

# Best Practices in Using Teaching Evaluation Techniques

Center for Professional Development  
Bemidji State University

This is a cover sheet for the Center's Summative Instructor and Course Evaluation Instrument.

1. An instructor and course evaluation instrument can be valuable in helping you document how you are doing as a teacher, but it should never be used alone. Use multiple sources of data. Best practice in using this form would be to encourage students to write comments on the back of the form, so that the responses you get are not all multiple choice ones. In addition to this form consider creating a teaching portfolio, in which you submit not only teaching evaluation results, but other material illustrative of your teaching, such as examples of discussion prompts and class activities that you use. Encourage discussion in your department about teaching evaluation techniques that are the most appropriate to your discipline. If your department chooses to use a common departmental form, that will allow comparison across the department and among teachers teaching the same course. Although these comparisons can be useful, try not to rank order within your department. Obviously half of your department has to be in the bottom half, even if all are doing very well. Consider asking peers from your department to visit your classes and record their observations. This can provide you with constructive suggestions for improvement if the peers have been trained in classroom observation. (The observations of untrained peers tend to be inconsistent across observers.)
2. Tailor this form to your specific course. The form is designed to apply to as many different courses as possible, so some valuable question areas that apply to only some courses are missing. For questions 17 and 18, add items such as "rate the instructor's ability to promote discussion in class" or "how useful to your learning were the case studies your instructor presented?" Ask the students to write the questions right on the form.
3. Evaluate across courses and across time. That is, evaluate all of your courses each semester rather than just that one course that you are having a problem with or that you are doing particularly well in. This will enable you to make comparisons with yourself over time and among your courses. Once you have a broad baseline of how you are doing, you can see the impact of changes you make. Consider making some changes in your teaching to bring up lower scales.
4. Try to get most, if not all, of your class to evaluate you. Otherwise any one student has too much power in determining your rating. If your class is smaller than 10, formal instructor evaluation instruments may not be appropriate
5. This particular form is designed to be administered towards the end of the semester so that the students will have had time to accurately evaluate the class. A formative mid-semester instrument is also available from the Center.
6. Best practice would be for someone other than the teacher of the course to pass out the evaluation instruments, collect them, and analyze them. It would be best for the teacher being evaluated to be absent during the evaluation. The validity of the instrument is enhanced when it is clear that the instructor has neither biased the ratings nor had the opportunity to throw out unfavorable ones. Some departments have the student comments typed out so that the instructor cannot identify handwriting. Insuring anonymity increases the validity of an instructor evaluation.