

# TLRC Panel on Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs): inherently flawed, but can they be useful, and if so, how?

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## Introduction

TLRC will facilitate a discussion amongst faculty on Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs). We take as a given that

- SETs have well-documented intrinsic and systemic flaws, biases, inequities, etc. that are difficult if not impossible to eliminate, and
- different stakeholders (individual faculty, departments, ARPT, etc.) use SETs in different ways and find the different types of questions useful to varying degrees

**We ask, can SETs, imperfect though they are, be useful for individual faculty, departments, ARPT, etc.? Our aim is not to resolve the numerous problems with SETs or develop a perfect SET that will satisfy everyone, but more modest: How can we – individual faculty, departments, ARPT – talk about and use SETs in ways that promote better teaching at OW, while acknowledging their limitations and reducing the impact of their shortcomings?**

## Background

The Student Perception of Teaching form currently in use at OW (now administered using a different vendor, Iota360) was approved by the Faculty Senate in 2016; that questionnaire is available at

<http://bit.ly/3FtBXDD>

In June 2022, some faculty brought to the Faculty Senate a **Resolution to Reestablish the Ad-Hoc Student Course Feedback Evaluations** Committee. It was not voted upon for assorted reasons and it is available here

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/13gNfq0POzdeKMLB6yGl9zleG9sd9\\_7xe/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13gNfq0POzdeKMLB6yGl9zleG9sd9_7xe/edit)

## Some Questions/Topics to guide the discussion

TLRC hopes that faculty attending the event will bring their own questions and topics they wish to discuss, and that the conversation develops naturally. We have created a list of questions

that may help start or guide the discussion if/when necessary. It is **not an exhaustive list of questions and topics worthy of discussion**, and it is unreasonable to expect we will have time to address all or even most of the questions below.

## Questions (sorted by topic)

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### Using the results of SETs

- What if any aspects of your own evaluations did you find most useful? Why?
- In your role evaluating a colleague's file, what if any aspects of the evaluations do you find most informative?
- What is your view on the position that "SETs should be used not to compare faculty with each other, but with themselves"?
- The June 2022 resolution seeks to create "a basic standardized guideline for scoring and ranking student Course Feedback responses and ranking across all Departments". Is this possible, and would it be useful? Is it in conflict with the view expressed in the previous question?
- How can faculty and departments communicate the value and limitations of student evaluations to various stakeholders?
- What are some ways departments should *not* use SETs?
- How does ARPT consider SETs in evaluating a candidate's teaching? Is there a certain weight assigned to these? The June 2022 resolution states that "student Course Feedback instrument results play a **critical** role in faculty appointment, reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions". Is "critical" the best word?

### Student Responses

- What are "good" evaluations? More precisely, what is desirable to see in evaluations, from the perspective of an individual faculty member, department, or APRT?
- How can faculty be "rigorous" yet still get "good" evaluations? More precisely, it seems reasonable to assume that faculty can get better evaluations by making their courses easier and/or grading leniently. If so,

how can faculty be encouraged to avoid making a course easier to get better evaluations?

- How should individual faculty respond – emotionally as well as practically - to “negative” evaluations”? To unfair or inappropriate comments?
- How can departments support faculty who are unhappy with their evaluations?
- Some teaching practices/strategies such as active learning have been shown to promote better learning but often lead to poorer student evaluations. How to address this?
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### Students

- Should students be given guidance/training in the types of feedback useful and appropriate for filling out the SETs? If so, who should be responsible for providing such training?
- Students feel that their feedback goes unheard, as there is no response from the faculty to their feedback, and that the same faculty continue to teach with limited change to their instruction. What can be done to address this feeling/expectation that the students have?
- How can response ratios be improved? Are there ways of improving the response rate that are effective, but you would *not* recommend?

### Instrument (i.e., the Student Perception of Instruction form which students fill out)

- How can we monitor whether the instrument is “effective” (the word used in the June 2022 resolution)? What does “effective” even mean?
- The June 2022 resolution seeks to use statistical expertise to design an instrument that is “valid” and “reliable”. Is this feasible, possible, etc.?
- The June 2022 resolution asks to “Revisit the Course Feedback instrument **annually** to maximize its utility, need for **modification**, and meaningful use as a part of the College’s culture of assessment.” Thoughts? How can we reconcile frequent revisions to the instrument with the need for consistency to be able to make comparisons across time?