Dear Jason,

The SOM FEC welcome the thorough efforts made by the committee to re-imagine the model for teaching evaluations. We acknowledge that student feedback can be of value and is important to empower students to become engaged in improving the teaching mission of the university. However, concerns still remain regarding student biases exerting a disproportionate negative impact on evaluations of faculty teaching, and the lack of clarity on how other modes of evaluation will be structured, collated and eventually weighted during the merit & promotion decision process.

- Concerns include Page 7, Q5 with the 1 (minimal), 3 (moderate) 5 (strong) scale. At the end of blocks when students are evaluated, they tend to be quite exhausted and frustrated/angry. This may prompt a lot of ‘1’ scores in an evaluation based on such negative feelings and thus will have a disproportionately negative impact on faculty who include rigorous questions to evaluate topic understanding on a final exam. FEC suggests that if a student selects such a negative score, then they should have to include a clear justification in a comment box for such a score so as to provide context. This can then be evaluated for merit i.e. a negative score with a comment of “The instructor put hard questions on the exam”, could be considered as lacking merit.
- The suggested guidance in providing comments to extract suggestions for improvement are worthwhile and could provide constructive feedback to the instructor.
- FEC advocates that student participation in the new SELs be made compulsory as the response rate is very poor and just favors negative comments. One suggestion that has been enacted elsewhere i.e. University of Arizona, is withholding of a student’s grade until they submit the evaluation so as to ensure a meaningful number of respondents. There was some additional discussion as to whether this could be enacted within a School/College or if it requires Senate Executive approval.
- The preamble regarding bias should also include a reminder of professionalism in the tone of their responses, particularly to students enrolled in professional courses i.e. medicine, business, engineering; and to focus on constructive comments.
- The report acknowledges that the “other” methods of evaluations are likely not going to be weighed as heavily as SETs, so even though faculty will be allowed to upload more evidence of their teaching, will committees weigh that evidence appropriately, or will they continue to rely on the data that they are familiar with – i.e. SETs?
The reframing of the questions doesn’t solve the underlying problem. No matter how you frame the question, students will upvote the things they like, not the things that are good teaching practice. For example, the question *What approaches or materials did you find most effective or successful in aiding your learning in this course?* The problem is students *are not qualified* to answer that question. They are not knowledgeable on the *scholarship* of teaching and learning. They will generally respond to this prompt by evaluating negatively the methods they disliked – regardless of how effective those methods were in helping them learn. Ask any group of students how many of them want more quizzes. Not a single hand will go up. Yet, we know that quizzing is one of the most impactful strategies for learning. With SETs you are dealing with student *preferences* not with what is most beneficial to their learning.

- Who will code all these qualitative answers generated by the revised SET/SEL to come up with some kind of useful metric?
- There are also concerns regarding what the “other” means of providing evidence of teaching effectiveness will involve as this is not specified. What kind of evidence is going to be supplied? Who is going to provide that evidence? If this involves teaching observation, then who will perform the observation and what metrics will be used?

Yours sincerely,

Declan F. McCole, Ph.D.
Chair, Faculty Executive Committee School of Medicine