

**STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS :  
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FACULTY SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

**May 7, 2013**

At the request of the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education (FSCUE) considered a variety of issues related to student course evaluations. The FSCUE Curriculum Subcommittee drafted an initial set of recommendations which was reviewed and amended by FSCUE over the course of the 2012-2013 academic year. As background to its discussions, FSCUE reviewed several documents: (1) "DRAFT Course Evaluation Proposal," dated March 25, 2011, revised January 18, 2012; (2) "Course Evaluation Proposal – Summary," dated January 12, 2012; (3) "Course Evaluations – Background Information," dated November 6, 2012; and (4) USG General Assembly Resolution R. 19-09, "A Resolution to Have Course Evaluation Responses be Disclosed to Students," dated November 11, 2009. FSCUE's recommendations are thus informed by the history of past efforts to implement changes in the course evaluation system at CWRU, and notably by the extensive work of *ad hoc* university committees convened for this purpose in 2003 and 2008.

**I. Purpose of Evaluations**

Because past efforts at implementing change were often complicated by disagreements over the purpose of student course evaluations, FSCUE's first task was to draft a statement of purpose reflecting the university's use of the course evaluation system. The following statement of purpose, having gone through several formulations, was endorsed by FSCUE and *approved by the Faculty Senate in the form of a resolution at its January 24, 2013 meeting*:

Statement of Purpose: Student Course Evaluations

The primary purpose of student course evaluations is to support the process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and course offerings at Case Western Reserve University by providing feedback to instructors and those responsible for overseeing curricular programs and instruction.

Secondary purposes of student course evaluations include: use as one factor among multiple factors in the evaluation of teaching in decisions pertaining to faculty salary, promotion, and tenure; and use as peer feedback on courses and instruction that can be consulted by students as they select courses.

**II. Recommendations**

FSCUE offers the following recommendations with respect to the issues identified below. In many cases, the recommendations listed under one heading are closely linked to other issues.

**1) Evaluation Questions**

With the primary purpose of evaluations being continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and course offerings, FSCUE recommends a very brief set of common questions to evaluate all courses and the teaching in those courses, with an emphasis on open-ended responses. Additionally, it recommends that course

instructors, departments, schools, Undergraduate Studies (through FSCUE), and Graduate Studies (through the Faculty Senate Committee on Graduate Studies) be able to add additional questions to the evaluation instrument to address special considerations relevant to their missions, while being respectful of students' time when adding questions. *A draft evaluation form with a common set of questions for all courses is attached.*

FSCUE recommends that students be asked to complete any questions assessing teaching for each course instructor, including Teaching Assistants who meet regularly with students to cover new material or review course material. Rosters of Teaching Assistants can be collected from the relevant departments.

## 2) Access to the Results

FSCUE recommends that all evaluation data, including the responses to free-text questions (which are currently accessible to course instructors only), be made available to those responsible for the staffing of courses, such as department chairs and program directors.

The committee recommends, however, that we continue to share *only the statistical summaries* of the common questions with the broader CWRU community.

## 3) When Students Complete Evaluations

FSCUE recommends that evaluations be open to students during the last two weeks of classes, up until the date and time that final grades are due for the semester according to the University Registrar's Five-Year Academic Calendar.

## 4) Improving Participation

Peer institutions use a variety of positive incentives to encourage students to complete evaluations. FSCUE recommends that the university consider putting such incentives into place (for example, a lottery to reward prizes to students who have completed all course evaluations).

FSCUE further recommends that a student's final course grade not post in SIS until he or she has submitted an evaluation for that course, but that all remaining grades post when the last final grades are due.

## 5) Resources to Support the Evaluation Process

FSCUE recommends that resources be devoted to helping faculty make effective use of the information collected through the evaluation process (e.g., through the University Center for Innovation in Teaching and Education).

To facilitate the process of adding questions to the basic evaluation form, FSCUE recommends that a library of questions be developed from which faculty can select appropriate questions and place them electronically into the forms for their courses.

FSCUE recommends that the evaluation process be adapted to a range of electronic devices (phones, tablets, etc.) to facilitate completion of the evaluations and encourage participation.

FSCUE recommends that the interface of the evaluation system, including data reporting, be reviewed and updated to reflect the state of the art.

FSCUE recommends that resources be devoted to developing baseline measures (e.g., correlations between evaluations and grades) and assessing the impact of changes to the course evaluation system (e.g., participation rates).

FSCUE recommends that the university facilitate a user-friendly, voluntary mid-semester evaluation process, perhaps electronically, so that students can provide feedback during a course and faculty can make adjustments before the end-of-semester evaluation process. The results of these evaluations should be available only to the instructor.

## DRAFT Course Evaluation Questionnaire

FSCUE proposes the following set of core questions for course evaluations. They are meant to be applicable to all courses and are designed to be consistent with the primary purpose of the evaluation process: to support the process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and course offerings.

The committee has concluded that an important mechanism for improving the student response rate is to limit the length of the evaluation form for each course. FSCUE therefore recommends that the core set of questions to be applied to all courses be limited to three to five. Some considerations that led to this conclusion are (1) the expectation that course instructors, departments, and schools will wish to add questions to support their local processes of continuous improvement; (2) reports from students that they would consider full questionnaires with more than 20 questions per course to be burdensome; (3) reports from faculty that the most useful feedback for improving instruction comes in the written comments, not the numerical ratings; (4) concern that questions about students' enrollment status and participation reduce their sense of anonymity, and perhaps their candor, in completing evaluations; and (5) a general sense that the common questions adopted centrally should be limited to information that would be used centrally.

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**DRAFT Course Evaluation Questionnaire**  
As amended by FSCUE 02-4-2014

The primary purpose of student course evaluations is to support continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and course offerings at CWRU. Please provide your feedback on this course.

For the full statement on the purpose of course evaluations, [click here](#).

1) The assigned work helped me learn the course content:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mixed Feelings	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>				

Please provide comments on the assigned work in this course.

For example, you might comment on whether:

- Readings and other assignments promoted learning of the subject matter.
- Graded assignments and exams reflected the goals of the course.

2) Your overall rating of the **instructor**: (this question would be asked for each instructor)

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
<input type="radio"/>				

Please provide comments on the teaching within this course.

For example, you might comment on the instructor's:

- Clear communication of goals, content, and procedures of the course.
- Preparation for class
- Provision of opportunities for student questions and discussion.
- Timely and effective feedback on assignments, papers, exams, etc.
- Effective use of class time

3) Your overall rating of the **course**:

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
<input type="radio"/>				

Please provide comments on the course itself.

For example, you might comment on:

- Course goals, procedures, and basis for grading.
- Pace at which the course was taught.
- Appropriateness of any course prerequisites.
- Overall structure and content of the course, including both in-class and out-of-class components.

4) What additional constructive feedback can you offer the instructor(s) that might **help improve** the class?