Reconsidering FCQs (Faculty Course Questionnaires)
University of Colorado Denver
Faculty Assembly Minority Affairs Committee (MAC)

Background
MAC is charged with making recommendations on the hiring, support, and retention of a diverse faculty at CU Denver. In 2012-13, MAC held a series of Diversity Dialogues to gather impressions on the environment at CU Denver with respect to inclusiveness. These Dialogues were conducted in three sessions with students, faculty/staff, and administrators, respectively.

In 2013-14, MAC followed this series with a goal of tackling the issue of retention more directly. The first step was to partner with the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) to gather and analyze FCQ data to determine if bias exists with respect to faculty members from underrepresented ethnic/racial groups. OIRE gathered and analyzed the data and reported findings to MAC.

Event Summary
Seventeen people in total attended the session on March 14, 2014 from 11:00-12:15 in the Auraria Library from a wide variety of departments including Auraria Library, Sociology, Business School, Women’s and Gender Studies, English, Anthropology, Political Science, Integrative Biology, CLAS, OIRE, CU Online/OIT. Rank and titles ranged from Lecture to full Professors, and also included a Research Analyst, Senior Business Professional, Associate Dean, and Vice Chancellor.

The forum was moderated by a MAC co-chair and was an open question/answer session. The campus RTP committee had a conflicting meeting and was unable to send a representative, but asked that the session be taped instead.

First, audience members were given a brief overview of some research in the area. For example, minority faculty are rated lower on student evaluations, there are preconceptions of warmth capability and political bias reflected in questionnaires\(^1\), Latino faculty are rated lower in general\(^2\), and strict Latino faculty are rated even lower\(^3\).

Next, the findings from OIRE were then summarized. In short, controlling for as many factors known to affect FCQ’s (course level, instructional method, enrollment, term, percentage female, average student age, average student GPA, average course GPA, instructor rank, instructor gender), minority instructors were scored approximately 0.25 points lower on both the instructor

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and course questions on FCQ’s, on average. This effect was moderated but not eliminated for the interaction of female and minority faculty members.

The moderator invited participants to join in the discussion by asking the following questions:

- Do assumptions about gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin and language shape FCQ student responses?
- What is the potential impact of FCQs on the underrepresented racial-ethnic faculty of CU Denver?
- Are there other limitations/hurdles in the tenure and promotion process for underrepresented racial-ethnic faculty?
- What are the alternative methods of evaluating teaching?
- How can we support faculty in the tenure and promotion process?
- How can we educate students on providing constructive feedback?
- How can MAC help you?

Detailed notes on the responses can be found in the full report.

**Summary & Conclusion**

As the population of students on the CU Denver campus continues to diversify, it is apparent that conversations like these need to continue and turn into actionable items to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for both faculty/staff as well as students. Several takeaways from this conversation make it apparent that we are not where we need to be, yet. Many faculty members voiced concerns about “teaching to the FCQ’s” by altering their normal methods in an attempt to please everyone as well as shying away from topics germane to the course to not offend anyone. The general feeling among the audience implied that this environment with so much emphasis on the FCQ is restrictive and possibly even unhealthy for the instructors as well as the students. General sentiment was that faculty members must take it upon themselves to prove excellence via multiple means of evaluation. There was also some discussion about guidance on this being located somewhere in the Regents’ documents. However, it is not apparent what resources are available to faculty in this regard or where to go for help. Coupled with this extra burden for finding and documenting teaching excellence are two factors that can harm minority faculty even more in the tenure and promotion process. First, on the research side some of the topics that are of interest to minority faculty may be considered “fringe” research and thus more difficult to achieve publication in the premier outlets. Second, on the service side many minority faculty feel a sense of “cultural taxation” by being asked/expected to serve in multiple service capacities to help these committees feel diverse. This can result in a self-fulfilling negative effect on tenure and promotion as faculty are burdened with more work, marginalized in research, and restrained in teaching. Creating an environment that welcomes diverse faculty as well as helps them to be successful should be of the highest priority. The next level of conversation should be shifted toward the actionable items in this regard.