

# Tips for Using Student Evaluations to Help Students Learn

*End-of-semester student evaluations provide useful information about student perceptions of the course and the instructor. Student feedback can be an effective method to adjust your course and enhance student learning.*

## Demonstrate that You Care about Student Feedback

- Let students know you care about their academic progress and tell them what changes you made over the years because of student evaluations.
- Consider conducting a mid-semester evaluation or a Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) to demonstrate you care about student feedback and to adjust some elements of the course before the end-of-the-semester evaluations.

## Administering Evaluations

- Set aside class time to administer the evaluation. This is essential because evaluations are generally considered valid if 80% or more of students respond. If you are using an online evaluation, consider scheduling it on a day when you are in a computer lab. It takes about 20 minutes to administer a student evaluation.
- Consider administering end-of-the-semester evaluations a week before finals. Students will take more care with an evaluation if they are not overwhelmed by other tasks.
- Consider returning a major assignment a week before administering the evaluations. Students need to align their understanding of the course with your assessment of their work. They also need some time to calmly reflect on the feedback. Students will then be able to effectively report in their evaluations on how much they learned in the course.

## Reviewing Numeric Scores

- Identify the three highest and lowest scores. Use the mean scores if departmental or university norms are not provided.
- Think about just those six scores. What do these scores tell you about what went well in the class? What needs improvement?

## Interpreting Specific Scores

- If one of your highest scores is “My instructor is knowledgeable about course material,” consider using another question. Students generally assume that the instructor is knowledgeable, so this score is almost always one of the highest. If your score is *not* high, consider increasing the visibility of your expertise.

## Reviewing Written Comments

- Having identified crucial areas of interest by looking at the numeric scores, write down three questions you have about the course. Read through the students' written comments and determine what they have to say about those questions. Use the numeric scores to identify the tenor of the class; use the written scores to identify the specifics of the situation.

- If there are one or two hurtful statements, ignore them. Everyone gets one or two of these!
- Save lengthy and meaningful positive comments and incorporate them in your teaching statement. Tape your favorites next to your computer to keep you inspired!

### **Determine What Changes You Will Make**

- Decide what changes, if any, you will make in your course and your teaching next time.
- Low scores on teacher-student rapport can often be addressed by learning student names, being clear about your grading criteria, using active learning, requiring students to visit your office hours, and chatting with students before and after class.
- Low scores on organization of the course can often be addressed by examining the syllabus, grading criteria, and determining whether course assignments and class objectives are aligned.

### **Talk to a Consultant in the Center for Teaching and Learning**

- Professional consultants read a lot of evaluations and can help you learn to read them skillfully.
- Reading written comments about oneself is always difficult. A professional consultant can help you read them dispassionately.

### **Using Evaluations for Summative Purposes**

- When using evaluations for tenure and promotion, concentrate on the global questions. These questions are often “Overall, I would rate the quality of this course as outstanding” and “Overall, I would rate the quality of this instructor as outstanding.” These scores summarize all of the more specific data and also capture student concerns about issues not included in any of the other questions.
- When comparing instructors on the basis of their student evaluations, remember:
  - ✓ First-year classes generally have lower student evaluations than classes for upperclassmen or graduate students.
  - ✓ Elective courses generally have higher student evaluations than required courses.
  - ✓ Science and math courses often have lower student evaluations than humanities courses.

#### **References**

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