

# Report

**To:** The Faculty

**From:** Committee on Instruction

**Date:** April 29, 1996

**Subject:** Report and Recommendations from Subcommittee on Course Evaluations

**A subcommittee was constituted and began its work in 1994-95 and submitted its final report to COI on December 11, 1995.**

## **Subcommittee Members:**

Deborah Abowitz, Sociology/Associate Dean of Faculty\*

Chris Persely (BSG; '95)

Jean Peterson, English (subcommittee chair)

James Pommersheim, Chemical Engineering

Charles Root, Chemistry

## **Charge:**

This subcommittee was charged with designing a "core" of common questions to be used on course evaluations across the University (report submitted to the Faculty by the *Task Force on Retention, Tenure, and Promotion Procedures* and adopted by the Faculty, April 1994)). These main issues were identified:

- the need for separate questions about the professor and about the course;
- the need to identify "common" areas of assessment valid across different disciplines, departments, and fields of study; and
- the lack of a reliable "point scale" for evaluations and the consequent difficulty in interpreting ratings across departmental forms.

While the subcommittee was not specifically charged to recommend a particular point scale, having considered this issue while investigating methods of evaluation in general, they felt it important to offer a recommendation as to the most effective way to achieve useful responses.

## **Report:**

In completing its assigned charge, the subcommittee investigated methodologies of course evaluations, reviewing a number of sample questions and questionnaires in use at this and at other universities, finally agreeing on a "core" of common questions, submitted to COI for recommendation to the faculty.

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\* The subcommittee was assisted by Debby Abowitz's research into the "science" of course evaluations, and the documents she introduced: items from Arreola and Aleamoni's workbook, *Developing A Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System* (1994), and from the *Journal of Higher Education*, a report on student evaluations at liberal arts colleges prepared by Wellesley College (1993), and an inventory of 500 "tested-for-effectiveness" evaluation questions prepared by the Center for Educational Development and Assessment (1994).

Their research also pointed out that the most effective method of soliciting reliable student response is to use groupings or clusters of several related but not identical questions to measure any particularly significant point. For example, a question intended to gauge the effectiveness of a teacher's communication skills ("The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly") could be most reliably considered in relation to a number of similar "cluster" questions ("The instructor lectures at a pace suitable for students' comprehension"; and "The instructor's voice was understandable"), which in turn offer additional information on the instructor's precise strengths or weaknesses in classroom communication.

The subcommittee developed a list of "core" questions and suggested that departments supplement this list of questions with other question to expand on or clarify the "core" areas of evaluation. Among the core questions are two global or overall questions that assess students' perceptions of the course and the instructor without confounding perceptions of the course and perceptions of the instructor (see questions #4 and #5 below).

Core questions address the most generalizable issues in evaluating teaching, issues relevant regardless of which department a faculty member is in, of the level of the course being evaluated, whether or not the course is an elective or requirement, and so on.

Finally, the subcommittee's research indicated that a fully "anchored" scale (one with each point on the scale given a value or label) is more valid than one in which only the endpoints are anchored, because it provides common points of reference. These scales should not be based on an A-F, or GPA, system but should be agree-disagree scales. Further, using a five-point scale (rather than a four-point) allows for appropriate variation within student ratings.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **1. A standard agree/disagree, five-point, fully-anchored scale should be used for the core questions on all course evaluation forms.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neutral/ mixed	Agree	Agree strongly

#### **2. The following questions should serve as "core" questions and be included on all faculty evaluation forms (with the agree/disagree rating scale).**

1. The course was well-organized.
2. The instructor was well-prepared for class meetings.
3. The instructor was fair and impartial with students.
4. I would recommend *this course* to other students interested in this subject.
5. I would recommend *this instructor* to other students.

#### **3. Each department or faculty member's evaluation form should also include one or more questions in each of the following question clusters:**

- 6(a) This instructor challenged me intellectually.
  - 6(b) The instructor stimulates intellectual curiosity.
  - 6(c) The instructor provided me with an effective range of challenges.
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- 7(a) I could get the instructor's help outside of class if I needed it.
  - 7(b) The instructor was available during office hours.
  - 7(c) Talking to the instructor in his/her office was helpful.
  - 7(d) The instructor was approachable for out-of-class consultations.

- 8(a) The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly.
- 8(b) The instructor recognized when some students did not comprehend course material.
- 8(c) The instructor used class discussion time effectively.
- 8(d) The instructor stimulated class discussion and student participation.

**4. The core questions can be supplemented with questions generated by the departments and by individual instructors, OR from the following additional sample questions/clusters:**

- 6(a) This course was helpful in developing new skills.
- 6(b) I gained an excellent understanding of concepts in this field.
- 6(c) This course helped me to become a more critical thinker.
  
- 9(a) The laboratory work was beneficial in terms of the overall goals of the course.
- 9(b) The laboratory section was a valuable part of this course.
- 9(c) The laboratory instructor adequately prepared me for the material covered in his/her section.
  
- 10(a) The seminar approach was effectively implemented in this course.
- 10(b) The seminar provided me with diverse insights into the course materials.
- 10(c) Class discussion was a valuable part of this course.
  
- 11(a) The team teaching method provided me with a valuable learning experience.
- 11(b) Instruction was well coordinated among the team members.
- 11(c) Team teaching provided insights that a single instructor could not.
  
- 12(a) The field trips were well planned.
- 12(b) The field trips offered insights that the lectures and/or readings could not.
- 12(c) The field trips were of instructional value.

**5. Some opportunity for open-ended responses should be provided in addition to the scaled items.**

**Sample** [This example uses the 5 common items, one or more of the alternatives from each of the 3 additional required groups, and some optional items. Appropriate open-ended questions would be added.]

## Department X Course Evaluation

Course \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Semester \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Responses to this evaluation will be used by the Department and the University as part of the student input into the evaluation of the instructor for purposes of retention, tenure, promotion, and/or salary review.

Please respond to the questions below using the following scale by circling the letter to the right that best represents your response.

Disagree strongly <u>[DS]</u> <b>1</b>	Disagree <u>[D]</u> <b>2</b>	Neutral/ mixed <u>[N]</u> <b>3</b>	Agree <u>[A]</u> <b>4</b>	Agree strongly <u>[AS]</u> <b>5</b>
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Please leave blank any item that is not appropriate to your course.

	<u>DS</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>AS</u>
1. The course was well-organized.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The instructor was well-prepared for class meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The instructor was fair and impartial with students.	1	2	3	4	5
4. This instructor challenged me intellectually.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The instructor was available during office hours.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Talking to the instructor in his/her office was helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The instructor recognized when some students did not comprehend course material.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Class discussion was a valuable part of this course.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I gained an excellent understanding of concepts in this field.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I would recommend <i>this instructor</i> to other students.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I would recommend <i>this course</i> to other students interested in this subject.	1	2	3	4	5