

# Student evaluations of teaching: COVID Edition

Center for Professional Development

Bemidji State University

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# What is required by contract?

Article 22, section D. subd.1. IFO contract:

- *For faculty with teaching assignments, the PDP shall include a process for student assessment*

Article 22, section E. subd 1.

- *If faculty members include student course assessments as part of their reports, such assessments shall be anonymous, identified only by course/section. Any other student communications or evaluations submitted with the PDR shall not be anonymous.*

# Common Practice at BSU

- BSU encourages student evaluations of teaching (SETs) for accreditation purposes at the university level
- While some form of evaluation is encouraged, no single format is required. Some departments use a standardized form
- Deans may give suggestions on how to document student feedback in our yearly PDRs
- These are important in documenting satisfactory progress towards tenure and promotion
- Nationwide, SETs are the most common form of assessing teaching effectiveness and play an outsized role in faculty reappointment and promotion

# What do the Administrators say

- We asked the Deans for informal feedback on the student assessments –
- One of the biggest roadblocks to getting tenured at BSU is if you are failing at teaching
- The way to demonstrate you are doing well at teaching is by providing evidence via student evaluations of your teaching
- For Tenure and Promotion Deans say faculty should use SETs to –
  - Recognize their own challenges
  - Address them (teaching strategies, different delivery of material, etc.)
  - Speak about how this helped you change/improve in the PDR process

# What are we trying to measure

Teaching effectiveness -

- Teacher's ability to deliver curriculum
- Students' success at meeting learning outcomes
- Typically we conflate these two issues and include questions addressing both in our SETs

# Do SETs really measure that?

- Growing body of evidence that suggests the use of SETs in personnel decisions is problematic
- SETs can be biased – race, gender, sexuality, nationality, language, accent, political opinion, age, ability, expertise can all influence how students see you and your abilities
- What is well known is that students' own biases regarding the categories above often negatively impact faculty (women, racial minorities, disabled faculty etc. )
- See reference list at the end of this presentation

So what should we do

Especially during this COVID  
impacted semester?

# Don't do it?

American Association for Colleges and Universities (AACU)

- Faculty did not plan to teach this way
- May not be skilled in teaching this way
- Challenges with technology may be beyond anybody's control

Formative assessments may be useful – ask about what worked and didn't

# Lead with compassion

- Consider messaging clearly to students that these are unusual times and this evaluation is not business as usual –
- *This has been an unusually difficult semester for students, professors, staff and administrators. We are aware that you may not have chosen the largely online delivery of class material; or that you may not have performed your best due to other pressures on your time. However, this end of semester feedback process will help us plan better for the upcoming semester and meet student needs better.*

# Focus on student experience

- Questions in SETs should focus on student experience
- Not teaching effectiveness
- Consider instruments as opportunity for student feedback rather than places for students to comment on their likes/dislikes
- Emphasize that student feedback is important but that this process is NOT an evaluation of teaching effectiveness

# Ask questions that students are supposed to answer

- Was the professor knowledgeable in her subject?
  - Students may not know what expertise in a subject looks like
- Did the professor teach in a clear manner?
  - Better, but still some issues – student may not have been paying attention
- Were you able to follow the professor's explanations/teaching?
  - Likert scale Always, almost always, etc.

# Ask questions students are able to answer

- How difficult was this class material compared to other classes I have taught
- Compared to other classes were the assignments easy or difficulty
- Was the class material difficult?
  - Would they know?

# Ask what you want to know

- Among the instructional methods used in class which ones did you find best matched to your learning style – mark all that apply
  - Panopto
  - Zoom recorded lecture
  - Video lecture with embedded PowerPoint
  - Asynchronous teaching
  - Synchronous class
  - Discussion section
- Don't ask what you don't want to know
  - Did the professor grade your assignments on time?

# Ask about their learning style

- Which one of the learning formats worked for you?
- Did you prefer synchronous or asynchronous learning?
- Were you comfortable with the level of peer interaction?

# Frequency and manner of communication

- Did faculty communicate with you in multiple ways
- Email, office hours, synchronous teaching announcements, D2L, Panopto, video lectures
- Did you/were you able to access all the information/messages sent to you?

# Examples – student experience

- Were sufficient resources provided
- Was sufficient flexibility offered
- Were things easy to find online
- Were students able to self-regulate their time
- Were the professors sufficiently available for communication

# Students self assessment

- Did you develop greater compassion for people different from yourself
- Were you able to address your own needs during the semester and attend to self-care?
- What barriers to learning did you face
- What barriers to personal wellbeing did you face

# Open ended questions

- Is there anything you would like me to know about your challenges or struggles that I might be able to adjust for, in the future?
- If you would like to make an additional comment for this course, especially given the extraordinary circumstances of COVID-19 this semester, please do so in the response box below.

<https://www.watermarkinsights.com/resources/blog/covid-conversations-5-dos-and-donts-for-adjusting-your-course-evaluation-strategy>

# In the end

- Be kind to yourself
- Students are burdened, anxious
- Likely that so are you

Questions? Comments?

# If you want to know more about student evaluations

1. Richards, Bedelia Nicola (May, 2019) “Faculty Assessments as Tools of Oppression: A Black Woman’s Reflections on (Colorblind) Racism in [the Academy]” in Byrd, W. Carson, Sarah Ovink, and Rachelle. J. Brunn-Bevel (eds.). *Intersectionality and Higher Education: Identity and Inequality on College Campuses*, Rutgers University Press
2. American Sociological Association Statement (September 2019)  
Individual and Institutional Strategies
3. Bedelia Nicola Richards. How to Challenge Race and Gender Bias in Student Evaluations Webinar for the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD), March 24, 2020. (available to NCFDD members)
4. Manya Whittaker How to make the Best of bad Course Evaluations. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. June 2, 2019.
5. American Association of University Professors (AAUP) How Do We Evaluate Teaching? (May-June 2016).
6. Wolfgang Stroebe (2020) Student Evaluations of Teaching Encourages Poor Teaching and Contributes to Grade Inflation: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 42:4, 276-294, DOI: [10.1080/01973533.2020.1756817](https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2020.1756817)

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