Digital Assessment Working Group
Recommendation on Course Evaluations
June 20, 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND
In March 2011, the Senate-Administration Council on Assessment (SACA) charged the Digital Assessment Working Group with developing recommendations for

1) An electronic system that will facilitate the management, archiving and reporting of annual assessment results for academic and administrative units (i.e. an 'assessment management system'); and

2) Managing the collection, use (reporting) and archiving of data from the new course evaluation form at course, program and institutional levels and in support of faculty tenure and promotion review.

The Working Group was charged with these two separate but related tasks because 1) in fall 2010, the campus adopted a single course evaluation form that gathers student feedback on learning outcomes relevant to course, program and institutional assessment initiatives, and 2) in response, in spring 2011, the Schools of Natural Sciences (NS) and Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA) decided to upgrade their course evaluation systems. These two initiatives created the opportunity to address course evaluation needs at an institutional level. This includes ensuring that learning outcomes data are accessible to the assessment management system and, more generally, to facilitate as possible the flow of course evaluation data to Digital Measures, the newly adopted faculty activity reporting system in support of tenure and promotion.

The Working Group's recommendations regarding the management of the course evaluation process follow.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The Working Group's recommendation for managing course evaluation is divided into three parts (A-C).

Recommendation Part A: Meet the Following Five Basic Needs for a Course Evaluation System, Regardless of the Method Used to Conduct Course Evaluations

Regardless of the method used to conduct course evaluations, the Working Group unanimously recommends that the following five needs be met in regard to conducting course evaluations at UC Merced. 1) Implement a single, campus wide system for managing course evaluations, possibly in partnership with another UC campus; 2) centrally manage the course evaluation process; 3) generate digital course evaluation data; 4) generate and deliver reports for all instructors in a timely fashion; and 5) develop a campus policy for the collection and use of course evaluation data that assures appropriate levels of confidentiality for students and instructors.

Recommendation Part B: Adopt a Centrally Managed, Online Course Evaluation System

The Working Group unanimously recommends that the campus adopt a centrally managed, online course evaluation system as this is the most cost-effective and resource efficient approach to conducting course evaluations. These criteria are particularly important in the context of increasing

enrollments and continued fiscal constraint. A shift toward online evaluations is also consistent with UC-wide trends, as five of the other eight undergraduate serving campuses have transitioned or are currently transitioning to an online method.

Adoption of an online system will save the considerable staff time associated with preparing, distributing, and scanning paper forms. These activities currently require about six to seven weeks of staff time annually per School. An online system will also enable instructors, programs, schools and the institution to easily customize the basic form to meet specific needs. Finally, as observed in the Merritt Writing Program and in the literature, student responses to open-ended questions will be legible, longer, and more detailed and, thus, more informative.

Recommendation Part C: Develop and implement a campus-wide strategy to obtain high response rates for online course evaluation

The Working Group unanimously recommends that, as part of the adoption of a centralized, online course evaluation system, the campus develop and implement a campus-wide strategy to obtain high response rates for online course evaluation. Such a strategy should capitalize on literature based recommendations that are outlined in the Working Group's full recommendation. While both local observations and the literature indicate that response rates to online course evaluations are nearly always lower than paper-based rates, numerous studies have examined the impact of this reduction in sample size on quantitative results and found no significant and/or meaningful differences between these two methodologies. With respect to qualitative results, studies show that student responses to open-ended questions in online course evaluations are longer, more informative, and more legible than those generated through paper-based surveys.