

## Proposal: Online Teaching Evaluations A Proposal by the CCFIT Online Teaching Evaluations Subcommittee (May 28, 2007)

### Introduction

Course and instructor evaluations are an integral part of the teaching experience and play a significant role in promotion and merit review. The current system for course and instructor evaluation being used at UC Davis relies on an inflexible paper system that uses outdated and labor intensive technology. The more than 8,000 courses offered at UC Davis each quarter places a heavy burden on staff who must process forms and transcribe written comments before releasing the evaluations for faculty review. Other universities, including three UC campuses, have recognized the inefficiency of the paper based system for course evaluation and have implemented secure on-line procedures. These web-based, secure, on-line course and instructor evaluations have significantly reduced the staff work load and improved overall efficiency. At Davis, The School of Veterinary Medicine has successfully used on-line evaluations for over 5 years. The Vet School has recently developed a course and instructor evaluation tool as part of their Sakai learning management system (LMS). Sakai is the underlying engine for Smartsite, the new LMS being rolled out for use by the general campus in Fall 2007.

### Specific Aim

The Office of Information Technology and Education (IET) has announced the roll out of Smartsite, a new LMS that simplifies the use of technology in the classroom. Smartsite provides faculty with several improved tools for course management including grade book functions, Wiki's, quiz and exam builders, and course communication tools. The open source code format of Smartsite allows for easy addition of new tools as well as improvements to existing one by programmer within IET. With the availability of Vet School's Sakai-based course evaluation system, the Campus Committee for Information Technology (CCFIT) believes that the Davis Campus can begin the process of implementing on-line courses and instructor evaluations through the Smartsite platform. It is the specific aim of this proposal to request that :

*The Provost provide the resources necessary so that programmers within IET can adapt the School of Veterinary Medicine's Sakai-based course and instructor evaluation tool to the Smartsite LMS.*

### The Need for On-line Course and Instructor Evaluations

There are two primary reasons to switch from a paper evaluation system to an on-line process:

1. *Reduction in Staff Workload.* The current procedure for course and instructor evaluations requires significant time and effort by staff. Completed forms must be read on a scanner and written comments transcribed. Estimates of staff time required to process one medium size class section (100-150 students) range between 8-10 person hours. Departments that provide "service" courses to the campus, i.e., Mathematics, Physics, English, etc., commit several weeks of staff time to the evaluation process. On-line evaluations would significantly reduce staff workload to almost zero by automatically storing numerical data and written comments to an electronic database. Summary reports would be generated electronically and made available to instructors and review panels through Smartsite.
2. *Increased Security.* Several departments and instructors have independently instituted online, web-based course and instructor evaluations. The chairs of CCFIT and The Evaluations Working Group have received several inquires from departments as to the availability of online evaluation systems. That is, faculty and staff have recognized the time saving features of on-line course and instructor evaluation. However, decentralized use of on-line evaluations exposes the university to an unacceptable risk level of security breach. It is unlikely that independently developed evaluations, i.e. systems not developed by IET, or purchased software have the appropriate authentication schemes or oversight by security experts within IET. An incident has already occurred on this campus where the results of an evaluation were released generally to the public along with student identification numbers. An on-line course and instructor evaluation tool imbedded in the secure Smartsite would reduce significantly the risk of security breach.

**Why the Smartsite On-Line Course and Evaluation System**

The School of Veterinary Medicine along with a team from Virginia Tech University initiated a project to develop a Course and Instructor Evaluation tool for Sakai. While Virginia Tech no longer participates in this project, the School of Veterinary Medicine has successfully completed their work and the Course and Instructor Evaluation tool has been placed into service through their version of Smartsite. Adapting the Vet School's evaluation systems to the general campus has several advantages. First, the Sakai evaluation tool has been beta-tested within the computer architecture of UCD and shown to have only minor problems; these problems are currently being addressed. The Sakai-based system has also been tested outside the Vet School in an upper division course, Nutrition 116A, and found to work well. Second, the Sakai on-line version of the course evaluation tool comes already integrated with the Banner System. Unlike purchased, closed-sources software, no programming will be needed for Banner integration. Third, while standard evaluation questions are part of the Sakai Course and Instructor Evaluation tool, departments and instructors can easily include questions specific to their course needs. Finally, the use of a course evaluation tool within Smartsite will eliminate the need for faculty and staff training. Those already using Smartsite will not need any further instruction in order to use the evaluation tool.

**Use of On-line Course and Instructor Evaluations as a Volunteer Program**

The CCFIT proposes that the initial use of the Smartsite Course and Instructor Evaluation Tool be voluntary. A voluntary program would allow IET, Deans, departments and instructors time to evaluate the bugs in the systems and request changes that would better serve the students. CCFIT and the new Academic Senate Standing Committee on Technology would coordinate procedures for evaluation and report directly to Kirk Alexander, Project Manager for Smartsite. We expect that the evaluation procedure will be similar to those already in place for other Smartsite tools.

**Estimate Cost for Re-Programming Sakai to Fit the Needs of the Campus**

The School of Veterinary Medicine programmed the Sakai Course and Instructor Evaluation specific to their needs. While we do not expect significant problems in adapting the program to Smartsite, some re-coding will be necessary. Kirk Alexander, member of the Working Group and current Project Manager for Smartsite has provided a rough estimate of time and staff need. The precise cost for the project cannot be finalized until the programming team at Mediaworks evaluates the code written by the Vet School programmers.

Table 1. Estimate costs for imbedding the School of Veterinary Medicine Sakai-based Course and Instructor Evaluation tool into Smartsite.

Activity	Staff Needs	Hours Required	Cost*
Programming	Programmer V	4 Person Months	\$33,120
Quality Assurance	Programmer V	2 Person Months	\$16,560
Oracle Database	Programmer V	1 Person Months	\$8,280
Administration and Beta-testing	Various/Students	Various	\$10,000
	Total		\$67,960

\*Cost of Programmer V is based on current figures at mid-range provided by the Division of Human Resources (\$5796/month). 30% benefits have been added.