

COMMITTEE ON TEACHING
2016-17 Survey of Department Chairs, Managers, and Provosts on the Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

To: Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

Introduction

In spring 2017, the Committee on Teaching (COT) conducted a survey of department chairs, managers, and College Provosts regarding their use of, and practices surrounding, student evaluations of teaching (SETs). This survey¹ was a crucial first step in the committee's efforts to revise SETs and how they are used on campus. The main goal was to understand how departments and colleges now are using course evaluations, and use this information to inform the committee's goal of shifting how teaching is evaluated at UCSC.

The survey collected information about current practices of SETs use by departments, programs, and colleges, and information about what other sources of data are now being used to evaluate instructor teaching effectiveness. Additionally, the survey sought to collect detailed feedback on advantages and limitations of the current course evaluations, as well as concerns and suggestions for improvement. The committee also sought the perspective of chairs and college provosts on the proposed change to the course evaluation framework, shifting the focus away from using course evaluations as the de-facto (and often the only) method for teaching evaluations, to be more instructor-driven, with the main purpose of assisting instructors to improve their own teaching.

All responses were confidential and reported at the aggregated campus level for departments. The Executive Summary below encapsulates some main themes from the survey results, and implications relating to course evaluation practice. A full summary report is forthcoming and will provide more detail on the specific responses from each section of the survey.

Executive Summary

The response rate was excellent (76%). Overall, 29 out of 37 departments and 6 out of 9 college provosts completed the survey, with comments emphasizing that the large majority of these campus leaders believe that revising SETs and how they are currently used is a very important topic. Below are the main themes that emerged from the department survey.

1. Campus standardized course evaluations are the main instrument used to rate instructors

A majority of departments, programs, or colleges (72%) use only the standard SETs with no additional questions, as the main tool to evaluate instructors. The remaining approximately twenty percent used a variety of customized questions whereby deployment varied considerably: some use them for all courses, some for only selected courses. In contrast, the colleges routinely used customized questions, placing a substantial importance on qualitative comments.

Overall, given the low usage of customized questions by most departments, the survey showed ~~that faculty are mainly evaluated~~ (and so there is an opportunity for feedback to improve

¹COT Survey on Departmental Use of Online Course Evaluations Winter 2017

teaching) based on the standardized questions. Conversely, the high use of customized questions in the colleges indicates that the evaluation of lecturers (who commonly teach college core courses) is often qualitatively different.

2. Analysis and interpretation of SET data is uneven

Comments from individual departments, however, indicated substantial variation in how standard SETs are applied. For example, some respondents suggested they have a formal rubric evaluation on only a subset of standard SET questions, others suggested department-generated questions are both essential and most valuable, while others indicated they focus mainly on whatever is perceived as CAP's main priorities (e.g., a focus on the one or two required questions).

In addition, there is wide variation in how departments treat quantitative data. Most departments do not aggregate quantitative data. However, the approximately one third of departments who reported that they do aggregate the quantitative data also reported using divergent approaches. Wide variation in aggregation of reported data is potentially problematic, as it is prone to error based on differing statistical approaches. Bias may also creep into the interpretations of aggregated data, which may vary over time driven by shifting approaches used to analyze and present data. Only a small number of departments used graphical methods, despite the fact that respondents think they are useful; departments noted they are typically very time consuming.

Overall, this suggests that providing departments with specific guidance, such as a best practices document, to analyze quantitative course evaluation data would be extremely useful. It may be helpful to departments if the new campus online course evaluation system is capable of producing more unified aggregation, and in particular graphical data presentations.

3. Perception of bias in course evaluations is widespread

A majority of respondents were concerned about negative bias in SETs for some groups; about half reported that they had directly observed it, and 40% reported that they suspected bias in evaluations they had reviewed in a leadership capacity. The most common bias mentioned was based on gender, and there were recurring comments about perceived positive bias based on instructors' charisma and ability to entertain the students, as distinct from teaching or learning.

Overall, this widespread perception among respondents that arguably the major instrument used to evaluate teaching for personnel actions is affected by bias raises questions regarding the inherent fairness of SETs. This strongly suggests a major challenge for continuing use of SETs will be shifting content and setting guidelines for interpretation and use with the goal of reducing the effects of bias.

4. Using class time or wireless access could dramatically improve response rates

Declining SET response rates accompanying the shift to online evaluations has been a persistent concern. Departments reported a variety of approaches to increase student response rate, however the most common method cited was to reserve time in the classroom for students to complete the course evaluations, as opposed to giving incentives, more automated reminders, etc.

Unfortunately, wireless access is now limited in the classrooms, and access to electronic devices can also be an issue. The survey results suggest that if these issues were addressed, then campus SET response rates could return to the level of former paper evaluations. This suggests that excellent mobile device functionality for the new online course evaluation system, as well as a focus on procedures that ensure the maximum number of students have access to needed interface, are particularly important.

5. Peer evaluations: guidelines and clearer framework are needed

Among “other measures” for evaluation of teaching, peer evaluations in some form were among the most commonly cited as being used, and were also the most common suggestion in terms of evaluation approaches which might be used more extensively in personnel reviews while also improving teaching. Approximately 50% of departments reported they are already conducting some form of peer-evaluation, typically teaching observations. However, practices reported varied widely, and comments suggested that clearer systems and/or guidance on best practices for direct observations or other peer review could greatly improve peer evaluations.

6. Departments were supportive of shifting the basic framework of UCSC course evaluation

Overall, responses indicated that while chairs and college provosts feel that the current SETs do have value, there is widespread interest in improving and de-emphasizing SETs as a main tool for teaching evaluation. Most were supportive of the proposed shift in questions, culture and practice toward using SETs primarily as instructor-driven instruments to improve teaching and learning (“formative” shift). At the same time, most felt that more detailed information or a proposal about such a shift would be required. The variation in responses among chairs/ provosts on this point is consistent with the wide variety of ways that current SETs are now being used between departments and divisions.

Respectfully submitted;

COMMITTEE ON TEACHING

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APPENDIX

**COT SURVEY ON DEPARTMENTAL USE OF ONLINE COURSE EVALUATIONS
WINTER 2017**

This survey is being conducted by UCSC's Institutional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies (IRAPS) in coordination with the Committee on Teaching.

Please click **next** below to start the survey.

(End of Page 1)

Introduction

As outlined in the communication you received on March 13, 2017, this survey encompasses current departmental use and practices around student evaluations of teaching (SETs). The survey is targeted for Department/Program Chairs and Managers, and represents a critical first piece in COT's efforts to gather information to assist us with the proposed major shift in teaching evaluations at UCSC.

The survey goals are two-fold:

- (1) to collect comprehensive information about the current use of the SETs, and other sources of data currently being used to evaluate instructor teaching effectiveness, and
- (2) to collect detailed feedback on advantages and limitations of the current forms and practices, as well as concerns about and suggestions for improvement.

Finally, we are also asking that you give us your overall feedback from a chair's perspective about the proposed shift in framework, away from using SETs as the de-facto main method of teaching evaluation.

For the UC criteria for Appointment, Promotion, and Appraisal, please see pp. 4-5 in the [UC Academic Personnel Manual \(APM 210\)](#). (A new window will open.)

Timeline

The survey will be open for three weeks from March 16th to April 5th.

Confidentiality

An UCSC Institutional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies (IRAPS) analyst will distribute survey links to department chairs/managers and will monitor responses to ensure the highest possible response rate while maintaining confidentiality of respondents.

To protect confidentiality, responses (including written comments) will be aggregated by division only for analysis and reporting. In other words, results will not be associated with specific departments, but *will be analyzed and reported only at the divisional level*.

Logistics

IRAPS administers this survey through their secure survey system. Every Department/Program Chair and Manager has received an email invitation with a survey link designated for their department/program survey responses. The chair and manager can access their department/program responses as many times as they need to add/revise their responses until the **survey closes on April 5th**.

If you have any questions regarding the survey logistics or confidentiality of data analysis and reporting, please contact IRAPS at surveys@ucsc.edu.

Finally, note that the survey questions focus on evaluations of teaching effectiveness of Senate faculty and continuing lecturers for personnel actions. At the end of the survey you will have an opportunity to comment on any distinctions your department makes between these service categories.

Thank you for your time and attention in providing responses. We realize the survey may at first appear extensive, but your feedback is critical. We need a comprehensive vision of what departments/programs think and are doing now to move forward with this ambitious project. Click NEXT to start the survey.

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NOTE: Both a Department/Program Chair and Department Managers have access to this survey and can enter answers for their Department/Program. Responses on each page can be saved (click "Save" at the bottom of the page) and can be edited at any point.

Please use the "Back" and "Next" buttons at the bottom of the page to view and edit any of the previously saved responses.

Departmental use of SET data for personnel reviews

1. How frequently does your department or program review SET data to evaluate teaching effectiveness of individual faculty? (Check all that apply)

- for personnel reviews
- yearly
- quarterly
- other, please explain: _____

2. Include any additional comments on the frequency of reviewing SET results in the text box below:

(End of Page 3)

3. To what extent does your department or program find useful each of the following sources of data or evidence for evaluation of teaching effectiveness of individual faculty for personnel actions?

	Do not use	Minimally useful	Occasionally useful	Useful in most cases	Essential
SET quantitative data	<input type="radio"/>				
SET qualitative responses (i.e., written comments)	<input type="radio"/>				
Course syllabi	<input type="radio"/>				
Other course materials (e.g., assignment sheets, quizzes, lecture slides)	<input type="radio"/>				
Personal Statement	<input type="radio"/>				
Additional self assessments (e.g., teaching philosophy, teaching portfolio, assessments of student learning)	<input type="radio"/>				
Sources of data specific to graduate students (e.g., mentorship)	<input type="radio"/>				
Teaching observations conducted by personnel committee members	<input type="radio"/>				
Teaching observations conducted by peers	<input type="radio"/>				

3a. If your department uses **other sources of evidence** in addition to listed in the previous question, please specify what evidence and how useful it is for personnel actions:

3b. Include below **any comments on the sources of data** used by your department to assess teaching effectiveness for personnel actions (e.g., advantages/limitations, concerns, suggestions for improvement):

(End of Page 4)

4. To what extent does your department or program find useful the following two questions, which are required on the existing UCSC SET, for the evaluation of teaching effectiveness of individual faculty for personnel actions?

	Not at all useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Essential
"Instructor's overall effectiveness as a teacher"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"The course overall as a learning experience"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4a. Please provide any comments regarding these two questions.

Currently the standard SET has 25 questions with the option of adding questions.

5. Does your department or program currently use the standard SET instrument “as is” or with additional questions?

- The standard 25 questions for all courses.
- The standard 25 questions plus additional questions for all courses.
- The standard 25 questions plus additional questions depending on course.

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To review the standard SET questions [click here](#). (A new window will open.)

6. Indicate the level of priority given to each of the following **sections** of the SET form for assessing teaching effectiveness of individual faculty for personnel actions?

	Not a priority	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority
Instructor appraisal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course appraisal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Profile (i.e., student self assessment)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comments (questions 22-25 on the standard form)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Department/Program generated questions*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*this option is shown only if Q5 = “The standard 25 questions plus additional questions for all courses” or “The standard 25 questions plus additional questions depending on course.”

6a. Include below your comments on prioritizing **specific sections of SET** to assess teaching effectiveness for personnel actions (e.g, advantages/limitations, concerns). If relevant, please comment on the value of adding department- or program-specific questions to SET.

7. Are there one or two questions in the standard SET questions that carry more weight in personnel reviews in your department or program?

- Yes
- No, all questions carry more or less the same weight

Q7a and Q7b are shown only if Q7=“Yes”

7a. Please specify the question(s) below:

7b. Please explain why your department or program finds those particular questions useful:

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Q8-8c are shown only if Q5 = “The standard 25 questions plus additional questions for all courses” or “The standard 25 questions plus additional questions depending on course.”

Department/program generated questions on SET

You've indicated earlier in the survey (question 5) that in your department/program the SET currently includes “[insert answer from Q5]”.

8. **How many** additional questions does your department or program add?

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6 or more

8a. **What topics** does your department or program ask about in the additional questions? Select all that apply.

- Questions regarding student learning
- Questions regarding course content
- Questions regarding course learning outcomes
- Questions regarding the learning climate
- Other, please specify: _____

8b. **What kind of questions** are these additional questions?

- Quantitative questions (scales)
- Qualitative (written responses)
- Both quantitative questions **and** qualitative (written) responses

8c. To what extent do you **prioritize additional questions** in relation to the standard 25 SET questions for personnel reviews?

- More important than the standard 25
- Equally important
- Less important than the standard 25

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Use of Quantitative SET Results

9. How does your department or program treat quantitative SET data from multiple courses for personnel reviews? (note: "compile" means performing calculations to summarize results across multiple courses)

- Does not compile quantitative SET data; each course evaluation is reviewed on its own.
- Compile for the entire review period by combining all courses taught.
- Compile for the entire review period by combining only the same courses taught.
- Other, please specify: _____

10. Please indicate how your department or program aggregates results from separate courses for a specific item (e.g., "Instructor fairness in evaluating students"):

- Calculate an overall percentage for a specific item (e.g., % of "excellent") across courses in the review period/year;
- Calculate an overall percentage for 2-3 responses for a specific item (e.g., % of "very good" and "excellent") across courses in the review period/year
- Calculate an average (mean) for a specific item across courses in the review period/year;
- Report a range from the lowest to the highest "percentage" or "an average score" for a specific item across courses in the review period/year;
- Other, please explain: _____

11. Please include any additional comments on **aggregating SET data** in the text box below (e.g., advantages/limitations, concerns, or suggestions):

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12. In evaluating the individual faculty's SET quantitative results, does your department or program have a target threshold (percentage, mean score, etc.), either formally or informally, that instructors are generally expected to meet?

- Yes. Please specify these target thresholds: _____
 No

13. Please select the different ways your department or program presents or prepares the quantitative SET results beyond the "Teaching table" required by CAP.

- Charts/graphs
 Tables
 Narrative summary of key findings
 Other, please specify: _____
 None of the above; only the Teaching table

14. Please include any additional comments on how your department or program uses the quantitative SET data in the text box below (e.g., advantages/limitations, concerns, and your suggestions for improvement):

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Use of Qualitative SET findings

15. How does your department or program analyze qualitative SET data (i.e., student written responses)?

- Read all responses without formal analysis
- Read to find specific key content identified by the department as of particular interest (e.g., students mention writing concepts in a writing class, students mention discriminatory practices, students complain or praise a specific textbook, etc.)
- Code responses to find overarching themes (based on frequency of responses)
- Count responses and create a percentage for a single course
- Other, please explain: _____

16. Do you include the qualitative SET findings in any of the following formats? (check all that apply):

- Narrative summary of the key findings in department letter
- Quote or paraphrase student responses in department letter
- Charts, graphs, tables
- Other, please specify: _____

17. Please include any comments on using the qualitative SET data (written responses) (e.g., how your department or program uses written comments, advantages/limitations, concerns, and your suggestions for improvement):

(End of Page 10)

Contextualizing SET Results and Findings

18. In personnel file letters, do you usually provide contextualizing information to accompany SET results and findings? (Check all that apply)

- Do not provide course specific context
- First time teaching course
- Number of times teaching the course
- Number of students in the course
- Number of non-majors in the course
- Number of majors in the course
- Developmental or gate keeping courses (e.g., ELWR-required writing courses, remedial math)
- Major course
- Non-major course
- General education course
- Innovation in pedagogical practices or format
- New course offering
- Other, please explain: _____

19. Please include any additional comments on contextualizing SET results and findings in the text box below (e.g., advantages/limitations, concerns):

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20. Has your department or program encountered bias in students' responses in SET?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q21 and Q22 are shown if Q20= “Yes” or “Not sure.”

21. In the space below, please describe the nature of bias.

22. Have you found that particular types of SET questions tend to elicit more bias than others?

- Yes
- No

Q23 is shown if Q22= “Yes.”

23. Please indicate which SET questions tend to elicit more bias.

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Progress: Changes in Faculty's Teaching over Time

24. During a personnel review, does your department or program consider changes (e.g., improvement) in faculty's teaching over time?

- No
- Yes, for all faculty
- Yes, for new faculty
- Yes, in some cases
- Other, please specify _____

25. To what extent does your department prioritize evidence of changes in faculty's teaching in personnel reviews?

- Not a priority
- Low priority
- Medium priority
- High priority

Q26 is shown if Q24= "Yes, for all faculty" or "Yes, for new faculty" or "Yes, in some cases" or "Other."

26. How does your department measure changes in faculty's teaching between two points in time? Select all that apply.

- Compare quantitative SET data
- Compare qualitative (written) responses in SET
- Compare teaching materials (e.g., assignments, quizzes, etc.)
- Use faculty self assessments (e.g., formative data discussed in file, Personal Statement or teaching philosophy)
- Compare teaching observations by other faculty members
- Use other sources, please specify. _____

27. Please include any additional comments on evaluating **changes** in faculty's teaching in the text box below (e.g., advantages/limitations, concerns):

(End of Page 13)

Student Response Rates

28. Is there a specific response rate threshold for the SET that your department considers necessary for adequate evaluation of faculty's teaching?

- No, we don't have a specific threshold response rate
- Yes, if it is below a certain percentage, we consider the course evaluation to be less meaningful

Q28a is shown if Q28="Yes, if it is below a certain percentage, we consider the course evaluation to be less meaningful"

28a. What "target" response rate does your department use for adequate evaluation in a given course?

- 75% or higher
- 66% or higher
- 50% or higher
- 33% or higher
- 25% or higher
- Other, please specify: _____

29. Does your department consider the response rate for the SET as another indicator of faculty's teaching effectiveness or overall course effectiveness?

- Yes, to a large extent (regardless of class size)
- Yes, to some extent (e.g. depends on the class size, overall ratings of the instructor)
- No, it is not an indicator

30. Please include any additional comments on using SET response rates as an indicator of teaching effectiveness in the text box below:

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Logistics of SET Administration

32. Currently, the SET is open for students to fill out from week 9 until the 1st day of finals week. Thinking about the time frame for students to complete the SET, from your perspective as Chair of your department, do have an opinion on which option below would be most effective in increasing both rates of return and quality of evaluations?

- Keep the time frame as it is
- Open in week 9 and close at the end of the finals week
- Exact open dates could be determined by individual department or faculty, but the window is fixed
- Other options, please specify: _____

33. Does your department recommend that faculty do any of the following practices to increase SET response rate? Select all that apply.

- Ask students to use electronic devices in class to fill out SET
- Ask students to meet in a computer lab for students to access and fill out SET during class hours
- Give extra credit
- Give other suggestions, please specify: _____
- No, we don't recommend any specific ways to increase response rates

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Proposed Shift in SET Framework

Currently the SET results and findings are primarily used summatively (i.e., to evaluate instructors).

34. As Chair, do you think that the **current SET** results provide useful information that individual faculty could use to improve their teaching?

- Yes, it provides specific enough information that may indicate areas needing improvement
- Yes, but only in a general sense (e.g., information is too general or ambiguous to indicate specific actions or areas needing improvement)
- No, it does not provide much useful information that can be used to improve one's teaching

35. As Chair, would you support a proposed **shift to a formative framework** (i.e., using online Student Evaluation of Teaching primarily to provide faculty with information they can use to improve their teaching and assess achievement of learning in their courses, as opposed to using it as the main evaluation tool for personnel actions)?

- No, I would not support
- Maybe I would support
- Yes, I would support

36. If the campus were to shift to a formative framework, as Chair, **what other measures of teaching effectiveness, within the context of APM guidelines***, do you think would be most effective **for personnel actions**? Please provide your thoughts and examples below.

*For the UC criteria for Appointment, Promotion, and Appraisal, please see pp. 4-5 in the [UC Academic Personnel Manual](#) (a new window will open).

37. Please share below any other information or thoughts related to SET and other ways to evaluate faculty for personnel actions and/or about the proposed shift to a formative framework.

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Evaluating Non-Senate Faculty

38. Does your department or program make any distinctions in evaluating teaching effectiveness of Senate faculty, continuing lecturers, and/or pre-6 lecturers for personnel actions?

- Yes
- No

38a. Please comment on any distinctions your department or program does and/or does not make between these service categories.

39. Please indicate what proportion of your department/program undergraduate courses are taught by Unit 18 lecturers?

- None
- Less than a quarter
- Quarter to a half
- More than half

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Thank you for completing this survey.

You will be able to access your survey to review and revise your responses even after clicking 'Submit ' below. To access the survey again, you will need to use the survey link provided in your email.

If you have questions regarding the survey administration (e.g., how to access your survey), confidentiality of your responses, data analysis and reporting, please contact IRAPS analyst at surveys@ucsc.edu.

Questions regarding the subject matter of the survey, data analysis and reporting may be directed to Matt McCarthy (mdmccar@ucsc.edu), Chair of COT.

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