Procedures for the University Council Approved Student Learning Experience Feedback

Responsibility: Director, Teaching and Learning Enhancement
Authorization: Vice Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience
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Student learning experience feedback is used in place of student evaluations of teaching. This is a deliberate shift away from positioning students as evaluators of teaching quality toward student feedback positioned as a vital component of a broad suite of evidence of teaching quality (including, for example, peer feedback and self-assessment). Additionally, the word evaluation often implies that the feedback collected will largely be used to determine if teaching quality is adequate (also called summative use) rather than for development or enhancement of teaching quality (called formative use). Student learning experience feedback serves both formative and summative purposes at the University of Saskatchewan. When used formatively, educators look to this information to enhance their teaching practices, courses and programs. When used summatively, student feedback serves as one piece of information to support assessment of teaching quality through collegial and administrative processes.

1. Instrument question limit and order

The total length of the survey should be planned within each college/department such that it does not exceed 20 - 25 questions in normal circumstances. This may need to include considerations for courses with multiple educators if that is common within the college/department.

The order of questions is 6 core closed-ended questions, college/department questions (inclusive of custom questions, modular questions, course-type specific questions), educator-personalized questions (up to 4), and then the 3 core open-ended questions.

2. Process for requesting a change to the core questions

University Council approved the delegation of decision-making regarding changes to the core question set to the Teaching, Learning and Academic Resources Committee (TLARC) of Council. The following process will be used for these requests:

a. Support in creation of a request will be available from the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Specialist.

b. Requests should take the form of a simple overview of:

   i. the request being made (e.g., what questions will be changed, in what way, and in what circumstance, if change is requested for a subset of courses)
   ii. the rationale for the change, with clear connections to the fit of the questions with the curriculum and/or local teaching practices
   iii. the process by which the revised questions will be validated (where needed)

c. Requests will be reviewed by the Director, Teaching and Learning Enhancement who will make a recommendation to TLARC with a rationale including the established parameters (see item e below).

d. TLARC will consider the recommendation and vote to accept or reject the request for change.

e. The request will be assessed against the following parameters:

i. The rationale for the change is clear and aligned with the curriculum and/or teaching practices of the courses identified
ii. Not changing the questions could cause confusion amongst students completing the instrument and/or could compromise the quality of student responses
iii. Plans for validation of the adjusted question(s) have been made, where needed

3. Open and close dates for end of course feedback

Typical practice is to open surveys two weeks prior to the final teaching day and close it on the last teaching day during the Fall and Winter terms. For Spring and Summer, this is reduced to one week. This practice is recommended for the following reasons:

- To get the highest number of questionnaire completions possible. Making the survey available while students are still taking classes provides educators the opportunity to remind students about providing feedback and, whenever possible, provide time in class to complete it on a phone, laptop or tablet.
- To achieve greater consistency regarding when in the course students provide feedback. Restricting access to only this time means that students completing the survey are doing so at the same point in the course.
- Research evidence indicates that results are not affected based on when the surveys are administered in a course (i.e., before, during or after the final exam period).[1]

As such,

a. The system is programmed to determine the default open and close dates of the course feedback period:

i. The system default open date is the date that falls two weeks prior to the final teaching day of the regular term;
ii. The system default close date is the final teaching day of the regular term/instruction period.

b. The open date is 'soft', that is:

i. It can be changed by department administrators (with the approval of the department head) for individual courses or for the entire department;

[1] Benton, S.L. & Cashin, W.E. (2012). Student Ratings of Teaching: A summary of research and literature. IDEA Paper #50. https://www.ideaedu.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/IDEA%20Papers/IDEA%20Papers/PaperIDEA_50.pdf. Accessed 15 October 2016.

ii. It is not determined by university policy or practice;
iii. Open dates can be set to any date between the day that the data has been imported and verified in the system and the day of the default close date. Note that there is often significant technical work required in order to have the system set up to open.

c. The close date is 'hard', that is:

i. It defaults to the system final close date (see a.ii);
ii. It cannot be extended by a department administrator past this date but can be set to an earlier date;
iii. It has been determined by university practice;
iv. It can be changed for individual departments by the System Administrator with the approval of the department head, dean, associate dean or designate (in the case of non-departmentalized colleges).

d. The system is also programmed to determine the default open and close dates of the midcourse feedback period. Mid-course feedback:

i. is enabled by default in the system
ii. is typically only done in courses running 6 weeks or longer
iii. can be disabled for individual courses or all courses by the department administrator with the approval of the department head, dean, associate dean or designate
iv. is purely formative with feedback going only to educators and not to department heads, deans, associate deans or designates.

Timing of open and close dates for ‘atypical’ courses will be determined on a case-by-case basis with the department head or dean, associate dean or designate.

Note: Due to the way the system is set up to send out notifications regarding course feedback it is advisable to ensure that open and close dates do not fall on weekends.

4. Reporting instrument feedback

Frequency distributions for closed-ended Likert-type (i.e., rating scale) questions will be shown first on reports. As average scores from closed-ended Likert questions require context for interpretation, average scores will be presented after the frequency distribution for each question.
Additionally, comparative distributions and/or averages will be shown for a minimum of five comparator courses from the college/department.

For larger aggregate reports, further text analytics such as frequency distributions for themes and positive/negative comment analysis may be included.

5. Changes/corrections to numeric feedback

On occasion, departmental administrators make errors in setting up surveys. For example, two sets of feedback are created for the same educator within a single course. In these instances, it may be necessary to make changes/corrections to how the data are stored in order to fix the error. When such a change/correction is required, the educator or departmental administrator will inform the System Administrator who, in turn, will consult with the Vice Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience. Any change/correction to numeric course feedback information must be authorized by the Vice Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience. Changes/corrections to numeric data for individual educators will not be made without the knowledge of the educator.

6. Removal of student comments

Comments provided by students on the survey are treated as confidential information (e.g., students' identities are traceable, but they are not disclosed). Comments will not be removed from course feedback unless they are deemed wholly inappropriate, such as comments that are hateful or discriminatory on the basis of attributes such as gender, sexual or gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion or disability.

a. If an educator believes that a comment is wholly inappropriate, the following steps must be followed:

i. A request is made by the educator to his/her department head or associate dean specifying why the educator finds the comment to be wholly inappropriate; and
ii. Both the educator's department head and associate dean (or associate dean and dean in non-departmentalized colleges) agree with the request put forward by the educator; and
iii. The Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience is informed of the request by the associate dean (or dean) and agrees that the comment must be removed.
iv. The Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience has the final authority for the removal of a comment. No comment will be removed without the educator's knowledge.

b. An educator can make a direct request to the Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience for the removal of a comment if a comment violates the University of Saskatchewan's policy, including but not limited to:

i. Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters;
ii. Discrimination and Harassment Prevention

c. Under normal circumstances, students will not be permitted to request a change or modification to their questionnaire responses after the end of the fill out period. Prior to submitting their responses, students will see the following: "**By clicking SUBMIT, you verify that you have answered this survey**

to your satisfaction, for the correct instructor, and that you understand that these answers cannot be withdrawn once the fill out deadline has passed." There are occasions when a student provides feedback in error, prior to the feedback being released to the educator, and makes the request that the feedback be removed. If the Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience views this to be a legitimate concern for the integrity of the feedback being provided, they can make the decision to remove it.

d. Students will be allowed to modify submitted responses up until the close of the fill-out period.

e. When a comment is removed from the system, the entirety of that student's feedback will be removed. Parts of a comment (leaving the remainder) or a comment independent of the rest of that student's feedback will not be removed and portions of a comment will not be altered.

f. Normally, students will be made aware of the removal of their comment only in the event that:

i. The Vice-Provost, Teaching, Learning and Student Experience believes it is in the student's best interest; and/or
ii. The nature of the comment is such that disciplinary action may be considered.

7. Department administrator access when a dual role exists

There are some, although rare, occasions in which the department administrator will also be the educator for a course. In order to preserve the integrity of roles and avoid any conflict of interest, a department administrator who is also an educator will not be permitted to manage the feedback for his/her own class(es). As such,

a. Department administrators for the course feedback system who are also educators must have a second department administrator assigned to manage their course feedback.
b. If there is not already a second administrator in the department with access to the system and the capability of creating surveys, the department head must appoint someone and have the request submitted to the System Administrator in reasonably good time.
c. If there is no one else in the department who can act as the second administrator, the department head must request that the System Administrator manage this educator's course feedback.

8. Release of results

To achieve confidentiality in student learning experience feedback and create anonymity in provision of results to educators, academic leaders and their delegates, unless the student chooses otherwise, the process for release of student learning experience feedback will adhere to the following:

a. No reports will be released where there are fewer than 5 responses to the questionnaire except where students have agreed to their feedback being shared (see next bullet).

b. To facilitate educator access to student feedback, will be provided the option of having their qualitative/open-ended responses included in reports to educators should fewer than 5 responses be received. This choice will be available to students during questionnaire completion and it will be made clear to students that, in the case of fewer than 5 responses, there is greater potential that an educator could attribute feedback to them.
c. To avoid inappropriate interpretation of results, in courses with fewer than 5 responses, no closed-ended question results will be released.
d. To facilitate appropriate interpretation of results, in courses with fewer than 10 responses, a qualifier will be added to reports indicating that: "due to a low number of responses the quantitative/closed-ended question results presented are less stable and caution should be used in the interpretation of the results, particularly in relation to aggregate and comparative statistics."

All attempts will be made to release educator end-of-course reports within 2 - 3 business days after grades have been approved. This timeline may not be possible if the reports are custom to the college, school or department; are being constructed and produced for the first time; or require significant human processing.

9. Aggregate data usage by department, college, and/or the university

Beyond the use of student-based course feedback data by educators, there are times when departments, colleges and/or the university benefit from summary level information. This usage fits with the principle that student feedback is collected, in part, to improve program quality and the quality of student experience. For example, a college may use student feedback (aggregated across courses and/or educators) as one piece of information in program review or renewal or to determine the outcome of a program change. As a second example, the university may wish to cross-validate findings from other student surveys (e.g., NSSE) with student learning experience feedback.

In those instances where a department, college or other unit in the institution wishes to use aggregated anonymized student learning experience feedback, certain restrictions apply. Any summary data being used must involve a minimum of three class offerings and a minimum of three unique educators. Additionally, any aggregation across the university must include data from at least two Departments, or else not include any information about which departments or colleges the data came from, but would include how many departments or colleges were included in the aggregation. Which of these two approaches to use will be determined prior to the generation of any reports. To reach the minimum number for aggregation, it is possible to use multiple years of offerings. Although the use of five or more classes/educators would be closer to an ideal with regard to aggregating data, it may be difficult in some instances. Setting a minimum number of three courses or educators accomplishes the following:

a. Ensures that the confidentiality of scores for individual educators is protected.
b. Increases the likelihood that the stability of the scores is good (e.g., that summary scores are not overly biased by individual scores in the extreme).
c. Makes clear to programs, departments, and colleges that the purpose of using data in this way is about obtaining an aggregate of student experiences of teaching and learning within a course and is not about assessing an individual educator.

An administrative unit seeking access to aggregated student learning experience data must request approval from the Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience. In certain instances, the approval from the Vice Provost Teaching, Learning and Student Experience may also require institutional research ethics approval.