

**Recommendations for the Development of
Course Evaluations
Assessment Resource Team, Antioch University
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As a learning organization, Antioch University is committed to the process of evaluating our practices and using those data to inform improvement in curricula and pedagogy. One particular area where we have consistently collected data is that of faculty instruction, although we have been idiosyncratic in our methods and somewhat uneven in our use of those data. The time has come for us to address this inconsistency and move toward generating useful information that we more regularly use to improve our practices.

The AU Assessment Resource Team (ART) shares with academic leadership the responsibility for improving Antioch University's methods and growing our culture of academic assessment. We have identified as one of our current priorities making the evaluation of instruction a more valuable element of our assessment process. ART's goal is to develop guidelines aligned with what research has shown to be the most effective way to use student ratings of faculty and courses and for those guidelines to become shared parameters across programs and campuses. Earlier in 2014 we submitted a white paper that presented a review of research on student ratings (their reliability, validity and usefulness) and proposed various principles that the Antioch University instruction evaluations should follow. The current document utilizes these guidelines and offers examples of prompts faculty and programs might use when developing their own unique instruments.

Collecting student ratings data must be characterized primarily as a way to answer questions that a faculty member or program want to address about the quality of student learning. Faculty can ask questions about the assignments they design or the methods they implement in order to reflect on these specific choices. Programs need to know more globally if their courses are moving students toward the right goals. Secondarily, program directors and other academic administrators may benefit from summary reports of student ratings to address questions related to quality assurance and faculty accountability. Therefore, the guidelines presented below provide opportunities for student ratings at three levels: campus or university level, program level, and individual faculty level.

In the main, core principles for student ratings at Antioch should be founded on the research consensus about good practice. What follows are ART's recommendations for course evaluation instruments developed for all Antioch programs, beginning in July 2015.

Campus/University Level

Campus or university-level ratings serve to provide insight into issues that we universally value. These are probably best characterized as questions focused on the integrity of our practices – such as whether or not faculty treat students fairly and with respect. These items can be used by faculty or members of academic leadership to confirm that Antioch walks its talk in terms of the student-centered nature of its instruction.

While flexibility and faculty/program ownership are essential, we do believe that a student ratings instrument should contain certain kinds of items, irrespective of discipline or profession. Therefore, one section of each course evaluation instrument **must** include the following:

1. One or more items linked to congruence of course with program goals and student learning outcomes;
2. One or more items linked to student accomplishment of course objectives; and
3. One or more items about instructor qualities such as fairness and respect for students, and the degree to which the instructor was responsive to student needs.

Examples¹ of items in required areas:

Type of Item	Example
Congruence of course with program goals/SLOs	1. This course helped me make significant progress toward the following program goals/SLOs: (<i>instructor specifies which program goals</i>)
	2. I developed specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field I'm preparing for [professional degree programs].
	3. I learned how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems [liberal learning outcome appropriate for all programs].
Student meeting course goals	Rate your progress on each of the following learning goals for this course [list]:

¹ Items used as examples here are from the inventory of items available from the IDEA Center's (ideaedu.org) student rating of instruction form. All items in that inventory have been subjected to rigorous pre-testing for validity and reliability. It is important to note that what is "valid" for use in one context may not be valid for use in another, so it is important for faculty and programs to ask, "Will information gained from this item be useful for course and program improvement?"

Instructor fairness	1. The instructor treated students fairly and respectfully.
	2. The instructor welcomed expression of diverse opinions from all class members.
	3. The instructor gave a fair assessment of my performance in the course.
Instructor feedback	1. The instructor provided timely feedback on student work.
	2. The instructor's feedback helped me learn.
	3. The instructor explained reasons for criticisms of students' academic performance.

Program Level

Academic programs have somewhat more targeted interests, often those tied to the learning goals articulated for students. An important type of student rating gives faculty a chance to see how well the curriculum is helping students develop the learning outcomes expected from graduates of the program. Anyone using this information should note that every course need not be geared toward every program-level goal or outcome. Program leadership should be able to use student rating data in the collective, determining if across the curriculum the students are being given the opportunity to move toward the outcomes expected of them. In a way, this is how students confirm the program's curriculum map.

Course evaluation content should be largely determined at the program level in order to answer the questions program faculty have about their courses and faculty. Queries about faculty qualities are important for programs to know that their faculty are providing the type of learning environment expected by the program.

Individual Faculty

The instrument developed by a program for course evaluation should have the flexibility for faculty members to add diagnostic questions of their own choosing, with responses to these questions seen only by them. Faculty members need the opportunity to query students about decisions they made, readings they chose, and strategies they tested. Faculty members can craft these types of formative questions uniquely for each time they teach the course so that they can address issues relevant to their current courses.

Examples of faculty generated diagnostic questions

The instructor:

1. Introduced stimulating ideas about the subject.

2. Inspired me to set and achieve goals that really challenged me.
3. Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter.
4. Encouraged students to share ideas and experiences with others whose backgrounds and viewpoints differed from their own.
5. Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning.
6. Related course material to real life situations.
7. Explained course material clearly.
8. Used assessments that covered the most important points of the course.

Next Steps

The Assessment Resource Team acknowledges that course and instructor ratings primarily address questions about the quality of student learning and instruction, and thus need to first and foremost serve the faculty of the university. Therefore, we submit these recommendations for evaluation and feedback from our faculty colleagues and academic leadership. Our hope is that by providing guidelines at the institutional, program and faculty level, we can increase the effectiveness of these methods for improving our practice.

Respectfully submitted,
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