



The purpose of this document is to offer guidance to unit leadership on the use of end-of-semester course evaluations during the 2020-21 academic year. We strongly recommend that you gather feedback from students with the intent to use their responses as a source of information to support continued development of instruction. This year many instructors have been teaching as if for the first time all over again, through obviously challenging circumstances. Keep this in mind as you engage with student evaluation data, exercising thoughtful caution when applying it to major decisions.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

- **Student evaluations of teaching are best used in the context of comparisons over time**, for the same instructor teaching the same course. They capture the effect of changes to a course and for the instructor, on student perspectives and experience in the course. In our current teaching context, there are a wide variety of variables in play, and evaluation of current instruction cannot properly be compared to past versions. Instead, instructors and unit leadership should consider current student evaluation information as valuable data to help inform teaching choices for courses taught in a similar mode in the future.
- **Student bias** on student evaluations of teaching is a well-studied phenomenon. **During this time of heightened emotional and mental stress, we can expect this type of bias to increase.** With this in mind, you should include a statement for students such as the following:

“Student evaluations of teaching play an important role in the review of faculty. Your opinions influence the review of instructors that takes place every year. We recognize that student evaluations of teaching are often influenced by students’ unconscious and unintentional biases about the personal characteristics of the instructor. Further, the added stress and disruption caused by our move to hybrid and virtual instruction may further enhance this unintended bias.

As you fill out this course evaluation, please focus on the quality of instruction and the content of the course, while generously assuming that your instructor has done what they can during these challenging times.”

- **Student evaluations of teaching should never be used as the only set of data for the evaluation of teaching effectiveness.** Instead, they should be considered alongside larger contextual issues, the instructor’s own reflections and discussion of their teaching, and thoughtful peer evaluation of teaching and teaching materials. This fact is even more important to consider given the widely recognized problems with student bias, our current challenging circumstances, and the newness of our current teaching environment. **Unit leadership should therefore proceed with caution when applying data from student evaluations of teaching to annual review, promotion, tenure, and contract renewal decisions.**

THANK A TEACHER

Consider contacting students taking courses in your major, and encouraging them to [complete a Thank-a-Teacher note](#) for instructors or TAs who have made a difference for them. The CTL will process these notes and distribute them to instructors after the grade submission deadline for the semester.

INSTRUCTOR REFLECTION & FEEDBACK

Instructor reflection on their teaching is a good practice to encourage every semester, and can be particularly useful after significant changes have been made to a course. Given our current context, it may also be valuable to gather feedback from instructors with respect to their own experience, and to help inform your decisions about instruction in your unit. Below are 5 questions to ask your instructors:

1. How much time did you spend on course prep this semester as compared to previous semesters (e.g., twice the usual)?
2. Which course modifications were most/least successful in terms of your ability to:
 - a. maintain student engagement in their learning?
 - b. effectively identify student progress and barriers to learning along the way?
 - c. effectively assess student learning for their final grade?What (specifically) worked well?
3. What unexpected student, instructor, and/or TA needs did you encounter? What did you learn from those experiences?
4. What (if anything) might you do differently in the future to build flexibility into your course while also maintaining consistency and clarity for students?
5. What resources and/or additional support would benefit you and your students for the coming semester?

STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF TEACHING

As per [university policy](#), there is a set of common course evaluation questions for use at UGA. However, additional questions may contribute to meaningful evaluation of teaching. With this in mind, we strongly recommend that you use some or all of the following questions to gather feedback from students:

1. What were your primary modes of engagement in this course? (check all that apply) [online (e.g., eLC); Zoom (or similar); face-to-face]
2. Please rate your level of agreement with respect to the following statements: [strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; strongly agree]
 - a. The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.
 - b. The instructor effectively engaged students through our course activities (online and/or during class meetings).
 - c. I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.
 - d. The instructor responded to my course-related inquiries in a timely manner.
3. What were the major strengths of this course and/or instructor? [open-ended]
4. What specific challenges did you face in your quest to succeed in this course? Specifically, what might we do differently next time? [open-ended]

View our sample Qualtrics form [here](#); request a version to copy and edit via ruth.poproski@uga.edu.