



A Constructive Guide to Understanding Your GatorEvals Feedback

Welcome

The landscape of higher education teaching with varying learning environments (labs, clinicals, rotations, online v. face-to-face, seminars) and course contexts is complex. The University of Florida (UF), like many peer institutions, collects student feedback at various times and for different purposes throughout the semester. As such, members of the UF community recognized the need for a set of guidelines and recommendations for faculty, staff, and administrators related to student feedback of teaching and courses.

Faculty play a central role in the student feedback process. Additionally, academic administrators and IT staff play an important role in both the policy and technological implementation of this process. This guide highlights important practices, policies, tools, and resources related to UF's GatorEvals course evaluation system. The focus is on the midterm and end-of-course evaluations, including both the qualitative and quantitative results. For additional guidance, you may wish to review:

[1. GatorEvals central website](#)

[2. UF Center for Teaching Excellence website](#)

A Constructive Guide to Understanding Your GatorEvals Feedback

John Jordi, PhD | Research and Policy Analyst,
Center for Teaching Excellence, University of Florida



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Introduction

Information from student feedback remains an important tool for faculty, department/unit heads, and administrators in assessing instructional effectiveness and documenting student perceptions of teaching and learning experience in a course.

Students as stakeholders are uniquely positioned to provide feedback. However, student feedback should be one of many metrics used for evaluating an instructor's effectiveness. Conclusions from student feedback for the assessment of teaching should only be drawn from clear trends and patterns after reviewing all available data, and in consideration of context(s) (e.g., course type, curriculum/syllabi changes, class size).

Additionally, data should be used in conjunction with other sources of teaching effectiveness evidence such as peer evaluation of instruction, and consideration of participation in curriculum initiatives, innovative teaching strategies, portfolios, as well as personal and professional development. It is particularly important to consider other sources of data when

they are used for high stakes or human resource decision making such as for faculty promotion/tenure decisions, reappointment, and salary/merit increases.

Course evaluation data are valuable as a comprehensive diagnostic tool that helps identify trends in students' perceptions of teaching and experience in a course. Below are recommendations to help you interpret course evaluation feedback and use that data effectively to inform teaching and course planning.

Increasing Response Rates



Time

• On-Campus/Face-to-Face Courses

- Set aside 10-15 minutes at the START of class to complete the evaluation.
- Show students how to access evaluations via website, Learning Management System (LMS), or email.
- Remind students ahead of time to bring laptops/tablets/mobile devices to class.
- Add this time on the class calendar in syllabus, LMS, etc.

• Online Courses

- LMS integration.
- Post evaluation timeline in syllabus and modules in LMS.
- Send an announcement and/or email to students in LMS at the beginning of the evaluation period.



Opt-in to the Midterm Evaluation

- Faculty can opt-in to have students complete a midterm evaluation.
- Identify student concerns and areas for improvement.
- Share results and reflect with students on what faculty will and will not change as a result of their feedback.



Talk to Students About Importance

- Educate students about course evaluations.
 - What are they for?
 - Why should they care?
 - What should they keep in mind when completing an evaluation?
- Share how you have used previous student feedback to shape your course or instructional methods.
- Share examples of student feedback on items you might not change.



Monitor Response Rates

- If response rates are low:
 - Send students an email reminder to complete.
 - Send an announcement to your course in the LMS.

Constructive Feedback

A Student's Guide to Meaningful, Constructive Feedback

	Less Helpful/Vague	More Helpful and Actionable
	"The instructor was great"	"Dr. Smith was quick to respond to student questions and concerns. She fostered an environment that encouraged us to speak up and contribute to the conversation."
	"The instructor just lectured the whole time"	"In a 3 hour course, I would suggest taking a few breaks between the topics being covered. A little more time should be spent on interaction with the students with hands on learning and discussion."
	"The instructor was engaging"	"The instructor included multiple class discussions throughout class. They posed questions for us to grapple with and asked us to formulate how we would approach the issue."
	"Improve organization of the course"	"I never really knew what to expect when coming to class. The syllabus did not include an outline of what would be covered each week. The wording in the slides were unorganized and led to confusion on relatively simple topics."
	"Tests were not on what I learned"	"The content in course materials was very general or in some cases very specific. It was very difficult to know what topics to review for the upcoming exams. It would be nice to have a review guide that covered the relevant material to review."
	"The textbooks were unhelpful"	"The textbook did not appear to relate to the concepts covered in class. It would have been useful if the instructor highlighted the portions of the textbook that supplemented the content learned in class or included relevant problem sets or review questions. I appreciated that the instructor added journal articles and other shorter materials that enhanced what we learned in class."
	"The teacher really cared about the students."	"I really appreciated that the instructor always answered emails within 24 hours and never canceled their office hours. They also made it a point to learn all of the students' names and a little bit about each of us."

Understanding Qualitative Feedback

Qualitative (e.g., free-text, open-ended comments) feedback is a valuable source of insight into your teaching and course. Qualitative feedback should be considered in conjunction with quantitative data, as well as other sources of information.

Contextualizing qualitative feedback can be difficult. However, student feedback can provide rich insights into your teaching and course. Open-ended questions/comments should be considered a professional communication between the student and instructor.

Below are recommendations to help you interpret qualitative course evaluation data and use that data effectively to inform teaching and course planning.

Recommendations for faculty to consider:

1. Read all responses.

2. Organize feedback into themes, patterns, and/or categories.

- Comment Analysis Worksheet
- Note frequency of categories
- Focus on comments that are related to your teaching and course improvement.
- Determine a general trend for each category (positive or negative).
- Develop a plan to address any actionable item
- Consider the effort required to incorporate the change to the impact on student learning.

- In future terms, provide students with additional information to help them understand why you might not change a particular teaching strategy or course material.

3. Interpret comments alongside qualitative results.

- Note any consistencies or inconsistencies.
- Note items beyond your purview (e.g., timing, location, class length) and consider passing to those individuals in your unit who can use this information.
- Negative comments can be discussed with trusted colleague or appropriate member of the university staff.
- The Center for Teaching Excellence provides consultations and workshops.

Sample Comment Analysis Worksheet

The worksheet is intended for use by instructors and teaching assistants to make sense of student comments. Often multiple comments are related to the same category; for example, ten students may all make comments about the assignments being unclear. This is not really ten different comments but rather one comment ten times. The multiple mentions give it weight, but it is only one area that needs to be addressed for improvement.

Tips for Analysis:

To facilitate organizing the comments, we have created a table that identifies the categories for the questions.

- The Comments Analysis Worksheet helps organize student comments and make sense of the written data. The worksheet has been organized alphabetically in sections according to most frequently commented categories.
- Note any student comments that will help in interpretation.
- Indicate positive and negative comments.
- Record the frequency of comments surrounding each theme to help identify the areas where students felt most strongly.
- Add any personal notes that will help in the process of building on the feedback received.

Comments should be tracked according to the category(ies) they relate to and whether they are positive or negative. Note that one comment may contain multiple points related to different comment categories. Any comments that are particularly insightful or constructive should be noted.

Comment Category	Sample Positive Comments	Total +	Sample Negative Comments	Total -	Actionable Items
Overall Course or Instructor					
Assignments					
Organization and Structure					
Assessments					
Teaching Strategies					
Non Actionable Suggestions					

Understanding Quantitative Feedback

Measures of Central Tendency

Mean

Definition

The mean is the sum of the response levels divided by the number of respondents.

- It is calculated by adding up the scores of the responses and dividing the sum by the number of responses.

Scores	Calculation	Mean Value
3,4,5,5,4	$(3+4+5+5+4)/5$	4.2
4,5,6,6,4	$(3+5+6+6+4)/5$	4.8

Recommendation

- The mean may be affected by extreme scores or outliers, especially when there are few responses.
 - Look at the distribution of scores across the scale and clusters of student responses.
- Review differences in mean scores that are meaningful for your context.
- For scores that are consistently well below the department norm (e.g. one standard deviation or more), a closer review of the reasons for the scores may be warranted.
- Because student ratings yield numerical averages, there is a temptation to overestimate the precision of the averages that are presented. Small differences in individual ratings are typically not meaningful and should not be used as a basis for personnel decisions.
 - Reporting to only one decimal point, rounded.
 - Generally, differences that are less than .5 above or below the comparison mean on a 5 point scale should be regarded as functionally equivalent.
 - However, this may be scale dependent if a unit utilizes a larger scale.

Median/Interpolated Median

Definition

The median is the point on a scale that divides a distribution of scores in half.

Recommendation

- The median is the middle value of an ordered list of responses. For example, the median for the following set of responses 3,4,4,5,5 would be 4.
 - The median value for an even set of values is found by calculating the average of the central two numbers.
- To interpret the median, the value must be calculated based on the respective response scale.
- Interpolated median - adjusts the median scores slightly upward or downward based on number of ratings above or below the median.
 - Calculation Methods
 - University of British Columbia - <https://seoi.ubc.ca/metrics/reported-metrics/>
 - University of Michigan - <http://aec.umich.edu/median.php>

Understanding Quantitative Feedback Cont.

Measures of Variation

Standard Deviation

Definition

The standard deviation represents the distribution of the responses around the mean. It indicates the degree of consistency among student responses.

Recommendation

1. The standard deviation represents the degree of similarity among the students' responses. The standard deviation should be used in conjunction with the mean to provide a better understanding of the response data.
2. A small standard deviation typically reflects a high degree of consensus among the students.
3. A standard deviation for a question greater than 1 indicates relatively high differences of opinion; in such cases, comments can be particularly useful to help understand the variation. Should be determined locally and institution and unit level
4. NOTE - The standard deviation is not a good measure of spread in highly-skewed distributions, and should be supplemented in those cases by the semi-interquartile range.

Course Characteristics

Course Enrollment Minimum

Definition

Course enrollment refers to the active number of students enrolled in a particular course whereby a report is generated from their responses.

Recommendation

1. Courses for which the number of possible respondents to the instrument is so small as to make the results of limited statistical usefulness, such as any course where the number enrolled is less than or equal to 5.
 - a. Courses with the same instructor/multiple sections may be combined to ensure minimum enrollment is reached.
 - b. Student responses are not made available until after final grades are submitted.
 - c. Cross-listed courses (e.g., undergraduate/graduate taught in the same class) may be combined.

Understanding Quantitative Feedback Cont.

Sample Size and Confidence Intervals

		Class size				
Mean of Error Interval	Interpretation	1-25	26-50	51-100	101-200	200+
<±0.1	Very precise estimate	>90%	>80%	>80%	>60%	>50%
<±0.2	Precise estimate	>80%	>70%	>70%	>50%	>40%
<±0.5	Somewhat precise estimate	>70%	>50%	>40%	>20%	>10%
<±1.0	General estimate	>60%	>20%	>10%	>10%	>10%
>1.0	Very general estimate	<30%	<10%	<5%	<3%	<1%

Note: Adapted from University of Toronto's "Cascaded Course Evaluation Framework: Validation Study of the Institutional Composite Mean (ICM)."

- Note. Guidelines are based on a 95% confidence interval around the mean with margin of errors ranging from ± 0.1 to ± 1.0 , a standard deviation of 1.0, and correction for the use of a finite population.
- Response rates affect the relative precision of the observed/collected scores in their ability to estimate the score that would have been attained had 100% of students responded. Simply put, the higher the response rate, the more precise the estimate is.

Sample GatorEvals Report

Course number and title:	Summer 2022 Individual Instructor Aggregated TEST COURSE 2000		
Instructor:	Example Instructor		
	Courses Audience: 125	Responses Received: 105	Response Rate: 84%

University Core Instructor Evaluation Questions	Response Rate^{^^^}	Mean*	IM**	DPT Mean[^]	DPT IM^{^^}	College Mean[^]	College IM^{^^}
1. The instructor was enthusiastic about the course.	84%	4.95	4.98	4.73	4.87	4.67	4.84
2. The instructor explained material clearly and in a way that enhanced my understanding.	84%	4.77	4.90	4.55	4.79	4.51	4.76
3. The instructor maintained clear standards for response and availability (e.g. turnaround time for email, office hours, etc.)	84%	4.91	4.96	4.71	4.86	4.65	4.83
4. The instructor fostered a positive learning environment that engaged students.	84%	4.89	4.96	4.65	4.84	4.61	4.82
5. The instructor provided prompt and meaningful feedback on my work and performance in the course.	84%	4.74	4.89	4.56	4.80	4.50	4.77
6. The instructor was instrumental to my learning in the course.	84%	4.79	4.92	4.52	4.81	4.43	4.75
Overall***		4.84		4.62		4.56	

Sample GatorEvals Report Cont.

University Core Course Evaluation Questions	Response Rate ^{^^^}	Mean*	IM**	DPT Mean [^]	DPT IM ^{^^}	College Mean [^]	College IM ^{^^}
7. Course content (e.g., readings, activities, assignments) was relevant & useful.	84%	4.48	4.67	4.50	4.67	4.39	4.57
8. The course fostered regular interaction between student and instructor.	84%	4.24	4.29	4.28	4.51	4.12	4.30
9. Course activities and assignments improved my ability to analyze, solve problems, and/or think critically	84%	4.52	4.72	4.41	4.63	4.30	4.54
10. Overall, this course was a valuable educational experience.	84%	4.56	4.76	4.57	4.70	4.38	4.60
Overall***		4.84		4.44		4.30	

This sample report indicates the following:

- ***Mean:** The mean is the sum of the response levels divided by the number of respondents. The mean is calculated by adding up the scores of the responses and dividing the sum by the number of responses.
- ****IM (Interpolated Median):** The median is the point on a scale that divides a distribution of scores in half. The IM adjusts the median scores slightly upward or downward based on number of ratings above or below the median. To view how the IM is calculated, visit <http://aec.umich.edu/median.php>
- *****Overall:** The overall value for both the instructor and course sections aggregates the values for all questions in each section.
- **^DPT and College Mean:** Mean for these items are aggregated for courses of the same level in the department and college. Courses in the 1000 – 4000 are undergraduate, and 5000+ are graduate.
- **^^DPT and College IM:** Interpolated Median for these items are aggregated for courses of the same level in the department and college. Courses in the 1000 – 4000 are undergraduate, and 5000+ are graduate.
- **^^^Response Rate:** Response rate refers to the active number of students who completed the survey to the total number of active students enrolled in a particular section/course. “The closer this number is to the number of students enrolled in the course, the more likely the results are to reflect the overall perception of students in the course. Likewise, the fewer number of responses in relation to the number of students enrolled in the course, the less meaningful the evaluation results.