

Student misconduct and teaching evaluations policy proposal

University of Oregon Senate Meeting

March 15, 2017

Who I am:

- Robert Lipshitz, Associate Professor of Mathematics.
- I have been at UO since Fall 2015. Before that I was a faculty member at Columbia University for most of 10 years.
- I have not had students cheat in my class at UO so far, to the best of my knowledge. (I've been lucky for the last year.) However:
 - I supervise graduate students and postdocs and mentor assistant professors who have.
 - Before coming to UO I was Calculus Director at Columbia for a year, overseeing roughly 5,000 students, and have taught more than 500, so have extensive experience dealing with student cheating.

On cheating

- Students cheat in various ways:
 - Copying solutions.
 - Taking exams “by proxy”.
 - Stashing notes in the bathroom.
 - ...
- Cheating hurts:
 - The students cheating.
 - All honest students, by creating unfair competition.
 - Class morale.
- So, policing student cheating is important and, at UO, mandatory.

Uses of course evaluations

- When evaluating classes.
- When evaluating instructors, for salary, promotion, and retention.
- When applying for jobs. Job applicants in mathematics, and other fields, are often expected to provide numerical course evaluation information.

So:

- Accurate information is valuable.
- Distorted information hurts careers.

The problem.

- Students who have cheated and been reported for cheating can still fill out course evaluations, potentially vindictively.
- **This happens.**
- It discourages reporting, and harms instructors who do their jobs.
- The same applies to students who have been reported for harassment or other misconduct.

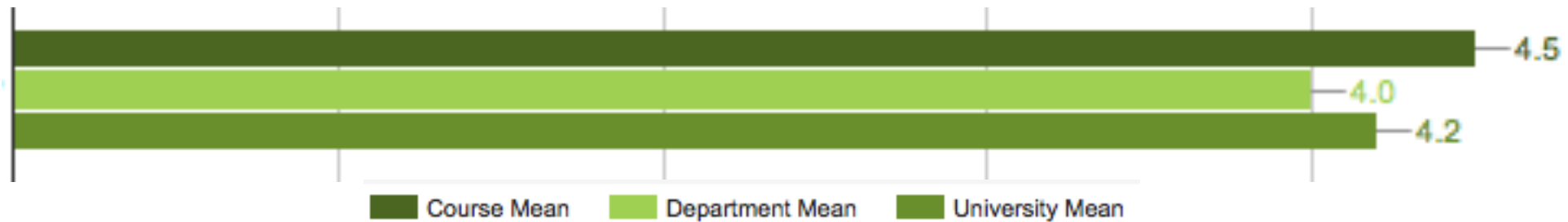
How often does this happen?

- I know of **2** cases in the Math Department where *4 or more* students cheated on a midterm exam and were reported, in a class of 35 or fewer, *in the last year*.
- In both cases, the instructor was in a junior position, so vulnerable.
- I didn't even ask around to find out about other cases.

Does it have an effect?

- Evaluations from an excellent math instructor:

What was the quality of the instructor's teaching?



Lipshitz, Math 342, Spring 2016. Enrollment 30, **76% response rate.**

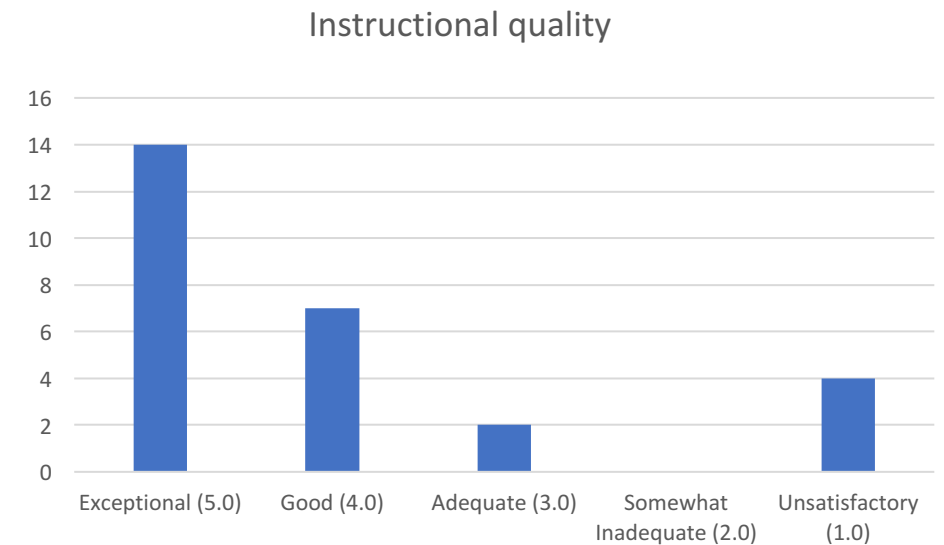
Does it really have an effect?

- Evaluations from an excellent math instructor:



Course average: 4.5
Department average: 4.0

Actual



Course average: 4.0
Department average: 4.0

With 4 disaffected students

Does it really have an effect?

- Evaluations from a hypothetical average math instructor:



Course average: 4.0
Department average: 4.0

Honest



Course average: 3.5
Department average: 4.0

With 4 disaffected students

Proposed remedy:

- Remove evaluations from students responsible for cheating or other misconduct in a class.
- Students still welcome to provide their feedback in other forums.

Concluding comments

- There are many other concerns about course evaluations, and I am glad that the Senate will conduct a broader review of course evaluations.
- This particular issue affects our instructors and graduate students (and everyone else) immediately, but is easy to ameliorate.
- The Senate should vote to immediately stop punishing our graduate students, instructors, and faculty for reporting misconduct.