

**Course Learning Evaluations Committee 2020-2021**  
**Final Report**

**Members:**

Louie Elliott, ME/CECS (year 1), **CHAIR**  
Shellie Acocello, HHP/CHEPS (year 1)  
Fernando Akda-Pons, BGES/CAS (year 1)  
Bernardo Aparan, MCLL/CAS (year 1)  
Karen Babine, English/CAS (year 1)  
Justin Colvin, MCLL (year 1)  
Naomi Klingbeil, MATH/CAS (year 1)  
Nai Lamb, MGT/RCOB (year 2)  
Adam Micielica, THSP/CAS (year 1)  
Leslie Moro, NURS/CHEPS (year 1), **VICE-CHAIR**  
Gretchen Potts, CHEM/CAS (year 1)  
Brian Rogers, LIB (year 1), **SECRETARY**  
Char Schmidt, HHP/CHEPS (year 2)  
Junrong Shi, SOCW/CHEPS (year 1)  
Dawn Ford, *ex-officio: Executive Director of WCTL*  
Cindy Williamson, *ex-officio: Executive Director of OPEIR*

**Summary:**

This report summarizes the activities of the Course Learning Evaluations Committee at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga during the 2020-2021 academic year. From the UTC Faculty Committee website, the purpose of this committee is stated in part: “recommends policies and procedures for evaluation of faculty instruction and for using evaluation results to improve instruction.” In addition, the committee was charged by Charlene Simmons, Faculty Senate President Elect to produce a report on how racial, ethnic, and gender bias presents itself in teaching evaluations with the goals to:

- create a short report to distribute to administrators and faculty so they can be informed about how bias informs teaching evaluations when using them in the EDO, RTP, and PTR processes.
- suggest changes to the teaching evaluation process based on the findings presented in their report.

The first meeting of the committee was on 10/22/20. Due to the pandemic, all meetings were held via Zoom. In attendance were Karen Babine, Louie Elliott, Thandi Klingbeil, Adam Micielica, Fernando Pons, Brian Rogers, and Junrong Shi.

#### Summary of meeting minutes:

- The participants were given a moment to introduce themselves.
- The chair asked for volunteers for the positions of Vice Chair and Secretary. Brian Rogers graciously accepted the role of Secretary. No volunteer came forward for Vice Chair.
- The chair discussed the SharePoint document repository created by Charlene Simmons for the CLE committee, found at Course Learning Evaluations committee SharePoint.
- The next order of business was to discuss the suggestion from Linda Frost, Dean of the Honor's College, to add a question to the student course evaluations concerning the modality that the course was delivered. Junrong asked what to do if your class delivery method doesn't exactly fit into one of the designated types. Fernando added that it would be difficult for the students to identify the modality themselves. Karen asked if we are able to make changes to the questions themselves. Louie pointed out that the committee will only make recommendations to the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Institutional Research (OPEIR) and report to the Faculty Senate.
- The committee next discussed the "Bias in Evaluations" report as tasked by Charlene Simmons. The general consensus was that there is a spectrum of awareness across the campus, but it may be higher in some departments and lower in others. It was agreed that hiring more women and minorities would aid to reduce bias.
- Next was discussed a question from Andrew McCarthy, Head of English and Chair of the Council of Academic Department Heads, concerning the frequency of emails sent to the faculty reminding them of the percentage of complete course evaluations. This topic was tabled until the spring semester.
- The final topic discussed by the committee was the low percentage completion of student course evaluations after the move to digital reporting two years ago. It was generally acknowledged that faculty have a hard time getting the students to fill them out. Questions were posed: 1) what is the current percentage rate and how does that compare to before the move to digital, and 2) what are the completion rates by college and department? This topic was also tabled until the spring semester.

A second (supplemental) meeting of the committee was on 11/6/20. In attendance were Louie Elliott, Leslie Moro, and Gretchen Potts.

#### Summary of meeting minutes:

- The chair asked for a volunteer for the position of Vice Chair. Leslie Moro graciously accepted the role of Vice Chair.

- Gretchen Potts reminded the chair to reach out to the Executive Directors of OPEIR and the Walker Center for their ex-officio appointment to the committee.
- Recap of the topics from the meeting on 10/22/20.

The third meeting of the committee was on 4/20/21. In attendance were Louie Elliott, Brian Rogers, Char Schmidt, Leslie Moro, Fernando Alda, Karen Babine, Cindy Williamson, Adam Micielica, Junrong Shi, Shellie Acocello, Thandi Klingbeil, Nai Lamb, and Dawn Ford.

Summary of meeting minutes:

- General:
  - Last meeting of the committee
  - Been a busy semester due to COVID
- Committee Purpose for the Year:
  - Impetus to investigate racial or gender bias in student evaluations
  - Charlene Simmons assigned a book at beginning of the year
  - Committee members to read the book and do any kind of write-up
- Conversations:
  - More a question of how student perceptions and how they are answering?
  - Are they even qualified to evaluate professors?
  - In prior experience, the questions were to eliminate altogether, and do they have value?
  - Need to know more about options for what we discovered?
  - Change questions again or take concerns to administration?
  - Good start is data analysis for determining where the committee wants to go from here
    - Question was originally about bias in the responses, not the question of the designs
    - OPEIR is currently cleaning up data from prior questions which will result in analysis
  - The survey was most recently designed by this committee, not OPEIR
    - Prior to this committee, it was a different committee that came up with the first version
    - Course modality change was pushed down from the top, not OPEIR
  - Last year COVID resulted in some negative evaluations
    - For people evaluating professors (department heads/dean), to take course learning evaluations with a grain of salt, and to point out to Admin the context/flip
  - Looking at old, COVID, or differences in instrument change?
    - For now, looking through 2017 or 2018
  - Distinction between race/gender of students as well, as part of the data
    - Not feasible to get that data, not pulled in as part of evaluation
  - Does data have comments or just the rating?
    - It's just the quantitative data, not the qualitative

A short report was generated by the Committee on the topic of racial and gender bias in student evaluations. The conclusion reached by the committee is that the validity and reliability of student evaluations is not certain and that the research shows extensive gender and racial biases exist. Acknowledging potential biases associated with SET and course evaluations is the first step in addressing this problem, but additional research and discussion concerning this issue is necessary.

The following recommendations may be useful for faculty, administrators and those involved in the EDO and RTP process:

1. Increased representation of women and minority groups in academia may reduce bias.
2. Faculty members and not administrators should develop instruments and determine practices that reflect the kinds of courses being taught. University-wide evaluation forms should be avoided.
3. Student evaluations should be completed in class.
4. It may be possible to eliminate bias, but the better approach is to look at alternative means of assessing faculty performance.