3 July 1995

TO: Jin Darney, for the Academic Deans, and Barbara Smith

FROM: Burt Guttman

SUBJECT: Putting evaluations together

I think the faculty needs to hold itself to a higher standard for creation of student evaluations. I've come to this conclusion after chatting with our local program secretaries and seeing what they have to do to assemble evaluations. Too many programs simply dump pieces of evaluation, from individual members of the team, on the program secretary and expect her to assemble them into a coherent whole. Aside from the unreasonable burden on the secretary (no small matter), the result, I'm afraid, is lousy and perhaps incoherent evaluations. Furthermore, this system allows students to fall through the cracks and have their evaluations lost or delayed.

With our computer facilities, if faculty members write their evaluations by computer, it is incredibly easy for each faculty member to assemble 20-25 final evaluations, put them in proper order, and hand the completed files to a program secretary. In contrast, it is difficult for the program secretary to juggle hundreds of evaluations in bits and pieces and to assemble them into coherent documents. I think faculty members assume that secretaries can do this easily, so they just dump the load on the poor secretaries and rush off. I maintain that this is a dereliction of duties.

When I'm working with other faculty members in a program, I consider it my duty to take the pieces they've written, put them in proper order, with a consistent format, and--most important--write some kind of introductory paragraph leading into the narrative to follow and make sure that the equivalencies at the end are all correct. Secretaries can't do that--or they should not do it.

If my teaching colleagues give me disks with all their pieces in good condition, it is a matter of a few key strokes, perhaps using a few creative macros, to transfer the pieces into single files for each student on my hard drive. Another few keystrokes will create the outline of an introductory paragraph, which I can personalize for each student, and add the correct equivalencies at the end. If people need instruction in ways to do this, any of us who do it regularly can easily teach them. But I think this business of expecting the program secretaries to be mind-readers and miracle workers has to end.

While I'm on the subject, some kind of brakes have to be put on the people who teach modules. I keep getting long course descriptions with ten times as much detail as any reasonable person would ever want to know, and usually there's no way to edit them down. These, too, make for lousy evaluations.