SSS 114
AREAS   Humanities (HU)
FINAL   05/03/2015 Su 2.00
PREREQS.

The causes, course, and consequences of the American Civil War. A search for the multiple meanings of a transformative event, including national, sectional, racial, constitutional, social, gender, intellectual, and individual dimensions.

📘 Textbooks   📄 **Syllabus**   💬 Evaluations

COURSE SYLLABUS   Reload | Open on Classesv2

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General Education Requirements

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Resources for New Faculty

G.E. Course Description Submission Page

USC Course Evaluations

Conversations

Category Guidelines

Student Comments

Interdisciplinary Studies

USC Course Evaluations   ⬈

This site provides members of the USC community with results from undergraduate students' course evaluations. This information is provided with appreciation for students' cooperation in completing course evaluation forms every semester.

Course evaluation results reflect the opinions of those students who took the time to fill out an evaluation form. The results tell us something about student satisfaction, but they do not tell us how much students actually learned or benefited from the course.

Results are provided for all undergraduate courses starting in Spring 2002 that (a) obtained a response rate of at least 50% on the course evaluation; (b) obtained at least 3 completed course evaluation forms; and (c) provided course evaluation data in a form that could be displayed here. At this time, data for several schools Dentistry, Fine Arts and Law) are not included because their procedures differ from those most commonly used on campus. We will add data from these schools as soon as possible. Evaluations for Business and Accounting are available beginning with the Fall 2002 semester; evaluations for Cinema-Television are available beginning with the Fall 2003 semester.

Users can search by course and by professor. Results are provided for 12 questions on the course evaluation form rated on a five-point scale (1=poor, 2=below average, 3=average, 4=above average, 5=excellent). For each item we display two important pieces of information:

1) The mean, or arithmetic average. Higher mean scores indicate higher satisfaction among students completing the questionnaire. 2) The standard deviation, which signifies how closely clustered around the mean the individual ratings were. A small S.D. means that most students were in close agreement, while a larger S.D. means that ratings were more varied. Roughly 68% of ratings fall within one standard deviation of the mean, 96% fall within 2 standard deviations and 99.6% fall within 3 standard deviations of the mean.

Find an evaluation...

By Instructor Name:

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L |

| M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |