

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

# Student-Administrator Roundtable on the Future of Penn Course Review

Friday, October 31, 2008  
College Hall 205



**SCUE**  
STUDENT COMMITTEE on  
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION



# Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Background (3 min.)
  - Penn Course Review: History and status quo
  - Online Evaluations: New opportunities and new challenges
- The Future of Penn Course Review (2 min.)
  - Fulfilling the promise of qualitative reviews
  - Supporting a sustainable PCR Editorial Board
- Open discussion
- Concluding remarks: Next steps and commitments (5 min.)



# Introductions

**Rob Nelson**, Associate Director for Education, Office of the Provost  
**Scott Romeika**, Director of Academic Affairs and Advising, Wharton  
**Joseph Sun**, Director of Academic Affairs, SEAS  
**Judith McKee**, Director of Administration, College of Arts & Sciences  
**Christina Costanzo Clark**, Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs,  
Nursing  
**Dan Shapiro**, IT Director, Information Systems and Computing  
**Stacey Lopez**, Vice President for Institutional Research and Analysis,  
Institutional Affairs

**Jay Patel**, Vice Chair Internal Affairs, UA  
**Michael Chen**, Academic Affairs Committee Volunteer Member, UA

**Joshua Kay**, Co-Chair, College Dean's Advisory Board  
**Ava Childers**, Co-Chair, College Dean's Advisory Board

**Ravi Naresh**, Co-Chair, Wharton Dean's Undergraduate Advisory Board  
**Nick Semeniuk**, Wharton Dean's Undergraduate Advisory Board  
**Casey Klyszeiko**, Wharton Dean's Undergraduate Advisory Board and SCUE

**Shana Hoffman**, Engineering Dean's Advisory Board

**Sarah Guo**, Editor-in-Chief, Penn Course Review  
**Samuel Sayegh**, Managing Editor, Penn Course Review

**Tamara Levy**, Co-creator, PennCourseReviewed.com

**Zach Fuchs**, Chair, SCUE  
**Aaron Werner**, Treasurer, SCUE  
**Liz Elfman**, Co-Chair, SCUE Online Initiatives Working Group  
**Jessica Riegel**, Co-Chair, SCUE Online Initiatives Working Group

## **SCUE Online Initiatives Working Group:**

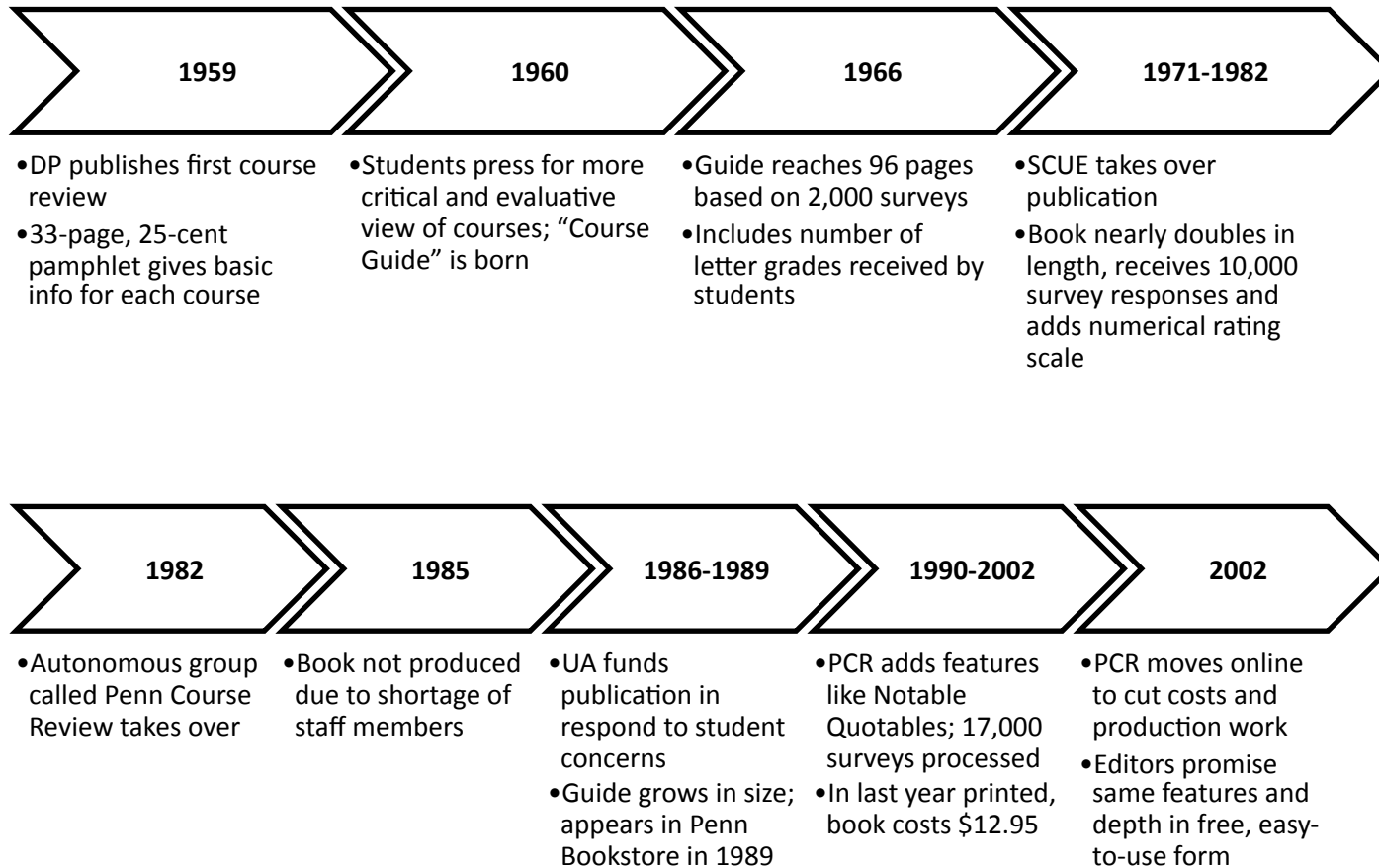
Gen Barnard, Monisha Chakravarthy, Shreyans Goenka, Billy Goldberg,  
Jaclyn Hall, Doug Hollin, Michael Ishii, Justin Rand, Sejal Shah



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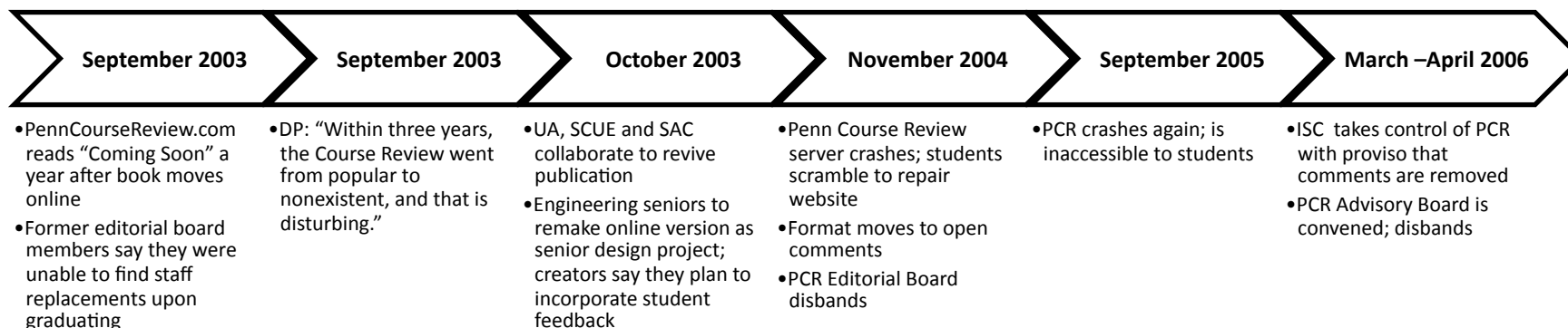
# Evolution of Penn Course Review



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## Evolution of Penn Course Review



### DP Opinion Column: "Numbers can only go so far" – 4/14/06

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### DP Staff Editorial: "Out with the old" – 9/13/07

Penn Course Review is **poorly configured and needlessly time consuming**...it's time the University got serious about revamping PCR.

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And although students provide a fair amount of information on these forms, **key portions of this data don't make it onto Penn Course Review.** In particular, student ratings depend heavily on who's doing the grading. Students fill out their school, GPA, expected grade and year on the forms, but students can't access that information online. At the very least, administrators should expand the availability of information on the site by simply presenting data that students already provide.



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# Out of context, quantitative reviews create incomplete impressions

COURSE LISTINGS							
<a href="#">Course Code</a>	<a href="#">Semester</a>	<a href="#">Course Title</a>	<a href="#">Lecturer</a>	<a href="#">Return</a> ?	<a href="#">Course</a> ?	<a href="#">[Instructor]</a> ?	<a href="#">Difficulty</a> ?
LING-001-001	Spring 2003	INTRO TO LINGUISTICS	<a href="#">BUCKLEY</a>	55/117	2.16	2.56	2.25

4: Excellent  
 3: Very Good  
 2: Good  
 1: Fair  
 0: Poor

On a 4.0 GPA scale, students interpret this as a mediocre course. In reality, students rated this instructor between "Good" and "Very Good"

RATINGS FOR EUGENE BUCKLEY	
All ratings are on a scale from 0 to 4. A value of 4.00 represents the most/best unless otherwise noted.	LING 001-001
Overall Quality of the course.	2.16
Overall Quality of the instructor.	2.56
Please rate the difficulty of the course. (0=easy to 4=difficult)	2.25
Instructor's ability to communicate the subject matter.	2.65
Instructor's accessibility and willingness to to discuss course content and any problems.	2.55
Value of assigned readings.	1.73
Amount learned from this course in terms of knowledge, concepts, skills and thinking ability.	2.33
Please rate the amount of work required for this course. (0=very little to 4=very much)	1.98
Would you recommend this course to a major? (0=no to 4=strongly)	3.17
Would you recommend this course to a non-major? (0=no to 4=strongly)	1.95
Was the instructor able to stimulate your interest in the material?	1.51

Missing data, such as expected grade

No insight into course content, pedagogy, nuances behind the numbers

Difficult to compare courses across disciplines

## Qualitative reviews give depth and context to the numerical survey data. Reviews allow students to make informed course decisions

### English 084: American Literature 1900-1945

	<i>Return</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Instructor</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>
Barnard	32/39	3.30	3.50	2.40

Part three in the general survey of American literature, this course is concerned with American literature and cultural life from the turn of the century until about 1945. Emphasis is placed on the period between the two World Wars as well as on the intellectual and cultural milieu in which the writer found themselves. English 084 is a study of writers, their works, and their world. Works by the following writers are usually included: James, Eliot, Frost, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, West, Stevens, DuBois, Williams, Wharton, Stein, Moore, and Hemingway. This course may be counted as a distributional course in Arts and Letters.

Students for the most part enjoyed this “interesting” and “educational” course. They also liked most of the assigned readings, finding them valuable in their learning experience. Most felt they had learned a considerable amount in this course.

Students heaped praise on Professor Barnard. As one student declared, she was the “first professor I’ve had. ... that has actually made me look forward to a 9 A.M. class.” Other students frequently used such words as “fantastic,” “amazing,” and “wonderful” to describe her. Although some students thought she was very absorbed in her own thoughts and was occasionally “condescending”, most students found her very “engaging” and easy to approach. She was always willing to help out her students if they needed any aid.

Many of the students in this course were College upperclassmen. Quite a few took it to fulfill a major requirement, other to satisfy the General Requirement, and several used it as an elective. All students expected to receive either an A or a B after approximately seven to nine hours a week on course work. This course was highly recommended to both majors and non-majors.

**Syllabus:** course content, texts, time period

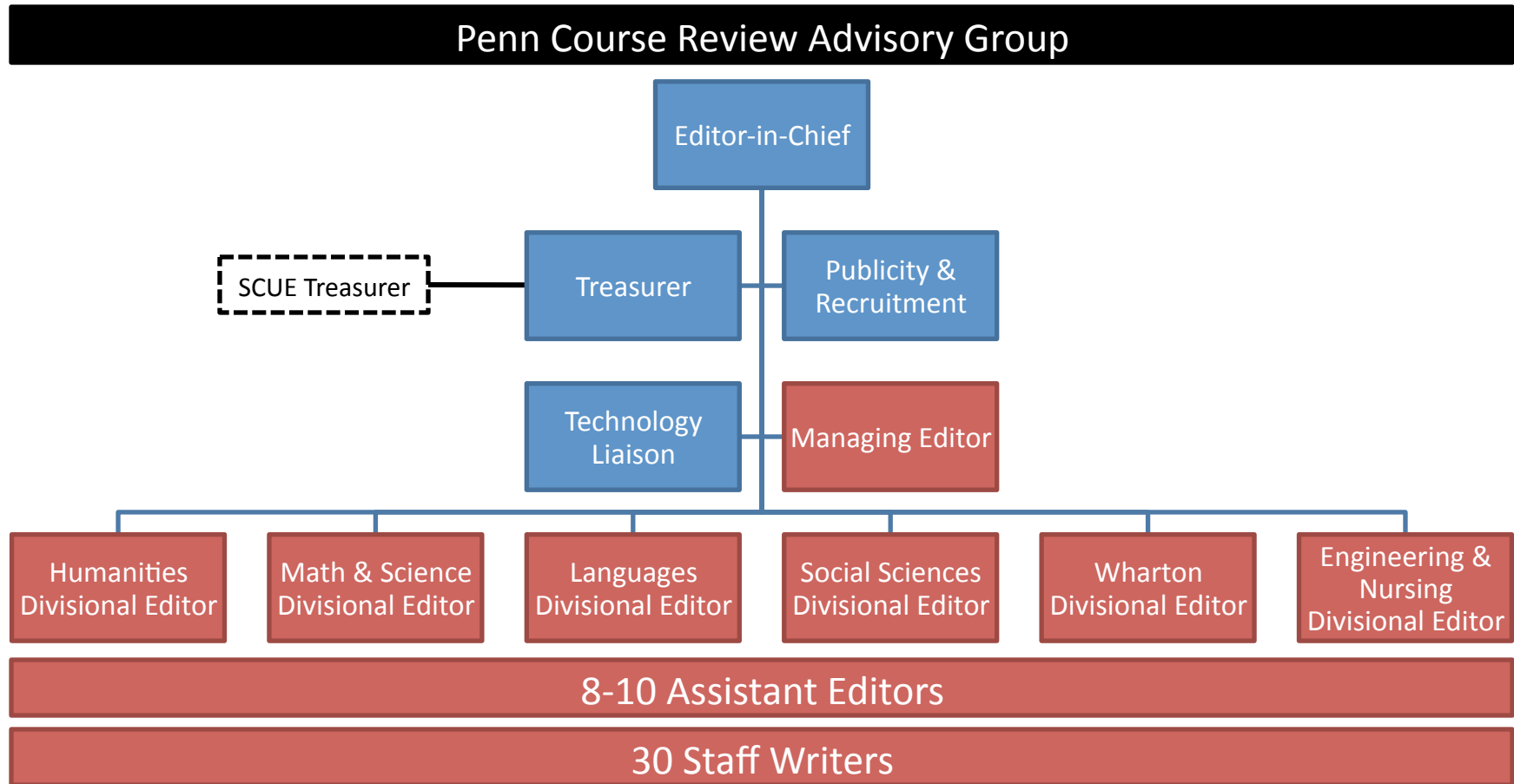
**Synthesized commentary:** course content

**Synthesized commentary:** Professor’s teaching and accessibility

**Synthesized commentary:** target audience, expected grade, workload



# Potential PCR Editorial Board Structure



## Questions for discussion

- How can we encourage students to give thoughtful and complete online course evaluations?
- How do we guarantee the longevity and sustainability of the Penn Course Review Editorial Board?
- What is the charge of the Penn Course Review Advisory Group? Which constituencies should comprise it?
- How can the Editorial Board recruit a large numbers of volunteer writers and editors?
- What constructive features can ISC add to the PCR interface?
- Should evaluation questions evolve?
- How can we ensure that course evaluation data is passed along to the Editorial Board each year?



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# The Daily Pennsylvanian

## **“Penn Course Review goes online-only” - 10/28/08**

Starting in Spring 2009, the course evaluation system will be completely electronic. With this shift, the Student Committee for Undergraduate Education hopes to make the qualitative comments - which students currently handwrite at the bottom of the evaluation form but are not published online - accessible to everyone.

## **Staff Editorial: “Out with the old” – 9/13/07**

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## **Staff Editorial: “Getting a bad review” – 9/13/05**

Few online resources are more useful for students seeking to maximize their educational experience. Further, the Review adds an extra layer of accountability for the faculty and staff. None of this matters, though, if the site is missing or outdated.

## **“Course Review returns after crash” – 11/3/04**

The turbulent history of Penn Course Review is currently on the upswing, with the site recently returning from a nearly two-month absence.... During fall semester's add/drop period, the server that previously hosted the Course Review crashed, and organizers were forced to scramble to get the site functioning for the spring semester advance registration period.

## **“Improved Course Review Web site aids students” – 3/25/04**

In an effort to aid students in the process of choosing classes, the Penn Course Review Web site is undergoing changes to make the site more user-friendly and easier to navigate. Created in place of a printed Penn course guide, the Web site was created last fall and has seen an array of improvements in recent months. Wharton class reviews, student comments and expanded search options were all added to the site.

## **“New Course Review site up despite kinks” – 10/28/03**

Overall, most seemed pleased with the site, which -- with the help of the Undergraduate Assembly,

Student Committee on Undergraduate Education and Student Activities Council -- was relaunched yesterday after being down since the summer. The Penn Course Review, originally offered in print, was made into a free, online publication last year with fewer features.

**Staff Editorial: "Welcoming back the Course Review" – 10/28/03**

True to the committee's word, the Penn Course Review is now back online. Although the Web site does not contain ratings for Wharton classes and is still without the quotes and comments that helped make the book so popular, the Web site is significantly more comprehensive and current than the previous incarnation.

**"Course Review to be online Monday" – 10/23/03**

For over 40 years, the Course Review was published in book form, providing honest student feedback on various courses and offering criticism of professors. But soon after going online last year, the Web site folded due to a lack of student interest in running the publication. Therefore, last month, three branches of student government -- the Undergraduate Assembly, Student Committee on Undergraduate Education and the Student Activities Council -- agreed to help revive this publication. The online version of the Review, which will be complete starting Monday at [coursereview.vpul.upenn.edu](http://coursereview.vpul.upenn.edu), will contain only the numerical statistics from Spring 2003 classes for three undergraduate schools -- the College, Engineering and Nursing...Student comments and "notable quotables" will be added once a staff is compiled.

**"Student groups agree to rehabilitates Course Review" – 9/22/03**

Three student government groups have agreed to work together to revive the Penn Course Review, the students' guide to classes and professors that dissolved over the summer...The Penn Course Review, which began in 1959, became an online publication last year, providing only about one-quarter of its original content. In July 2003, after its leaders had graduated, the Web site came down when its domain name expired.

**Staff Editorial: "Bringing back the Course Review" – 9/15/03**

Within three years, the Course Review went from popular to nonexistent, and that is disturbing. The Penn Course Review was one of the best ways to hold professors accountable for their teaching methods. Without it, the evaluations that students fill out at the end of each semester are for naught, because there is no way to know if their peers shared the same opinion.

**"Course Review's future unclear" – 9/15/03**

But this year, the Review is gone. After moving the publication online last fall -- and cutting the content to half of what the printed edition contained in the process -- [www.penncoursereview.com](http://www.penncoursereview.com) currently contains no information other than "Coming Soon."

**"The search for the perfect class" – 10/1/02**

With a long and colorful history, the move to the Web continues the evolution of this Penn publication... staffers maintain that the site will soon be of the same quality as the printed version. At this point, the site offers reviews of about 200 courses -- less than half of what the printed editions contain...Although it's been in the works for an entire year, the site was finally created over the summer... the move not only eliminates cost, but the book's staffers no longer have to deal with the printing and distribution of the book.