

Presiding Officer Dr. Ken McGill forwarded this memo in an email message to Standing Committee Chairs and members of the Executive Committee on October 18, 2010

Dear Members of the Academic Community,

I am writing in response to concerns about the discrepancy in computed average ratings of the Student Opinion Survey (SOS) results prior to the implementation of the online system in spring term of 2009 as reported by Susan Cumings:

“ ... for the years preceding the implementation of electronic student evaluations, the summary information from Student Opinion Surveys available on line does not match the summary information provided on paper by Institutional Research back during those years. The raw data (number of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, etc) is the same, but the CRN averages reported are vastly different. This means that the current, on-line system, and the older system used to produce the official paper reports up to and including spring 2008 performed their calculations differently ... “

According to the Office of Institutional Research, the hardcopy data that Susan refers to was generated from the SPSS analysis system and distributed to individual faculty and to their department chair. As Susan indicates, this data was correct. The online data for previous terms (those prior to spring 2009 and incorrect) was generated using a SQL script based on the SPSS file being converted to an Excel spreadsheet and then being loaded into an Oracle data table in the Banner Information System. The raw data is correct but the calculation of averages in the SQL script was incorrect. The averages computed were based on the total number of responses including missing responses. This had the effect of adding a “0” to the sum of responses for each non response and thus lowering the average. This only occurred if a student submitted a paper form (which added “1” to the divisor in the formula for the average) and failed to mark one of the 5 choices, effectively adding a “0” to the sum of responses. The calculations for previous terms (prior to spring 2009) were created at some point in the past and when the online system was implemented in spring 2009, the posted results were not checked as it was assumed the calculations were correct and the output forms were just being made available from a different access point.

The online system avoids all of this because the data is stored in one table as it is collected and that table is the only source for all output.

When the error was discovered, the Office of Institutional Research, in conjunction with the Information Technology Data Management staff, immediately began a process to identify and correct the problem. As of Tuesday the 12th of October, the calculation procedures had been corrected and the raw data verified by Data Management staff. The output for terms prior to spring 2009 has been reviewed by the Office of Institutional Research and is now reported as correct and the calculations are the same as for those terms covered by the online process.

Sincerely,

Sandra Jordan