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Subject: narrative evaluation proposal

I think the most important element of a comprehensive narrative evaluation reform is to ensure that undergraduates are appropriately represented in any decisions that are made. This is consistent with UCSC's "uncommon commitment to undergraduate education." As clients of the educational system, students are in a position to provide unique insights into what works and doesn't work for them. I would therefore like to recommend the addition of voting student representatives to the Committee on Educational Policy and the Academic Senate.

One of the major problems with narrative evaluations is their decreasing value in large introductory courses at UCSC. The most important factor here is the huge class sizes. Class sizes need to be reduced. In K-12, a class of 35 is considered to be too large. A college class of 80 or 90+ must certainly be too large.

In order to improve the quality of the narrative evaluations, students should be required to complete a self-evaluation. Ideally, a picture of the student should be included with the self-evaluation to aid the teacher in linking the name to the student.

Classes should be also transformed into a discussion format rather than a lecture format, so that there is two-way interaction between teachers and students. Individual projects on topics of interest to the student should be encouraged in addition to or in lieu of assigned coursework. Education should be not be the passive receipt of knowledge. (A good site on educational reform written from the perspective of cognitive specialists is Engines for Educators, http://www.ils.nwu.edu/~e_for_e/nodes/EDUCATOR-pg.html) One positive side effect of discussion-based courses is that teachers have much more to go by when writing narrative evaluations than in lecture-based courses.

For classes with 25 or fewer students, "exit" interviews with the instructor could be required. Students can also be encouraged to give their input into curricula and textbook development and selection.

Students and faculty should also be encouraged to interact in other contexts, such as socially and in informal settings.

It also seems as though students and staff are unsure about whether or not to choose grades. I would like the official policy of the school to be to encourage students not to choose grades unless they are considering transferring, medical school, health services careers, or have some specific reason to request grades. This would eliminate a lot of the uncertainty involved, especially for students new to the school...

Narratives are inherently, on a theoretical basis, better than grades. If there are problems with them, it is not with the concept but with the implementation. Let's fix the implementation of narratives rather than eliminating them. Lowering class sizes, putting in voting student representatives on the CEP and Academic Senate, and requiring self evaluations of all students in all courses would be a good start.

Respectfully submitted,
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