

Associated Students, Inc.
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo

Resolution #25-04

RESOLUTION CALLING FOR REFORM OF THE COURSE EVALUATION
INSTRUMENT AND PROCESSES

- WHEREAS: The ASI Board of Directors serves as the official voice of students at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), San Luis Obispo, and
- WHEREAS: Student evaluation instruments as defined in Section 8.4 of the University Faculty Personnel Policies¹, commonly known as “course evaluations” or “student opinion surveys” shall be referred to throughout this document as “student evaluations of teaching” (SETs), and
- WHEREAS: “Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are commonly used to provide: (1) formative feedback to faculty for improving teaching, course content and structure; (2) a summary measure of teaching effectiveness for promotion and tenure decisions;”² and
- WHEREAS: “Students are well-positioned to speak of their satisfaction with their experience in a course (e.g., difficulty of content, engagement, or boredom) but are much less capable of assessing an instructor’s teaching quality, effectiveness, and breadth of knowledge and scholarship;”³ and
- WHEREAS: As per the University Faculty Personnel Policies, AY 2024-2025, “all student evaluation instruments must be proposed by the department and approved by the college and the office of academic personnel;”⁴ and
- WHEREAS: As established by AS-759-13⁴, “All student evaluation instruments must include the following two prompts with responses on an agreement scale:
1. Overall, this instructor was educationally effective
 2. Overall, this course was educationally effective;”³ and
- WHEREAS: According to the Collective Bargaining Agreement, CBA 2022-2025, “written or electronic student course evaluations of faculty instructional effectiveness... shall be required for all faculty unit employees who teach;”⁵ and
- WHEREAS: “During the time of periodic evaluation and performance review of a faculty unit employee, the Working Personnel Action File (WPAF), which includes all information, materials, recommendations, responses, [course evaluations summaries,] and

1 https://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/academic-personnel/1/PDF/criteria_university.pdf

2 Student Evaluation of Teaching EffectivenessResearchGate<https://www.researchgate.net/download/1.pdf>

3 <https://evals.stanford.edu/evaluating-teaching/course-feedback-measure-teaching-effectiveness>

4 <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/senateresolutions/761/>

5 <https://www.calfac.org/contract-2022-2025/#article-15>

rebuttals, shall be incorporated by reference into the Personnel Action File;”⁵ and

WHEREAS: “Faculty unit employees may submit written rebuttals to student course evaluations pursuant to Provision 11.2 when it is believed that additional information is needed or in the case of student bias. Evaluators must review such written rebuttals when reviewing underlying student course evaluations;”⁵ and

WHEREAS: “Student course evaluations collected as part of the regular student evaluation process shall be anonymous and identified only by course and/or section;”⁵ and

WHEREAS: “The format of student course evaluations shall be quantitative (e.g., “Scantron” form, etc.) or a combination of quantitative and qualitative (e.g., space provided on the quantitative form for student comments);”⁵ and

WHEREAS: “Course Summary Reports” are provided to instructors after grades are due, consisting of “a complete accounting of the quantitative responses and all the student comments from a given class section of a course”;¹ and

WHEREAS: “Research consistently fails to find evidence of a compelling correlation between measures of student learning and ratings of teaching quality and effectiveness;”³ and

WHEREAS: “Research has identified a number of factors that affect SETs that are out of an instructor’s control. Ratings can be biased by a number of variables such as an instructor’s gender, perceived attractiveness, ethnicity, and race. Evidence also suggests that course characteristics such as class size and type (core curriculum versus elective) affect SETs;”³ and

WHEREAS: The Cal Poly College of Liberal Arts implements a guide for anti-bias in evaluations with the purpose of “identify[ing] how biases could potentially impact the review of retention, promotion, tenure, and leave cases and to make suggestions for avoiding negative impacts;”⁶ and

WHEREAS: “Evidence suggests that there are issues with the statistical validity of SETs, such as there being non-standard distances between ratings (e.g., unequal difference in scoring assignment of responses such as ‘Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, or Very Poor’), which makes interpreting results – especially when comparing means – problematic;”³ and

WHEREAS: University-wide response rates of SETs have fallen below 46% every quarter since AY 2020-2021;⁷ and

WHEREAS: SETs are subject to response bias such that the distribution of responses is often bi-modal and may fail to represent the broader student population; and

6 <https://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/cla/1/images/21-22%20Anti%20Bias%20Guidance%20for%20Evaluations.pdf>

7 <https://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/academicsenate/1/images/sa011425.pdf>

WHEREAS: "The use of SETs as a basis for decisions on promotion and tenure is justified only if SETs are a valid measure of teaching effectiveness and student learning;"⁸ and

THEREFORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: The ASI Board of Directors recommends that the course evaluation instrument be referred to as "student evaluations of teaching" (SETs) in all relevant university documents and communications to better reflect the purpose and scope of these evaluations; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: Academic colleges and department chairs consider incorporating more qualitative items into SETs that are within the scope of students' abilities to assess, providing more accurate and constructive feedback on teaching effectiveness; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: The California Faculty Association, through the collective bargaining process, explores expansion of the existing evaluation rebuttal system to allow faculty to request the removal of specific SETs from their Personnel Action Files, subject to approval by the college dean or their designee, to increase accuracy and reduce bias in the representation of teaching performance; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: The Office of Academic Personnel consider designing summary reports to include more robust visual representations of the quantitative rating frequencies to improve clarity of the results; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: All academic colleges consider incorporating anti-bias guidelines into peer evaluation processes for instructor performance reviews to promote fair and objective assessment of SETs and reduce the influence of implicit biases; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: Administrators explore the feasibility of providing students with access to a curated version of student evaluations of teaching, filtered for bias and relevance, to support informed decision-making when selecting courses, instructors, and schedules; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: Actions proposed in this resolution are intended to bolster student response rates and, in doing so, mitigate the broad impacts of

⁸ <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2020.1756817>

response bias and other systemic issues associated with the collection and use of SETs; and

FURTHERMORE
BE IT

RESOLVED: This resolution be sent to University President Jeffrey D. Armstrong, Academic Senate Chair Jerusha Greenwood, Faculty Affairs Committee Chair Kenneth Brown, Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Lynnette Zelezny, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Personnel Simone Aloisio, California Faculty Association San Luis Obispo Chapter President Lisa Kawamura, Interim Dean of the College of Engineering Robert Crockett, Interim Dean of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design Kevin Dong, Dean of the Orfalea College of Business Damon M. Fleming, Interim Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science Jeremy James, Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts Kate Murphy, Dean of the Bailey College of Science and Mathematics Dean Wendt.

Certified as the true and correct copy, in witness thereof, I have set my hand and Seal of the San Luis Obispo Cal Poly Associated Students, Inc. this 20th day of May 2025.

ADOPTED at the regular meeting of the Board of Directors at San Luis Obispo Cal Poly Associated Students, Inc. this 14th day of May 2025.

Attest:

ASI Secretary

Signed:
ASI Chair of the Board

Signed:
ASI President

Authored By:

Hannah Reyes, College of Engineering

Jett Palmer, Bailey College of Science and Mathematics