

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
University Senate

Sense of Senate Resolution on Confidential Student Evaluations

07-16/17-FAC – November 15, 2016

WHEREAS, The current system of student evaluation within the CSU, as set forth in section 15.17 of the CSU Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2014-17, is an anonymous system, meaning it is normally impossible for anyone to connect a student with their responses; and an alternative possibility is a confidential system, which allows connection of students with their responses under certain conditions; and

WHEREAS, Faculty at Humboldt State have been, through anonymous student evaluations submitted in recent semesters, exposed to instances of gender-specific harassment and gender-specific foul or abusive language that is in violation of the Standards for Student Conduct (TITLE 5. California Code of Regulations. 41301); and

WHEREAS, The anonymous nature of student evaluations prevents the Humboldt State University Administration from pursuing serious allegations appearing in student evaluations, yet such allegations may influence a faculty member's reputation; and

WHEREAS, The anonymous nature of student evaluations prevents the Humboldt State University Administration from pursuing conduct violations unless the language of the evaluation is considered by law enforcement to constitute a threat; and

WHEREAS, The absence of redress for faculty exposed to harassment and/or foul or abusive language through student evaluations causes undue stress to faculty, negatively impacts the classroom environment, may cause faculty to leave HSU, hinders the investigation of possible Title IX violations, and forfeits commonly accepted standards of accountability; now, therefore be it:

RESOLVED: That the Senate of Humboldt State University strongly urges the CFA and CSU to replace CSU's anonymous student evaluation process (CBA Article 15.17) with a confidential student evaluation process. We strongly encourage the CFA and CSU to make this change in the next contract; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the Senate of Humboldt State University strongly urges the CFA and CSU to adopt confidential student evaluations solely to permit campuses to address alleged violations of University policy, and that student evaluation continue to be guided by the ideals of receiving constructive criticisms of faculty teaching. A student's identity shall be unveiled by appropriate administrators only when necessitated by alleged violations of University policy; and be it further

RESOLVED: That this Resolution be forwarded to the HSU Chapter of the California Faculty Association, Associated Students at HSU, the leaders of the CFA and CSU bargaining teams, the Academic Senate of the CSU, and the Associated Students of the CSU.

RATIONALE:

We owe it to our faculty to be vocal and to act on this issue, first and foremost because it is the right thing to do. Abusive/harassing language appearing in anonymous student evaluations is not theoretical, but has happened on campus. The inability to act and appropriately deal with students who engage in this conduct is antithetical to the values espoused in our Strategic Plan (“We believe in the dignity of all individuals”), and contrary to the Student Code of Conduct. Literature on this subject reveals that abusive, harassing, and attacking comments within student evaluations is primarily aimed at female faculty and faculty of color. For example, Lampman (2012, “Women Faculty at Risk: U.S. Professors Report on their Experiences with Student Incivility, Bullying, Aggression, and Sexual Attention”) noted “Women, minorities, younger faculty, and those with less experience and credentials reported more incivility/bullying from students.” Furthermore, contrapower harassment (defined *in 1984* by Katherine Benson as sexual harassment when the victim has formal power over the abuser – the term was coined in reference to faculty-student relationships) can have very serious impacts on faculty (for a succinct summary see “Contrapower Harassment and the Professional Archetype: Gender, Race, and Authority in the Classroom” by NiCole T. Buchanan and Tamara A. Bruce in Association of American Colleges and Universities’ *On Campus with Women*. 34:1-2). A move to confidential, rather than anonymous, student evaluations will not eliminate abusive/harassing/threatening language. However, over time, it is highly likely that it will reduce the frequency of such language, and will allow us to formally deal with those who use student evaluations to harass/bully/attack or threaten faculty.