CofC Faculty Educational Technology Committee  
Meeting minutes  
Feb 25, 2010

Committee members present: Bing Pan, Georgia Schlau, Henry Xie, Bob Podolsky, Amy Mecklenburg-Faenger  
Committee members absent: Dongmei Cao, Tim Scheett, Bradley Woods

The committee was tasked with recommending possible solutions to the misuse of College-sponsored listservs. The request to the committee came from Joe Kelly, Speaker of the Faculty, in response to a request by Bev Diamond, Interim Provost.

Problems with listserv misuse are of two main types: replies and inappropriate subjects. These are best exemplified by a review of postings to the FACULTYANDSTAFF listserv during calendar year 2009. The description for this listserv indicates that it is intended for official College business and is not meant to receive replies or involve discussion. Nevertheless:

- at least 15% of postings were replies to previous postings (includes only those tagged with “Re:”; could be higher given that many threads change subjects);
- based on a subsampling of 300 of the remaining 2273 posts, approximately 21% were for campus events appropriate for the EVENTS listserv (and many of which were duplicated on the EVENTS listserv) and 14% were appropriate for other listservs (OPENDISCUSSION or CLASSIFIEDADS).
- In summary, at least 50% of posts were inappropriate for this listserv, adding at least 1330 additional messages per year.

These problems exist to varying degrees on other listservs, but the main problems appear to be with the FACULTYANDSTAFF and FACULTY listservs. The committee considers most violations to be out of ignorance, though there is some evidence of willful violations once individuals have been contacted about poor practices.

The goals of trying to reduce these problems are:

- to reduce mailbox and archive clutter by eliminating duplicate postings;
- to create a more reliable set of archives, so that information can be relocated more easily (for example, classified ads, discussion items, and official College announcements can be reliably found in their relevant listserv archives);
- to allow faculty to avoid receiving messages that are appropriate for listservs from which they have chosen to opt out.

The Faculty Educational Technology Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. Rename the FACULTYANDSTAFF and FACULTY listservs to more clearly indicate that they are intended for official College business only. Currently they are treated as a way to reach faculty and/or staff with any information. We recommend using OFFICIALBUSINESSFACSTAFF and OFFICIALBUSINESSFAC as the new listserv names. Another possibility is OFFICIALFACSTAFF and OFFICIALFAC.
2. Clearly define what qualifies as “official College business.” If relevant, limit posting privileges on the official business listservs to those who convey official business.
3. Create a new listserv called COFCDISCUSSION as a forum for the College community to discuss College issues. These discussions currently show up on FACULTYANDSTAFF (where they are inappropriate) or on OPENDISCUSSION (where they are not seen by the large number of people who have opted out). We feel that many who are not interested in discussing current events as covered on OPENDISCUSSION might want to know about discussions of campus issues.

4. Redefine or clarify definitions of some listservs. For example, CLASSIFIEDADDS (which would be better called CLASSIFIEDS) should be described as a forum for all discussion about or offers of goods or services (commercial, religious, animal adoption, etc.).

5. Create a mechanism for reporting violations of listserv policies, along with a mechanism for banning repeat offenders. We recommend a system where complaints must originate from faculty or staff. The complaint would be sent to a designated individual or committee, to evaluate whether the complaint is valid. Violators would be warned for a 1st offense and banned for one year from posting on that listserv for a 2nd offense. We hope that our other recommendations will help to reduce the need for enforcement.

6. To further reduce this need, include a footer on all listserv postings that provides a brief description of the purpose of the listserv. For example, the footer for posts to the OFFICIALBUSINESSFACSTAFF listserv could say something like, “This listserv provides official announcements of College business. It is not intended for other postings or for replies. Repeat offenders will be banned from posting.”

7. As part of new faculty orientation, and as a reminder at the start of each school year, an email should be sent by IT listing the purpose of each of the College-sponsored listservs and a reminder about enforcement of rules.

Bob Podolsky
Chair, FETC

Additional notes on above recommendations in response to questions sent by Bev Diamond
Apr 21, 2010

1) Currently, we allow faculty to opt out of the Facultyandstaff or the Faculty listserv. I believe. Because people aren’t always aware of this, and because most people don’t have access to the FacultyAdmin listserv that people cannot opt out of, College messages do not make it to all faculty. Are you proposing that as we rename these to Officialxxx, that we continue to allow opting out or prevent it?

It seems to me that the administration should be assured of reaching all faculty and/or staff with particular kinds of information. The only way I can think of doing so is to require that faculty/staff belong to the “OFFICIAL” listservs, which is a reasonable requirement since the email account is provided by the College. So, I would recommend mandatory official FacAdmin, FacStaff, Fac, etc. listservs, as many combinations as are needed for official announcements to reach the right people.

2) Currently, we allow people who subscribe to any of the unmoderated listservs (and there are very few moderated listservs) to post as well. I am not familiar with the technology, but it makes sense to me that either a listserv is unmoderated, and any subscriber can post, or it is moderated, and IT would have to update the list of faculty and staff every time someone was hired in order to allow them to post, clearly a
cumbersome procedure. Do you have an enforcement mechanism in mind for offenders of protocol, knowing the technology better than I do? It's possible that some of your other suggestions and some education will get rid of the need for enforcement.

Unfortunately I don't know the technology much better than you do. This is the kind of suggestion that needs to be put to IT to see how feasible/time consuming it would be to control who can post to a college listserv. It would take someone's time, but not much. It could work easily if an employee's job classification put them on a list that automatically made them eligible for posting to an administration listserv. As for starting with an open list and then banning offenders, this would likely involve someone adding names to a list, but again I think the frequency should be low. Yes, here's hoping that education will reduce the need for enforcement.

3) Regarding complaints originating from faculty or staff—everyone who works here is faculty or staff. Could you elaborate on who you thought ought not to originate a complaint, or the sense of what you were after here? Do you mean classified staff?

I should have been clearer. What I meant is that an employee would actually have to register a complaint as a first step in enforcement, as opposed to someone in IT monitoring for non-compliance.

4) The EVENTS listserv is supposed to be for the posting of College events. Should this be renamed COLLEEVEVENTS or should its purpose be broadened? My concern with it being broadened is that people opt out and we lose the ability to reach people with College events. Or would the Committee recommend allowing these events on the OFFICIALxxx listservs, something that doesn't fit with current instructions?

Currently, EVENTS is broadly used for all events. I see a couple of options. (1) We could allow the broad practice to continue and change the official description. A quick look at the EVENTS archive suggests that fewer than 5% of posts are for outside events. So, it seems unlikely that people are opting out of the EVENTS listserv because of the posting of outside events. Keeping EVENTS all inclusive is the easiest way to make sure that events are not posted inappropriately to other listservs. (2) As you suggest we could have a listserv for College events and perhaps one for other events. If so, I would abandon EVENTS and replace it with COFCEVENTS and OTHEREVENTS. It might even be useful to have the discussion listservs be named in parallel, COFCDISCUSSION and OTHERDISCUSSION. I could ask George Hopkins how he would feel about changing the name from OPENDISCUSSION.

So, to summarize a possible revamped collection of listserv names:

OFFICIALFAC
OFFICIALFACSTAFF
OFFICIALADMINFAC
CLASSIFIEDS
SPORTS
COFCDISCUSSION
OPENDISCUSSION (or OTHERDISCUSSION if we use OTHEREVENTS)
EVENTS
or
COFCEVENTS
OTHEREVENTS
The committee discussed three issues at this meeting.

I. **Online course evaluations.** The FETC has been handling this issue since 2005, and has previously listed costs and benefits of moving to an online system in FETC committee and Faculty Senate meeting minutes. The FETC has been the home committee for this issue since 2005, and has previously listed costs and benefits of moving to an online system in FETC committee and Faculty Senate meeting minutes. For this meeting we were asked by Interim Provost Bev Diamond for our perspective regarding whether to replace the paper system with a fully electronic system, as a hybrid system is no longer considered an option. Use of a newly adopted evaluation form awaits a decision about whether to use the paper or electronic format.

The general consensus of our discussion was that online evaluations will be adopted sooner or later, given that apparent benefits outweigh costs and that such systems have been adopted successfully elsewhere. Because response rates at other institutions have been shown to rise following an initial drop at the start of the program, the college should focus most on ensuring that response rates are immediately maximized, in order not to disadvantage faculty who will rely for tenure and promotion on evaluation data collected soon after the switch. Hence, assuming that the online system will be adopted now or later, the relevant questions seem to be:

1. Do we currently have the information needed to maximize response rates?
2. Is the college prepared, based on that information, to maximize response rates?

Regarding question 1, we feel that (a) faculty who took part in the pilot program should be consulted to find out what worked or did not work from their perspective, (b) faculty whose response rates were especially high should be consulted in more depth to find out how they achieved those rates, and (c) students, perhaps through SGA, should be heavily consulted to find out what would increase their participation. We do not know if these data are available, but they seem critical to implementing a permanent program.

Regarding question 2, we feel that all means of increasing response rates should be under consideration, pending feedback from faculty, students, and evaluation of success at other institutions. For example:

1. Using positive or negative incentives. The student member of our committee cited having access to grades as an especially strong motivator and felt it should be considered. Such is the policy at other schools that show high response rates.
2. Allowing students as always to “opt out” of giving feedback on individual questions or on entire course evaluations, but only by visiting the evaluation.
(3) Making evaluations available at more convenient times. Giving evaluations during the last week of class seems necessary only with a paper system. Students might find it easier to participate once classes are finished, for example on a reading day. Students might even be given the option of completing an evaluation after the final exam, since the exam is part of their experience of the course. It does seem reasonable to require evaluations only during typical daytime class hours in order to avoid late night venting.

(4) Making it easier to navigate to evaluations and feedback. We discussed a general rule of web design that information should be placed no more than two clicks away, especially when asking the viewer to fulfill a task. Consider single-click reminder emails that go to password-protected pages where evaluations can be completed rather than the more cumbersome process of navigation through a set of pages that requires a set of instructions. Students are more likely to complete an evaluation if they receive reminders when sitting at a computer, and faculty are likely to find the system less frustrating if the data are not buried in the Faculty Activity System.

II. Committee representation on the panel to acquire a new learning management system (LMS). Tim Scheett from our committee has volunteered to serve. Deanna explained that he will be part of a larger group (ADITR, Academic Department IT Representatives) making initial recommendations, and will also be part of a smaller group of five on the procurement panel. The decision will be based in part input from users who will have a chance to try the four options under review.

Deanna Caveny left before the next discussion.

III. Committee role in distance education. The committee received a request from Joe Kelly, Speaker of the Faculty, to consider voting on, bringing to the faculty senate, and maintaining the guidelines for Distance Education (DE) on campus. A member of our committee, Henry Xie, serves on the DE committee but has not yet attended any meetings.

Our discussion supported the unanimous opinion that the FETC was not the proper home for administration of the DE guidelines. The presumption seems to be that a DE course is like a traditional course with technology added, but those with experience in DE indicated that such courses require extensive planning and alteration involving more pedagogical and curricular issues than technical issues. Teaching at a distance can substantially change how material is covered and the nature of interactions, learning exercises, and evaluations. Few of the guidelines seem to involve issues within the mandate of the FETC. An alternative suggestion was to have a separate DE branch or subcommittee within the curriculum committee, with the FETC serving in an advisory role on technological issues.

Some additional concern was expressed about moving ahead with DE (a) without sufficient resources in place, including technical support, given that resources for on-campus educational technology are viewed by many as inadequate, (b) without technological means in place for verifying that enrolled students are actually doing work or taking exams, and (c) without verifying that ISPs within the state of South Carolina are sufficient to meet the demands of online course activity. Before finalizing guidelines for course design the DE committee ought to develop a realistic blueprint for the resources needed to launch a successful program, which might be better gauged by consulting other successful programs.

Bob Podolsky, FETC Chair
CofC Faculty Educational Technology Committee
Meeting minutes
Aug 18, 2009

Committee members present: Amy Mecklenberg-Faenger, Tim Scheett, Georgia Schlau, Henry Xie, Dongmei Cao, Bob Podolsky
Committee members absent: Bing Pan

The FETC had its first meeting of the academic year in the Mathematics conference room at 2 PM. After discussing the recent history of the committee’s work, which focused for the last two years exclusively on online evaluations, we agreed that we would prefer to focus on issues that are related more directly to education.

During individual introductions we described the issues that brought each of us to the committee. Out of this conversation emerged several issues:

- making knowledge of technology resources, including classrooms and available software, more transparent
- providing a central web location for information about educational technology (e.g., Web 2.0, mobile technologies, clicker use, etc.)
- helping to advance the goal of upgrading classroom facilities
- helping to advance the goal of choosing a new course management system
- helping to advance a laptop and wireless computing initiative

There was generally a low level of interest in dealing with privacy issues, particularly regarding the storage of grades, as these seemed less related to education than to security. No one had expertise or even experience with the kinds of electronic gradebook software being discussed by the privacy committee.

We concluded the meeting with a discussion of several possible goals for the committee this year and with some immediate goals of gaining information about the following issues:

- status of the switch to a new course management system, and potential role for FETC
- status of hardware technology survey, and potential role for FETC
- interest in laptop initiative
- potential for survey of faculty use of technology and interests
- development by FETC of guidelines for IT to implement webpages with materials for aiding faculty in use of educational technologies
- potential role of FTI in the development of such materials

The meeting concluded at 3:30.

Bob Podolsky, Chair