



Evaluating Evaluations and Mitigating Potential Harm **Academic Appointments Support Committee Session** **(2024-10-29)**

Overview:

This session was offered to examine Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPoTs) and peer evaluations through an EDI lens, and learn how to effectively use SPoT data to support tenure and promotion applications. Explore ways you can handle and respond to vexatious comments to mitigate psychological harm.

Presented by:

- Breda Eubank, Health and Physical Education. As the former Chair of the Faculty Evaluation Committee (now a part of the Policy and Governance Committee of the Association).
 - Mirjam Knapik, Counselling (presenting in this session to provide faculty with methods to manage vexatious comments)
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Key Takaways from the Session

Impact of SPoTs on Faculty:

- Reading Student Perception of Teaching (SPoTs) can induce anxiety, especially for faculty undergoing tenure review.
- Marginalized faculty members are disproportionately affected by vexatious comments in SPoTs.

Current Process for Addressing Vexatious Comments:

- Faculty must initiate the removal of vexatious comments by submitting Form 300 to their Chair within 10 days of receiving SPoTs, which can exacerbate stress and anxiety.
- The process is seen as inadequate, as it places the burden on faculty to manage distressing feedback.

Defining Vexatious Comments:

- Recommendations for what constitutes vexatious comments include irrelevant, harassing, frivolous, and defamatory remarks.
- Misgendering and off-topic comments should be recognized as vexatious and addressed accordingly; however, there is anecdotal evidence which suggests that comments misgendering Members have not been removed.

Systemic Issues and Training:

- The current evaluation system perpetuates systemic biases, and there's a disconnect between how SPoTs are utilized and their actual proven ineffectiveness in evaluating teaching.
- Training for tenure and promotion committee members should, perhaps, be ongoing, rather than a one-time requirement. This could help to ensure that members of Tenure and Promotion Committees keep these concerns about SPoTs top of mind when considering SPoT feedback in tenure dossiers.

Psychological Safety Concerns:

- Negative comments can lead to significant anxiety, perceived as a threat to faculty well-being.

- The Employer needs to enhance its processes related to SPoTs to provide psychological protection in the workplace, ensuring that feedback mechanisms do not harm faculty.

Possible Recommendations for Improvement:

- Modernize SPoT evaluation processes using AI to filter vexatious comments before faculty view them.
- Enhance student education on the importance and impact of SPoTs to encourage meaningful feedback.
- Advocate for the use of SPoTs only for formative purposes, not summative evaluations related to tenure. This change can be achieved through bargaining with Member support.

Future Steps:

- Continued dialogue on the topic in bargaining to effect systemic changes.
- Emphasize the responsibility of the employer to safeguard psychological safety and support faculty through improved feedback processes.

Action Items for Faculty:

- Utilize Form 300 proactively to remove harmful comments from tenure dossiers.
- Engage with students to foster a culture of constructive feedback and respect within SPoT evaluations.