

V. Course Evaluation and Revision

Chapter 14 - Improving Your Teaching with Feedback

There are several ways to get feedback about your teaching: student feedback, self-evaluation, peer observation, viewing a videotape of your teaching, consultation with a faculty colleague, or a consultant from the Office of Distance Learning. The more information you gather about your teaching the more you can improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience for your students.

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Types of Evaluation

Formative and Summative Evaluations

Evaluation has different purposes. It can be used to improve, rate, or rank a process or product. When used to improve the process, the evaluation is formative, because it is helping to shape the development of the process. When used to rank the quality and effectiveness of a course, the evaluation is summative. Obviously, both types have their place in the improvement of instruction.

- The **SPOT** (Student Perception of Teaching) course evaluation form used at FSU has information detailed enough to help you make course revisions for the next time you teach the class (formative). SPOT also has section D, **SUSSAI** (State University System Student Assessment Of Instruction), which provides summative information for making judgments about the quality of your instruction.
- The Office of Distance Learning (ODL) offers an instrument known as **TABS** (Teaching Assessment by Students), which is distributed to students approximately one-fourth to one-third of the way into a course. This timing provides you with information that enables you to make changes during the current term, if you wish. The TABS instrument, used together with consultation from ODL, has proven to be effective in improving student

perceptions of instruction and teaching.

For detailed information on both the SPOT and the TABS forms, go to **SPOT** (p. 3) or **TABS** (p. 6).

Suggestion from a former student - “When we fill out end-of-semester evaluations on teachers and courses, it doesn’t do us much good. Our class is over. If we could give feedback when it might do some good – during the semester – that would be better.”

Student Feedback: What It Means, How to Use It

How valid and reliable is student feedback? Most instructors, at one time or another, have asked:

- Are students good judges of effective teaching?
- Over time do students tend to remain consistent in their judgments of effective teaching?
- Do students give the highest ratings to those instructors from whom they learned the most or to those instructors who are popular?
- What is the agreement between student evaluations and other qualified judges of teaching effectiveness?

Research for the past 15 years on student perceptions of teaching in higher education courses shows that students consistently select eight factors that are important to them in

rating teaching effectiveness. Students tend to remain consistent in their judgments of instructors not only from term to term, but also from year to year. Student ratings of teaching effectiveness are strongly correlated with their ratings of how much they learned in a course but only moderately correlated with how much they say they liked the instructor. Finally, student evaluations correlate highly with ratings given by faculty peers and teaching consultants. For more information, see Kulik (2001).

Effective Teaching Factors

The eight factors of effective teaching are that the instructor:

- **Demonstrates knowledge of the subject matter.**
 - ◇ Provides relevant subject matter.
 - ◇ Answers questions on the subject matter.
 - ◇ Directs students to appropriate resources for further information.
- **Shows enthusiasm for the subject.**
 - ◇ Expresses overt interest.
 - ◇ Articulates the importance of the subject matter.
 - ◇ Is well prepared for class (clear syllabus and schedule, organized in class).
 - ◇ Syllabus is clearly written and formatted and has a positive tone.
 - ◇ The schedule for topics, assignments, and tests is clearly presented and changes during the term

are minimal.

- ◇ Appropriate materials are presented or made available for each topic/class meeting.
- ◇ Activities (within and outside of class) are well organized.
- **Explains information clearly.**
 - ◇ Presentations are well organized.
 - ◇ Language of presentations and explanations is appropriate to the topics and to student levels of knowledge.
 - ◇ A variety of examples are provided.
 - ◇ Visuals or other appropriate aids are presented.
- **Encourages discussion/class interaction.**
 - ◇ In class, stimulates student thinking and encourages responses.
 - ◇ Encourages student questions and answers.
 - ◇ Invites students to share information and give opinions.
- **Stimulates interest in the subject.**
 - ◇ Encourages higher level thinking skills (beyond just memorization).
 - ◇ Helps students see relevance in topics for their own lives or goals.
 - ◇ Provides opportunities for students to gain confi-

dence that they can achieve in this subject area.

- **Is readily available to students.**
 - ◇ Provides opportunities for students to meet individually or to ask questions (office hours, e-mail, online discussion boards, etc.).
- **Shows concern for students.**
 - ◇ Provides additional help when asked.
 - ◇ Provides opportunities for additional help when students seem to need it, even if they have not asked.
 - ◇ Responds quickly to student requests for help.

How are courses evaluated at FSU?

SPOT (Student Perception of Teaching) is used to evaluate courses at FSU. Adopted by the Faculty Senate in March 2003, SPOT replaces both the SUSSAI form (which has been incorporated into SPOT as Section D) and the SIRS form.

- **Section A:** General information that will be used to describe the student population evaluating the course.
- **Section B:** Details about the course and the instructor's performance.
- **Section C:** Overall evaluation of the course and instructor.
- **Section D:** SUSSAI (State University System Student Assessment of Instruction): All SUS schools are required by the Florida Legislature to have students use this common tool for assessment of classroom instruction.

- **Section E:** Space for responses to questions that a department may wish to add for evaluation of its courses.
- **Section F:** Space for responses to questions that an instructor may wish to add.
- **Section G:** Students' written comments on what was best about the course and instructor and what should be improved.

University Policy

Campus-based courses - Instructors (faculty, adjuncts, and graduate assistants) who teach undergraduate courses with ten or more students in fall and spring terms, or graduate courses with five or more students in fall and spring terms, must administer course evaluations. The instrument used for student assessment of courses is the SPOT form.

Online courses - University policy does not require fully online courses be evaluated, but it is highly recommended and may be required by schools, colleges, or departments. These courses are evaluated using eSUSSAI (rather than SPOT).

Complete information on requesting, administering, and receiving evaluation results is available for both on-campus and online courses at Assessment and Testing, Office of Distance Learning.

Course Evaluation: Results and Reporting

Course evaluation results for each course and instructor are compiled into a report, which indicates for each question:

- The number and percentage of student responses falling into each evaluation category.
- The median and the interquartile range of the responses.

Instructor Reports: Access and Delivery

- **Instructors** have access to a secure website to view and print their course evaluation reports. The original forms with the handwritten comments are returned to instructors after scanning. (Paper reports are no longer used.)
- **Department chairs** receive a printed copy of each instructor's report. Additionally, department chairs have online access to instructors' reports.
- **Deans** have online access to reports on instructors within their college or school.
- **President and Provost** have online access to all instructors' reports.

University-wide access

University-wide summary reports by term are available online to everyone, including the general public. These reports provide an overall picture of how students rated all instructors and courses at FSU for a selected term.

College, school, and department access

Summary reports by term for each college, school, and individual departments are available to the President and Provost online. Deans and department chairs may access the summary reports for their respective colleges and schools. Deans can also access the summary reports for all departments within their respective colleges and schools. Department chairs and instructors may access the summary reports for their own departments. Access reports from the **ODL website**.

Since fall 2003 all SUSSAI results can be viewed online at the Assessment and Testing, Office of Distance Learning by searching for instructor, course, or department. A CD-ROM containing SUSSAI reports is available at Strozier Library. Additional copies are also sent to the United Faculty of Florida, Student Government Association, Student Disability Resource Center, and FSU's Panama City Campus. For SUSSAI prior to Fall 2003, print format copies are available at these same locations.

How do you interpret course evaluation results?

Reading your report

- For items marked in rating categories of strongly agree, agree, excellent, very good, or good, take note of what is

working and keep doing it.

- For items marked as disagree, strongly disagree, fair, or poor, take note of problems in these areas. Look at Section G on the back of the evaluation form to see what students have written in the open response section. This information often helps to understand the ratings in the closed response sections of B, C, and D.

Considering the context

It is important to consider your results in the context of teaching evaluation results for the university as a whole. These results can be found for any term at Assessment and Testing, Office of Distance Learning.

Ask yourself:

- How do my responses on each item compare to the overall University-wide statistics for each item?
- How do my responses on each item compare to other courses taught at the same level (1000, 2000, etc.)?
- How does my teaching affect student learning and attitude, both positively and negatively?
- In which areas should I consider making changes?
- What should I continue to use or to do?
- What specific changes should I make?
 - ◇ Topics
 - ◇ Syllabus
 - ◇ Schedule
 - ◇ Readings and other materials

- ◇ Activities (in and out of class)
- ◇ Assignments/Tests
- ◇ Teaching delivery methods and/or style
- ◇ Course procedures/policies
- ◇ Other areas

The results of the end-of-term questionnaires arrive too late to make changes that term, and the questionnaires usually do not encourage students to give the specific comments an instructor might need either to identify how well students have understood the material or to spot weaknesses in classroom presentation, organization, pacing, assessment, and workload. A much more effective feedback activity is one that takes place during the term or even several times during the term, such as the TABS instrument.

Teaching Assessment by Students (TABS)

TABS is designed to be given to students during the semester (preferably mid-term) to collect information you can use to make timely improvements to your course. The TABS instrument, developed and administered by the Office of Distance Learning (ODL), includes Likert-style questions (strongly agree, agree, etc.); the option for instructor-developed questions; and standard, as well as instructor-developed, open-ended response questions. All assessment records, results, and recommendations related to TABS are confidential. In addition, TABS is used for formative

evaluation to help instructors improve or enhance their teaching skills. Therefore, the services of ODL are **not** for summative evaluations for personnel decisions. Contact ODL at **644-4535**.

TABS also can be administered through your course website. See *Modify Your Teaching Approach* for details.

How does TABS relate to the eight factors of effective teaching?

TABS Questions	Effective Teaching Factors
1-4, 8-15, 17-21, 23-25	Presentation/Facilitation
6-7	Subject matter
5, 15-16, 22, 26-27	Student
28	Student learning in course

How to Analyze the TABS Report

Section I - Note those items that have means above 2.5, especially items receiving ratings of 3's and 4's (3 - disagree, 4 - strongly disagree).

Section II – (Supplemental Items) You may have added items to gather information about particular elements of the course. Interpret numbers according to your own scale or look for similarities in comments.

Section III – (Free Response Section) Especially note what students say you do best. You can expand on these strengths. Get student suggestions about course improvements and group them in related areas.

Section IV - If you have added any open-ended questions, use the methods discussed above.

Other Types of Student Feedback

Instructor-Written Student Questionnaires

Often instructors create their own questionnaires, which work fine if the questionnaires are kept short and focus on a particular technique they are trying out in a class. Be certain that the student responses are anonymous and that students are not graded for turning in an evaluation.

Whatever form of feedback you choose to receive from your students, it is useful to get someone else to help you assess

the comments and discuss different possibilities of responding to student suggestions. It is also good to talk to the class as a whole about the comments – some that you intend to address, and perhaps reasons others that cannot be addressed.

Written Feedback from Students

- **Use a Minute Paper** – A less formal way to get written feedback from your students is to have them write down what they like about the class, what they do not like, and suggestions for improvement. This method can be used two or three times during the semester and also can be used to evaluate a particular class session.
- **Use E-Mail** - Cross and Angelo (1988) recommend instructors solicit comments and suggestions for improvement, backed up by examples, using e-mail from students. This tool would certainly be useful for distance learning classes.
- **Use a Survey** - Your course website (in Blackboard) has a survey tool that will allow you to enter your own questions and then provide students the opportunity to respond anonymously to your questions. This tool is useful not only for distance learning classes but also for campus-based courses.

Conduct a Discussion with Students

Get feedback through a discussion in which students are encouraged to speak openly about the class and the instructor. The topics should be the strengths of your teaching and possible areas for improvement. You can facilitate this discussion, or if you prefer, you may be able to get a colleague to help you with this.

The advantages of this type of forum are that students tend to give detailed information and that one student's remarks often trigger comments from others, leading to issues that might not have been mentioned in less interactive methods. After a consultant-conducted forum, the consultant meets with the instructor to share students' comments and helps interpret them. This method often can give you more useful feedback and options than with written feedback.

Self-Reflection

Keeping a **teaching journal** can be a useful tool to help you reflect on your teaching and assist you as you work to develop your own personal teaching style. Here are some ways you might use such a journal:

- **As you are planning your instruction, write down the learning objectives** of a class session and how you plan to reach those objectives. If you articulate what you want students to be able to do after a particular class period, you will design more effective instruction.

- **Immediately after a class session, reflect on whether you reached the objectives**, what worked, what did not work as well as you would have liked, and alternative strategies you might try another time. Also, write down anything you learned, e.g., observations about a particular student, a combination of students in small groups that worked well, or something you learned about yourself as an instructor.
- **Write down ideas gained by talking to colleagues, consultants, or from attending workshops.** Relating these ideas to your own teaching can assist you in becoming a more effective instructor.

Peer Review

Having another instructor sit in on a class period can be a rich source of information. As an observer, this person can often help you understand the dynamics of your classroom. Many teachers find it beneficial to pair up with another teacher and sit in on each other's classes, paving the way for discussion about teaching in your discipline that can be beneficial to both instructors.

Videotaping and Consultation

One of the most powerful and, therefore, helpful forms of feedback on your teaching can be the viewing of a videotape of one of your class sessions. The videotape will give you information on your teaching that is unavailable by any other means; it will help you see yourself as others see you.

Viewing the tape with a consultant can be even more useful. A consultant can help you see the whole picture, assist you in focusing on your behaviors that facilitate student learning, and stimulate a discussion about alternative ways of approaching aspects of your teaching that you would like to change. Consultants at ODL are available to videotape your classroom and consult with you as you view your tape. These sessions are confidential and, if you would like, the videotape can be erased.

Resources on Feedback

Books/Articles

- Braskamp, L. A., Brandenburg, D. C., & Ory, J. C. (1984). *Evaluating teaching effectiveness: A practical guide*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
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- McKeachie, W. J., Lin, Y. G., Daugherty, M., Moffett, M., Neigler, C., Nork, J., Walz, M., & Baldwin, R. (1980). Using student rating and consultation to improve instruction. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 50, 168-174.
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