FAQ’S REGARDING CLASS CLIMATE COURSE EVALUATIONS

DEVELOPMENT AND CREATION OF THE SURVEYS:

How were the new surveys constructed?

The survey is comprised of elements selected at the university, college, and department levels. The four required items selected at the university level must be included on all evaluation forms. Two of these items are course/instructor-related statements that require a response on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from excellent to poor. The other two items ask for additional information about (1) whether the course was required, and (2) what grade was expected.

An additional set of statements that require responses on a 5-point scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) may be chosen by colleges and departments within each college. These statements are designed to gather information that is important to those units. College-level and department-level statements must be approved by the dean of each college.

Who actually creates the surveys for distribution to the students?

College delegates serve as liaisons among faculty, departments, the dean of the college, and staff in the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). They also enter items chosen by the colleges and/or departments into the survey software.

Doug Atkinson, Director of Reporting in the OIR, supervises survey administration and Lisa Johnston, Program Coordinator in the OIR, works directly with the college delegates and assists them in survey construction and deployment.

What parts of the evaluation results will be posted online?

The university is required to post only the two required course/instructor-related statements that are used for all university classes. All other course survey results are collected for the benefit of the instructor to aid in improving teaching effectiveness.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURVEYS:

How are the students informed about the survey?

Students receive notification of the availability of the surveys via e-mail to their preferred e-mail accounts. Links are provided within the e-mail that take them to the surveys for each class. A single e-mail is sent to each student, which contains the links for all classes in which he or she is enrolled. Students are also provided information about how they may also access the evaluations directly through ASAP, UTSA’s online system for accessing information about classes, financial aid, and other student and instructor information. Reminder e-mails are sent once a week to students for any survey not yet completed until the end of the evaluation period. In addition, faculty members will be asked to announce to their students that the surveys are open.
When are the evaluations administered, and how does that happen?

Students are sent an e-mail with a link for each class in which they are enrolled, informing them that the surveys are open. The evaluation period begins approximately four weeks prior to final exams and closes 10 days later (exact dates provided at the beginning of each semester). Each class can be evaluated during that time window. Once a class is evaluated, it is impossible for a student to access that class evaluation again.

What classes are evaluated?

Departments are asked at the beginning of each semester to identify the classes they want to have evaluated. We require that all organized classes with at least five enrolled students be evaluated, although departments may ask for other classes to be evaluated depending upon their needs.

If a class would normally be excluded from evaluation, can a request be made for it to be evaluated?

Requests for class evaluations are considered on a case-by-case basis; decisions are made in consultation with your department chair and the dean of your college.

When are results of class evaluations made available to faculty members?

Faculty are sent the results no less than five business days following the last day that final grades are due, or the first full business day following that day if it falls on a holiday.

What is being done, and what can be done, to maximize response rates?

A detailed communication/marketing effort uses a variety of media to inform students about the survey and encourage them to respond. Announcements appear on flat screens around campus, on the UTSA Today website, and when students log into the UTSA network. There are also two half-page color advertisements in The Paisano student newspaper.

Two videos are available on the classroom desktop computer for faculty to play that inform students about the survey, explaining its confidentiality and importance and announcing a lottery drawing for prizes once the surveys are complete. In order to access this video, the course computer must be on and the instructor logged in. Clicking the icon will start the video. The first video is labeled “Eval Video 1” and the second (a reminder) is labeled “Eval Video 2.”

The lottery will award new iPads each semester, based on a random drawing from students completing surveys. The number of iPads awarded is determined by the overall response rate. If the response rate is less than 50%, two iPads will be awarded; if the response rate is from 50% to under 60%, three iPads will be awarded; four iPads will be awarded if the response rate is 60% or higher.

Research indicates that faculty can have a significant effect on increasing response rates if they repeatedly communicate to students the importance of completing the surveys, explain how the results will be helpful to you in improving the courses and teaching, and the fact that the results will be provided to them, as they always have been, anonymously. This latter point – assurance of
anonymity – is especially important to students. In order to ensure anonymity, two databases are maintained. One database contains the responses to the survey, but does NOT include any individual student information (IDs). A separate database containing only information about student e-mail addresses and whether or not the survey is completed is used for the lottery drawing, but no survey responses are contained in that database.

Another way that faculty can increase response rates is to frequently remind students while the surveys are available, and make some time available during a class for students to complete their evaluations using their laptops, smart phones, or computers in university computer labs. If class time is provided, the instructor should not be present while students are completing the survey.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:

Are the results used as part of decisions regarding merit, tenure and promotion?

UTSA’s policy is to use the results of surveys as part of the information used for evaluation of teaching in decisions regarding merit, tenure and promotion. However, surveys are not the sole means by which teaching effectiveness is measured. All departments have been encouraged to develop multiple tools for evaluating teaching effectiveness to avoid over-reliance on the student surveys. The campus Teaching and Learning Center is a good resource for implementing alternative teaching effectiveness measures.

Can the results of the new online evaluation be compared to the old IDEA surveys?

For about a decade, UTSA used the IDEA survey instrument to evaluate classes. The questions asked on the IDEA survey – including the “general” evaluative questions (i.e., overall course, overall instructor) – are different than those asked on the new form. Thus, while some general comparisons can be made, these will have to be interpreted very cautiously. Initial analyses show that while the response rate to the online surveys for the fall 2010 semester was somewhat lower than the IDEA survey (46% for online, mid-60% over the years for IDEA), the mean responses to the required evaluative items were not systematically different from those obtained from the IDEA survey. OIR will continue to assist the faculty and academic administration in evaluating the consistency of results conducted using the online survey.