

Effective Teaching Committee Survey

The Classroom Environment

March 10, 2009

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Executive Summary

During the 2007-2008 year, the Effective Teaching Committee determined that a survey of faculty was needed to provide a broad and deep understanding of the issues from the perspectives of those who routinely use the classrooms, meet with students, and plan their instructional environments. In the fall of 2008 the survey instrument was complete and all full time faculty members were surveyed.

In all, 174 individuals responded to the survey. In general the committee sought to gather information on space, rooms, equipment, and general environment. The Effective Teaching Committee analyzed the results and summarized them in this report. **Based on these results, the Effective Teaching Committee makes the following overall recommendations:**

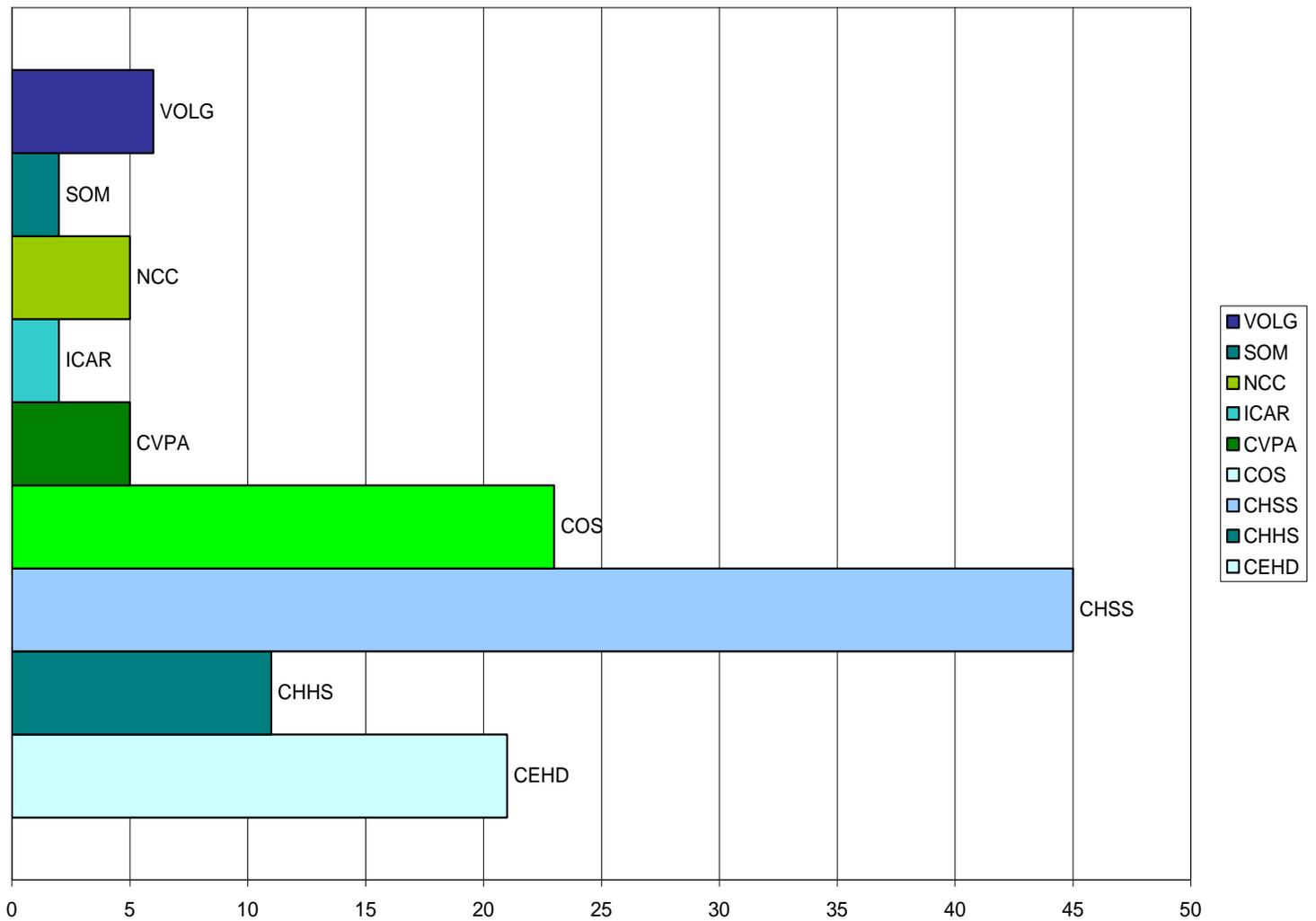
1. The Provost's Office should ensure that faculty members are offered the opportunity to be involved directly in decisions regarding the design of new classrooms and faculty should be a part of the process that analyzes future space planning.
2. The Faculty Senate should charge the Learning Environments Group with -investigating and making specific recommendations in the following areas:
 - a. Flexible classroom seating design
 - b. Consistent classroom quality throughout the campus(es)
 - c. More fully equipped electronic classrooms for the future
 - d. Diverse classroom structures for ultimate flexibility for instruction
 - e. Respond to other recommendations based on results found in this survey.
 - f. Re-survey faculty in Academic Year 09-10 and find an effective way to survey adjunct faculty and GTAs as well.
3. The Faculty Senate should ask for better communication from the Academic Support Offices at Mason and ask that they provide specific training for faculty and students on how to access and effectively use these services.
4. The Faculty senate should share these results with the GMU faculty by posting the results on the faculty senate website.

The summary of the results from the survey are included in pages 2-14 of this report. The appendix provides a brief overview of the results of the report on pages 14-15.

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Overall Survey Results

Q1. What is your department? (Answered question: 132, Skipped question: 42)



Q2. What is your employment status? (Check all that applies)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Full-time	42.7%	73
9-month	52.6%	90
12-month	4.7%	8
Part-time	0.0%	0

Q3. Faculty status?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Tenured/ Tenure-track	76.3%	129
Term	23.7%	40
Adjunct	0.0%	0

Q4. Category?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Instructional Faculty	75.1%	127
Research Faculty	20.7%	35
Administrative Faculty	4.1%	7

Q5. Rank?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Full Professor	23.5%	40
Associate Professor	32.9%	56
Assistant Professor	34.7%	59
Instructor	8.8%	15
Graduate Student	0.0%	0

Q6. How many classes do you plan to teach at Mason during this Academic year 2008-2009? Please indicate the number of each type of class you expect to teach this year below:

Answer Options	Response Average	Response Total	Response Count
Lecture sections	3.97	647	163
Lab sections	1.24	62	50
Recitation sections	0.70	30	43

Q7. How long have you been teaching at the post-secondary level?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Fewer than 2 years	2.9%	5

2 to 5 years	9.4%	16
5-10 years	25.1%	43
More than 10 years	62.6%	107

Q8. Please rate your satisfaction with each of the following aspects of the classroom environment:

Answer Options	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A	Rating Average	"Response Count"
Supplies	5	39	23	70	27	4	3.46	168
Stationary equipment	15	75	32	35	9	1	2.69	167
Student seating	6	55	44	48	14	0	3.05	167
Flexibility of room furnishings	4	37	37	66	20	3	3.37	167
Cleanliness	19	88	29	19	13	0	2.52	168
Temperature	11	60	35	46	13	0	2.94	165
Lighting control	11	75	33	38	8	0	2.74	165

Q9. Overall, how satisfied have you been with the general classroom environment of your assigned classrooms?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Satisfied	3.6%	6
Satisfied	41.0%	68
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	22.3%	37
Dissatisfied	30.7%	51
Very Dissatisfied	2.4%	4

Q10. On the whole, how do you think the general classroom environment at Mason affects your teaching?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Promotes effective teaching	28.0%	46
Does not affect teaching	24.4%	40
Impedes effective teaching	47.6%	78

Q11. Please provide comments or anecdotes about your experience with the general classroom environment

Answer Options	Response Count
answered question	118
skipped question	56

The written responses for question #11 can be grouped into four main categories:

Category 1: Classroom climate environment: The largest number of responses indicated that the classrooms were too cold or too hot. Many indicated that some classrooms had inflexible or poorly-designed lighting. There was a strong desire of several respondents for a classroom design that made it possible to use a screen and whiteboard at the same time. There was an overwhelming call for whiteboard markers to be provided in the classroom.

Category 2: Feast or Famine Classrooms: A large number of respondents indicated that some classrooms are fantastic and others are very bad. In addition, some indicated that the University is undersupplied with special types of classrooms such as collaborative in-class work, instructor-accessed technologies, student-accessed technologies, and workshop and seminar classrooms. Others indicated that there are non-flexible seating arrangements in many classrooms. At least a dozen respondents mentioned that there is a need for more fully equipped electronic classrooms.

Category 3: Miscellaneous: Some respondents indicated that some classrooms have equipment that does not work and other items that need repair; that they were assigned to teach in inadequate classrooms with poor seating, no white board, too big, too small, etc; that there are too many desks crammed into the Robinson classrooms, needing an electronic classroom and not being put in one, needing to bring their own computer equipment into the classroom; class size and room size are not coordinated; and in large classes, the lines of sight are obstructed.

Q12. Please list three (or fewer) specific things that could be done to improve the general classroom environment at Mason: (answered question = 137, skipped question = 37)

By far, the most responses (39) indicated that the University needs more diverse classroom structures. Many suggested that there was a need for more specialized classrooms, especially seminar rooms, and flexible space with movable chairs. Others (34) indicated a need for more computer projectors, digital technology, internet access, and/or document cameras in all classrooms with up-to-date technology. Twenty-five suggested that professors have the ability to control temperatures in the classroom and provide more lighting options. Of course, many wanted markers provided in all classrooms. Additional comments included (1) Incorporate more split screens for computer and board, (2) Provide more blackboards/whiteboards, (3) Provide more power outlets in all classrooms, (4) Modernize infrastructure, (5) Clean classroom at the end of the afternoon, (6) Consult faculty when designing classroom space, (7) Reduce number of chairs in the classroom, (8) Provide newer desks and chairs in rooms, (9)

Acoustic design improvements, (10) paint classrooms, (11) Build more wet labs and make them available, and (12) Make sure there is a better match between space size and class size. Two specific recommendations were to knock down Robinson/David King/Krug and build taller, better buildings.

Questions 13: Types of technologies, frequency of use, general satisfaction.

The results of the questions regarding technologies indicate an overwhelming majority of faculty used some kind of technology in the classroom in 2007. Computers and LCD projectors were the most used, followed by DVD-VHS players and document cameras. Interestingly, the next most popular technology reported was the overhead projector.

A majority used computers and LCD projectors more than 20 times. A large number of respondents also used overhead projectors and document cameras more than 20 times.

The majority were generally satisfied with their experiences (68), with some (38) indicating “very satisfied” and only 1 of the respondents indicating “very dissatisfied.”

- Significant points from respondents’ commentary included use of computers and LCD projectors to access the Internet for streaming video, for Power Point presentations; some for video conferencing.
- A small number expressed some frustration with the equipment in the classrooms:
 - Sound problems in some classrooms
 - Faulty equipment (computers, DVD players)
 - Calling for technology help and finding a remedy can take up valuable teaching time.
 - Only one respondent reported never using any technologies
 - Only one reported never having been assigned to a “smart” or “electronic” classroom

Questions 14, 15, 16: Types of technologies faculty borrow, general satisfaction

Out of 162 people who responded to the question asking if they had ever borrowed equipment to use in the classroom, 96 responded in the affirmative; 66 reported never having borrowed equipment. For the question asking the types of equipment borrowed, 76 respondents skipped that question altogether.

The most frequently borrowed equipment were, in order of frequency, laptop computers (or computer carts with projectors), LCD projectors, overhead projectors, document cameras, and DVD-VHS players. One borrowed a video camera (probably from the STAR Lab, not classroom technologies), a couple borrowed slide projectors; one a boom box. One indicated borrowing a GPS unit; another, a microphone with speaker.

Although the majority (40%) reported being satisfied with borrowing equipment for classroom use, and 11.3% reported being very satisfied, 18.3% reported being dissatisfied and 6.1% reported being very dissatisfied. There were 28 respondents (24.3%) who reported being

neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 59 respondents skipped the question altogether, which makes an 18% dissatisfaction rate significant.

Question 17, 18: Types of technologies respondents provided themselves and technologies respondents wanted that were not available to borrow from the University?

A majority of respondents (61%) reported having to provide technology themselves, and 32% said that there was equipment they wanted to use but was not available either in the classroom or from classroom technologies.

- The types of equipment faculty members provided for them are overwhelmingly laptops.
- A few miscellaneous items mentioned include
 - Remote PowerPoint Control
 - Presentation wireless remote
 - Wireless mouse/laser pointer
 - External speakers
 - Markers and erasers (a technology of sorts, I suppose)
- The types of equipment faculty members wanted to use but were not available in the classroom or from classroom technologies included:
 - Digital voice recorders
 - Wireless Mouse
 - Remote control devices (NOTE: committee members reported that faculty members sometimes purchase their own wireless remotes)
 - Mac computers
 - A few comments were included such as “functioning computer” and “Internet access,” which I assume to mean WiFi, since virtually all classrooms have Ethernet access.
 - Document cameras.

Questions 19, 20: Summary of satisfaction with classroom technology and its effects on teaching.

A majority of respondents reported overall satisfaction with the technologies in their assigned classrooms, although the percentages were more evenly distributed among the possible answers. 43% reported satisfaction; 21% reported dissatisfaction.

Asked whether the technology at Mason promotes effective teaching or impedes effective teaching, 62% reported that it promotes effective teaching; 22% reported that it impedes.

→Please note: that the dissatisfaction percentage in all of the technology questions hover in the 20% range; and the satisfied percentage fluctuates between around 40% and 70%.

Questions 21, 22: Comments about classroom technology and what can be improved.

The comments about individual experiences with classroom technology focused on the aspects that are problematic – computers that do not work; electronic classrooms that are well equipped for teaching, but inadequate for student presentations/projects. Many spoke about

the technology equipment being great, but the seating less so because most tables, etc. are not movable. When there are problems with any of the equipment in a room, it takes too long to contact tech help to respond to the problem and then get back to teaching. It makes the teacher look incompetent. One person commented that there are “nasty technicians with poor attitudes,” and one respondent stated that there were far too many classrooms outfitted with electronic technology. **One respondent mentioned Susan Campbell as having provided good orientations to electronic classroom technologies.**

The overwhelming number of anecdotes dealt with equipment that did not work and that faculty were not notified when changes or problems occurred. Many noted that they cannot teach without the technology, which means there’s more at stake when something does not work. There were a number of complaints about having to check out equipment and lug it across campus to their classes, though more than one respondent congratulated the classroom technologies office in Robinson for its efficient handling of lending equipment.

Suggestions for improving classroom technologies ranged from one respondent asking for a standing committee of faculty to vet the classroom use of technology to an overwhelming majority requesting that every classroom on campus be fully equipped with computer, projector, Internet access, document cameras and DVD-VHS players. (Several requested that Mason retain VHS players.)

- The following are requests listed in the order of their frequency in the survey:
 - Fully equipped electronic classrooms, maintained and supported
 - Standardization of equipment in classrooms
 - Create rooms with flexible design for classrooms and space for students to plug in laptops
 - Dual screen capability for computer and document camera
 - More and better microphones
 - Better scheduling of smart classrooms
 - More convenient pick-up locations for borrowed equipment
 - One person suggested delivery of technology that’s needed for classes
 - More courteous techs (“don’t treat me like I don’t know anything.”)

Q23: Please consider the following academic support offices. Are you aware of these offices? (Yes out of 153 responses)

- Office of Disability Services = 145
- Career Services = 142
- Classroom Technologies = 142
- Center for Teaching Excellence =141
- Counseling and Psychological Services = 138
- Writing Center = 138
- Academic Advising Center = 126
- Division of Instructional Technology = 125
- Instructional Resource Center = 111
- Learning Center = 55

- Freshman Center = 44

In the past year, how many times have you used services provided by these offices (include referring students)

	1-3 times	more than 4
• Counseling and Psychological Services	54	10
• Academic Advising Center	50	17
• Office of Disability Services	45	40
• Center for Teaching Excellence	45	25
• Career Services	42	31
• Classroom Technology	37	64
• Writing Center	37	52
• Division of Instructional Technology	37	28
• Instructional Resource Center	34	21
• Learning Services	16	7
• Freshman Center	14	21

Overall how satisfied have you been with these offices?

	Very/Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied/Very
• Classroom Technologies	77	14	11
• Office of Disability Services	64	11	6
• Writing Center	58	11	12
• Center for Teaching Excellence	55	18	6
• Career Services	45	25	7
• Counseling and Psych. Services	46	25	3
• Division of Instr. Technology	42	13	11
• Instructional Resource Center	38	11	6
• Academic Advising Center	31	32	4
• Learning Services	14	9	1
• Freshman Center	11	9	1

Q24: Overall, how satisfied have you been with the support and resources you have received from academic support offices?

(out of 146 people)		
Very/Satisfied	Neither/Nor	Dissatisfied/Very
65.7%	25.3%	8.9%

Q25: On the whole, how do you think academic support office at Mason affect your teaching?

(out of 145 people)

Promotes effective teaching
60.7%

Does not affect teach.
31.7%

Impedes effect teach.
7.6%

Q26: Please provide comments or anecdotes about your experience with academic support offices.

Positive Comments

1. The writing center is great.
2. ODS was very cooperative in support of students with disability. Professional and accommodating.
3. My few experiences with recommending the counseling services have been very positive. (One student in particular benefited tremendously.)
4. Tech support is improving for students and faculty. The blackboard system is expanding and is being improved.
5. IRC people are great. I have had individual help with them on four different occasions and they were wonderful and very patient.
6. The Center for Teaching Excellence is a wonderful resource!!
7. The Office of Disability Services is severely understaffed. They do an amazing job considering how few resources and people they have.
8. Staff is always very knowledgeable and helpful.
9. The Center for Teaching Excellence does fantastic work given its absolutely minimal staff. Compared to peer institutions, this office is extremely under-resourced. The same goes for the IRC.
10. While I haven't used the Center for Teaching Excellence in the past year, I went to a number of workshops when I started teaching at Mason and they were very useful and stimulating.
11. CTE is one of the best services on campus for instructions.

Negative Comments

1. I had a suicidal student whom I referred to the counseling center and they told him they could not see him. Great...NOT what they need to hear.
2. Academic advising center not current on programs at GMU and often give wrong or even damaging advice to students.
3. The disability office goes too far to aid some students---makes things unfair for others. (i.e.: unlimited time for exams is not fair to others).
4. The support is too far removed from the everyday classroom teaching.
5. When I needed the assistance of the Writing Center for my class they were not flexible for my class needs.

6. The Writing Center has NEVER returned my e-mails.
7. Most of the above have not effect whatsoever on what I do day to day. They might as well not exist.
8. Most are of little real help.
9. Grossly inadequate support for distance/web based education/resources/supports.
10. Students say ODS environment is too noisy for exams.
11. Students usually come to see me after they have already tried to get assistance from many of these departments. I am thus hesitant to send other students to these offices, and obviously those who have already gone to them cannot reasonably be encouraged to return. They have found no reason to consult the faculty service office.
12. The technology offices are those that most directly affect teaching, but the support of instruction does not (ironically) seem to be a primary part of their mission(s). All of the non-technology offices are fine.

Suggestions

1. Hours need to be more flexible for graduate students. There have to be staff used to providing support to graduate students, including student resources.
2. There are a good number of excellent support services, but they tend to be distributed (and some are more visible than others). The Writing Center should have more space and more visibility as a central element of learning and teaching at GMU.
3. Classroom Tech is generally very good, though they could be more proactive about notifying faculty if there is a problem with the equipment in a particular room.
4. These offices need to be promoted more. Perhaps at the beginning of each semester a list of resources available to faculty and students in this area should be sent to all departments for distribution to all instructional faculty members.
5. Sometimes their talks could use more pep.
6. Protect these important services from budget cuts-without them we could not serve our students effectively.
7. They should publicize how they can support faculty more.
8. The offices could do more outreach to faculty so that we are aware of them and what they offer.

The rest of the comments deal with faculty having no use of these offices or did not know these offices existed.

Q27: Please list three (or fewer) specific things that could be done to improve academic support office at Mason.

The responses (#37 but several of these provide more than one suggestion) can be grouped into four main categories.

First, several mentioned the need for **better communications** about the available services. For example, twenty one comments dealt with the need for better communication and promotion regarding the services available, including a desire for advertising the array of services, explanations of what the various offices do and what is possible, more outreach to faculty and students, and increased funding and services. Also mentioned was the need for perhaps moving the offices to higher visibility locations, clarification of the many technology offices, and more staff members who are prepared to help.

Second, individual and **Specific Training** needs were suggested. These ten suggestions focused on support for instructors in pedagogical technologies (5 comments), more services for students in uses of the technologies, faculty support systems, specific needs of those teaching science, and a wider variety of ways for faculty to obtain these services.

Third, several comments were about the **Writing Center**. Seven comments centered on the need for better services, more training in scientific and social science writing, a desire to fund the writing center better, help for faculty in promoting writing with their students, and one concern about the delay in receiving response from the writing center.

Finally, there were eight comments about the need for improved **Advising** services. These were grouped about the need for more training for the advisers, up-to-date information for them, better matching of advisers with the appropriate students, and a stronger communication link between the program advisers and those in the undergraduate academic advising. In addition, there were some very specific comments mentioned just one time. These included better services in Arlington, better Banner access and use, better counseling services for students, cut down the number of administrators and overhead costs, and more support for late night classes, and increased infra-structure for distance education and seminar classes.

Q. 28 Comments/Suggestions not asked in the survey

There were a total of 25 comments volunteered by faculty at the end of the survey not asked in the survey. The comments have been grouped into 3 categories, bullets summarize very similar comments.

1 – Comments identifying areas of needed improvement

- The university space planning was criticized as not effective for both teaching and research. Some criticisms were directed to the university passive attitude towards professors with poor teaching skills, whereas no incentive or support is given to those who focus on teaching. Heavy teaching load for term faculty is seen as an obstacle to

effective teaching. Lack of teaching paths to tenure and the degree of commitment to teaching relies solely on the individual units.

- The lack of student preparation for entering some programs where there are no enforced requirements is seen also as a serious impediment to effective teaching.
- It is felt that administrative oversight and compliance monitoring are substituting for effective support for faculty development.
- Some colleagues suggested that the space dedicated to seminars be increased and that the University should support more collaboration and outreach to make the programs more efficient and to highlight how they interconnect.
- Some colleagues suggested to address shortcomings at both low end (whiteboard inefficient, lack of markers) and high end of the technology spectrum with better and better serviced equipment as a way to ensure no time is wasted after unresponsive technology.
- One criticism, with no justification was directed to IRC and CTE. Some colleagues in CHSS were criticized for not promoting quantitative reasoning in their classes.

2-Comments of praise

- Praise was directed to IRC, DOIT and CTE and their staff for their services. University Life staff are praised for providing support to academic programs by enriching students' co-curricular experiences.
- A few colleagues were grateful to the Effective Teaching Committee for providing the opportunity to voice concerns and make suggestions through the survey.

3-Specific Comments-Suggestions

- It was suggested that the university promotes effective changes in teaching attitudes. It is felt that many faculty hold feelings of negativity about the student body and cling to content-based courses.
- Faculty reported students' complains regarding the seemingly inconsequential activities in 700 level classes offered by the MAM program. It was commented that several faculty in the MAM program do not hold terminal degrees and lack University teaching experience and this is a serious impediment to effective teaching.
- Need to offer [more] lab/recitation sections with teaching assistants, with funding for GTAs and more lab space.
- A specific survey for graduate programs needs to be conducted with regards to good teaching environments, adequate technology and support services.
- It was suggested to start a study to monitor effectiveness and use of GMU support offices.
- Increase student services are needed in Arlington.

Appendix: Brief Summary of results

Effective Teaching Committee Survey

The following summarizes the results of the survey:

1. Responses represented the major units on campus, with the largest number of responses coming from the largest units (College of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Science, College of Education and Human Development, and the College of Health and Human Services). Other units had small numbers of responses.
2. Respondents were overwhelmingly tenure track faculty who work a nine-month contract. They were primarily instructional faculty and represented all ranks (approximately one-third at assistant, associate and full professor ranks; eight percent were instructors). Approximately one quarter of the faculty (25.1%) have taught at the post-secondary level for 5-10 years and almost two-thirds (62.6%) have taught ten years or more.
3. Most respondents expect to teach four sections of lecture-format classes; one third expect to teach slightly over one lab section, and a small number expect to teach less than one 'recitation' section.
4. Respondents are most satisfied with the classroom cleanliness, temperature, and lighting, and the stationary equipment. They are least satisfied with supplies (markers, for example), student seating, and the lack of flexibility in the room furnishings. In general, approximately 44% are satisfied or very satisfied with the classroom environment, 22% are neutral about this category, and 33% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their classrooms in general.
5. More than one quarter (28%) feel the classroom environment improves their teaching, almost half (47.6%) feel that the classroom environment impedes their teaching, and one quarter feel it does not affect their teaching either way. The additional written responses can be grouped into three categories: classroom climate environment, feast or famine classrooms, and miscellaneous. Several specific suggestions were made for improvements.
6. Respondents are very dedicated to the use of information technology in their teaching. A large number use technology (e.g., computers and LCD projection, document cameras, overhead projectors) more than 20 times per semester. The majority were generally satisfied with their experiences (68), with some (38) indicating "very satisfied" and only 1 of the respondents indicating "very dissatisfied."
7. Ninety-six respondents have borrowed equipment; 66 have never done so. The most frequently borrowed items are laptop computers (or computer carts with projectors), LCD projectors, overhead projectors, document cameras, and DVD-VHS players. The majority (40%) reported being satisfied with borrowing equipment for classroom use, and 11.3% reported being very satisfied, 18.3% reported being dissatisfied and 6.1% reported being very dissatisfied.
8. Overall, it is worth noting when asked to characterize if technology at Mason promotes or impedes effective teaching, 62% reported that it promotes effective teaching and 22% reported that it impedes it. In all of the technology questions, the satisfied percentage fluctuates between around 40% and 70% while the dissatisfaction percentage hovers in the 20% range.
9. In general, most respondents are familiar with the wide variety of academic support offices. Out of 153 responses, 82% or more know the following: Office of Disability Services, Career

Services, Classroom Technologies, Center for Teaching Excellence, Counseling and Psychological Services, Writing Center, Academic Advising Center and the Division of Instructional Technology. The Instructional Resource Center, Learning Center, and Freshman Center were less recognized (73%, 36%, and 29% respectively). Overall, 65.7% were satisfied or very satisfied, 25% were neutral, and 9% were dissatisfied with these support offices. Over 60% feel these offices promote effective teaching, 31% feel it does not affect their teaching, and 7% said they impede their teaching.

~~10~~ When asked for specific things that could be done to improve academic support, four categories emerged. Individuals suggested better communication about the services, improved specific training was requested, the writing center requires some development, and advising services could be expanded and enhanced.