A&M hands out bonuses

By VIMAL PATEL

Some Texas A&M University instructors are richer this week because officials have begun distributing checks based on anonymous student evaluations.

The initiative, a relatively new concept and the largest such effort in the nation, gives awards between $2,500 and $10,000 to teachers based on the end-of-the-semester surveys.

Chancellor Mike McKinney, who has been criticized by some for the initiative, chatted up during brief remarks at a reception for the winners Friday in the doomed Academic Building.

"We don't pay you as much as you deserve. ... This is a poor substitute for that, but it's a substitute I have access to," McKinney said. "Some of the reviews have not been favorable, but I will tell you, the results have been favorable."

Some faculty members at Texas A&M have said the program could turn into a popularity contest. Education groups have voiced concern that it relies on a "popularity contest."

"The criticism wasn't really surprising," said Frank Ashley, the A&M system's vice chancellor for academic affairs. "Any time that you do something totally based on student opinion, it's controversial. ... It's totally teaching effectiveness, there are lots of variables. This is just an award that says for this semester, for this class, students felt this person did an incredible job."

Despite the concerns, A&M system officials are expanding the program.

The $1.1 million pilot initiative began last semester at Texas A&M University, Prairie View A&M University, and Texas A&M-Kingsville. Beginning this semester, it's at all nine A&M universities.

McKinney has asked the Legislature for $12 million for continued funding.

Initially, the top 3 percent of instructors were eligible for the largest award of $10,000. Those winners were chosen randomly. Some instructors and received a check for $5,000 Friday. He got the lowest amount possible for the top award because his class only had 19 students, and the amount winners receive is partly dependent on class size.

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Conrad wasn't concerned that teachers would change their instruction style in an effort to gain popularity with students.

"I can't imagine senior faculty changing the way they teach," he said. "They're pretty stubborn people."

About 320 Texas A&M instructors took part in the program last semester. About 2,500 were eligible for it, officials said.

An estimated 400 faculty members have signed up to participate in the spring program, officials said. The deadline to enroll is Friday.

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Is anyone else bothered by the fact that the paper published the names of the faculty and their respective bonuses? In many business organizations, people have been fired for doing this. In addition, media organizations have been sued for publishing similar information.


Comment Title: Can administrators be evaluated by students too?
It would be interesting to have an anonymous review of Murano's performance. Tuition hikes during a deep recession while faculty get bonuses is probably not popular with students (and parents). Why do instructors have to sign up to be considered for a bonus? Let all 2500 compete and a prof could refuse the money to protest.


Comment Title: Bonuses for State Employees - ???
Taxpayer money should never be used for bonuses. What happened to the $48,000 that the Houston Chronicle had reported on that was budgeted for high ranking system executives? Hopefully, the chancellor knows better than to distribute bonuses to his staff using taxpayer money!

Posted by: We don't pay you as much as you deserve. On: 3/8/2009

Comment Title: You didn't mention anything about some extra money for staff and employees. Oh, there is noting for them? How common.