



Using Student Evaluations of Instruction Guidance for Department Chairs and Committees

The use of student evaluations of instruction (SEI) remains commonplace despite bias and validity concerns. This document is meant to serve as an aid to those who have the weighty responsibility of serving as reviewers. SEIs should not overshadow other items used to demonstrate effective teaching, nor should they be ignored. Hopefully, these reminders help to put SEIs into context.

- **No panacea:** The best strategy for using SEIs is to steer clear of using them alone. When possible, SEIs should be used holistically, along with self-evaluations of teaching, teaching portfolios, and peer evaluations. The use of SEIs and these other data provide context for evaluating what is in a report. And while not perfect, the use of other data points can also reduce bias.
- **Teaching Strategies:** Data shows that students often rate instructors based on their behaviors rather than assessing their teaching strategies and, thus, the student's learning.
- **Size Matters:** The larger the class, the more reliable the data. Pay attention to the response rate and if the SEI report driven by a small sample of students.
- **Self-Evaluation:** When reading the self-evaluation, consider if the faculty member provides context for teaching techniques that may explain student evaluations. *(Faculty are strongly encouraged to write a self-evaluation to accompany the SEIs).*
- **Closing the Loop:** Examine if the faculty member provided evidence that they took previous teaching feedback and applied it. How did the faculty member attempt to become better at teaching?
- **See the Whole Picture:** While you can become accustomed to using one or more questions as the telltale sign of teaching effectiveness, this will likely yield an incorrect assessment. Overall ratings are for diagnostic purposes. Do not focus on minor point differences. Look at how the faculty member has performed in other sections of the same course or across courses. This information will more likely reveal a pattern.
- **What Did You Expect:** All people seek to meet expectations when the expectations are clear. Much like students in a class, faculty need to understand the expectations of teaching. What are the expectations that have been set? For example, is it recommended that faculty administer mid-semester evaluations?
- **Context Matters:** Contextualize data to allow for meaningful differences. For example, information about course characteristics (e.g., disciplinary field, class size, required/elective, lower division/upper division, etc.) should be considered when reviewing evaluation results.
- **Comparisons:** When comparing the faculty member's ratings to that of the department or the college, be careful. Again, the same concerns about bias exist. Using these comparisons in the overall assessment of teaching can provide some



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information for a holistic evaluation but should not be used as the sole measure of effectiveness.

- **The Long Game:** The evaluation of teaching is about students making a judgment call on teaching quality. The expectation is that this information is utilized to increase quality; therefore, one course or one semester should not be the key determinant in your review.
- **No Comment:** Studies show that students who leave comments generally had positive or negative feedback - not the middle of the road. Keep this in mind.