

## Concerns About Student Feedback Forms

TAUP has expressed concerns to the administration about the use of an online version of the Student Feedback Forms (SFFs, formerly known as CATEs), in particular because of the low response rates reported in the pilot program. We have heard contradictory things regarding the status of this online program from several sources. On the one hand, we're told the pilot program is still in the testing stage and that no decision to move wholesale to it has been made. On the other hand, faculty are telling us that their Deans' offices are presenting the push toward online as inevitable, emphasizing the advantages – e.g., paper use reduced, money saved and convenience – not the potential disadvantages.

Low response rates for the online pilot – on the order of 25% to 45%, compared with 75% to 80% for the paper in-class version of SFFs – call into question the online version's validity; that is, whether it measures what it is intended to measure. This is an important issue for all faculty. With such low response rates, we doubt this measurement of the quality of faculty teaching is accurate.

Since SFFs are used to judge teaching performance, they can determine the course of a faculty member's career at Temple. For NTTs on the teaching/instruction track, they can make the difference between having a job or not. For tenure-track faculty, teaching is one of two primary bases upon which the decision to grant tenure rests. SFF scores play a big role in promotion and merit pay too.

Excessive emphasis is often placed on these scores, making them a kind of high-stakes test. Teaching should be judged by multiple measures, not just a single form asking for student opinion. In fact, multiple measures are explicitly called for in our contract for the evaluation of NTTs (see [Article 15](#), paragraph B4).

We want evaluations of teaching to be meaningful and accurate. Online SFFs may be more convenient and less expensive, but we should look at all the pros and cons of them before making a move. The consequences fall on the faculty and our interests should be voiced and responded to.

We're concerned about online forms for a couple of other reasons, too. The uncontrolled nature of the online administration – e.g., students could be multitasking while answering - may change the results from the in-class distribution and make the results less valuable. Many students fill out the in-class evaluation thoughtfully. Thus, we should be concerned not only about the comparison of response rates but compare the quality of their responses on open-ended questions.

Moreover, it's possible that student responses could be tied to student information because of the need to login with a Temple username and password. The data needs to be secure to guarantee anonymity. We've all heard examples of data security breaches at universities. We don't want students to be wary that their ratings will be linked back to them.

TAUP will continue to be in touch with the administration as the testing phase for the online form proceeds. We're pleased that administrators we have talked with have been receptive to our concerns. We want to make sure that these concerns are kept in mind as the pilot proceeds and decisions are made.

Please tell us your experiences and your thoughts, so we can best represent your interests. Contact us at [taupaft@aol.com](mailto:taupaft@aol.com), call us at 1-7641, or, if you are a TAUP member, share your comments with colleagues and start the conversation by sending an email to TAUP FORUM ([taup-forum@googlegroups.com](mailto:taup-forum@googlegroups.com)).

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