

Summary Update Number 14, April 15, 2005

Lionel M. Raff
Regents Professor
Chair of the General Faculty

The purpose of this and previous Summary Updates is to keep all Faculty informed of recent events that have occurred and of initiatives currently in progress. All Summary Updates may be found on the webpage for the Faculty Council. Due to the short time frame between this Update and the upcoming General Faculty vote on the Rank-in-Class evaluation proposal, only this issue will be addressed here. Other current issues will be covered in a subsequent update.

Vote on a Proposed Experimental Program to Critically Examine a Voluntary Rank-in-Class (RIC) Evaluation System

After two months of study and revision, the final form of the proposal to initiate an experimental educational project designed to test the efficiency of a rank-in-class (RIC) evaluation system to serve as an auxiliary evaluation metric for assessment of student performance was debated and then approved by the Faculty Council on a 74.1% favorable vote. The actual vote was 20 in favor, 7 opposed. This vote sends the issue to the General Faculty for a mail-in vote with a positive recommendation for approval from the Faculty Council. The mail-in vote will be conducted during the last two weeks of April. The complete text of the proposal can be viewed by logging onto the Faculty Council's site using the drop down menu on the University's home page. Once the Faculty Council's home page loads, click on the highlighted link at the top of the page "here".

Many faculty sincerely believe that RIC evaluations will produce a quantum leap in the effort many of our students devote to their studies. These faculty believe that this increased effort will produce a greatly enhanced academic performance that is reflected in improved graduation rates and student success subsequent to graduation. Many other faculty sincerely believe that this will not happen. They believe that students will take advantage of the optional nature of the program and not participate by simply requesting transcripts that do not show RIC evaluations. Others believe that competition is counterproductive to learning.

I suggest that the essential point is that neither of these groups can be certain that they are correct. This is the case because there are virtually no data on the efficacy of an RIC evaluation procedure. The proposed program will change this dramatically. At the end of the four-year program, a specialized, balanced assessment committee will report their objective evaluations of graduation rates, retention rates, student success rates in obtaining entry level positions, student satisfaction, etc that result from the use of RIC

evaluations. Since some departments will opt not to participate, the evaluation committee will automatically have good control groups to assist in the assessment process. We anticipate appropriate publications in educational journals as one of the products of the program. Research to discover the truth is the very essence of a true university.

My position is that we should conduct this educational research project to determine if an auxiliary RIC evaluation procedure will provide a positive benefit to the University and its students. At the present time, grades are severely inflated. Even more serious is the fact that the distribution of grades has become so narrowed that there is little incentive for many of our better students to study and learn. As designed, the RIC project is optional with both students and departments. No department that believes the evaluation procedure will be harmful need participate. The departments that regard RIC evaluations as potentially very beneficial will have the option of using them.

To obtain the opportunity to test the efficiency of RIC evaluations, we must obtain a positive vote from the General Faculty. I am, therefore, requesting that you put aside any reservations you may have about the RIC proposal and vote to give us the opportunity to conduct this research.

Over the last four years, when the Faculty has needed help, the Faculty Council and its officers have provided that assistance. Examples include the class action lawsuit to address retirement issues, attention to the problems in the IT Division, sabbatical leave policy changes, policy changes to allow increased access to vested TIAA-CREF funds, restoration of the Student/Faculty IT Committee, revision of Appendices A, B and D in the Faculty Handbook, lobbying efforts with the Board of Regents that resulted in the President's Restore, Reward, Grow program to raise faculty salaries to the average of the Big 12, and actions that resulted in the return of peer-reviewed journals to the main library. We have also obtained faculty representation on the University Cabinet (President, Provost, and all Vice Presidents).

Next week you will receive your ballot on the RIC proposal. To have the opportunity to investigate such an evaluation method, we now need your help. I ask you to provide it.