Protect Women by Banning Them?

June 10, 2015

By Scott Jaschik

Could parietals be reborn?

The University of Missouri at Columbia is considering a plan that would ban female visitors to fraternity houses after 10 p.m. (and until 3 a.m. the next morning) on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The plan was developed by a coalition of fraternity alumni leaders and proposed as a way to protect women from sexual assault.

The plan embraces some strategies used on other campuses, such as banning hard liquor at fraternity events. But it goes beyond that, not only with the ban on weekend overnight visitors, but by proposing that fraternities and sororities all start drug testing members.

The plan has been described, incorrectly, as an adopted policy. A spokeswoman for the university stressed that officials were considering these ideas and took them seriously, but that no decisions had been made on which proposals to adopt. She said student leaders -- including Greek leaders -- would be consulted and play a key role in developing any policy.

Public reaction has been intensely negative, with people taking to social media to denounce the proposals. People have raised questions of fairness, asking why the university would ban women from fraternity houses at night while maintaining coeducational dormitories. Many have accused the university of generalizing about fraternity members, implying that they are all likely rapists who need to be kept away from women at night.

Fraternity-related websites have been outspoken about the proposal. Total Frat Move said that the idea belongs "on the Mount Rushmore of university incompetence." The site said that this rule would "kill fraternities" while moving parties "underground," where women may be more at risk of sexual assault.

Among the most vocal critics of the proposal have been sorority leaders, who characterized the proposal as sexist.

The Panhellenic Association sent a letter to university leaders stating its opposition. "By restricting women from certain locations under the guise of 'safety,' this policy lends itself to the notion that women cannot make choices for themselves about their own safety," the letter says.
"Additionally, this policy might inadvertently give men within fraternity houses the right or feeling of entitlement to treat women who do not abide by this rule as the men wish," the letter adds. "This could lead to an increase in dehumanizing or making women counterparts inferior to the fraternity men. We do understand that this policy was suggested as a means to protect women from an unsafe environment. However, if women would be unsafe during the hours of 10 p.m. through 3 a.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night, we implore fraternities to remove the members who are currently contributing to an unsafe environment and to recruit members who will not make an environment unsafe in the future."

**University Of Missouri Considers Banning Women From Fraternity Houses During Party Hours**

*In an attempt to address sexual assault on campus, the University of Missouri is considering drastic changes to its Greek life system, including banning women from fraternity houses during typical party hours.*

According to a list of proposed policy changes that leaked online last week, the university may ban out-of-town formals, prohibit hard liquor in fraternity houses and forbid female "guests" from entering fraternity houses between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

The MU Fraternity Alumni Consortium crafted the proposal, which is calls "Safety of Women Students in Fraternity Houses." Founded in 2009, the consortium is an unofficial assembly of Greek alumni that acts as an advisory group for the administration.

"Some [policies] still under consideration, some are not. We are very, very early in the process, and the things you are seeing are coming from a document over two months old and dated information," consortium spokesman Ted Hellman told The Columbia Daily Tribune last week.

One suggested policy would have subjected all sorority and fraternity members living in Greek housing to mandatory drug testing. This proposal resulted in a torrent of criticism from the student body and has since been removed from the list, The Columbia Daily Tribune reports.

The consortium showed the suggested changes to Tim Wolfe, who presides over all four University of Missouri System campuses, including MU. The school's Panhellenic Association and the Interfraternity Council then read the suggestions and wrote a letter to Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin to express concern with them.
Although members of the university's Panhellenic Association have said they support policies like prohibiting hard liquor, they raised a number of concerns about administered drug testing, uniform sexual assault education for male and female students, and the designation of women as "guests" in fraternity houses, which they say would allow a pretense of male entitlement to prevail within the Greek community.

"We are concerned by the very premise of this proposal," the Panhellenic Association wrote. "The goal is to address the safety of women students in fraternity houses, but the proposal was written by men who are not entrenched in daily campus, fraternity and sorority life."

Reinforcing their position, the council released a statement on Friday describing some of the polices as "ineffective and uneducated."

In addition, the Twitter account @StopLoftin was created to criticize the Greek life policy proposals. Many of the tweets claim a lack of representation for the very people the policies seek to support. One post pointed out that no assaults were reported as having occurred within a MU fraternity house in the last academic year. According to campus security records, the tweet is accurate.

Due in part to research linking members of Greek life with higher sexual violence rates, the system has been under increased scrutiny in recent years. Fraternity members are more likely to be perpetrators of sexual assault than non-fraternity members, a 2013 study found. Other research has shown that approximately 29 percent of sorority women report having been sexually assaulted in college, while the rate for non-sorority women is 7 percent.

MU spokesman Christian Basi told The Huffington Post the proposals are not finalized, and are not ready to be put into effect right away.

"The proposed policies ... will be discussed at an upcoming summit with MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin and student leaders," Basi wrote in an email. "The purpose of the upcoming summit is to review the proposed policies and seek input from student leaders on the implementation of the policies."

The Chancellor’s Summit on Sexual Assault & Student Safety in Fraternity Houses is scheduled to occur on June 20, and is only open to people who have been invited. When asked if the university would wait until more students were on campus to decide whether to implement the proposals, Basi responded, "The proposals, along with any type of implementation timeline, are part of the discussion at the summit. Because the proposals and the timeline are still under discussion, I can’t speculate on when they might be implemented."

The University of Missouri Panhellenic Association did not respond to a request for comment.
EpicEd encourages positive gaming through summer camps

By Bruno Vernaschi

Tuesday, June 9, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Four years ago last Thursday, Connor Hall was on his family’s yacht in the Florida Keys when tragedy struck.

He went to hitch the boat to a mooring buoy when the rope looped around his right thumb and pulled it off.

A competitive gamer, Hall needed all of his digits — particularly his thumb — to follow his dream. He underwent surgery and, because his tendon and artery were in place, doctors were able to reattach his thumb.

After three months of rehabilitation, Hall participated in a gaming tournament in his hometown of St. Louis that wound up being the first victory of his career. He compared it to athletes who tear their ACLs and come back stronger than ever.

**A senior finance major at the University of Missouri, Hall’s competitive gaming career has come to a close, but his contributions to video games are far from over.**

**Hall partnered with MU alumnus Jack Jones and Dan Clay, dean of MU’s College of Education, earlier this year to found EpicEd, a company dedicated to promoting the positive aspects of gaming to kids through a series of classes and camps.**

“Kids that maybe don’t have the athletic capability as some of the other kids at their ages get to learn teamwork and responsibility,” Hall said. “You’re learning very important aspects of life that you don’t get to learn in the classroom.”

Jones said the “Epic” in the name of the company stands for “exercise, perseverance, integrity and cooperation” — four values that form the basis of the business’ curriculum.

The concept behind EpicEd was born through Clay, who was frustrated with the gaming habits of his three sons. Rather than force his kids to do something else, Clay decided to use it to his advantage.
“If I could get them to want to do other things as much as they want to game, I’d be in great shape,” Clay joked. “But these kids love gaming, so how can we leverage that love and desire and obsession with gaming into something that will benefit them later in life?”

When he noticed other parents had the same concerns, Clay decided to create EpicEd. He met Hall through Missouri Innovation Center President and CEO Bill Turpin, and the two started planning.

With an organizer in Clay and an experienced gaming veteran in Hall, the pair found further diversity with Jones, who is otherwise known as “The Healthy Gamer.”

Jones runs a YouTube channel that has more than 26,000 subscribers and millions of views. He uses the channel to promote fitness.

Jones’ father died when he was in eighth grade, which led Jones to fall into the virtual world of role-playing game “EverQuest” for as many as 12 hours a day as an escape. He realized the error in his ways and decided to find a balance between gaming and getting into shape.

“I’ve been able to develop myself into a completely different person,” said Jones, who has since gained 85 pounds and won a bodybuilding competition.

Jones joined the EpicEd team and the business model solidified. The group focused on social, mental and physical fitness when developing the curriculum.

Hall presented his business strategy in April at the annual Ignition Pitch Competition.

He beat about 15 other entrepreneurs and finished in first place to take home a $6,000 prize.

EpicEd has since developed a series of summer camps, dubbed the Epic Gamer Camp, planned for kids ages 10-15.

The camp costs $149 and is set to run in two waves — one from June 15-19 and another from July 27-31. Those enrolled will be playing games such as “Super Smash Bros. Melee” on GameCube.

“While we provide these games for them to play, we want to educate them on a few aspects that we think are very important not only in the competitive gaming world but in the real world as well,” Hall said. “They’ll be working as a team to build strategies.”

The higher-level camp, Epic Gamer Pro, costs $169. That camp will run from July 20-24 and is reserved for ages 14-18. This class will use games such as “League of Legends” and will introduce the business side of gaming.

Hall said the camp will teach the students how to become professional gamers and create websites while still fostering teamwork and cooperation.
“Video games are not going away,” Jones said. “If you have something that kids are naturally excited about, using that to teach them the other things you want them to learn is absolutely possible.”

Jones said kids naturally will want to attend a video game camp, but they will learn valuable lessons in the process.

“It’s really a win-win on both sides with the parents and the kids,” he said.

Registration for any of the gaming camps is available through the Columbia Area Career Center’s website at www.career-center.org.

What does carp taste like? Try some at bowfishing fair

Got a hankering to taste some fried carp?

Or would a carp burger, carp sausage or chili-con-carp be more likely to land on your plate?

You’ll have a chance to try all of the above during the first-ever World’s Bowfishing Fair on Friday and Saturday at Springfield’s Bass Pro Shops.

The Bowfishing Fair showcases the growing sport of hunting nongame fish with a bow and arrow and is part of the third annual U.S. Open Bowfishing Championship that’s being held on five area lakes this weekend.

**Carp is a popular table fare in Europe. But Mark Morgan, associate professor of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Missouri, hopes to sway Missourians to give carp a try.**

He and a chef from Columbia will be cooking up a variety of carp-based dishes Saturday from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. as part of his campaign to “Eat MO Carp.”

“The fish we’ll be dealing with are bighead carp and silver carp — the one that’s famous for jumping,” Morgan said. “But any of our recipes will work for common carp and grass carp that you have down in your area.”
Because carp is a very bony fish, Morgan said the key is getting the fish into a ground, boneless form. On Friday, Missouri Department of Conservation will show how to clean carp and will cook free samples for the public.

On Saturday, Morgan’s crew will offer carp-in-a-cup “walking tacos” for $3, carp chili for $3, carp burgers and sausages for $4 and carp burritos for $5. Money raised will help promote the Eat MO Carp campaign to market carp as tasty food.

“There’s a larger movement taking place where eating invasive species is a tasty way to deal with an environmental issue,” Morgan said. He notes that silver carp and bighead carp populations are exploding in many U.S. lakes and rivers, with detrimental impacts on native fish.

“Once you get carp into ground form that’s 100 percent boneless, you can put it into just about anything where you’d use ground meat.”

**About the Bowfishing Fair**

If you’re curious to learn more about bowfishing, there will be numerous booths, exhibits and hands-on activities at the Bowfishing Fair, from 10-a.m.-7 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Among them:

• Vendor booths displaying the latest bowfishing gear.

• Opportunities to try bowfishing and test gear by shooting at targets in the pond at Sunshine and Campbell.

• Free bowfishing seminars led by the experts, including winners of the U.S. Open and World Championships.

• Carp cooking demos and free fried carp samples.

• Opportunities to purchase burgers, sausage links and chili made with carp.

• Conservation displays that explain why removing nongame and invasive fish benefits water quality and gamefish populations and how these harvested fish are put to good use as environmentally friendly fertilizer.

• Bow shooting contests.

• Live music by the Mark Chapman Band.

• Opportunities to meet Brian “Pigman” Quaca, host of Boss Hog and Aporkalypse; Mike Hunsucker, host of Heartland Bowhunter; Kevin VanDam, 4-time Bassmaster Classic winner and 7-time Bassmaster Angler of the Year; and other celebs.

• A dunk tank, proceeds going to the Bowfishing Association of America.
Asian Carp to be Served at Springfield Fair


Talk, Then Talk Again

June 10, 2015

By Jacqueline Thomsen

NO MU MENTION

A university tapped by the White House to lead the charge on sexual assault education and prevention released a report Tuesday on how institutions can best spread awareness of their sexual assault policies and resources.

A report from the University of New Hampshire’s Prevention Innovations Research Center found that students who were able to interact with and discuss their college’s policies were more likely to retain information on resources within the institution or be more knowledgeable about the policies themselves. As more colleges are encouraged to amp up their sexual assault education, experts hope these results can help officials find effective strategies for their students.
Close to 1,800 students from seven different campuses were included in the study, which exposed students to one of four methods of education, while one group received no education and was treated as a baseline for the other groups. While the various forms of education appeared to increase most of the students’ knowledge on sexual assault policies, it was those who were read the policies aloud and then took part in a 20-minute facilitated conversation on the resources who seemed to improve the most.

Other students were asked to watch videos of students reading the policies aloud, but more than 70 percent of those asked only to view the film did not because they were told it was optional. Those students performed similarly to students who received no direct education at all.

Students who had the policies read aloud to them in class saw improvement in knowledge and confidence about university resources, but still did not absorb as much as those who took part in a conversation after hearing the procedures.

Sharyn Potter, co-director of the New Hampshire research center, said the findings were a clear sign to colleges and universities to adapt more interactive and repetitive training processes for their students.

She said past research on how students learn already indicated that a hands-on approach to learning a college’s policies and resources was more effective than a one-time session held in the middle of what is already a busy orientation for overwhelmed incoming freshmen.

“When students have the opportunity to role-play, to have conversations, to actually interact with the material, it’s a much more effective way of enabling the students to process and learn, and hopefully be able to talk about all of those practices,” Potter said.

UNH is already seen as a leader in sexual assault prevention. After launching a bystander intervention training program that has been widely adopted across the country, the university was identified by the White House as one of the three leading institutions effectively combating sexual assault on campus. And UNH researchers were awarded a grant by the Department of Justice in October to teach students how to prevent sexual assault.

Representatives of organizations that advocate for increased sexual assault education saw the survey results favorably and hoped that university officials would introduce the results into their programs.

Sarah Merriman, the communication coordinator at Students Active for Ending Rape, said it is important for higher education institutions to do their due diligence in exploring effective ways to share information before launching programs that may end up not making a difference for students.

“We want to encourage folks to do more research right now and not leap too fast, to make sure they have all of their bases covered,” Merriman said.

Annie Clark, co-founder of End Rape on Campus, said her organization has found that colleges have plenty of resources addressing sexual assault, but students often aren’t aware of them or don’t know how to access them.

Finding the best ways to inform students of procedures and resources, she said, is essential to preventing sexual assault and helping survivors on campuses get in touch with the right offices and authorities.

“You could be spending lots of money on an online program, you could be doing your part on paper, but students aren’t retaining that information,” she said.
In Heated State-Budget Fights, Students Strive to Be Heard

By Sarah Brown

Public colleges and universities in several states once again face the prospect of sharp budget cuts this year, and students say they have an important role to play in opposing them.

Still, student activists say, mobilizing peers is at least as significant a challenge, as they might not understand how budget cuts will affect them — until the cuts occur. Other activists say politicians don’t take them seriously. Timing can also be a barrier: Many legislative sessions wrap up in the summer, when most students are no longer on the campus.

The Chronicle examined college and university systems in four states that face significant budget cuts this year — Wisconsin, Louisiana, Illinois, and Connecticut — and spoke with students and experts to gauge how students are influencing the debate, and whether their efforts to roll back the proposed cuts are paying off.

Wisconsin

Initial proposed cut: $300 million over two years (13 percent) across 26 University of Wisconsin campuses.

What the cut could mean: The flagship campus, in Madison, said it would eliminate at least 400 positions in anticipation of the budget cuts and would scale back some academic and support programs. At least six campuses in the system have offered buyouts to some faculty and staff members.

What students have done: A group called UW Students Against Education Cuts has gained nearly 1,700 members on Facebook and has spoken out on campuses and at the Legislature. The group’s leaders have tried to design activities — such as a rally
between classes — to take no more than a few minutes of students’ time. Students have also spearheaded a campaign asking the system’s president, Raymond W. Cross, to either take a public stand against state leaders’ budget proposals or resign.

"By the time it affects every student, it’s too late," said Lorenzo L. Lones, vice president of the student body on the Green Bay campus. "We’ve tried to help them understand the severity of the situation."

Changes made to the proposed cut: Lawmakers voted to reduce the cut to $250 million in late May. They have also moved to reduce the faculty’s role in shared governance and to remove tenure protections from state law, prompting an outcry from faculty leaders. The system’s Board of Regents voted late last month to move such tenure protections to system policy, though many faculty members have said that tenure would still be weakened if the budget plan was adopted.

Important date: June 30, the last day of the fiscal year, is the deadline for the state’s budget to be adopted.

Have students made a difference? A number of students have worked passionately to oppose the cuts, but Mr. Lones admitted that he doesn’t think many Wisconsin politicians care what students think. David J. Vanness, an associate professor of population health sciences on the Madison campus, said he’d like to see more students rallying against the threats to tenure and shared governance, "but it’s summer, and they’re not here."

**Louisiana**

Initial proposed cut: $567 million over one year (78 percent) across four higher-education systems totaling 28 campuses.

What the cut could mean: In late April, F. King Alexander, president of the Louisiana State University system, raised the possibility that his institutions would declare financial exigency — a designation that would allow campuses to fire tenured faculty members and restructure their finances. Some observers suggested that smaller campuses would have to close.

What students have done: A coalition of student groups has organized rallies throughout the spring, including a march to the Legislature in April that attracted about 1,200 attendees.

Andrew Mahtook, student-body president at LSU’s flagship, in Baton Rouge, said that at least one member of the student government had been at the Legislature each
day of the session. He said students had attended committee meetings and had met personally with legislators, including Rep. Charles E. Kleckley, a Republican who is speaker of the State House of Representatives, and the chief of staff to Gov. Bobby Jindal, also a Republican. And next week, LSU’s student government plans to release a report card that grades each state lawmaker on higher-education issues.

Changes made to the proposed cut: The State Senate approved a budget on Monday that would allocate $955.3 million to higher education, keeping state support nearly flat. Senators made some other changes in the budget passed last month by the House, which will now consider the bill again.

Important date: June 11 is the last day of the legislative session, though the governor could veto the budget and force lawmakers to call a special session.

Have students made a difference? Mr. Mahtook said that, in his experience, lawmakers were happy to meet with students and took them seriously. Albert L. Samuels, a political-science professor at Southern University at Baton Rouge, called Mr. Alexander’s mention of financial exigency a "game-changer" that "sent a chill up lawmakers’ spine." But he said students’ activism had helped.

Illinois

Initial proposed cut: $387 million over one year (31.5 percent) across 12 university campuses and 48 community colleges.

What the cut could mean: The University of Illinois president, Timothy L. Killeen, said last week that some administrators would be laid off and some retiring employees wouldn’t be replaced. Randy J. Dunn, president of the Southern Illinois University system, has said that tuition would have to double systemwide.

What students have done: University of Illinois students aren’t as politically engaged as are students in some other states, said Mitch Dickey, the student-body president at the system’s flagship, in Urbana-Champaign. Instead, students have shared personal stories on a Tumblr page called "Cuts Mean Us." Each testimonial includes a student and a quotation about how the cuts would affect him or her.

Mr. Dickey said students had also written nearly 1,000 letters to lawmakers. He and a dozen other members of the student government have been more directly involved. He’s testified before members of the State House of Representatives and attended legislative hearings alongside the state’s college and university presidents.
Changes made to the proposed cut: Democrats, who control the legislature, have proposed to reduce the cut to 6.5 percent over all, but their proposal would still leave a $3-billion gap in the state’s budget. Mr. Killeen said last month that he expected the final cut to universities to be less severe than the original proposal.

Important date: June 30 marks the end of the fiscal year and the new budget deadline, as lawmakers extended the session past its official end, on May 31.

Have students made a difference? "In my conversations with lawmakers, it sounded like we were very effective in committee hearings," Mr. Dickey said. Nicholas C. Burbules, a professor of education policy at the Urbana-Champaign campus, said the university’s government-relations staff had told him that students were the institution’s best representatives.

Connecticut

Initial proposed cut: University of Connecticut officials have said that Gov. Dannel P. Malloy’s budget proposal would leave the institution with a nearly $40-million deficit; a $22-million cut was proposed for the system of Connecticut State Colleges and Universities.

What the cut could mean: Susan Herbst, UConn’s president, has said that the cuts would force her to lay off faculty and staff members and to curb degree programs. She has also warned that the university would have to postpone its 10-year plan to increase capacity by more than 6,500 students. The state-colleges system will increase tuition on all campuses. One community college made plans to close a branch campus.

What students have done: About 60 to 80 students attended a legislative hearing on the budget in late February, and several students testified to lawmakers. If students couldn’t lobby legislators personally, they wrote notes to lawmakers, and other students delivered them.

"There was a sustained effort throughout the legislative session," said Adam J. Kuegler, external-affairs chair of UConn’s student government. "Students were really willing to give their time."

Community-college students in Meriden, Conn., also protested the closing of the branch campus there.

Changes made to the proposed cut: In the budget passed last week by the legislature, UConn would receive $10.9 million more in state money than it received
last year, but the university would still face an $18.3-million deficit. The state-colleges system would take an $8.2-million hit. Lawmakers voted separately to keep the community-college campus in Meriden open.

Important date: June 20 is the deadline for Mr. Malloy, a Democrat, to sign or veto the legislature’s budget. He said last week that he was unlikely to veto it.

Have students made a difference? "You can tell that the legislators want to hear from the students," not the administrators, said Jeremy T. Teitelbaum, dean of UConn’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. He said that while UConn students were generally not engaged with the budget process, the students who testified were highly articulate and well prepared.

Flawed Evaluations

June 10, 2015

by Colleen Flaherty

NO MU MENTION

They’re almost universally loathed by professors as being too subjective and an unreliable indicator of performance. But beyond that, surprisingly little is known about student evaluations of faculty teaching. How many colleges require them, and what do they ask? How many students complete them, and what effect do they have on instructors’ careers?

A committee of the American Association of University Professors wanted to help answer some of the questions, and help stir discussions about a better way to rate professors in the classroom. Survey responses gathered by the committee from some 9,000 professors suggest diminishing student response rates for course evaluations, too much focus on such evaluations alone in personnel decisions -- especially for non-tenure-track faculty -- and a creep of the kinds of personal comments seen on teacher rating websites into formal evaluations.

But while the committee argues that whatever value student evaluations ever had is shrinking, it says student surveys can play an important role in a more holistic faculty evaluation system.
“I’m a department chair myself, and it matters to me to get some feedback from students about how their experience in the classroom was,” said Craig Vasey, who heads both the AAUP committee that conducted the study and the department of classics, philosophy and religion at the University of Mary Washington. “But [student evaluations] have to be supplemented by class visits by peers and reviews of syllabi, and participation in ongoing faculty development.”

Noting that one survey respondent had offered up what is a perhaps a more fitting name for student evaluations -- “student satisfaction surveys” -- Vasey added, “We’re not calling for them to be abolished, but there’s something dishonest about what they are and how they’re being used.”

Last fall, the AAUP’s Committee on Teaching, Research and Publication sent out 40,000 invitations to tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty members to participate in its online survey about teaching evaluations. It asked questions about institution type and required mechanisms for evaluating teaching -- such as student evaluations on paper or online, development of teaching portfolios, engagement with an on-campus center for teaching, and evaluation by peers or administrators. It asked about the existence of a faculty mentoring program, how student teaching evaluations are crafted and by whom, and faculty members’ feelings about them.

The committee received about 9,000 responses back. The majority came from tenured professors (54 percent). Some 18 percent came from full-time, non-tenure-track faculty members and 15 percent from tenure-track, not tenured faculty members, according to a write-up of the data to be presented at the annual meeting of the AAUP in Washington this week. Most respondents were from four-year, teaching-intensive institutions (48 percent), followed by four-year research institutions (35 percent). The rest were from community colleges or professional schools.

Here’s what respondents said: frequent use of online and paper evaluations is now about even. Required use of quantitative evaluations beat required qualitative evaluations, at 55 percent versus 44 percent, respectively.

Respondents who said their institutions had adopted online evaluations reported much lower student return rates than those who stuck with paper evaluations: 20-40 percent versus 80 percent or higher.

“With such a rate of return, all pretensions to ‘validity’ are rendered dubious,” the paper says. “Faculty report that the comments coming in are from the students on either of the extremes: those very happy with their experience and/or their grade, and those very unhappy.”

Faculty members said they had little to no input in crafting evaluation instruments, and pointed out that teaching in one field is quite different from the next -- something evaluations should reflect.

In a comment section the survey, some faculty members said they’d seen the kind of “abusive, bullying effects of anonymity that are today pervasive on websites... making their way into student evaluations,” the committee says. “Women faculty and faculty of color report negative comments on their appearance and qualifications, and it appears that anonymity may encourage these irrelevant and inappropriate comments and attacks, which are sometimes overtly discriminatory.” Those findings are in line with recent research suggesting strong gender bias in student evaluations.

Other professors talked about how being a tough professor works against them in student evaluations. Here’s an example: “My students often give me (I’m a woman) lower course evals than my peers because I assign a lot of work and hold them to high standards. They don’t like this in the moment, but I know from talking with them that a few years later, students are able to see the ways in which this work influences their current abilities and vision and they are grateful. But I don’t get the benefit of this perspective.”
Most evaluations are done in the last weeks of the semester, according to the survey. Some institutions allow students to complete the evaluation even after they’ve received their final grade, potentially compromising objectivity.

Some 25 percent of professors say their evaluations were frequently published for students and others to see. Other means of evaluation vary. About half of respondents said they were evaluated frequently by administrators, and about two-thirds by peers.

“The development of teaching portfolios, mentoring of junior colleagues or teaching assistants, or engagement with an on-campus center for teaching and learning, while often recommended, was tagged as required by very few respondents,” the committee says.

Roughly half of respondents reported a mentoring program for junior faculty on their campuses, but few were involved with one. And while 75 percent of respondents said there’s a center for teaching and learning, most said the centers were better known for helping instructors with technological needs than pedagogical ones.

Most agreed that teaching and learning centers demonstrate a campus’s commitment to pedagogical excellence, and 86 percent supported the idea of mentoring programs for junior faculty. Even more respondents (90 percent) said institutions should evaluate teaching with the same seriousness as research and scholarship. While two-thirds of respondents said student evaluations create upward pressure on grades, some 77 percent were against the idea of quotas to fight grade inflation being imposed by the administration.

Who decides what goes into a student evaluation instrument? Some 55 percent of respondents said that was not the job of the faculty primarily. Some 62 percent said decisions concerning the use of student evaluations in personnel decisions, such as promotion, tenure and merit, did not lie with the faculty.

Over all, some 69 percent of respondents said they saw some or a strong need for student feedback on their teaching. But only 47 percent said teaching evaluations were effective.

“We saw numerous claims that faculty are evaluated and recommended (or not) for contract renewal or promotion as a result of the grades they assigned, especially claims that there is administrative pressure to pass many students who deserve to fail courses,” the committee says.

The committee pays significant attention in its write-up to adjunct faculty concerns, to include graduate teaching assistants, saying that most respondents noted that traditional monitoring of teaching was limited to those on the tenure track.

For adjunct faculty, the committee says, there is “significantly less support and, oftentimes, exclusion from participation in mentoring, teaching programs, instructional development and peer evaluations. Given the reality that [non-tenure-track] faculty are responsible for teaching the majority of courses and that graduate students represent the next generation in higher education, this lack of mentoring and attention to quality seems disturbing and a cause for concern.”

The committee also argues that online course evaluations, with their low rates of return, “aren’t working” for any faculty member, tenure track or not. It endorses having faculty within departments and colleges -- not administrators -- develop their own, more holistic teaching evaluations, and they raise the possibility of ending student anonymity, saying that students might be more accurate and fair if required to give their names.
Perhaps most importantly, the committee calls on “chairs, deans, provosts and institutions to end the practice of allowing numerical rankings from student evaluations to serve as the only or the primary indicator of teaching quality, or to be interpreted as expressing the quality of the faculty member’s job performance.”

Addressing adjunct faculty concerns, the committee adds, “We especially call on administrations to stop the lazy practice of making contract renewals on the basis of such partial, biased and unreliable data.”

Philip B. Stark, a professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley and co-author of a widely read 2014 paper that was critical of student evaluations of teaching, said he was even more against them now, given the growing body of evidence of their unreliability -- especially concerning gender bias.

“I no longer think [student evaluations] should be used in any formal way by any institution, especially not as a measure of teaching quality and especially not for the purposes of hiring, merit evaluations, firing, tenure, et cetera,” Stark said. “They do not measure what they purport to measure.”

Stark said he thought that basic items such as “Could you hear the instructor from the back of the room?” or “Could you read the instructor’s handwriting?” or even “Did you enjoy the class?” might be worth collecting, but only for the instructor’s eyes.

Vasey’s committee doesn’t claim that its sample is representative as a whole. In fact, the paper discusses at length the fact that non-tenure-track faculty, for example -- a minority of respondents -- actually make up the majority of the teaching force. But it says the survey results offer a valuable snapshot nonetheless.

Adrianna Kezar, director of the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success at the University of Southern California, has studied student evaluations extensively, along with how adjunct faculty employment impacts student learning. She said student evaluations are the primary means for evaluating non-tenure-track faculty, and often for non-rehiring. Like the AAUP committee, she said student evaluations shouldn’t be abolished, but that non-tenure-track faculty need more robust, complete measures of performance.

“Research demonstrates that student evaluations can be valuable among several sources of input on faculty teaching but need to be combined with other sources including peer observations, syllabus review, portfolio analysis and teaching philosophy and reflection, among other approaches,” she said. “Single metrics of teaching have not been found to provide a complete enough picture for improvement.”

Kezar said via email that the issue has implications for student success, namely that overreliance on teaching evaluations for adjunct faculty ratings has led to “integrating effective educational practices such as active or collaborative learning because students often resist new evidence-based teaching approaches that require greater engagement and challenge and therefore penalize instructors who use such approaches. Faculty are often given higher evaluations if they do not challenge students to work hard.”

Of course, not all course evaluations are created equal. Ken Ryalls is president of IDEA, which offers colleges and universities research-based course evaluation systems that can control for class size, student motivation and other factors. He said he understands faculty concerns about low response rates baring statistically insignificant data, but that the correlation between response rates and teacher ratings is actually quite low.

Ryalls said IDEA has an 81 percent response rate on paper and 66 percent online, and that a mobile device delivery system eliminates the paper advantage, since students can fill it out at their fingertips.

“Even without a mobile option, response rates can be just as high online as with paper if teachers take certain actions,” he said. “Faculty can clearly communicate their expectations for student compliance, ensure confidentiality, monitor response rates, send reminders, and create a culture that values student feedback.”
The most effective ways to get students to complete course evaluations is to assure them that their responses will be valued and make a difference in the future of the course, Ryalls added.

Qualitative comments, just like numerical scores, “should be used as part of a global picture and analyzed over time to look for informative patterns of feedback that may help instructors improve,” he said. Instructors also may guide students on how to write helpful comments before the surveys are given.

Ryalls said he agreed with the AAUP paper in that faculty members should have input in what questions are asked. He also supported a more comprehensive faculty ratings system. Ideally, he said, student evaluations should count for no more than 30 to 50 percent of the overall assessment of one's teaching, and ratings should be collected from at least six classes before summative decisions about effectiveness are made.

“When we stop thinking of evaluation as an event that occurs at the end of the semester and start thinking of it as an ongoing process that is based on multiple sources of information,” Ryalls said, “we will begin to accept the value of student ratings gathered from a reliable and valid system.”