

Resolution #19-93

Approved by the Faculty Senate: December 10, 2019

Approved by the Chancellor: pending

Report regarding recommendation to Pilot Test Blue Text Analytics Software (BTA)

Over the summer 2019, Jeff Popke, Chair of Faculty formed a workgroup comprised of members from the Faculty Governance and GEIE committees to consider ECU policies and procedures related to student evaluation of teaching. This activity followed the Faculty Senate's approval of revisions to Part X, I.B. Cumulative Report for Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure in the *ECU Faculty Manual* and the adoption of a Mandatory Statement about Survey of Student Opinion of Instruction (SSOI). The workgroup forwarded a recommendation to Chair Popke formally supporting the pilot test of Blue Text Analytics software and a summarization of student comments from the SSOI and access of the results to department chairs and other evaluators.

In the recommendation, the workgroup took into consideration the following:

- According to the *Faculty Manual*, Part VI, Section IV, III, *evaluations of an instructor's performance may include supervisors' opinions based on investigations prompted by student complaints*. The identity of the student(s) is known to the unit administrator, and before including it in the evaluation, the complaint must be thoroughly investigated by the unit administrator in a timely fashion (usually 5 days since receiving the complaint).
- According to the *Faculty Manual* policy, comments included in Survey of Student Opinion of Instructor (SSOI) are anonymous, so their use in evaluations of instructor's performance is inappropriate. Because of the nature of the SSOI, it will always be impossible for the administrator to know the identity of the student, to carry an appropriate investigation of the complaint or do it in a timely fashion, since results are not until the courses are finished.
- Research demonstrates that SSOI scores are a poor measure of teaching effectiveness. They are correlated with many variables unrelated to teaching effectiveness, including the student's grade expectation and enjoyment of the class; the instructor's gender, race, age, and physical attractiveness; and the weather the day the survey is completed.
- Research also shows that anonymity in student comments is necessary but may work against the gathering of reliable information by allowing students to make unfounded claims.
- Research shows that in order to make appropriate use of student comments, those comments need to be classified and analyzed. A holistic evaluation of the comments is inappropriate.
- Recommendations regarding best practices for evaluation of teaching shows that evaluators can gain perspective on instructor's performance by reviewing multiple courses taught by the instructor over multiple semesters, or by reviewing the performance of the students taught by the instructor in subsequent related courses.
- In the past, administrators at ECU have relied too heavily on SSOI scores to evaluate the teaching effectiveness of faculty.
- In the past, administrators at ECU have inappropriately used anonymous comments from students to evaluate the teaching effectiveness of faculty.
- Some administrators at ECU and the SGA believe that the inclusion of SSOI comments would be useful tools for administrators.

The workgroup recognized that ECU needs to engage in a discussion on the appropriate use of SSOI in the evaluation of teaching. A better understanding by all campus constituencies of the role of SSOI is necessary. The piloting of BTA for 1 year seemed an appropriate step toward what should be a multipronged approach.

In August 2019, Chair Popke forwarded the workgroup's recommendation to the GEIEC with a request to "consider this BTA recommendation, along with possible guidance to the campus for the

use and interpretation of the information and provide a formal report to the Faculty Senate.” In order to fulfill this task, the GEIEC consulted with IPAR regarding the BTA software.

The committee received the following feedback from IPAR:

- While reaching out to schools currently using BTA, they found out that:
 - Faculty didn't feel the Blue Text Analytics was helpful with sections with small enrollment (or small number of responses to open-ended questions);
 - Blue recommended using Text Analytics at the department level (more robust), rather than at course/section level; and
 - Blue Text Analytics would have the capacity to identify sensitive themes (e.g., violence, threats, self-harm, etc.) in the future.

IPAR indicated that they would support the pilot text of BTA software if ECU has an evaluation plan. They suggested that faculty/chair surveys or focus groups could be options for how to evaluate the effectiveness. However, in their opinion, testing the reliability of BTA results would prove to be very challenging, almost impossible.

Besides consultations with IPAR, the GEIEC researched the *Faculty Manual* for policies regarding evaluation of instructors, and past discussions within the Faculty Senate and the GEIEC about providing access to student comments to department chairs and other evaluators. In addition, the GEIEC created a discussion board so members could continue discussion of the topic beyond the regularly scheduled meetings. During Fall 2019, GEIEC dedicated the majority of three meetings to discuss BTA.

Below is a summary in broad categories of the issues that the GEIEC took into consideration.

ECU use of BTA is anomalous

- For confidentiality reasons, the company that owns BTA can only provide ECU with the names of 3 institutions currently using BTA, although they had indicated that 60+ institutions currently use the software.
- Of the 3 institutions provided, each one uses BTA differently.
- No institution currently using BTA use it at the instructional level, only at the programmatic or college level.
- As indicated by IPAR, with the particular use that ECU has in mind, establishing reliability could be an extraordinarily complex task; almost impossible.
- It might be preferable as a recommendation to pilot BTA not per course but at instructor, program or college level.

BTA potential benefits

- Identification of areas of concern (alcohol, drugs, suicide, sexual harassment) was positive. However, the identification would not happen in a timely manner in order to be used to intervene.
- BTA could be used to demonstrate that there are biases in people's comments (racism, xenophobia, misogyny). In other words, ECU could use it for researching bias.
- SGA would consider ECU's adoption of BTA a good faith effort to address their concerns. However, as indicated by the SGA representative to the GEIEC, they were aware of the BTA shortcomings, and were “not married” to its adoption.

BTA reliability

- Doubtful of the value of BTA at the instructor level.
- Doubtful of the value of BTE at the program level.
- Unit administrators would lack knowledge of the context for the words in the BTA report.

- BTA would be a hindrance for the unit administrator. Instead of helping the administrator to understand the teaching effectiveness of an instructor, it would obscure the picture for him/her.

BTA unintended consequences

- Right now, faculty have the option of sharing comments with unit administrators. An unintended consequence of implementation of BTE would be that faculty would feel that providing the comments was now what was needed for the administrators to have the full context.
- BTA may code as negative words that are not (for example “difficult”).
- There was a potential danger that the BTA would generate “false positives” (for example “racist”). This would increase the number of unnecessary investigations.
- Administrators might take actions against faculty if negative words were preponderant in the report generated by BTA.

What should accompany adoption of BTA.

- A statement on limitations of use of BTA;
- A determination of what class size makes the use of BTA worthwhile;
- An assurance that BTA was appropriate for DE courses; and
- Required training for unit administrators on the interpretation and use of BTA, including suggested weighted rubric to be used for annual evaluation purposes and limiting the weight that BTA data would be evaluated/scored at.

On November 4th 2019, in accordance with Chair Popke’s request, the GEIEC completed their extensive consideration of the workgroup’s recommendation to pilot test BTA software, discussed guidance to the campus for the use and interpretation of the information, and provides now the following resolution as a formal report to the Faculty Senate on this important matter.

Resolution Regarding Recommendation to Pilot Test Blue Text Analytics Software

Whereas, the company that owns the software recommends using Blue Text Analytics Software at the department level and not at the course/section level; and

Whereas, ECU’s workgroup recommendation was to use Blue Text Analytics Software at the course/section level so that data could be used in evaluation of teaching of individual faculty members; and

Whereas, universities currently using Blue Text Analytics Software have found that results for small enrollment courses and/or small number of responses were not helpful; and

Whereas, it would be impossible to evaluate the reliability of Blue Text Analytics Software results; and

Whereas, Blue Text Analytics Software is not a marked improvement of our current practices to justify the costs.

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the General Education and Instructional Effectiveness Committee does not recommend to pilot test Blue Text Analytics Software in order to summarize student comments from the SSOI and provide access of the results to unit administrators and other evaluators.