

OVERVIEW OF PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

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AUBURN UNIVERSITY EVALUATION OF TEACHING POLICY¹

The University views the evaluation of teaching as an on-going process which relies on multiple assessment measures. One such measure is the University's computerized Teaching Effectiveness Survey for gathering student perceptions. Faculty members are required to have this standardized instrument administered in their classes one semester per year, usually fall semester.

Departments send completed cover sheets and scan sheets to the Division of University Computing for analysis.

Administration procedures for the survey are explicit. Each college/school, department or faculty member may include "optional questions" or evaluation materials in addition to, but not in lieu of, the University's survey. While their classes are being evaluated, faculty members shall not be present in their classrooms. Persons conducting class evaluations shall encourage students to print their comments. It is recommended that handwritten comments be typed before they are given to faculty members, after final grades have been awarded. It is inappropriate for faculty members to contact students to discuss individual evaluation responses. The class data from the scan sheets and any additional comments from the students are reported to the faculty member; the department head also receives the data on each class and each faculty member evaluated.

These data along with other assessments of teaching will be used in the yearly review of each faculty member by his or her head, in the third year review by the department, and in review for promotion and/or tenure by the department, and by the school/college and University-level committees. In addition, the academic dean receives data from each department without identifying faculty information. The departmental data yield a college/school summary which is distributed to the Provost.

Faculty and the various departments are urged to employ additional measures of teaching effectiveness. Possibilities include alumni assessments, employer assessments of matriculated students, evaluations from persons or organizations external to the University for which the faculty member consults or provides instructional services of some kind, and administrator assessment of performance. An important method of assessment is evaluation by professional colleagues.

Peer evaluations, mandated by the Board of Trustees, may be achieved in a variety of ways. Faculty members and/or departments should develop an appropriate peer evaluation strategy or strategies. Evaluation by professional colleagues might include the following:

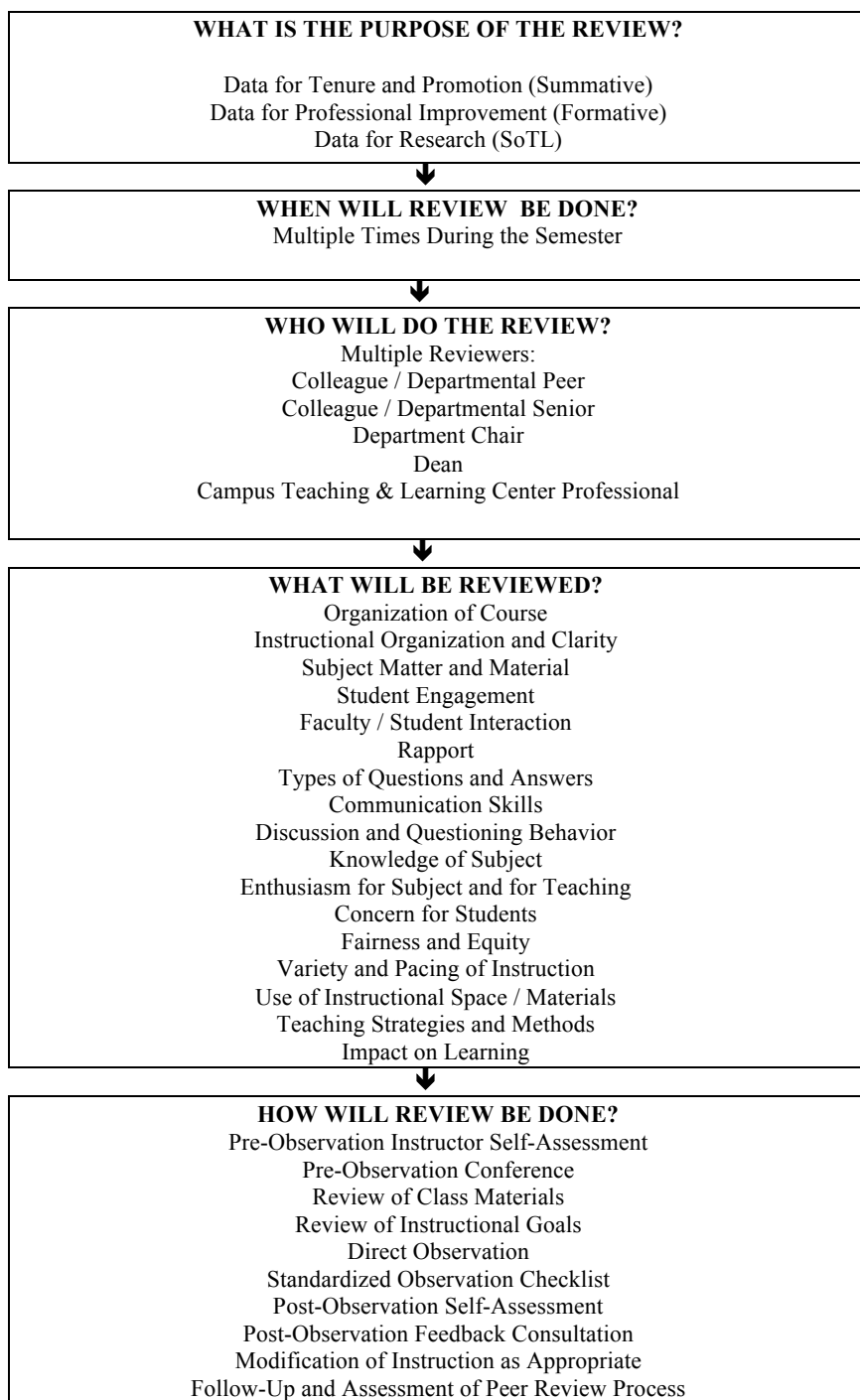
1. Evaluation of the faculty member's syllabi, tests, handouts, and other materials used in class.

¹ Auburn University Faculty Handbook (<http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/handbook.html>)

2. Evaluation of the faculty member's preparation of students for subsequent courses in the field.
3. Evaluation of the faculty member's work in a team teaching situation by his or her partner.
4. Comparison of the faculty member's work with that of others teaching the same course.
5. Observation of the faculty member's classes.
6. Evaluation of a portfolio developed by the faculty member in which he or she presents him or herself as a teacher. The portfolio might include a general statement on teaching philosophy; syllabi with detailed information on course content and objectives, teaching methods, reading and homework assignments, and student evaluation procedures; materials that show the extent of student learning, such as scores on standardized tests taken before and after the course, term papers and laboratory manuals, and work from the best and poorest students; a list of courses taught with enrollment and grade distributions; etc.

To further confirm the University's concern for quality instruction and instructional programs, the Teaching Effectiveness Committee, the Curriculum Committee and the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee have been established. These committees are charged with carrying out a process of continuing evaluation and enhancement of instructional programs and evaluation of proposed changes in the curriculum.

PLANNING FOR PEER REVIEW FLOWCHART*



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PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING: SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

Purpose:

To provide a counterpoint to information gained indirectly through student evaluations, alumni surveys or administrator comments.

Process:

1) Instructor to be observed should complete some form of self-appraisal before the class visit. This can be the basis for a pre-visit conference discussion between the instructor and the observer(s).

2) The instructor should set up meeting with the observer(s) to discuss the following:

- a. An overview of the class-to-date,
- b. The instructor's overall course objectives and teaching philosophy,
- c. How things are going to this point,
- d. How well the students are prepared and motivated,
- e. The physical or environmental factors that may be influencing class,
- f. The teaching approaches being used and reasons for using them,
- g. The direct purpose of the observation,
- h. Any particular needs or things to look for,
- i. The instructor's goals for the class being observed,
- j. The particular assignments/activities for the class, and those that preceded.

3) Observer(s) should review the course syllabus carefully before visiting the class.

4) The individual being observed should inform his/her class prior to class visit. The instructor should explain the purpose and value of such a peer review process and encourage students to act as natural as possible.

5) The peer observer(s) should arrive 10-15 minutes early. Observer(s) should sit 1/2 way back, to one side of class. It is not necessary for instructor to introduce observer(s).

6) The class observation should last the entire class or at least 50 minutes for multi-hour class.

7) The observer(s) should visit more than one class. Don't rely on only one observation. Observe different classes and different subjects if possible. Use the same observation procedures for each observation.

8) More than one observer should visit the instructor. For a comprehensive review, I suggest utilizing one or two observers from the instructor's department, one colleague from another academic department who has been recognized for teaching expertise, and one professional from the campus center for teaching excellence.

- 9) To standardize the data provided by peer review, I suggest that all observers use the same observation checklist. The instructor can also complete a checklist for self-assessment of the class.
- 10) Observe student behavior as well as instructor behavior.
- 11) The observer(s) should attempt to view the class from student's perspective as well as the instructor's perspective.
- 12) It is critical that the observer(s) focus on the instructional process as well as the content.
- 13) All observers should prepare a detailed follow-up report.
- 14) Observers should meet with instructor to discuss results of peer review within two weeks of the classroom visit. Observers can meet individually with the instructor or as a group depending on time variables and comfort levels. I prefer individual meetings.
- a. First ask instructor to share his/her reactions and impressions of the class.
 - b. Review written comments.
 - c. Start feedback with positive (strength) and then alternate strengths and suggestions for improvement.
 - d. Avoid judgmental statements.
 - e. Discuss follow-up activities.
 - f. Schedule additional observations as needed.

Caveat:

Keep in mind that peers may not be the most reliable and valid assessors of teaching effectiveness. Cohen and McKeachie (1980) indicate that colleagues are *most qualified* to assess

- a. Mastery of course content
- b. Selection of course content (knowledge of what must be taught)
- c. Appropriateness of course objectives
- d. Appropriateness of instructional materials (readings, use of media, etc.)
- e. Appropriateness of evaluative devices (exams, written assignments, reports, etc.)
- f. Application of most appropriate methodology for teaching specific content areas
- g. Commitment to teaching/concern for student learning
- h. Student achievement based on performance on exams and projects
- i. Support of departmental instructional efforts

Cohen, P.A., and McKeachie, W.J. 1980. The role of colleagues in the evaluation of college teaching. *Improving College and University Teaching*, 28 (4), 147-154.

(Groccia, J.E., 1998)

Peer Observations of Teaching: Considerations
Dr. Karen St.Clair
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1. What is the purpose of conducting peer observations of teaching?
 - a. The most useful purpose would be to improve teaching.
 - b. Other purposes (to rank or classify faculty, to corroborate with student evaluation data, for example) would be a poor use of everyone's time.

2. Will the observations be used for gathering formative or summative evaluation information?
 - a. Techniques, methods, processes, will be different (informal versus formal, for example).
 - b. Formative can be done without summative, but summative should not be done without doing formative.

3. There are many decisions to make before conducting classroom observations. Here are a few:
 - a. One observation will not give anyone the full flavor of an instructor's teaching. How many will be conducted?
 - b. Because there is so much going on in a class, the observer must have a focus – what exactly is to be observed? Do you want to see teacher-student interaction? Do you want to see the teacher's use of technology? Do you want to see how the students behave in the class?
 - c. Observers need to be “trained” to conduct observations in a way that will yield the most valuable, or desired, information. Who will conduct the training?

4. Once the above are decided, the technique, or method, of observing should be developed in cooperation with experts.
 - a. There is no “observation checklist” that will suit every department's needs unless it is so vague that it will yield worthless information.
 - b. List the desired teacher and student behaviors – ones you expect to see in a “good” class – and develop a method that enables the observer to record the occurrences.
 - c. Decide if a running narrative, behavior-sampling, or time-sampling will best give you the data you want to have.
 - d. Practice using the method to see if it works for what you want.

5. Conduct the observations.
 - a. Schedule pre-observation consultations, the observations, then a post-observation consultation. The pre- and post- consultations enable the observer and the instructor to be on the same page about what is to be observed and how the session will go, and feedback will be delivered.
 - b. There should be more than one observation. You cannot know much about a class by spending one period in it.

6. Evaluate the process.
 - a. Did the observations fulfill your purpose?
 - b. Are there teaching and learning “deficiencies” that need to be addressed?
 - c. How can the data be used effectively to enhance teaching and learning?

SELF-EVALUATION OF TEACHING²

Part 1: Teaching

1. How satisfied am I with my teaching?
2. What are the strong points of my teaching? Weak points?
3. What would I change if I taught this class or lab again?
4. What did I find most interesting about this teaching experience? Most frustrating?
5. Other comments?

Part II: Course Goals

6. What were my course goals and teaching objectives and why were these selected?
7. How well did I meet these goals and objectives?
8. What particular problems, if any, did I encounter in attempting to meet these goals and objectives?

² Adapted from Davis, B. 1988. Sourcebook for Evaluating Teaching, Office of Educational Development. Previously adapted from Instructor Self-Description and Evaluation of Course Form, Office of Instructional Development, UCLA.

9. What trends are there currently in my field that will lead to revision in my goals and objectives for this course?

Part III: Course Feedback

10. After working with the materials, what do I now think of the assignments, examinations, readings, labs, or special projects listed on the syllabus?

11. How effective was my feedback to students on their exams and graded materials?

12. Which course activities placed special demand on my time (e.g., field trips, oral examinations, student project or labs, special preparations)?

13. How might I want to revise or expand the forms of feedback I requested from my students?

14. What do I think of the student evaluations of the course? Which comments do I feel should lead to revisions in the course syllabus?

EVALUATION OF TEACHING: COURSE MATERIALS REVIEW³

Sometimes it helps to look at materials with some fixed criteria in mind. This checklist offers a beginning set of guidelines. You can use it generally: Read over the items and then look at your course materials. Or, use it more precisely: Assign each item a number on a five-point scale, for example. Be forewarned, though, this is a checklist, not an empirically verified instrument. So, take numerical results with a grain of salt. It might be useful to also modify this checklist for completion by students.

Course Syllabus

- Identifies instructional resources – books, films, speakers
- Outlines the sequence of topics to be covered
- Describes evaluation procedures
- Includes a class or activity schedule or calendar
- Lists major assignments and due dates
- Contains information about the faculty member, i.e. name, office address, office hours, phone number
- Includes a statement or description of course objectives
- Is structured to make information clear and easily understood

Assignments (as they appear on the syllabus or elsewhere)

- Produce meaningful and challenging learning experiences
- Include a variety of activities which are responsive to varying student interests, abilities and learning styles
- Are appropriate to course objectives and content level
- Are spaced at appropriate intervals in the course
- Are challenging but not overly burdensome
- Prepare students for more complex courses in the subject

Exams

An Ungraded Copy:

- Contains content consistent with course objectives – in other words, the instructor is evaluating students on what she believes they ought to be able to do or know
- Contains items written so that the intent of the questions is clear and explicit
- Covers manageable amounts of material in terms of time allocated for studying it
- Requires analysis and application of content as opposed to regurgitation of details

A Graded Copy:

- Includes written comments which give some feedback about both right and wrong answers
- Presents written comments that are clear and readable
- Includes some explanation of how exam scores were calculated

textbooks(s)

- Are appropriate to course level
- Are clearly related to course objectives
- Are generally acceptable in terms of departmental standards
- Present content in a systematic and logical order so as to enhance the understanding of someone unfamiliar with the topic (Note: assess content order based on the sequence assigned in the course.)
- Present material interestingly to encourage reading

³ Checklist from *The Teaching Professor*, August 1987

Supplementary Reading Lists

- Contain relevant and current material
- Supplement course content
- Include content that is challenging yet not inappropriately difficult
- Specify location of supplementary materials
- Include information to direct reading in terms of its relationship to course content

Lecture Outlines (provided students)

- Communicate a sense of proportion and detail that is consistent with content
- Provide enough information to assist the note-taking process without making note-taking unnecessary
- Include space for students to write additional information
- Are enhanced by lecture presentations in class

Study Questions/Review Materials

- Prepare one to perform successfully on exams
- Cover content that is covered on the exam
- Are designed so that their completion facilitates student retention and understanding
- Do not force students to focus on large quantities of material that are irrelevant to exam content
- Provide opportunity to practice problem-solving skills

Visual Materials (as in prepared slides and transparencies)

- Illustrate content enhanced by visual representation
- Are clear and “graphically” illustrate the content
- Include written elaborations that are clear and easily read
- Can be seen and read with ease everywhere in the classroom
- Contain manageable amounts of material so excessive amounts of time are not required to copy the material down

Overall Conclusions

- Compared with other course materials you have seen these are better than average
- As demonstrated by these materials, the content selected for inclusion in this course is appropriate and justifiable
- These materials communicate an appropriate level of instructor preparation and concern

General Comments

Peer Review Evaluation Sheet⁴

Scale:

- 1 =Very Poor; needs serious substantial improvement
- 2 =Poor; needs much improvement
- 3= Good; needs; needs a fair amount of improvement
- 4 = Very good; needs a little improvement
- 5 = Excellent; needs no improvement

Content and Delivery	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Comments
Appropriate use of time (begins and ends on time)							
Provides introduction/overview of topic/daily goals							
Appropriate level of presentation (Depth and breadth)							
Clarity of presentation (Seems prepared; explains jargon)							
Relevance of information (Stays on topic)							
Knowledge (Uses citations; answers questions clearly)							
Logical flow (Well organized, useful transitions)							
Pace of presentation							
Poses appropriate and clear questions							
Repeats Students' Questions and Comments							
Use of relevant examples in presenting topic							
PowerPoint (Avoids direct reading off of screen)							
PowerPoint (Grammar and spelling)							
PowerPoint (Clarity—Proper font size and visual clarity)							
Use of Demonstration/Links to Concepts							
Use of Active Learning Techniques							
Handouts (Useful in understanding topic)							
Provides conclusion/take home message							
Physical Presence	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Comments
Makes eye contact with general audience							
Makes eye contact while speaking to individuals							
Facial expression							
Movement about room							
Posture							
Professional attire							
Use of appropriate hand gestures							
Voice—Audible							
Voice—Variation in inflection and tone							
Voice—Appropriate pace of speaking							
Social Presence	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Comments
Composure/Confidence							
Reinforces student participation							
Relaxed teaching style (may include sense of humor)							
Engaging (Interesting and informative)							
Respectful							
Use of student names							

Other Comments:

⁴ Developed by William Buskist, Auburn University Department of Psychology. Used by permission of author.

RECOMMENDED PROTOCOL FOR CONSULTATIVE FEEDBACK ON TEACHING⁵

Consultation on student evaluations of teaching is recognized as an important strategy to support university faculty in learning from student ratings feedback. However, not all approaches to consultation are equally effective. Based upon the findings of the meta-analysis of the research on teaching consultation conducted by Penny and Coe (2004) the following activities are recommended as the protocol for consultative feedback:

1. Include active involvement of faculty in the feedback process. Must reinforce the idea that the faculty member plays an active role in this process, it doesn't just happen to the faculty member. The consultant is just that, a consultant, and not the person who is going to "fix" the problem. Consultant and faculty member work together to analyze and assess the feedback and generate strategies and practices that maximize the benefits of consultation for the instructor.
2. Use multiple sources of information. The consultant should use information collected from sources in addition to student ratings including interviews with the instructor, classroom observation, videotape recordings and instructor self-ratings.
3. Provide opportunities for peer interaction. Should involve expert peers in the consultation process. Consultation may result in more successful outcomes if faculty members have the opportunity to interact and draw upon the knowledge and experience of their more knowledgeable colleagues. Therefore, maximize the use of trained faculty members as consultants and/or provide opportunities for faculty to work in groups with peers from the same discipline. An additional benefit of this strategy is that it helps build a collaborative learning culture where there is sharing and openness about teaching.
4. Allow sufficient time for dialog and interaction. Time and space is required for meaningful reflection, dialog, analysis of feedback, examination of assumptions and for planning and experimentation with alternate improvement strategies. Learning from student feedback does not occur immediately. Therefore consultation should be an ongoing, multiple session process and not be a one time occurrence.
5. Encourage the use of faculty self-ratings. Allow faculty members to complete the same rating form used by their students or an alternate instrument that allows instructors to assess their own strengths, weaknesses and effectiveness. A comparison of teacher perceptions with student perceptions should be encouraged and the consultant should facilitate discussion about any discrepancies that are uncovered.

⁵ Adapted by J.E. Groccia, 2004, from Penny, A.R., & Coe, R. 2004. Effectiveness of consultation on student ratings feedback: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 2, pp 215-253.

6. Use high quality, psychometrically sound rating forms and feedback information. Effective consultation rests upon timely, accurate, reliable, and relevant feedback data. Ratings information should be diagnostic and formative in nature and the consultant should focus on improvement rather than accountability.
7. Facilitate critical reflection on values and beliefs about teaching and teaching effectiveness. Improved teaching depends upon the understanding of one's role in teaching therefore the consultant should help instructors understand and shape their conceptions of teaching and learning. Engage faculty in a discussion of their teaching philosophy.
8. Target specific areas for instructional change and establish improvement goals. The consultant should target a limited number (2-3) of instructional areas or behaviors for change. Choose the aspect of teaching where improvement will have and immediate impact on student learning. Once these have been accomplished, additional area can be targeted. Help set specific goals and steps for change. Agreed upon goals should be documented and used to serve as a reference for follow-up progress.
9. Monitor progress with the feedback of subsequent student ratings. Schedule a follow up meeting to review the next semester's student ratings. Review prior goals and revise as necessary.

UNDERSTANDING AND USING STUDENT EVALUATIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR TEACHING

Auburn University Policy:

Auburn University views the evaluation of teaching as an on-going process which relies on multiple assessment measures. One of which is information provided by students using end-of-semester student evaluation forms developed by the University of Washington and adopted for use at Auburn beginning fall semester, 2007.

These forms, collectively titled the Instructional Assessment System (IAS), go beyond simple collection of data and include information designed for teaching improvement (formative) and merit-performance (summative) purposes.

Benefit of Student Evaluations:

Probably the most important benefit of student evaluation is the feedback that these data provide to instructors, so that courses and teaching procedures can be refined to enhance student learning. By highlighting instructional methods, teaching activities and student input, this evaluation can have a positive impact in improving the climate of teaching and learning across the AU campus.

Although student evaluations provide much information about student perceptions of what instructors are doing and offer suggestions for course improvement, instructors are often not aware of how to use these data to make meaningful changes. Instructors express difficulty translating student comments into action, especially when these comments are often contradictory. Following are some suggestions for instructors to help resolve problem and facilitate the use of student evaluations to improve teaching and learning.

Consult With Others:

By many accounts, the best first step in using student comments to improve teaching is to consult with a colleague or teaching specialist regarding the meaning of these data. Contact the Biggio Center to set up a private consultation to review these

forms, discuss them with a senior member of your department or set up a group of colleagues to review each other's student comments. It would be very helpful if departments or academic units develop mentoring mechanisms to facilitate this collegial support. In addition, it is suggested that academic units develop and publicize a list of instructors who receive exceptional ratings on each of the individual items of the evaluation forms. In this way, an instructor who wants assistance with change in response to comments on a specific dimension of teaching (i.e., use of examples, enthusiasm, course organization) can easily identify a colleague to consult.

Review and Reflect on Teaching Objectives and Philosophy:

For student evaluations to lead to change, it is important for you to review and reflect on course objectives, teaching philosophy, and student responsibility, learning outcomes and teaching methods. Ask yourself questions such as "What did I want to accomplish in this course? How well were these objective met? How do student's comments correspond to my assessment?" It may be very helpful to first review your teaching philosophy statement to identify what you say are important factors in student learning and what kind of learning environment you are trying to create in your classes. Reflecting on these behaviors or factors can help you create variables to assess from your IAS reports.

Review your syllabus, or share your syllabus with a colleague for review to get another perspective, to see if modifications can directly address student comments. Often, comments about course organization, workload and desired outcomes can be resolved by improved specificity and clarity in one's syllabus.

It is important for you to consider your strengths as well as weaknesses. Look at what your students say you are doing well before you work on the suggested changes. Identify the teaching behaviors or course variables that contribute to high ratings in these areas. Modification of your teaching or course should be seen in this context and future changes should not jeopardize what is currently working right.

Focus on a Few Areas at a Time:

It is recommended that you focus on a few areas for change instead of wholesale transformation of your course or teaching. Identify which student comments have the highest priority to you in terms of their importance in meeting your teaching and learning objectives and focus on them first. Change should be incremental and gradual. Get comfortable with, new teaching techniques, procedures and policies before making major course or instruction modifications.

Interpreting Numerical Rating Data:

There are a couple of ways to look at the numerical data. One is to focus on the median scores, which are provided in the IAS report. Remember, median is different than mean, and indicates the score at which half the class rated you higher and half the class lower. The median is one type of [average](#), found by arranging the [values](#) in [order](#) and then selecting the one in the middle. The higher the median score, the higher the number of students rate you on the behavior or variable in question. Another way to look at the numerical scores is to look at the distribution or percentage of responses and group these into two or three categories. It may make sense to collapse the excellent (E) and very good (VG) ratings into one category, the good (G) and fair (F) ratings into another, and the poor (P) and very poor (VP) into a third. This type of analysis yields a different picture of your teaching than the one median score and may provide information that can better describe your student's perceptions.

Interpreting Written Comments:

Many instructors prize student written comments more highly than numerical rating scores. However, while these comments are often rich with insights and suggestions, it is often difficult to make sense of them in ways that lead to identifiable change. This is compounded by the often-contradictory nature of written comments and the disorganized way that they are presented and read. It is suggested that you try to impose some structure on these comments by sorting them into categories. The most basic categorization would be by strengths and weaknesses, with student comments listed under the appropriate heading. Another method for organizing student comments is to group them by overall course rating; one group containing comments from students who

rated the course high, another with comments from less satisfied students. This puts the comments into a context that may be helpful for interpretation and future change.

Constructing a graph can also facilitate organization of written comments. First, make a chart listing the four or five characteristics you believe lead to effective college teaching. You could also refer to your teaching philosophy statement or course objectives to determine what you are trying to achieve in your teaching. You can then place student comments under the characteristic with which it most closely relates. Place a minus sign (-) next to negative comments and a plus sign (+) next to the positive comments. Tally up the plusses and minuses at the bottom as a way to highlight and summarize the comments and provide direction for change.

Example: Analyzing Student Written Comments

Characteristics of Effective Teaching	+	-	Conclusions/Change
Organization	√√√√	√	
Clarity		√√√√√	
Challenge		√√√√√	
Communication Skills	√√√√	√	
Concern	√√√√√		
Group Work	√√√	√√	

Other Factors to Consider:

Some other facts about student ratings that should be considered when trying to interpret the results for teaching improvement or personnel purposes:

- student ratings are generally reliable and valid;
- the instructor not the course is the primary determinant of the student ratings;
- use ratings from a variety of courses to form a general picture of your overall teaching effectiveness;
- classes in which student provide higher ratings are generally the classes from which students learn more;
- for personnel decisions, numerical student ratings tend to overlap considerably with written comments;
- in general age, and years of teaching experience do not correlate to student ratings;

- faculty gender is generally not associated with student ratings;
- faculty who demonstrate higher positive self esteem, energy and enthusiasm tend to get higher ratings;
- research productivity is not correlated with either high or low student ratings;
- class size moderately influences student ratings with students in smaller classes giving higher ratings;
- time of day does not influence ratings;
- regular faculty receive higher ratings than GTAs;
- student motivation and expected grades are correlated to ratings with students who are more motivated and who work harder and those who expect higher grades providing higher ratings;
- students in lower level courses give lower ratings than those in higher level courses;
- students in required courses give lower ratings than those in elective courses;
- academic field makes a difference—students in math and engineering courses give lower ratings than those in social science type courses, which in turn receive lower ratings than courses in the humanities and the arts;
- students give higher ratings in difficult courses where they have to work hard;
- adequate instructor-level reliability may be obtained when ratings are aggregated across at least seven classes;
- ratings from courses with fewer than 15 students should be viewed conservatively;
- using multiple evaluation methods, not just student ratings will provide the most accurate picture of your teaching effectiveness and the highest quality of suggestions for teaching improvement.

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