

1 September 15, 2011

2 **S.R. 1102**

3
4 **Title: In Support of Mandatory Electronic Course Instructor Surveys**

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6 **WHEREAS,** The Commission of 125 Report states that a “key to improving UT’s capacity for
7 world-class teaching, scholarship, and research is to require that those who lead
8 departments and research centers meet a higher standard of excellence”; and,
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10 **WHEREAS,** The Commission of 125 Report stresses the importance of “holding [faculty]
11 accountable for the outcome” in terms of teaching and research; and,
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13 **WHEREAS,** Student feedback to professors is an essential component of ensuring the retention
14 and development of a world class faculty; and,
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16 **WHEREAS,** Course instructor surveys are the primary mechanism for student feedback about
17 course design and delivery; and,
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19 **WHEREAS,** Students use this data to select courses and evaluate professors when registering
20 for classes each semester; and,
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22 **WHEREAS,** Course instructor surveys are also central to the goals of the Course
23 Transformation program because they “[increase] instructional efficiency and
24 productivity”¹ by providing a standard by which professors are assessed by
25 students who have taken their classes; and,
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27 **WHEREAS,** These surveys are also used to recognize outstanding faculty with teaching awards
28 by providing student feedback on the quality of Course design and on the teach
29 ability of professors; and,
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31 **WHEREAS,** Course instructor surveys must be representative of student opinion as they also
32 factor into tenure decisions; and,
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34 **WHEREAS,** Surveys with fewer than five responses, including those for courses consisting of
35 fewer than five students, create a privacy concern as the course unique number
36 and handwritten comments can possibly be traced back to the students; and,
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38 **WHEREAS,** The current policy may discourage students in small courses from voicing their
39 opinion if they believe the professor will recognize their handwriting; and,

¹ <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/ctp/about-ctp/>

40 **WHEREAS,** Paper surveys are more representative, as they are administered during class
41 where most of the students are present, but the current policy does not protect
42 student anonymity in all cases; and,
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44 **WHEREAS,** However, the alternative to paper surveys, Electronic Course Instructor Surveys,
45 are currently voluntary and because of this student participation is limited; and,
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47 **WHEREAS,** Voluntary responses are more likely to have strong positive or negative biases, as
48 students with strong opinions are more likely to participate in a voluntary survey,
49 which can lead to an inaccurate interpretation of results; and,
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51 **WHEREAS,** The use of handwritten comments in small classes raises privacy concerns that
52 may lead to students censoring their feedback to faculty; and,
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54 **WHEREAS,** Typed comments on electronic course instructor surveys are official university
55 documents and are subject to open records requests; and,
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57 **WHEREAS,** Student comments written in electronic surveys are subject to the Texas Open
58 Records Act (TORA); and,
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60 **WHEREAS,** However, Legally protected data in student comments is redacted if those
61 comments are made public to ensure that student privacy is protected; therefore,
62 be it,
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64 **RESOLVED,** That the Senate of College Councils supports mandatory electronic course
65 instructor surveys; therefore be it further,
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67 **RESOLVED,** That the Senate of College Councils recommends that student grade be withheld
68 until students complete all electronic course instructor surveys from their most
69 recently completed semester; therefore be it further,
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71 **RESOLVED,** That the Senate of College Councils supports the continued use of paper course
72 instructor surveys during the transition period, as they are more representative of
73 student opinion than voluntary electronic surveys; therefore be it further,
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75 **RESOLVED,** That this resolution be sent to Brad Englert, Shelby Stanfield, Gretchen Ritter, the
76 Educational Policy Committee of Faculty Council, and the Research and
77 Education Technology Committee of Faculty Council.
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