



The purpose of this document is to offer guidance on the subject of course evaluation practices for the current (Spring 2020) semester. We strongly recommend that you do *not* engage students in typical course evaluations, but instead consider one or more of the options discussed below. In addition, we urge you to avoid using Spring 2020 data from students for the purposes of annual review or promotion and tenure decisions (although leveraging positive feedback is non-problematic).

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. With the significant shift to remote instruction for the final third of the semester, it is difficult to interpret student evaluations of teaching in this compare-and-contrast manner. As a result, typical tools for student evaluation of teaching are not a particularly useful way to evaluate teaching effectiveness in present circumstances.
- We recommend a **mindset shift from “evaluation of teaching” to “gathering feedback”** – particularly for the Spring 2020 semester. Focus on finding out about student and instructor experiences as a way to inform future actions and decision-making (for both unit leadership and for individual instructors).
- **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.** If you do want to use a student evaluation of teaching tool, please 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 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 unusual weeks.”

- One of the challenges faced by student evaluations of teaching is the simple fact that **more recent events tend to play a more significant role in their ratings of instruction**, and it is difficult to take a longer term view of things. As a result, it is likely that students asked to evaluate their experience in a course this semester will almost surely provide feedback that is highly informed by their experience during this final third of the semester – even when prompted to focus on the first part of the semester. As a result, even if typical tools for student evaluation of teaching are used, they should be interpreted very carefully.

Please continue reading for four recommended alternatives to traditional student evaluations of teaching.

Alternatives to Typical Student Evaluations

Instructor Self-Reflection & Reporting

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. In addition to contributing to iterative course development, this reflection on teaching practices can inform an individual's narrative related to their development as an instructor. Given the larger scale disruption to instruction experienced this semester, it may also be useful to ask instructors in your unit for specific feedback to help inform your approach to key courses during the next academic year.

Below are five questions you might ask your instructors to answer – with emphasis on only the final question as something to report specifically to your unit's leadership.

1. What did I do as an instructor to reduce student apprehension and anxiety during this time of disruption? What might I do more of next time?
2. Which course modifications were most/least successful in terms of my 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 I encounter? What did I learn from those experiences?
4. What (if anything) might I do differently in the future to build flexibility into my course, in case of other (hopefully less significant) disruptions to my teaching?
5. Given my students' experience in my course this semester, what adjustments or special considerations should be made for AY2020-21 courses? For example, is there an anticipated impact on student readiness for the next course in a specific sequence?

“Mid-Semester” Formative Feedback from Students

Just as it is beneficial to collect feedback from students part way through the regular semester, we recommend encouraging instructors to collect feedback from their students during the second week of remote instruction. This will help maintain open communication between instructors and students, and will help to create or maintain a class climate in which students are active partners in the experience.

The best way to gather this feedback from students is with two simple questions:

1. What's working well so far in our shift to remote instruction?
2. What suggestions or questions do you have for me, about the remainder of this semester?

Collecting this feedback anonymously through a tool like Qualtrics is a good way to proceed, followed by circling back to students with responses to their feedback, after it has been collected.

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 – particularly

during this challenging end to the semester. The CTL will process these notes and distribute them to instructors after the grade submission deadline for the semester.

End-of-Semester Student Feedback

Instead of more typical student evaluations of teaching, consider soliciting feedback from students in your major(s) and/or students enrolled in your unit's key courses. Specifically, we recommend asking them to provide examples of what they consider to have been best practices from instructors, during the remote-instruction portion of the semester. Once collected, consider sharing these student responses with your faculty, in order to cultivate conversation around practices for the future.

[Follow this link](#) to view a sample version of this survey, created by the CTL in Qualtrics. Please contact us via <https://ctl.uga.edu/contact/> if you would like us to share this survey with you to edit for your own purposes.

Note also that you might collect similar information from instructors in your unit, after the semester is over. This data can be used in conjunction with an opportunity for the sharing of ideas among colleagues.