STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND COURSES

THE TEACHING AND COURSE EVALUATION PROJECT

BEST PRACTICES ON INTERPRETATION AND USE OF EVALUATION DATA

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

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1 INTRODUCTION

A key objective of the Teaching and Course Evaluation (TCE) project was to develop a best practices guide on the interpretation of data from student evaluations. The objective of this guide is to support the responsible use of student evaluation data. Supporting responsible use of evaluation data was a primary goal of the TCE project.

2 RECOMMENDED APPROACH

The original approach for developing a best practices guide was to create a single document that would be used by the entire SFU community. As a result of our findings during the project, it is recommended that a slightly different approach be taken. Rather than creating a generic technical manual for all stakeholders that may or may not be used, adoption of a set of best practice principles for using student evaluations of teaching and course data is recommended.

Additionally, it is recommended that these principles, once approved, be embedded in the implementation of a new system of student evaluations at SFU. The approach will be to ensure that coordinated, locally appropriate procedures that are aligned with these principles are put in place by each faculty, school/department, or common interest group as part of the implementation process. The emphasis will be on developing support materials that are meaningful and of practical use in the context of the rollout to each constituent group. It is expected that this approach will be of greater practical value and is likely to be more effective in supporting responsible use of evaluation data.

Section 3 below outlines 14 recommended best practice principles in five different areas for the use of data from student evaluations.

3 BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR SET DATA AT SFU

3.1 POLICIES

*Student evaluation of teaching and courses will be conducted based on consistent, standardized policies.*

Effective policies are essential to ensure that, overall, evaluations are conducted in a consistent and equitable manner. These characteristics of consistency and equitability are necessary for valid and useful evaluation data. Additionally, consistent institutional policies will be adopted for storage of, ownership of, and access to the raw data and reports.

*Institutional policies will address design, implementation and interpretation.*

Institutional policies on student evaluations often focus primarily on implementation. However, many issues affecting validity are introduced during design and interpretation of results. For example, questions that are unclear or improperly constructed can be introduced at the design stage. Effective policies can be employed to mitigate such issues from arising. SFU policies will cover all stages of evaluation including design, implementation and interpretation.

3.2 DESIGN

*Clear evaluation goals for student evaluation of teaching and courses will be developed and maintained at the institution-wide level, the faculty level, the school or department level, and at the instructor level.*

Evaluation design should accurately reflect current pedagogical priorities and current research on student learning. A multi-level approach will enable a distinct focus on these different priorities at the institution-wide, faculty and school or department level. Faculty and school or department level questions will be designed by appropriate members of the given faculty or school/department.
The evaluation instrument will be designed according to rigorous theoretical and psychometric standards.

The questions in the evaluation instrument will be carefully designed and tested with the aid of structured support from appropriate groups such as the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) and Institutional Research and Planning (IRP). This will ensure that both the questions and the scales are understandable and answerable by students. “Noise” and bias will be reduced through careful design of questions that will be made available in a formal SFU evaluation question bank. The question bank will be utilized at all levels of the multiple-level approach. Support will be provided to instructors to assist with designing appropriate questions that will provide the desired results. A manual will be made available to support good practice in selecting/designing questions for the instrument at all levels.

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION

A consistent approach will be used for distributing, collecting, processing and storing evaluation results.

In order to ensure validity, evaluations will be implemented in a consistent manner across the institution. This consistency will extend to the process of distributing evaluations and collecting, processing, and storing results and comparable statistics.

Instructors and students will be provided with sufficient information regarding the evaluation process, an efficient means of providing feedback, and easy access to evaluation results.

There will be a coordinated effort by the institution to explain the value of course evaluations both to instructors and to students. Student response rates will depend, in part, on an effective appeal from the instructor to the student regarding the importance of evaluations. Promoting ways in which the evaluation results have been used to make improvements will also be utilized.

Evaluations will be administered using appropriate and standardized procedures.

Appropriate and standardized procedures will be established for the administration of course evaluations. The research suggests that comparisons - if made at all - should only be between instructors in the same or similar disciplines and between courses that share similar characteristics. Practices will be standardized regarding how comparisons between instructors or courses (if employed) are made. The privacy of instructors and students will be protected. The appropriate amount of data will be distributed to appropriate audiences. Appropriate and consistent procedures will be in place for storage of and access to data.

3.4 INTERPRETATION OF EVALUATION DATA

Issues affecting interpretation of evaluation data will be factored into the presentation of results.

Issues affecting the interpretation of evaluation data can be related to course demographics. Demographics will be included in evaluation reports and where possible, factored in to the presentation of data. A model will be created by IRP that accounts for potential areas of bias and this information will be incorporated into the presentation of evaluation data. Care will be taken to encourage the comparison of scores of comparable courses (e.g. comparable disciplines, similar course types, and similar student types). Care will also be taken when including comparisons with aggregate scores (with Department, Faculty or University scores) in the presentation of the data.

Training and support will be provided to assist administrators and faculty with interpretation of results.

Guidelines and education will be provided to assist administrators to understand statistical data (for example, the standard deviation, range or frequency of reported scores) to facilitate interpretation of evaluation results. Structured support will be provided to assist faculty with interpretation of the data and with the application of results to improve/enhance teaching. Structured resources will be provided to
support training in the interpretation of evaluation data. Support and materials will address different audiences.

3.5 RESPONSIBLE USE OF EVALUATION DATA

Student evaluation of teaching and courses data will not be used as the only source of data to evaluate teaching performance.

Student evaluation of teaching and courses will not be the sole source of data for decision-making around teaching performance. Other sources may include peer evaluation (classroom observation) and/or teaching portfolios. One additional source of data will include the option for instructors to include a brief narrative that would provide context to the evaluation and make note of any circumstances they think should be considered. This narrative will be included in reports used for summative purposes. Decisions based on student evaluations as one source of data will include trends over time.

Evaluation data will be a viable means of providing diagnostic or formative feedback to instructors.

The results of instructor level questions will be private to the instructor. These instructor-only questions will provide an opportunity to include questions of a purely formative nature that are very specific to the instructor and the course.

Evaluation results will be issued promptly at an appropriate time.

Evaluation results will be distributed after all grades have been submitted in a given term. However, once the grades have been submitted, results will be issued promptly.

Evaluation results will not be issued unless they meet minimum requirements.

Reports based on an insufficient number of students (or an insufficient response rate) will not be produced. A set of rules regarding when to issue reports will be created and followed.

Evaluation results will be shared with students.

Students will be given access to evaluation results. The details of which results are communicated to students may vary across faculties.