

INTERPRETATION GUIDE
FOR
STUDENT FEEDBACK FOR ALTERNATIVE LEARNING COURSES

Prepared by

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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STUDENT FEEDBACK FOR ALTERNATIVE LEARNING COURSES

OVERVIEW

Purpose

This guide provides information and suggestions on how to interpret the Student Feedback Report for Alternative Learning Courses.

Background

The College and the faculty have agreed upon a formal program to collect feedback from students about instructors. Student evaluation of faculty is an integral part of the Faculty Performance Review and Advancement process at the College. The Student Feedback Instrument was approved by both the College and the faculty. The modified Student Feedback Survey for Alternative Learning Courses is used for students enrolled in classes taught in special programs such as Co-op, Independent Studies, Life Lab, Open College, and Virtual College.

Process for Collecting Data

Students are asked to provide feedback to each of their instructors through a well-defined process. Student feedback is collected every Fall Term for classroom faculty on continuing contract. Faculty on approved leave during the Fall Term and faculty who choose the Spring Term option collect feedback in the subsequent Spring Term. Classroom faculty on annual contract, and adjunct faculty, collect feedback from students in each class every semester.

Packages are prepared in the academic department for instructors for each course taught. The packages contain an instruction sheet, answer sheets on which students identify the course reference number and the year/term, and the Student Feedback Survey for Alternative Learning Courses. The survey instrument consists of 6 core items that are the same for all instructors, and 5 optional items that may be included by each campus department upon agreement from the department.

Surveys are administered in accordance with procedures established by the department, which ensure the integrity of the process and elicit the best student response rate possible. Responses are anonymous and no identifying information is requested from the students. The survey materials are returned to the respective Campus Testing Department by a designated individual to further ensure confidentiality. The Campus Testing Departments process survey materials and distribute feedback reports to faculty after the semester has ended. A copy of each report is sent to the instructor's chairperson, and copies are to be made available to students.

INTERPRETING THE STUDENT FEEDBACK REPORT

1. *Whose feedback is included in the report?*

Students are able to provide feedback to their instructors according to the specifications in the current contract. All students are given an opportunity to participate in the process as established by the department. To ensure anonymity, students are asked not to identify themselves. The results are presented by section for each course.

2. *How are results presented?*

A. **General information**

The Student Feedback Report for Alternative Learning Courses has several pages. The first page identifies the instructor, the class providing feedback, the year/term, the course location and reference number, the department for which the course is taught, the number of students in the class, and the number of responses to the survey. This cover page also states who receives a copy of the report and includes contact information for questions. Subsequent pages report feedback results.

B. **Data: Two types of results are presented.**

Type I. The results section of the report begins with the identifying information from the cover page. This is followed by a summary of the responses received for each item on the survey. The survey items are presented on the left side of the sheet for the 6 core items, with the number and percent of respondents selecting each answer choice on the right side. The five choices for these items are: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Does Not Apply/Unable to Comment, which is labeled as Unable to Comment in the report. See Example A.

Example A:

	STRONGLY AGREE		AGREE		DISAGREE		STRONGLY DISAGREE		UNABLE TO COMMENT	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
THE INSTRUCTOR INFORMS ME ABOUT MY PROGRESS.	16	76.2	5	23.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

For this example, 16 students (or 76.2%) “Strongly Agree” that this instructor informs them about their progress while 5 students “Agree.” and no students selected “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” A total of 21 students responded to this item. In this example, no students chose the option “Unable to Comment.” Again, note that the column headed by “Unable to Comment” actually represents “Does not Apply/Unable to Comment.”

For the five optional departmental items, the text of the item is not displayed since items may vary by department. The item number and response information is displayed for each optional item included on the survey instrument. Answer choices are labeled “Response A” through “Response E.” If available, a copy of the survey is included, which has the text and answer choices for the optional items. See Example B.

Example B:

	RESPONSE A		RESPONSE B		RESPONSE C		RESPONSE D		RESPONSE E	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
7.	20	87.0	3	13.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

In this example, 23 students responded to departmental item #7. Twenty (87%) selected Response A and 3 (13%) selected Response B.

Type II. This type of data is available for the 6 core items only. The item is displayed on the left side followed by the percent of responses for each of the options for the class. This part of the report also displays the mean and the standard deviation (SD) for each item based on response options other than “Unable to Comment.” Also displayed are data for use in comparing the instructor’s ratings with results for other sections of the same class taught in special programs on the instructor’s campus, other sections of the same class taught in special programs college-wide, and all classes taught in special programs on the instructor’s campus. See Example C.

Example C:

		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNABLE TO COMMENT	MEAN	SD	N
		%	%	%	%	%	#	#	#
THE INSTRUCTOR	YOUR CLASS	76.2	23.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.76	.43	21
INFORMS ME	SAME CLASS-YOUR CAMPUS	77.3	17.6	3.8	0.8	0.5	3.72	.57	757
ABOUT MY	SAME CLASS-COLLEGE-WIDE	84.4	12.9	1.9	0.4	0.4	3.82	.46	2675
PROGRESS.	ANY CLASS-YOUR CAMPUS	84.8	12.2	1.7	0.9	0.3	3.82	.49	24322

The value of N in the last column represents the number of responses used in the calculation of the mean and standard deviation and does not include “Unable to Comment” responses.

3. *How are feedback results used in the performance review of instructors?*

The Student Feedback Report is a required source of information about an instructor’s performance and is an integral part of the Performance Review. How instructors are perceived by their students is important and informative. **However, the views of students represent only one perspective of total performance and there are elements relating to effective instruction beyond those included on the feedback survey. Therefore, feedback results are not used as the sole basis for the evaluation of an instructor.**

Further, these results represent a snapshot of perceptions at a particular point in time. It is important to gather evidence about the performance of instructors over the entire period covered by the Performance Review. Other sources of information are required for a thorough performance review.

4. *How do I interpret the results?*

Type I results: Type I results include the number and percent of the responses for each of the possible responses. The responses “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” are considered positive responses. The standard practice is to add these responses to reflect the extent to which an instructor received “positive” responses to a given item. There are several things to be aware of in this process. The first is **to not over-interpret small differences especially when the number of responses is relatively small.** The number of responses is generally considered small if less than 30. See the following examples.

In Example D, a total of 15 students responded to the item and 53.3% of the responses are positive. Because the number of responses is small, the combined positive rating is subject to fluctuation if as few as one student responded differently. Example E illustrates this point. One less student selected “Agree”, which then changed the positive response percent to 46.6%.

Example D:

	STRONGLY AGREE		AGREE		DISAGREE		STRONGLY DISAGREE		UNABLE TO COMMENT	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
THE INSTRUCTOR TREATS ME WITH RESPECT.	5	33.3	3	20.0	1	6.7	5	33.3	1	6.7

Example E:

	STRONGLY AGREE		AGREE		DISAGREE		STRONGLY DISAGREE		UNABLE TO COMMENT	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
THE INSTRUCTOR TREATS ME WITH RESPECT.	5	33.3	2	13.3	1	6.7	5	33.3	2	13.3

It is usually helpful to look for patterns in the responses. In Example D (and E), there is a wide range of disagreement among the responses. This can be seen in the equally large number of responses for “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree.” The students who responded for this instructor have widely divergent views about the extent to which the instructor treats them with respect. **Information from other sources would be needed before evaluating an instructor on this item.**

Type II results: Type II results include the mean and standard deviation for the class being reviewed as well as for comparison groups. The mean indicates the average response to the item, and can range from 1.0, indicating that everyone strongly disagreed with the item, to 4.0 indicating that everyone strongly agreed with the item. The higher the mean, the more positive the response. The standard deviation (SD) indicates the extent to which students agreed with one another in their ratings on the item. If all students selected the same response to an item, the standard deviation would be 0.0. The greater the value of the standard deviation, the more students’ responses varied. High standard deviations suggest the need to examine student response patterns further or look for other sources of information related to the item. Example F illustrates the possible interpretation of Type II results.

Example F:

		STRONGLY AGREE %	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	STRONGLY DISAGREE %	UNABLE TO COMMENT %	MEAN #	SD #	N #
THE INSTRUCTOR	YOUR CLASS	76.2	23.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.76	.43	21
INFORMS ME	SAME CLASS-YOUR CAMPUS	77.3	17.6	3.8	0.8	0.5	3.72	.57	757
ABOUT MY	SAME CLASS-COLLEGE-WIDE	84.4	12.9	1.9	0.4	0.4	3.82	.46	2675
PROGRESS.	ANY CLASS-YOUR CAMPUS	84.8	12.2	1.7	0.9	0.3	3.82	.49	24322

The value of N in the last column represents the number of responses used in the calculation of the mean and standard deviation and, therefore, does not include “Unable to Comment” responses. When using this comparative information, it is important to look at response rates for answer choices as well as the mean and standard deviation. Note that the mean displayed for “Any Class-Your Campus” in this example is slightly higher (3.82) than the mean for the individual instructor’s class displayed as “Your Class” (3.76). However, the standard deviation is also higher for “Any Class-Your Campus” indicating less agreement between student responses to this item. In this example, 100% of the students rated the instructor positively by selecting “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” for the instructor’s class and no students selected “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (displayed in “Your Class”). Even though the mean rating is slightly higher for “Any Class –Your Campus”, the percent of students selecting “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” is slightly lower (97%).

Item and overall interpretations: A survey consists of a series of questions. Since the items are never identical and may be asking about different concepts, **the results for one item may not be combined with the results of any other item in an attempt to find a single value to represent the instructor's effectiveness.** In addition to items covering different concepts, we do not know if the same students responded to the same items. We have a count of the number of students who responded to the items, but we do not know how they responded. In a class of twenty students, all 20 may respond to one item, while only 15 respond to a different item. In this case, the responses obtained for the two items were based on different groups of students. **Again, do not combine results for one item with results for another item. Consider the items individually.**

SUMMARY:

Keep these important points in mind when reviewing and interpreting Student Feedback Reports:

- **Use student feedback in conjunction with other sources of information as required by the Faculty Performance Review Process.**
- **Do not over-interpret small differences, especially when the number of responses is relatively small (less than about 30).**
- **Look for patterns in responses, across items, and over time before drawing conclusions.**
- **Do not combine results for one item with results for another item.**
- **Assume the feedback is valid and valuable. Past research on the Student Feedback process indicates that students consider their responses to individual items and differentiate between items when rating instructors. In addition, focus groups with students reveal that they appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and believe that their ratings should be taken seriously.**