

TRACE

Teacher Rating And Course Evaluation

A New Student Survey of Teaching and Learning

Prepared by the 2006-07 Faculty Development Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

The Faculty Development Committee (FDC) herein proposes a new approach to assessing student satisfaction with their courses and instructors. Student surveys will be conducted on-line and will make use of multiple choice and open-ended answers to questions organized into four content areas:

- ★ Course Features
- ★ Self-Evaluation of Learning
- ★ Instructor Effectiveness
- ★ Instructor - Student Relationship

The content and format of the proposed survey questions were designed to:

- provide useful information to students about courses and faculty;
- help faculty become more effective teachers;
- give peer evaluators and administrators input from student ratings of faculty teaching.

To achieve these multiple uses, the proposed survey includes summative assessments of teaching and learning based on multiple-answer questions, and more formative assessments through open-ended questions. In designing the survey the FDC built upon the work of last years FDC and relied heavily on a survey developed by the Student Government Association (SGA). In addition, the faculty members of the committee wish to acknowledge the many thoughtful contributions of its SGA representative, Michael J. Paradiso.

2. SURVEY QUESTIONS

Course Features

Prompts:

- (1) The syllabus helped me to learn.
- (2) The textbook(s) helped me to learn.
- (3) The materials posted online, including Blackboard helped me to learn.
- (4) The out-of-class assignments and/or fieldwork helped me to learn.
- (5) The lectures helped me to learn.
- (6) The in-class discussions and/or activities helped me to learn.
- (7) The classroom technology helped me to learn.

Response: Multiple-choice (I strongly agree, agree, am undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

Prompt: The strongest features of this course were:

Response: Open-ended

Prompt: The features of this course most in need of improvement were:

Response: Open-ended

Self-Evaluation of Learning

Prompt:

- (1) I learned a lot in this course.
- (2) I learned to apply course concepts and principles.
- (3) I developed additional skills in expressing myself orally or in writing.
- (4) I learned to analyze and evaluate ideas, arguments, and points-of-view.
- (5) I found this course intellectually challenging.

Response: Multiple-choice (I strongly agree, agree, am undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

Prompt: The best way to increase learning in this course would be to:

Response: Open-ended

Instructor Effectiveness

Prompt: The instructor...

- (1) ...possessed the basic communication skills needed to teach the course.
- (2) ...clearly communicated ideas and information.
- (3) ...clearly stated the objectives of the course.
- (4) ...covered what was stated in the course objectives and syllabus.
- (5) ...came to class prepared to teach.
- (6) ...used class time effectively.
- (7) ...provided sufficient feedback.
- (8) ...fairly evaluated my performance.
- (9) ...is a teacher I would recommend to other students.

Response: Multiple-choice (I strongly agree, agree, am undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

Prompt: What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?

Response: (almost always effective, usually effective, sometimes effective, rarely effective, almost never effective)

Prompt: Describe strengths of the instructor as a teacher.

Response: Open-ended

Prompt: Describe areas in which your instructor could improve as a teacher.

Response: Open-ended

Instructor - Student Relationship

Prompt: The instructor ...

- (1) ...treated students with respect.
- (2) ...acknowledged and took effective action when students did not understand the material.
- (3) ...was available to assist students outside class.

(4) ...displayed enthusiasm about the course.

Response: Multiple-choice (I strongly agree, agree, am undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

Prompt: Additional comments on the relationship of the instructor and the students.

Response: Open-ended

3. SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The FDC proposes that the questions be administered on-line, and sees several benefits to this approach:

- Shorter turn-around than paper surveys;
- Greater accuracy in recording the answers to open-ended questions (of which there are more in this questionnaire than in the current one);
- Greater potential for data mining, e.g., searching for key words in responses to open-ended questions;
- Reduced administrative costs.

Incidentally, an effective on-line presentation of these questions will probably require a slight modification of the format. For example, it may work best to present one cluster per page, and to position the prompts in a fashion that is slightly different from what one sees above. These changes would be cosmetic, not substantive.

There are perceived drawbacks to on-line surveys: a potential lower student participation rate, which could lead to

- responses skewed toward extremes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as one encounters in current on-line surveys, e.g., RateMyProfessor.com, and
- limited usefulness for tenure and other review purposes during transition to TRACE.

However, given the large number of universities that have successfully implemented on-line rating, and strong SGA support, the FDC is confident that these issues can be resolved. We recommend that the FDC work with the SGA, Information Services, and the Information Technology Policy Committee to come up with an implementation strategy.

The FDC considered several ways to address the potential for low participation rates including:

Extensive promotion by SGA of the new survey, emphasizing the important role played by students in its development and that they can play in shaping the quality of their education. (See the Appendix for an excerpt from an SGA memo.)

Extensive promotion by the faculty and the Provost.

4. MULTIPLE USES

As noted in the introduction there at least three purposes served by the proposed survey:

- (1) Accurately record and effectively disseminate student satisfaction with their educational experiences at Northeastern University. In addition, an enhanced sense of student involvement in evaluation may contribute to the desirable goal of having students take some responsibility in the long-term for the quality of their education.

- (2) Provide assessment information that will promote faculty development.
- (3) Provide peer and administrative evaluators with useful information as they consider faculty raises, tenure and promotion.

The first purpose was the historical driving force behind the current TCEP surveys. The FDC believes that the proposed on-line format coupled with a web-based distribution of selected responses enhance student access to information they seek when selecting courses.

The current TCEP format provides little information of value in helping faculty develop their teaching skills. The proposed survey was designed to meet this need. The FDC hopes that student survey responses, particularly to the open-ended questions, coupled with instructor-run mid-course evaluations, will provide quality assessments that significantly enhance teaching effectiveness in the future.

With respect to the third purpose, the FDC feels that the evaluation of faculty teaching should not be left entirely to students. Indeed a long-standing Senate policy, most recently affirmed and amended March 29, 2006 (see the Appendix), requires modes of evaluation in addition to student ratings, especially for probationary faculty. The FDC also feels that all faculty, and particularly new faculty, should be encouraged to observe each other and engage in collegial discussions of both content and content-based pedagogy.

5. CLASSROOMS?

We considered the possibility of including questions about the classroom on the form. This was rejected on several grounds. First, it was felt that the main point of such questions would be to document to the leadership of the University the need for more and better classroom space. Whereas not long ago this would have been useful, it was felt that today this point has been accepted by the leadership.

Moreover, changing the number and quality of classrooms is out of the hands of the instructor or even the next few levels up in the university chain of command. If the president or trustees still need to be convinced, we should conduct a separate student-faculty survey on this point.

Finally it was felt that such questions increased the already substantial burden on the responder, without contributing to the main purpose of the questionnaire. Thus they would, on net, degrade the quality of the replies.

February 5, 2007

APPENDIX A. SENATE RESOLUTION OF MARCH 29, 2006

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate approve the following revision of the May 23, 1994 resolution:

...every unit shall carry out adequate, good faith teaching evaluations of *all instructors of record* as part of the annual merit review, as part of the tenure evaluation process, and/or as part of the promotion evaluation process as applicable. The teaching evaluation results will be compiled by CEUT and sent in a timely manner to each instructor evaluated. A second copy of these results will be sent to the instructor's unit head, who will then see to it that those results are incorporated into the merit review process according to the unit's procedures. For probationary faculty, adequate good-faith evaluation procedures

will include annual evaluation by two or more means, one of which must include student teaching evaluations (the SGA evaluations). The other means could include:

- peer classroom visits;
- peer evaluation of class materials;
- teaching portfolios;
- evaluations by earlier graduates of the program;
- other means appropriate to the discipline.

For tenured faculty, adequate good-faith teaching evaluations will include annual student teaching evaluations and, at least once every 3 to 5 years, evaluations by one or more additional means.

Written copies of the unit's procedures will be approved by the appropriate Dean and the Provost's office, and copies kept on file in the Provost's office.