Dominic Pino asked the following questions (in black) to the Effective Teaching Committee over email on Monday, April 22, 2019. The Committee's responses (in blue) were over email on Tuesday, April 23, 2019. For transparency's sake, here is every question and answer, in full and unchanged.

1. The recommendations say, "The Committee has been made aware by the Office of Institutional Research ad Effectiveness (OIRE) that online evaluation of faculty is being seriously considered due to its cost-effectiveness" (p. 3). As I wrote in my April 2 story, the associate provost at OIRE is unaware of any cost-effectiveness determination being made by her office, and the actual cost of administering paper evaluation forms is trivial (about $19,000) in the context of a university budget. **Is there information that the ETC has about cost effectiveness that backs up the claim made in the recommendations?**

The source of this information is OIRE; we are relating what we were told in our meetings with them as recently as last Fall. We have not yet met with new OIRE Director Durham, who was only recently hired, and we will wait until after the Faculty Senate has made a determination on how to proceed with our work before setting up a meeting to brief her on it.

2. Recommendation 6 express concern about Wi-fi capability (p. 4). So does Recommendation 13 (p. 9). During the Faculty Senate meeting, much was made of the prospect of 150 students in a lecture hall on Wi-fi at the same time with concerns that might crash the internet. As a student, I can tell you that there are currently 150 students on Wi-fi at the same time in lecture halls because everyone's phone is connected (plus laptops). The Mason Wi-fi network has thousands of users at the same time across campus. Wi-fi networks can handle high numbers of users. **What was the foundation for this concern in the recommendations?**

Campus IT informed our committee that different buildings on campus are in various stages of upgrade. As such, having large numbers of students online in the same building at the same time may be an issue. Thus, we recommended this concern be addressed.

3. Recommendation 8 says the primary purpose of the Course Evaluation Form should be formative (p. 5). **Will students have a new way to provide summative feedback on their professors' performance? If not, why should students, the consumers of the professors' product, have no say in summative evaluation of that product?**

Research suggests that student feedback can best be used for formative purposes, that is, for improvement of teaching. Summative evaluation, which takes place at the end of the semester, is too late for faculty to make improvements so that the current students will benefit from them.

4. Recommendation 10 states that "faculty evaluation should have as its secondary purpose accountability" (p. 6). **Will students have a new way to hold faculty accountable?**

Students always have a number of ways to hold faculty accountable for their teaching, whether this means providing written feedback on the course evaluation form or through email, meeting with individual faculty or their supervisors to discuss their concerns, filing a grade appeal or, in cases such as sexual harassment by a professor, filing a grievance against a faculty member. Student evaluation forms were never designed to, nor are they useful for, conducting an objective assessment of faculty accountability by students.

5. Further along in Recommendation 10: "Some suggested weights include 50% for peer review, 30% for self-assessment, and 20% of the total evaluation score based on the results of the Course Evaluation Form…" (p. 8). **Why should professors get 100% of the say in students' final grades, but students only get 20% of the say in professors' course evaluations? Is self-assessment a meaningful way to evaluate performance? (The biases inherent to rating oneself seem obvious.) How can other professors who are not in the classroom everyday meaningfully evaluate the performance of a professor? Aren't there inherent biases in peer review that would corrupt the evaluations?**

The research suggests that the best way to evaluate anyone's performance is by using multiple measures, including self-report with supporting evidence. Recommendation 10 also states the need to prepare faculty for peer review by providing training in this process in order to limit bias and ensure the reliability of results. Peer review could include observations of teaching, review of course materials, and obtaining feedback from students. Procedures would be established by each college or program, and these would be responsible for establishing the reliability and validity of the results.

6. In the section of the recommendations about alignment with Mason's Strategic Plan, the rationale for alignment with Strategic Goal 8 begins with "Research has shown…" and does not cite any research (p. 10). Students certainly would not be able to do such a thing in their writing. **Should I, as a student, hold professors to the academic standards expected of me when I read their writing**?

The Faculty Senate has previously received extensive references to our work (see the bibliography that Dr. Renshaw sent you on our behalf two weeks ago).

7. The rationale for Strategic Goal 8 continues to say, "By removing the bias inherent in using a single number for high-stake evaluation, Mason can improve the accuracy and fairness of faculty evaluations and improve retention of minority and female faculty" (p. 10). Is there any evidence of the current process harming the retention of minority and female faculty at Mason? By that I mean, **are there cases of specific female or minority professors at Mason who were harmed by the current course evaluation process**?

This information would not be public record, unless it resulted in litigation. Thus the Committee would not be privy to this information.

8. The rationale for Strategic Goal 9 states that faculty "indicated overwhelming dissatisfaction with the form itself, as well as how the form is used in renewal, promotion, tenure, and salary decisions" (p. 10). **Do you think this dissatisfaction may arise because people in general don't really like being evaluated?** I know students often indicate overwhelming dissatisfaction with grades; that doesn't mean grades are unfair.

The survey data do not allow us to make inferences about any individual's intentions or reasons for replying the way he/she did.

9. The rationale for Strategic Goal 12 says, "In particular, minority faculty must be supported and retained through the use of accurate evaluation systems" (p. 11). In my mind, an accurate evaluation system would not support any particular group because it would be fair and based on general rules. How could an accurate evaluation system support a particular group of people? What would the new system do to support minority faculty?

To support all faculty, we need to reduce the possibility of bias against any single group. Research we have reviewed shows a clear incidence of bias against minority and female faculty, as well as international faculty and those with disabilities, when they are evaluated based on student evaluations of teaching.

In general:

1. Do you view professor course evaluations as analogous to student final grades?

No. Course evaluations are used for a variety of purposes, among them being to make career decisions such as contract renewal, granting tenure or promotion, and merit pay. As such, they are subject to federal and state laws on employment discrimination and must be shown to be valid and reliable measures of faculty performance.

2. You said at the Faculty Senate meeting that these recommendations were the product of 5 years of work. Why was Robert McDonnell, the Course Rating Specialist at OIRE who has 20 years of experience, never consulted in that span of time when crafting these changes?

When we contacted the Director of OIRE, Dr. Kumar, we were given the names of several staff members with whom to coordinate but not the one you name. When Dr. Kumar left last year, Dr. Detlev put us in touch with another staff member, but not the one named.

3. Do you believe that college students, after 15+ years of experience with teachers, have any particular expertise in rating a teacher's effectiveness?

Students' experiences are important and valuable in evaluating college courses. This is one of the primary reasons colleges and universities utilize the course evaluation form - to allow students to provide feedback on their course experience. As such, this Committee continually works to ensure that the form is valid, reliable, and reflective of current research regarding student evaluations of teaching. As you can see from our policy recommendations and the proposed new form, we seek to both validate student voices and to provide reliability and validity to the form.

Student learning is the ultimate goal of a course, and experienced students are in a good position to assess their own learning through candid self-assessment. Students are less prepared to understand how people learn and how to objectively compare pedagogical approaches used in a learning environment that facilitated or hindered their learning outcomes. In addition, students have a good sense of liking or disliking a course or an instructor, and there is a risk that likability may substitute for an objective understanding of facilitated learning outcomes or teaching effectiveness.

We believe that student voices are important. Therefore, we are suggesting that faculty collect student feedback more than once per semester. Recommendation #14 suggests that faculty include in their courses multiple ways for students to provide feedback - midterm or interim evaluations and other ways to elicit anonymous feedback from their students so that specific issues can be addressed during the semester and not after the course is over.

 4. Are there any studies where the population of interest is Mason professors?

We are unaware of any reports or published research on Mason instructors.

5. Would you be interested in meeting with students to discuss the course evaluation changes?

We have always been interested in including students in the conversation and have organized various meetings with the Student Senate and both graduate and undergraduate students in CHSS, the School of Engineering, and the College of Education & Human Development, and incorporated their input into our findings. To include student perspectives, we conducted an online survey of a random sample of all Mason students in Feb. 2017. We have met with students as part of our data gathering and will continue to meet with other groups in the future. In fact, we are meeting with representatives of the Student Senate tomorrow. There is no reason we would not continue to do so in the future.