

Guidelines for using student feedback in faculty reviews

This document summarizes the procedures and principles that will guide FPC's consideration of the student feedback collected via the IDEA forms in faculty reviews. It also serves as a set of guidelines for faculty participating in departmental reviews. For practical information about working with IDEA itself, please visit the [Course Evaluation/IDEA Help Center](#) page.

General principles for reviewing student feedback

1. FPC recognizes that student feedback represents students' perceptions of their experience in a course. In that sense, it also potentially reflects the biases of these students (regarding gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, social class, sexuality, ability, etc.). Student feedback is biased to the extent that it is influenced by variables unrelated to teaching effectiveness. FPC reads student feedback carefully and contextually and takes seriously the responsibility to keep up to date on evolving research regarding the potential sources of bias in student feedback.
2. Student feedback is not an objective measure and will be considered as only one indicator of teaching effectiveness. During a faculty review, information about teaching quality comes from many sources. The instructors' own reflections on pedagogy in the professional activities statement is one of the most important. Other sources of information include: evaluations written by peers who have observed classes directly; comments from department colleagues relayed in departmental memos and letters; reports solicited from students and alumni (for promotion reviews); input from majors committees; and feedback from students reported on end-of-course feedback forms. Each of these sources has potential value and potential drawbacks; all need to be considered in context.
3. Student feedback will be reviewed chronologically (oldest to most recent) with the aim of identifying patterns and trends, including improvement in feedback after previous issues.
4. Student feedback will be used as part of an assessment of an individual faculty member's trajectory over time. Comparisons to other faculty (in the department, at the College, or in the IDEA database) are not appropriate in reviews. In the past, comparisons to department and college means were common, but research in this area increasingly warns against making these sorts of comparisons.
5. Feedback indicating problems with remote/hybrid instruction should not be dismissed but should be properly contextualized. The extent to which the issues are idiosyncratic to the remote teaching environment and pandemic circumstances will be considered.
6. In cases where student feedback may indicate problems with instruction, FPC will be interested to know the faculty member's interpretation of the student feedback, their response to it, and any plans for remedying perceived problems with instruction. The PAS and PAS discussion are appropriate vehicles for sharing this information with the committee. Mentorship or introduction to teaching resources may be in order.

Which IDEA form data will FPC review?

7. For each course, there are five tabs: summative, formative, quantitative, qualitative, and segment comparison. The qualitative tab shows students' narrative comments. The other four tabs provide different visualizations of the quantitative data. Users can see some of the same metrics in these different tabs, displayed in slightly different ways.
8. FPC will not review formative and segment comparison tabs because they are intended primarily for the instructor, who may, if desired, use this information for reflection and self-improvement.¹
9. FPC will consult the "Progress on Relevant Objectives" page in the Summative area in order to learn which learning objectives a faculty member has identified as essential (E) or important (I), but otherwise will focus attention on the data displayed in the **qualitative and quantitative** tabs.
10. Within the Quantitative tab are five sets of metrics, common to all instructors. FPC will review all this data, but when reviewing the section titled "Describe your progress on," FPC will focus primarily on the learning goals specified as essential or important by the instructor.
11. FPC will read all narrative comments displayed in the qualitative tab.

Principles for evaluating quantitative data

12. When reviewing data under the quantitative tab, FPC will prioritize examination of the overall distribution of responses rather than the mean. A mean score is sensitive to extreme values (i.e. 1) that pull it down. The spread of values across ratings categories offers more information about how the class (as a group) characterizes its classroom experience.
13. Research shows that faculty ratings tend to be favorable. However, when a distribution is normally distributed or trends negative, it usually indicates that a larger than the usual proportion of students perceive deficiencies in that area. This may or may not be a problem. In these cases, FPC will consider:
 - Is there reason to believe that this survey item is important in the context of the course? (e.g. relevant to this course/pedagogy, an area the faculty member identified as important?)
 - To what extent might bias play a role in explaining the distribution?
 - How does this piece of evidence compare with other indicators of teaching quality and effectiveness?

¹ The summative tab provides raw and "adjusted" data that attempts to reduce teaching to a single number, then compares the number to one of many databases (including the "IDEA database") to assign a color code (green, yellow, red). This is overly simplistic and not appropriate for the purposes of faculty reviews. The formative and segment comparison tabs provide data that is personalized to the course, based in part on "points of emphasis" selected by the instructor. They are meant as a starting point for reflection and self-improvement, not objective review.

14. Ratings that trend negative across many questions, courses, or semesters may indicate that students' expectations or needs are not consistently being met. Such trends will be explored to determine if a problem exists.

Principles for evaluating qualitative feedback

15. FPC recognizes that all faculty receive negative feedback some of the time. The committee will look for patterns and trends, both in particular courses and over time, striving to note areas of strength and accomplishment identified by students as well as any areas where reflection or adaptation may be in order to respond to negative comments.
16. FPC will be cognizant of novelty and negativity biases. While people tend to remember feedback that is unusual or negative, such comments should not assume undue importance. In most cases, isolated outlier comments will be discounted. However, there are times when even isolated comments merit serious attention, for example, when they convey experiences of bias, exclusion, or discrimination.
17. FPC will consider the extent to which comments may reflect the biases of the students writing them.
18. If there is a pattern of unusually negative feedback in a particular course or over a particular period of time, this may indicate that students' expectations or needs are not consistently being met. Such trends will be explored to determine if a problem exists.