

SENATE COMMITTEES ON FACULTY AFFAIRS, EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND
CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT, AND INTRA-UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

Faculty Teaching Assessment Framework

(Advisory/Consultative)

Implementation: Upon Approval by the President

Introduction and Rationale

The University Faculty Senate committees on Faculty Affairs, Intra-University Relations, and Educational Equity and Campus Environment were charged to review the current faculty teaching assessment process and propose a more developmental assessment that reflects more than one data point (current SRTes). Moreover, any student feedback tool must acknowledge and attempt to decrease the potential for bias in its composition and interpretation of responses. The chairs and two members from each committee formed a sub-committee to guide the review and proposal process: Felecia Davis, Paul Frisch, C. Libby, Rosemarie Petrilla, Nicholas Pyeatt, Mary Vollero. Nicholas Rowland led a support team to generate initial student feedback questions. Angela Linse, executive director of the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence and associate dean for teaching, Eric Plutzer, director of Graduate Certificate Program in Survey Methodology, and Joshua Rosenberger, academic director of Penn State Survey Research Center, provided invaluable review and assessment of the final student feedback questions. To improve teaching and address issues of bias, the committees recommend the following Teaching Assessment Framework.

The objectives of a revised faculty teaching assessment framework are two-fold:

1. To provide faculty with feedback (student and peer) for course development and instruction.
2. To provide administrators with more robust and equitable tools to evaluate how faculty use feedback to inform pedagogy.

The goal is to improve teaching assessment without excessively burdening students, faculty, or administrators.

Methodology

Our preliminary research and benchmarking are outlined in the April 2021 Informational Report [“Developing a Faculty Teaching Assessment Framework”](#). To solicit broad feedback, the committee presented exploratory goals, concerns, and questions during separate listening sessions with students, faculty, and administrators. We also distributed an online survey for each group to share with their units.

Based on the initial surveys and listening sessions, we drafted a framework to present to our three standing committees. After incorporating their feedback, we held two more listening

sessions with faculty senators and the Academic Leadership Council. In each, 90-minute session, we solicited feedback and revised again.

This proposed framework for teaching assessment allows for a three-tiered approach to improving teaching. The first tier, two student surveys focused on learning objectives, will provide early and summative feedback to the faculty member. The second tier, a peer-review by a trained faculty reviewer, could provide opportunities to share and hone pedagogical strategies. Finally, the self-reflection encourages the faculty member to document annually their own assessment of their courses, student feedback, and peer reviews. The committees recognize that some units have spent considerable time and thought developing a system to evaluate faculty teaching. This framework is not meant to replace assessment practices that are good and mostly equitable; rather, the intent is to ensure that all faculty teaching assessment models include this three-part foundation to increase equitable and consistent practices across all units for all faculty.

Reducing Bias

If the University determines that it must continue including student feedback in faculty evaluation, this committee strongly recommends implementing the proposed three-tiered process to significantly reduce the current over-reliance on an inherently flawed assessment tool. The committee's research and benchmarking with nationwide models indicate the prevalence of multiple points of bias in all forms of teaching assessment, particularly regarding race, gender, abilities, age and more. Student feedback, in particular, has garnered national scrutiny and there is mounting evidence to support the elimination of using student feedback for summative evaluation of faculty. In every listening session and survey conducted, students, faculty and administrators expressed concern about implicit and explicit bias in assessment practices.

Recognizing the impossibility of eliminating bias in evaluative tools, the framework incorporates critical points of intervention to reduce the potential for and effects of bias. For peer reviews, the evaluation templates are designed to focus on evidence-based critique and all recommendations must be actionable and designed to improved pedagogy. Moreover, the faculty member under review can choose to be evaluated from within their unit, outside their unit, or a Schreyer consultant. For student feedback, the committee sought lots of consultation and took great care to create a survey with two categories of questions that would: 1. elicit self-reflection from students about their engagement with the course, and 2. focus on course learning objectives rather than personal proclivities.

Overall Recommendations for Implementation

Foremost, the committee members recommend the formation of a joint teaching assessment task force comprising members from Faculty Affairs, Educational Equity and Campus Environment, and Intra-University Relations to evaluate the efficacy and implementation of the proposed process. The following are specific areas of concern:

Courses for which faculty do not control design and/or content

- Student feedback should be collected but not be attributed to the faculty's evaluation.

- The feedback should be directed to the unit groups that design or produce course content for process assessment and improvement.

Administrator education and support

- Both administrators and faculty requested professional development to support administrators using this new model.
- The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs should provide guidelines for best practices and facilitate developmental coaching and performance management for consistency in evaluative methods across units.

On-going assessment of the tools and implementation

- Planning and implementation should be an ongoing partnership between faculty and the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs. Faculty should have equal representation on any future groups regarding teaching assessment.
- The Senate and the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs should jointly implement the Teaching Assessment Framework on a three-year cycle:
Year 1: Implementation
Year 2: Data Collection
Year 3: Evaluation and Revisions (incorporate best practices)
- The Teaching Assessment Framework should be reviewed thereafter on a five-year cycle. The review should assess: 1. consistent implementation across all units, 2. equitable practices, and 3. anti-bias measures.
- During the three-year implementation cycle, the standing committees, Educational Equity and Campus Environment, Faculty Affairs, and Intra-University Relations, will present an annual informational report on the Teaching Assessment Framework and a report after every fifth-year review.
- Faculty Senate should create permanent charges and sub-committees for the following standing committees: Educational Equity and Campus Environment, Faculty Affairs, and Intra-University Relations.

Student Education

- Students should receive education about how feedback is used and its importance.
- Consider a very brief anti-bias statement on the student survey.

Peer Feedback Background

The Committee acknowledges that at different career stages faculty members may want feedback from within their discipline, outside their discipline, from within their unit, or outside their unit. Striving for improved student engagement and disciplinary content at various learning levels and campus environments requires flexible and varied professional development options.

This framework responds to several consistent concerns expressed regarding peer-review of teaching. Paramount was the extreme inconsistency across units; the method and frequency of reviews varied widely—sometimes even within units depending on faculty rank and status. Other concerns include

- the questionable value of peer-reviews conducted by colleagues within the small units.
- the inherent opportunity for bias and/or intimidation, both perceived and actual.
- the lack of compensation or adequate service recognition for the time and effort required for quality peer reviews.
- the need for training peer reviewers.
- a desire for a more formative conversation between peers.

Peer Feedback Recommendations

1. Each unit should determine their own best practices within the framework. Those practices should include clear guidelines for implementation and equitable reviewer compensation (monetary or workload adjustment).
2. The faculty member being evaluated should have the option to choose an evaluator from one of three sites: within their unit, outside their unit, or from a pool of Schreyer consultants. The faculty member may also choose the source of assessment (e.g. [Hybrid](#), [Face-to-Face](#) or [Online](#))
3. Each evaluation should include a pre-review consultation, one class period observation (virtual or in-person), and a post visit conversation to discuss the class observation and the final evaluation.
4. The content of each evaluation should include only evidence-based observations and action-oriented recommendations.
5. The frequency of peer evaluations varies across units but should occur no less than every five years and no more than once per academic year.
6. Create a Schreyer module or e-learning course (e.g., “Peer Review of Teaching Academy”) to train interested faculty reviewers from a variety of disciplines. The goal would be to incentivize a ready pool of reviewers which would increase consistency among units.

Student Feedback Background

Student feedback is critical for improving the delivery of courses at Penn State. The sub-committee used evidence-based best practices, benchmarking, survey research experts, and continual input from faculty, academic leaders, and students to develop the Student Course Feedback survey (SCF). The SCF questions focus on the following areas:

- Student engagement: prompting students to reflect on their activity
- Student learning practices
- Access to faculty support beyond the “classroom”
- How course activities support learning outcomes
- How course materials support learning outcomes
- General student experience
- Opportunities for course design and content feedback

Key:

OE: open-end

Y/N: yes or no option

Faculty Only: response supplied only to faculty

Mid-Semester Questions (for 15-week courses only)

Rationale: The goal of mid-semester feedback is to provide faculty with information during the course to allow for immediate adjustments, if appropriate. We readily acknowledge that all feedback does not require action or change. However, mid-semester feedback can sometimes make a difference in how the course proceeds and in understanding how that group of students are progressing. We encourage faculty to use the student responses to initiate classroom conversations. We also understand that every group of students is different each semester, thus no one semester can provide holistic feedback. Instead, tracking trends over time is a more appropriate measure of outcomes.

1. (OE) What has been the most helpful for your learning in this course so far?

- Rationale: we hope this question will allow students to tell faculty what activities, lectures, learning habits, or anything else that helped them understand the course content.

2. You know what you are expected to learn by the end of the course.

- a. I know everything am expected to learn
 - b. I know most of what I am expected to learn
 - c. I know only some of what I am expected to learn
 - d. I know hardly anything of what I am expected to learn.
- Rationale: this question is focused on course objectives. We want to understand if the students know what their learning objectives will be for the course. We did not use words such as “objectives” or “goals” in order to limit confusion and misinterpretation; students don’t always focus on the learning objectives outlined on a syllabus.

3. (OE) Which course materials or resources are helpful? How are they useful?

- Rationale: each faculty member uses course materials differently. “Course materials” encompasses anything in or outside of the classroom that is used for the course. Faculty would benefit from understanding what materials resonated with the students and which did not. The responses provide an opportunity to open a dialogue around whether or not students know they exist or have issues accessing them. Asking this question mid-semester provides an opportunity for adjustments early in the semester.

4. (OE) What course activities/assignments helped you learn? How were they helpful?

- Rationale: each course at our university approaches education and learning in a unique way. We hope this question is broad enough to encompass all the various kinds of learning that occurs in a classroom, online, or in any environment related to the course. For example, music might provide different activities and assignments than a biology class and it is critical to understand how the students experience the course activities and assignments. This question strives to understand exactly what assignments have been most beneficial and in what way. We also hope that students

might be prompted to look further into their course activities and assignments to learn the course material.

5. (OE) What, if anything, has caused you difficulty in terms of learning in this class?

- Rationale: in general, we attempted to keep the questions positive in order to maintain a developmental approach. However, we do understand that students sometimes have trouble learning in a class. Often this is due to student specific issues, lack of preparation, lack of organization, or lack of resources, to identify just a few. Sometimes it could be course related. This question attempts to understand, early in the semester, what things might or could go better in order to help students be successful. We hope this information would provide the faculty member with opportunities to open a dialogue and/or adjust if necessary. Because this section only goes to faculty, any negative impact to the faculty member should be negligible.

6. (OE) What practices have you personally adopted that have improved your learning?

Rationale: student engagement in their courses and in active learning is critical for student success. This question intends to identify what things work for the student. This information could be shared with the class, anonymously, or worked into future class activities or information. We also hope that this might prompt the students to reflect on their investment in the course.

End of Semester

In 15-week courses, the Student Course Feedback survey would be administered weeks 12 through 13. We realize that students will not have experienced the entire course, but they will have completed enough of the course to provide useful feedback. Moreover, the data and feedback suggest that waiting until the last week of the course can have several negative consequences. For example, students are tired and often do not want to complete or forget about the student feedback. Many faculty have documented pressure to adjust grading, assignments, etc. knowing that the student feedback is forthcoming. We hope that by providing these at weeks 12 through 13 we get helpful feedback and reduce the risk of negative impacts.

Questions 1 through 5 are provided to faculty and administration. These questions provide academic administrators with information regarding faculty performance. The listening sessions strongly indicated that open-end questions often provide the richest and most actionable information. However, we appreciate that they can also be difficult to analyze for large courses and make recommendations for assistive software.

Questions 6 through 8 are shared only with faculty. Student, faculty, and administrator responses alongside a review of literature make clear that student feedback should be used in a developmental way. A formative approach allows faculty to consider all input and determine the best plan of action. Faculty know their content best and should have decision-making power to determine what feedback is incorporated and how. To avoid the negative impacts of incomplete data sets, small response numbers, and students who do not have the expertise to evaluate course design and delivery, this feedback is used as part of a larger assessment framework.

1. (OE) (Repeat) What has been the most helpful for your learning in this course?

Rationale: this is a repeat question from the midsemester feedback to gain information about the course in its entirety.

2. (OE) Describe the time(s) in this course when you were most engaged.

Rationale: we hope this question prompts students to think about how they were engaged in the course as well as provide faculty with helpful insight to adjust, reaffirm, or change items for future offerings.

3. (Repeat) The course activities/assignments were:

- a. Very helpful for my learning.
- b. Helpful for my learning.
- c. Somewhat helpful for my learning.
- d. Not helpful at all

Rationale: in the mid-semester feedback we asked a similar, open-end question. This version solicits additional information to better understand if, overall, the course activities and assignments were helpful to their learning.

4. Which of the following best describes when assignments, exams, or other assessments were graded?

- a. All were graded in time to be useful for later assignments and exams.
- b. Some were graded in time to be useful for later assignments and exams, but some were returned too late to be helpful.
- c. Most were returned too late to be helpful.

Rationale: in response to student, faculty, and academic administrator feedback we have included a question to gauge if faculty are providing feedback to students. We hope this information will help identify areas of possible improvement.

5. (Y/N) Did the instructor provide contact information on the syllabus?

Rationale: we understand that student and faculty engagement in office hours or other connections beyond class time can be critical to helping a student succeed. The University policy requires faculty to provide contact information, but any specific guidelines and policies vary by unit. Therefore, we wanted to make sure that students had the opportunity to give feedback on knowing how to contact faculty.

6. (Faculty Only) (OE) (Repeat) If your course required materials, which materials or resources enhanced your learning? How?

This is a repeat question from midsemester because all material may not have been shared by the mid-semester feedback point.

7. (Faculty Only) (OE) What are the most important things you learned in this course?

Rationale: this question allows the student to reflect on what they learned in the course and provides insight for faculty.

8. (Faculty Only) (OE) Do you have any recommendations for the course?

Rationale: faculty review and revise their courses all the time, do assessment on a continual basis, and often adjust throughout the semester. This question informs that process and with additional information or input regarding what might be changed. Providing this feedback only to faculty will allow faculty to use as appropriate while decreasing anxiety and potential weaponization of feedback that could otherwise impact promotion or salary.

Student Feedback Recommendations

1. Provide indicated feedback from student survey to faculty at the mid-semester.
2. Provide indicated feedback from student survey to administrators and faculty at the end of the semester.
3. Use software that can provide summary formats with thematic analysis for open-end questions.
4. Mitigate bias by providing course development information rather than focusing on qualities of the instructor. Frame student survey to solicit information about student engagement, learning practices, support outside the classroom, learning materials, learning activities, student experience and course design and development.
5. Remove survey responses from students sanctioned for academic integrity.
6. A student review of the Student Course Feedback questions should be included in the teaching assessment review cycle.

Faculty Self-Reflection Background

The self-reflection assessment is intended to give the faculty a voice in the review process. This can be accomplished by providing administration with an overview of pedagogical developments and responses to the student or peer evaluations. The integration of a reflective assessment received the greatest support from faculty and would complete the teaching assessment cycle. These reflections could include:

- Contemplative conversation about the student feedback and how and if to integrate into future courses.
- Analysis of a course based on real-time adjustments.
- Identification of resources that might facilitate teaching success.
- Comparisons to previous year assessments and goals, if applicable.
- Highlight any concerns about bias in student survey, peer reviews, or their overall teaching experience.

Finally, the recommendations address the strong consensus that the reflections should not overburden the faculty, staff or administrators.

Faculty Self-Reflection Recommendations

1. Each unit should have the freedom to determine their own best practices within this framework.
2. The self-reflection assessment should be easily integrated into the annual review process through Activity Insight.
3. Units should provide templates and/or rubrics for ease of completion and review.
4. Narrative sections should be optional and include word limits for brevity.

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