

Resolution Encouraging Columbia University Schools to Implement Open Course Evaluations

April 27, 2012

WHEREAS the release of selected results of course evaluations to the University community (“open course evaluations”) promotes a culture of transparency, accountability, and self-examination consistent with the highest ideals of scholarship; and

WHEREAS open course evaluations provide students with critical academic guidance not easily obtained elsewhere; and

WHEREAS a policy of open course evaluations, being a testament to the importance of students’ opinions, encourages students to submit more thoughtful evaluations of greater benefit to instructors and departments; and

WHEREAS a closed course evaluation system reinforces the status quo, namely, widespread use of unofficial third-party evaluation websites exhibiting polarized and unfiltered reviews; and

WHEREAS implementation of an open system affords an opportunity to reexamine and optimize existing course evaluations, to foster University-wide dialogue about the latest pedagogical ideas and techniques, and to encourage improved methods for informing students about courses, such as departmental open houses; and

WHEREAS Columbia's peer schools, and several of Columbia’s graduate schools, have successfully implemented open course evaluations to the benefit of both students and faculty,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT all Columbia University schools work to implement an open evaluation system during the 2012-2013 academic year, with due consideration to the specific needs and limitations of each academic program, and the expectation that open course evaluations should become the norm; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the implementation of open evaluations be done with consideration to the Report on Open Course Evaluations published by the Student Affairs Committee and its recommendations, including recommendations that

- future responses to selected quantitative questions, and appropriately moderated responses to at least one general qualitative question such as “Would you recommend this course to your peers, and why?”, be published; and
- evaluations of both student instructors and teaching assistants remain closed by default; and
- during an initial two-semester rollout period, only tenured faculty evaluations be released to the community; and
- following the rollout period, all faculty be included in the open evaluation system; and
- evaluations produced during the first two semesters of teaching at Columbia by any faculty member be subject to a grace period and not, by default, released; and
- any instructor who wishes to publish results that are not released by default be given the option to do so; and
- the course evaluation period be extended for several days after exams are complete, while still ending before the release of final grades; and
- evaluation results be fully integrated with the online Directory of Classes and published in a clear, effective, and accessible format aggregated both by instructor and by class.