

Senate Teaching and Learning Committee 2024.2.07 Report to Senate Regarding Student Course Feedback

In the last three years, this committee (1) investigated and identified best practices in constructing measures of student course feedback, resulting in the document below and (2) investigated and identified best practices in teaching, resulting in the TEACH document, available on the ITL website.

We then began the process of writing items for a revised “student course feedback” survey¹. We used the TEACH document to compose items, and also consulted other course feedback surveys. The goal of this revision was to align what YSU has identified as best practices in teaching with what we are assessing, and to abide by best practices in obtaining student feedback.

At this time, our committee has collected feedback and made changes accordingly. We are now asking for a vote to move forward with the new student survey items and process outlined here. With a vote of Senate approval, we would begin to use the new instrument and process in Summer, 2024. Following implementation, we will return to Senate with any suggestions for changes based on instrument analysis.

In this report:

- **Document 1 - Summary of the State of Student Evaluations of Teaching, with Recommendations**
- **Document 2 - Draft Document of New “Student Course Feedback” Survey**

¹ Document 1 referred to student course feedback as “student experience surveys.”

Summary of the State of Student Evaluations of Teaching, with Recommendations

(2021.04.04, 2023.04.05, and 2023.12.6 presented to Academic Senate)

The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee was asked to review our student evaluation of teaching process and offer recommendations. This paper represents a brief summary of the information we've gathered.² First, we address common problems with student evaluations and proposed solutions. We then highlight best practices that might be included in a measure of student experience. Last, we offer concluding recommendations for a revised evaluation measure and process.

Problems with Student Ratings of Instruction, and Suggested Solutions³

1. Students as Raters

Students are not qualified to evaluate teaching methods, yet their evaluations are often weighed heavily – or only - in assessing teaching effectiveness.

To effectively assess teaching, multiple sources of evidence (at least three) should be consulted. Examples of sources of information about teaching effectiveness include the following: student ratings, peer classroom observations, teaching awards, learning outcome measures, teaching course portfolio, teaching scholarship, peer review of course materials, external expert ratings, self-ratings, videos, student interviews, exit and alumni ratings, employer ratings, mentor's advice, and administrator ratings. **Given that students are not expert in evaluating teaching effectiveness, student evaluations of teaching should be renamed "Student Experience Surveys."**

2. Validity of Student Ratings

a. Items on student evaluation of teaching measures are often unrelated to learning, or invite bias. Biased responses are often related to physical attractiveness, charisma, personality, gender, age, race or nationality, and class length and difficulty. There are several strategies that have been shown to mitigate student bias. First, **adding a bias statement to the instructions has resulted in a small but significant difference⁴** A second strategy is **eliminating questions regarding expressiveness such as "enthusiasm, warmth, confidence, and voice tone."⁵** Third, it's wise to **use items that measure concrete behaviors (e.g., "This instructor returned graded assignments**

² Similar conclusions have been documented by the American Sociological Association, 2019

³ Berk, R. A. (2013). *Top 10 flashpoints in student ratings and the evaluation of teaching*. Stylus Publishing.

⁴ Peterson, D.A. M., Biederman, L, A., Andersen, D., Ditonto, T. M., & Roe, K. (2019). Mitigating gender bias in student evaluations of teaching. PLOS ONE 14(5): e0216241. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0216241>

⁵ D'Entremont, Agnes G and Hannah Gustafson. 2017. "Panel: Gender Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching." Paper presented at the American Society for Engineering Education, Columbus, OH

within two weeks.” “This instructor was always available during their office hours.”⁶ Another strategy is **considering other items that address the student’s motivation, self-efficacy, engagement, and the teaching methods they observed.**⁷

b. Global items (e.g., “This was an excellent class,” “This teacher was excellent”) are often used as a single indicator of success. Although they appear valid, their reliability is low compared to the whole. Furthermore, they invite bias. Global items should be excluded from student ratings measures. In evaluating faculty, people should pay attention to the whole scale or subscales rather than putting weight on specific items.

c. Many homegrown scales have issues with reliability and validity. Commercial vendor scales often have extensive analysis for reliability and validity, but they can be cost prohibitive. Homegrown scales should be analyzed by experts in scale development.

d. Midpoint response items (e.g., neutral) can distort ratings and should be eliminated.

3. Online Ratings Have Special Problems

There are several issues that make online ratings problematic, but there are a few solutions. One problem is student **concerns about anonymity**. Additional issues include lower **response rates** (see below), **negativity bias**, **lack of standardized administration**, and **no control over response conditions** (when students have many days to complete the evals, we don’t know if the student or someone else responded, students may be responding under very different conditions, and students may be conferring before responding). These **problems can be reduced or eliminated by using standardized in-class administration, with clear directions about the nature and purpose of the measure, monitored by an appointed student.**

4. Timing Near Final Exams

Student surveys don’t assess the whole course, although there are difficulties with assessing after final exams.

5. Low Response Rates

YSU is typically at about a 50% response rate. The rate should be 80%+ if only source for summative evaluation, 70%+ if combined with other sources for summative

⁶ Andersen, K. and E. D. Miller. 1997. "Gender and Student Evaluations of Teaching." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30(2):216-19.

⁷ Howard R. Mzumara, Ph.D., Director of Evaluation and Psychometric Services IUPUI Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS). “Revisiting Course Evaluations: Strategies to Minimize Gender and Racial Biases in Student Evaluations of Teaching.” Presentation given at the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, IN October 14, 2019 <https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/overview/institute-files/2019-institute/monday-2019/mzumara.pdf>

evaluation, and 60%+ if being used for formative evaluation. **Administering student ratings during class is the best way to boost response rates.** Other ideas include specifying the purpose and importance of the ratings, assuring anonymity and confidentiality, having a user-friendly system, using email reminders, offering student incentives (e.g., prizes, extra credit, early access to grades), and rewarding faculty or departments that meet a target response.

6. Score Interpretation

People vary in how they understand and interpret scores. Those using student ratings to evaluate teaching effectiveness should receive training in how to interpret scores.

There are many guidelines for interpretation. For example, if results are skewed, we should pay attention more to the median than the mean. We should look to student comments to interpret statistics. There should be benchmarks for ratings: for formative decisions, a rating below 75% may indicate a red flag whereas a rating below 50% would indicate cause for concern. We can examine item and subscale ratings that may indicate strengths and weaknesses, or we can assess course by course. For summative decisions, we should require a graphic display of total ratings over time so see the whole picture and trends.

7. Assessing Different Modalities

Although there is overlap between f2f and online instruction (structure, delivery, interaction, support), asynchronous instruction is slower and more “guide on the side.” Solutions to evaluating different modalities include adding additional items to f2f scales for online instruction, revising f2f scales to adapt to online (e.g., evaluation of technology use), and using commercial or published scales.

Recommendations

1. Rename student evals as “Student Experience Survey⁸” and return to administering the survey during class.

Monitored by a student, the survey would have clear directions about the nature (e.g., anonymity) and purpose of the measure, as well as statement about bias and the kinds of comments that are helpful. As in-class administration is not possible for asynchronous classes, there, students will respond online at their leisure.

2. Open student survey for the last two weeks of the full term, to close before finals week. For seven-week courses, open student survey for the last week.

3. Use student experience surveys as one of at least three sources of data in evaluating teaching effectiveness. Offer training information to those responsible for interpreting student survey data.

⁸ This was later renamed “Student Course Feedback”

4. Create survey items that (a) reflect best practices in teaching, (b) have no middle score, (c) have no global items, (d) measure concrete behaviors and teaching methods observed, (e) address the student's motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement, and (f) include teaching with technology. The opportunity to add questions to the instrument should remain.

5. Identify a faculty member(s) to assist in assessment of instrument validity and reliability, factor analysis, and item analysis. Input will be sought from YSU faculty, students, and administration before a proposal to Senate.

New “Student Course Feedback” Survey
(2023.04.05 and 2023.12.6 presented to Academic Senate)

Directions: This survey is to be administered in-class unless the course is asynchronous online. The instructor(s) is to leave the room. A volunteer student shall share directions to access the survey and/or QR code, read aloud Section 1, and ask students to refrain from discussing their answers with others (repeat, if necessary).

Results of this measure should also indicate context, such as class modality, number of students, lower or upper division, etc.

Section 1 – Purpose, Anonymity, Bias

Student Course Feedback

Your feedback plays an important role in helping your instructor maintain or improve the course. Feedback is also considered in their performance review. Your answers are anonymous – your name does not appear on any report – furthermore, your instructor will not see your feedback until the semester has ended.

YSU recognizes that student evaluations of teaching are often influenced by students’ unconscious and unintentional biases. As you fill out this measure, please keep this in mind and try to resist stereotypes about instructors.

Focus your comments about the content of the course (e.g., the assignments, the textbook, the in-class material) rather than unrelated matters (e.g., the instructor’s appearance or identity).

Section 2 – Verifying Instructor

Instructor of record is identified.

Section 3 – Feedback Measure

Instructions: Please offer your candid feedback to the items below.

1. Syllabus and Policies	
The instructor provided a course syllabus within seven days of the start of the course. (three days, 7 week courses only)	___agree ___disagree

The instructor provided a grading scale.	___agree ___disagree
The instructor provided a list of graded items (e.g., tests, assignments, assessments).	___agree ___disagree
The instructor followed the syllabus.	___agree ___disagree
The instructor made changes to the syllabus.	___agree ___disagree
<i>(if agree)</i> Any changes the instructor made to the syllabus were clear, and beneficial to my learning.	___agree ___disagree
The instructor abided by university policies (e.g., attendance, accessibility, nondiscrimination, academic integrity). <i>(can link to these)</i>	___agree ___disagree

2. Feedback and Grading	
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree	
The instructor shared how to succeed in the course (e.g., criteria, rubrics, directions, examples).	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The instructor made feedback and/or grades readily available (e.g., in Blackboard).	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The instructor provided feedback that helped me learn/progress in the course.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The instructor indicated when to expect feedback or graded student work.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
I had a sense of my standing in the course (e.g. grade, instructor feedback) before the last day to withdraw from the course.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD

3. Course Content	
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree	
Content was connected to course goals.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
Course content was easy to access.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The course used a variety of materials to support my learning (e.g., books, multimedia, articles, software).	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The technology used to deliver this course (e.g., BlackBoard, web-based instructional sites, collaboration systems) provided an effective learning environment.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The class provided me with opportunities for problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, or application of material.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
This class helped me see how to apply course content to practical problems or real-life situations.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD
The course was appropriately challenging for the course level.	___SA ___A ___D ___SD

4. Communication	
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree	
It was clear how and when to communicate with my instructor.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
The instructor responded to messages within 48 business hours.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
The instructor was available during scheduled office/support hours.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
The instructor created an inclusive class environment that communicated value for all individuals.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
I felt like I could reach out to my instructor.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD

5. Virtual/Teaching/Lab Assistants	
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, NA = Not Applicable	
My instructor had a teaching assistant (i.e., online assistant, teaching or lab assistant). <i>If yes, go to Qs.</i>	__ agree __ disagree
It was clear how and when to communicate with the online teaching assistant.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD __ NA
The online teaching assistant generally responded to messages within 48 business hours.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD __ NA
The online teaching assistant answered my questions in a helpful manner.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD __ NA

6. Self-Analysis	
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree	
I took this course as a required part of my major.	__ agree __ disagree
I wanted to take this course in this format (online, face-to-face, etc.)	__ agree __ disagree
I understood the syllabus.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
I looked forward to taking this course.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
I felt prepared to take this course.	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
I attended most class sessions I logged in regularly (online only)	__ SA __ A __ D __ SD
What grade do you expect to earn in this course?	Credit, No Credit (OR) A, B, C, D, F

7. Please explain any of your above answers or offer additional feedback. Your answers will be reviewed by your instructor and department chair after the semester has ended.

Section 4 – Thank You

Thank you for your response!