TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Office *of the* Provost

To: TTU Faculty and Staff

From: Rob Stewart, Senior Vice Provost

Cc: Michael Galyean, Provost & Senior Vice President

Re: SmartEvals Course and Instructor Evaluation System

After more than a year of pilot testing, the electronic system for conducting student evaluations of courses and instructors, SmartEvals, will be implemented campus wide this semester, Fall 2017. This semester has been the go-live target since the start, and the decision to commence with it comes after discussion in many meetings, and careful review of the pilot results. As a reminder, here are some of the advantages of SmartEvals over the traditional paper/pencil approach:

1. The electronic platform is fully accessible for students with disabilities, and is ADA compliant -- a requirement we must adhere to in any case.
2. A single campus platform for student evaluations of courses is more efficient and less costly.
3. SmartEvals results will be available to instructors immediately after the semester's grade reporting is complete (as reported by the Registrar), far faster than our current paper/pencil solution.
4. Students are able to complete SmartEvals over a period of time both inside and outside the classroom.
5. Automated SmartEvals messaging alerts students to the availability of course evaluations and provides reminders.
6. Faculty can send their own reminders to students, including a link to the SmartEvals site.
7. The form is secure behind eRaider credentials. Students can complete forms associated only with the classes they are currently enrolled in.
8. The SmartEvals form includes a comments field, and because access to the form is available over several days, students have more time to offer constructive comments. These comments will be directly available to the instructor along with the ratings summary information.
9. Rating summaries and comments are accessible only to the faculty member, their chairperson and dean, and select Provost staff. Students have no access to submitted comments. Permissions management enables chairs and deans to request access for relevant other reviewers.
10. SmartEvals has flexibility to add custom rating or comment items to a course or department's evaluations. Once we have fully implemented the solution for two semesters, we will activate this feature.

In early meetings and focus groups concerning the implementation of SmartEvals, several questions and concerns emerged that were specifically addressed in review of pilot runs.

1. Response rates
    a. Overall response rates are comparable for SmartEvals and paper/pencil evaluations. In some instances, paper/pencil rates slightly exceeded SmartEvals; in other instances, SmartEvals had higher rates. For the largest pilot sample of Spring 2017 (over 36,000 SmartEvals submitted and over 48,000 paper/pencil evaluations submitted), the

response rates were in the mid 60% range, and not significantly different. In fact, these rates are in the historical normal range for paper/pencil evaluations at Texas Tech.

b. A direct comparison in summer courses showed a substantially higher response rate for SmartEvals (over 60%) than for Qualtrics (about 52%), the electronic evaluation platform used in recent years for summer and online courses.

2. Evaluation item means
    a. For the nearly 100,000 total ratings submitted in Spring 2017, paper/pencil evaluations showed slightly higher mean ratings (e.g., 4.5) on each of the three valuation items compared to SmartEvals (e.g., 4.3). The difference was statistically significant and believed to be a function of the huge data set rather than to real differences between the evaluation approaches. In particular, mean ratings in the mid-4.0 range are interpreted as very good, and 4.6 versus 4.3 is not considered a meaningful difference.
    b. In sum, we found no meaningful difference in evaluation item means across delivery (paper versus electronic) method.

3. Student comments
    a. Anecdotal evidence indicates that students are making better use of the comments field in SmartEvals than what they do on handwritten evaluation forms.
    b. Faculty users have reported better quality comments from their students using SmartEvals.
    c. Student comments will not be accessible to students, nor to others without administrator authorized permission granted.

4. Administering the evaluations
    a. Students and instructors of record will be notified when SmartEvals is available for the semester's period of course evaluation.
    b. Instructors may send their own reminders and provide announcements in class about the availability of SmartEvals.
    c. The system also sends reminders during the availability period.
    d. Students may submit SmartEvals only once per course; once submitted, they are done.
    e. If administered during a class, instructors must be absent from the room, as has been the rule for paper/pencil course evaluations.

Institutional Research will hold training sessions at the end of the month to explain the new course evaluation process for evaluation coordinators and department chairs. Faculty are welcome to contact Kerri Ford or Mary Elkins in Institutional Research with specific questions regarding SmartEvals http://www.depts.ttu.edu/irim/CourseEval/SmartEvals.php. I am also glad to meet with departments or program area faculty, and we look forward to continued discussions or even town hall sessions as we move to campus-wide implementation.

On behalf of the online course evaluation project team, we express appreciation to many faculty members, departments, and whole colleges who have piloted SmartEvals to help us determine the best approach to implementing this important tool.

Thank you.