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Vice Provost Judith Ruderman spoke to DSG senators Wednesday night about professor assessments.



VP for Academic Affairs Jimmy Soni talks about a new website that will allow students to evaluate professors.

DSG considers eval site to rate profs, classes

By: Ashley Dean

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In as little as two weeks, students could have a new way of evaluating courses and professors.

Senior Jimmy Soni, Duke Student Government vice president for academic affairs, has been working with Pick-A-Prof, a nationwide website that he said will ameliorate the problems associated with current University evaluation systems, including the policy that requires professors to opt in to include course evaluation information on ACES.

"The truth is, it's a system run by the people we are trying to evaluate," Soni said. "Faculty have not been our strongest supporters when it comes to evals."

Senior Joe Fore, DSG executive vice president, said course evaluations have been an ongoing concern for the governing group.

"DSG has perennially dealt with this issue, and each year we've been more and more frustrated with our inability to solve the course evaluations problem," Fore said.

Last year DSG initiated a new course evaluations website, but Soni said there were problems updating the system.

On ACES, students cannot view narrative comments that others wrote on the paper-based evaluations distributed at the end of each semester. Also, the evaluations are designed to aid professors rather than students, said Judith Ruderman, vice provost for academic and administrative services.

Soni said he selected Pick-A-Prof because students need an independently run, third-party system. It is

the largest website of its kind in existence, he added.

"We've gone through a number of stages of improvements, first working with the faculty, then working with our own independent site that we ran," Fore said. "Now I think this is the next logical step to take and a vast improvement over what we've done so far."

The program was informally, unanimously approved by the Senate but will not be proposed in a resolution until next week. If passed, the website will be unveiled the following week for student use.

Pick-A-Prof would create a website specifically customized for the University and would include grade histories, professor comparisons and information, student reviews and a schedule planner.

The service would be free because the costs for a smaller university like Duke are covered by revenues from Pick-A-Prof's new partnership with Facebook. The website would be made available via Facebook and possibly ACES. It would supplement the paper-based system but replace the current DSG-run site.

"[Pick-a-Prof] has been around for five years, they have 250 schools, they've got millions of recommendations on the site-I see this as a sustainable, long-term option for students," Soni said.

In other business:

The Duke Symphony Orchestra came before the Senate seeking charter recognition following a prior objection by the Student Organization Finance Committee. SOFC chair Alex Crable, a sophomore, said the group does not meet the DSG bylaw that says chartered groups may not be selective. DSO holds auditions for members.

Senators debated whether the group is in fact selective, as all individuals who have auditioned thus far have been accepted into the orchestra. DSO representatives were told to return next week, due to an absence of quorum.

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