

Suggested Guidelines for Effective Use of Student Evaluation of Instruction

This document is meant to be a guide to organizing and presenting data related to student evaluation of instruction, to assist Faculty in their application for promotion, tenure, or merit pay. It is also meant to be an aid to individuals and committees in decision making so they can more easily interpret information presented to them, and render fair and consistent decisions related to promotion, tenure, or merit pay.

Faculty who wish to use “other types of student evaluations, peer evaluations, portfolios, pre-test/post-test or other ‘value-added’ outcomes measures” as allowed in the Faculty Handbook should consult authorities in the use of those measures. It is the responsibility of candidates to provide guidelines for interpretation of those types of data.

I. Guidelines for Administration of Student Evaluations of Instruction

Below are suggestions for best practices in administering student evaluation of instruction.

When student evaluation of instruction should be administered during the semester.

The best time to administer teaching evaluations is during the penultimate week of the semester (the week prior to the last week of teaching). If administered too early in the semester, students will not have had the time to experience enough of the class to determine if various objectives had been met. If administered too late in the semester, students could likely suffer from ‘evaluation fatigue’ and end-of-semester stress, and take their responsibility too lightly.

When student evaluation of instruction should be administered during the class.

Ideally, the evaluations should be administered at the beginning of the class session in order to provide adequate time for the students to complete them.

Who should administer student evaluation of instruction.

The professor of record should not administer the evaluations. A colleague, staff member, or student should administer and collect all completed evaluations, seal them in an envelope, and return them to the department’s administrative assistant. It is important to remind students that faculty will not see any evaluation results until well after the final grades have been submitted.

Meeting with students before they begin the evaluations.

It is advisable that the faculty member impress upon the students the significance of their participation. It is entirely appropriate to inform students that their feedback not only helps to improve the teaching and learning process, but that it also provides evidence necessary for professional advancement. Generally, if faculty take it seriously, so will the students.

The following items pertain specifically to the use of the IDEA Student Evaluation of Instruction instrument.

When Chairs and Faculty receive results.

Copies of the IDEA Diagnostic Form Report are distributed by CSTL to faculty in the subsequent semester from when they were administered. Original forms may be held at

the department level, and written comments may be transcribed in an anonymous fashion determined by the department.

Confidentiality.

Aside from what faculty share in their teaching dossier, the results from the IDEA Diagnostic Form Report will be known only to the faculty and their department chair. Duplicate copies of all IDEA Diagnostic Form Reports will be archived in the CSTL offices, but they will not be examined or read by any members of the CSTL staff, except upon request by the individual faculty member.

Specific advice about selecting IDEA Objectives.

Although the IDEA evaluation form identifies 12 teaching/learning objectives, it is important for faculty to select just those that they realistically expect to satisfy in their class, and that they think are most germane to what they teach, how they teach, and what the students are expected to accomplish. The IDEA center recommends that not more than five objectives in total should be selected. One should choose fewer “Essential” objectives than “Important”. For example, choose two Essential and three Important (or two and two or one and three, etc.). Think seriously and realistically about the class; if an objective is a significant part of the class and if specific instruction, assignments, or weight is given to that objective, then it should be identified as either Essential or Important. It is unrealistic that all or even many of the objectives can be met in a given class. Efforts to treat more than five objectives as Essential or Important will almost certainly result in spending too little time on too many tasks, which hinders instead of helps the learning process. Objectives identified as Essential are double-weighted. Consequently, both failure and success at accomplishing them will be apparent.

II. Guidelines for Presenting Student Evaluation of Instruction Data in Promotion, Tenure, and Merit Pay Dossiers

What data should be presented relative to IDEA.

The following pieces of information should be included for each class in which the instrument was used (please consult the example Table 1 below):

- * number of respondents and number of students,
- * the statement of reliability,
- * the statement of whether data are representative,
- * the adjusted *t*-score for Progress on Relevant Objectives,
- * the Comparison Category.

Because IDEA is administered campus-wide only every other spring semester (odd years), administering IDEA in at least some classes (especially when classes rotate) every year or semester provides a more representative set of data. This may be of particular value to probationary faculty who will have a limited number of chances to use the instrument. If comments are included, then the dossier should also include all written comments for each class in the supporting material. The faculty member should make a statement on their perception of the written comments and actions taken to address negative or positive aspects of their course in

the Record of Service. Likewise faculty should address reasons for less than favorable scores, and actions taken to address negative or positive scores. The candidate may wish to use the IDEA analysis under Teaching Methods and Styles. The candidates can discuss their improvement in teaching effectiveness (not just performance) by showing how their revisions in teaching methods and styles helped in changing the *suggested actions* from *consider increasing use to strength to retain* or how they have otherwise responded to the recommendations.

Table 1. Results of IDEA Student Evaluation of Instruction, Progress on Relevant Objectives

Course	Semester	NR/ NS	Reliable? Representative?	Adjusted <i>t</i> -score	Comparison Category
SE200 Majors Introduction	2001 Spring	39/ 43	Highly Reliable, Representative	43	Low Average
UI100 Freshman Seminar	2003 Spring	38/ 43	Reliable, Representative	48	Average
SE400 Advanced Majors	2003 Spring	49/ 50	Highly Reliable, Representative	56	High average
UI100 Freshman Seminar	2005 Spring	14/ 14	Marginally Reliable, Representative	58	Higher
SE200 Majors Introduction	2005 Spring	12/ 12	Marginally Reliable, Representative	52	Similar

(Note: Comparison Category nomenclature changed in 2005)

Faculty may present (but are not required to) other adjusted *t*-score data from the IDEA instrument listed below in a fashion similar to that above. Particularly, a candidate may benefit from including discipline-normed *t*-score data, as well as nationally-normed data.

- * Overall Excellence of the Instructor
- * Overall Excellence of the Course
- * Improved Student Attitude (from evaluations prior to 2005)
- * Summary Evaluation (2005 and after)
- * Discipline-normed (2005 and after)
- * Institution-normed (2005 and after)
- * Specific IDEA Objectives
- * Other

What data should be presented relative to other departmentally-approved instruments.

Because departmentally-approved instruments are different across campus, an example of the instrument should be included in the supporting material. Further, the scoring rubric should be described including the scale (indicating most favorable and unfavorable scores), departmental average or median scores for that semester (or other specified period of time), and the range of scores judged to be effective. Departments should define these values. The number of respondents should also be indicated. The dossier should also include all written comments for each class in the supporting material. The faculty should make a statement on their perception of the written comments and actions taken to address negative or positive aspects of their course in the Record of Service. Likewise faculty should address reasons for less than favorable scores, and actions taken to address negative or positive scores.

III. Guidelines for the Interpretation of Student Evaluation of Instruction

The following are factual items related to the IDEA instrument and should be kept in mind when interpreting data from IDEA Diagnostic Form Reports:

What adjusted t-scores and Comparison Categories represent and of what particular value they are.

Students evaluate instructors on a scale of 1 to 5 on their perception of classroom activities. The score for each item is normalized to the scores on all the classes evaluated in the comparison set of classes that the IDEA Center updates periodically, and a *t*-score is generated relating the impressions of those students relative to the impressions of students in all classes across the nation for that activity. A *t*-score of 50 would fall in the middle of that range, with higher scores being more favorable (see Table 2). Adjusted *t*-scores compare courses with similar properties: size and student motivation. The adjusted *t*-score is then used to place perceived performance on that objective into a Comparison Category. The IDEA Center scale currently employed is found in the following table:

Table 2. Correspondence between Adjusted *t*-score and Comparison Category as of 2005

Adjusted <i>t</i> -score	Comparison Category
≥63	Much Higher
56-62	Higher
45-55	Similar
38-44	Lower
≤37	Much Lower

Given that the standard deviation reported by the IDEA Center is 10, an adjusted *t*-score of 56 cannot be distinguished between a Much Higher and a Similar Comparison Category, and likewise a 44 cannot be distinguished between a Similar and a Much Lower Comparison Category. **The IDEA Center stresses that scoring in the Similar Comparison Category (formerly average) constitutes effective teaching (i.e. performance; see footnote 1).** To that end, “multi-tiered” criteria based on different scores required to meet criteria for Good, Superior, and Outstanding are completely inappropriate as made explicit by the IDEA Center.

Why Progress on Relevant Objectives is of particular importance

Adjusted *t*-scores from items related to course-specific objectives are weighted (see II. *Specific advice about selecting IDEA Objectives*) for the course that is being evaluated. **The IDEA center stresses that the best piece of data to use from the IDEA reports for personnel decisions is the Progress on Relevant Objectives data.**

How other measures from the IDEA Student Evaluation of Instruction might be interpreted in personnel decisions.

The following IDEA adjusted *t*-scores should be considered at the discretion of the faculty member only:

- * Overall Excellence of the Instructor
- * Overall Excellence of the Course
- * Improved Student Attitude (from evaluations prior to 2005)
- * Summary Evaluation (2005 and after)
- * Discipline-normed (2005 and after)
- * Institution-normed (2005 and after)
- * Specific IDEA Objectives
- * Other

and may be used to make a case for higher ratings of performance, and therefore Superior or Outstanding Teaching Effectiveness, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient.

The candidate may wish to use the IDEA analysis under Teaching Methods and Styles. The candidates can discuss their improvement in teaching effectiveness (not just performance) by showing how their revisions in teaching methods and styles helped in changing the *suggested actions* from *consider increasing use* to *strength to retain* or how they have otherwise responded to the recommendations.

How estimations of reliability, and whether or not the score is representative, enter into evaluating quality of instruction.

Allowances should be made in favor of the faculty member for evaluations that come from class sizes that are particularly small and fall in the category of Unreliable or Highly Unreliable. Likewise evaluations based on a small number of the possible respondents, judged “may not be representative,” should not be considered particularly indicative of the faculty member’s effectiveness. On the other hand, it is in the best interest of the faculty member to conduct the student evaluation of instruction in a manner that maximizes the representative value of the evaluation (see I. Guidelines for Administration of Student Evaluation of Teaching).

The following are suggestions on how to include student evaluation of instruction data in decisions relating to tenure, promotion, and merit pay:

Classification of the qualifying scores for acceptable teaching performance, relative to student evaluation of instruction.

Faculty with a) adjusted *t*-scores placing them in the Similar to Higher to Much Higher Comparison Categories in Progress on Relevant Objectives or b) departmentally-defined

effective scores on approved instruments, in the majority of classes evaluated, have arguably demonstrated effective teaching performance.

When and how less-than-acceptable scores of student evaluation of instruction should be considered as representative of acceptable teaching performance.

Allowances should be made in favor of the faculty member for special circumstances including, but not limited to:

- * teaching a course for the first time;
- * using an evaluation instrument such as IDEA for the first time;
- * teaching a course on-line for the first time;
- * teaching under emergency circumstances.

The candidate can also show effective teaching by appropriate response to inadequate scores or negative comments, giving examples of changes in teaching approaches or course management. Likewise, steady improvement to acceptable ratings indicates proper use of student evaluation of instruction in improving teaching performance.

Decision-makers, particularly at the departmental level, should comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the student comments. Decision-makers should indicate whether the quality of the comments and changes in teaching approach that address the comments indicate acceptable teaching performance.

How student evaluation of instruction should be used in assessing teaching effectiveness.

Student evaluation of instruction is an anonymous process and is not always compatible with academic rigor. **The IDEA Center stresses that student evaluation of instruction should make up no more than 25-33% of the measure of teaching effectiveness** (see footnote 1). The University is ill-served to define teaching effectiveness by a single measure of teaching performance. Having evaluated the faculty member as meeting the criteria for acceptable teaching performance through scores on student evaluation of instruction, or responses to scores or comments from student evaluation of instruction, decision-making bodies must take into account other activities presented by the faculty member consistent with accomplishment in teaching effectiveness including, but not limited to:

- * other types of student evaluations, peer evaluations, portfolios, pre-test/post-test or other "value-added" outcomes measures" as allowed in the Faculty Handbook.
- * course improvement activities
- * curriculum improvement activities
- * teaching activities with individuals

and other measures of effectiveness prescribed by departmentally-approved criteria.