

PROPOSED BEST PRACTICES FOR STUDENT OPINION FORMS

1. Follow the requirements stated in ACDEANINST 1531.12G in both the development and administration of Student Opinion Forms (SOFs).
 2. The SOF **should**:
 - a. measure the impact of the instructor's performance on the students, not ask for an evaluation of the instructor's performance.
 - b. offer at least one free-response field for students to respond to supplemental queries by the instructor.
 - c. have each question target a single rating item.
 3. The SOF **should NOT**:
 - a. ask students to judge instructors on aspects of teaching that are beyond most students' ability to assess accurately or objectively.
 - b. use a numerical rating scale.
 - c. have items predicated on the belief that any particular teaching method is the best under all conditions.
- In addition:**
4. Ask questions about the course, as opposed to the instructor, on a separate form, at a separate time.
 5. Consider the potential uses of the following question before posing: "Would you recommend the teacher?"
 6. Word carefully items relating to "timely feedback" and "availability for EI," as student expectations can vary widely.
 7. Use only appropriate, parallel and balanced scales when following Likert. Define every point on the scale.
 8. Include 15 or fewer items on the SOFs.

When **conducting Teaching Evaluation** consider the following guidelines:

1. Apply the same standards that are used in evaluating candidates for promotion and tenure (including information determined from the SOFs) when evaluating teaching as part of the annual performance evaluation.
2. Distill information from the SOFs in ways that emphasize the context, relative reliability, and subjective nature of the data and comments.
3. Do not compare SOFs between instructors teaching different courses.
4. Do not use SOFs as the only means for measuring teaching. Teaching evaluation should be based on multiple sources of data.
5. Never reduce the results from the questions to an overall average. Avoid reporting numbers.
6. Keep in mind that USNA sample pools are generally small and, therefore, lack statistical power.
7. Include self-reflections from the instructor on the student responses and on any aspects of teaching the course that might be relevant to evaluating teaching performance.
8. The design and use of the SOFs should avoid incentivizing instructors to relax standards or pedagogy for the purpose of increasing student ratings. Likewise, the SOFs should not be used for unduly penalizing instructors for well-intended experiments with new pedagogy that happen not to go well the first time around.

When distributing the SOFs to the midshipmen:

1. There should be a standard method for distributing, administering, and collecting the forms.
2. Most students need time to think and, preferably, dedicated time in class to get high response rates and thoughtful comments.
3. Separate the completion of the course feedback and instructor feedback forms to prevent students from conflating the types of information.

FURTHER GUIDANCE.**1. Follow the requirements stated in ACDEANINST 1531.12G in both the development and administration of SOFs.**

- a. The forms should not ask for information that can be considered PII.
For example, *student's name, major, CQPR, expected grade.*
- b. Students should be aware that completion of the form is voluntary.
- c. The instructor should not be in the room when students complete SOFs.

2. The SOF should:

- a. **Measure the impact of the instructor's performance on the student, not ask for an evaluation of the instructor's performance.** The form should measure student perceptions and reactions, rather than asking for an *evaluation* of teaching.

- **EXAMPLES OF EVALUATION TO AVOID:**

- *How would you rate this instructor compared to all other teachers you have had?*
- *Overall, how would you rate this teacher?*
- *Rank Instructor (circle one): Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor*

- **EXAMPLES OF RATING TO INCLUDE:**

- *The objectives of the course were clear. (select from a scale Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)*
- *The instructor was respectful of student opinions.*

The items on the SOF should measure specific aspects of teaching performance. The items on the SOF attempt to measure specific aspects of teaching performance to get the most useful feedback.

- **GOOD EXAMPLE:**

- *Were class discussions meaningful?*
- *The instructor inspired students to set and achieve challenging goals.*

- **POOR EXAMPLES:**

- *What do you perceive to be your instructor's attitude toward teaching?*
- *Your instructor nurtures the intellectual growth of the student in understanding the course material.*

The SOF should have items designed to identify generally accepted good teaching practices.

- **GOOD EXAMPLES:**

1. *Did the instructor conduct the class in a professional manner with the proper decorum?*
2. *The instructor modeled professional respect for others.*

- b. **Offer at least one free-response field for students to respond to supplemental queries by the instructor.** Afford the midshipmen the opportunity to write thoughtfully about the impact of the instructor. Solicit explanations/comments after every item to help understanding of the rating. For example, an instructor may want students to comment on their experiences with a new pedagogical approach used in the course for the first time.
- c. **Have each question target a single rating item.**
- POOR EXAMPLES:
 - *Your instructor promotes interest and enthusiasm for the material, is interested in the student's progress, establishes a dialog with students, helps students outside of the classroom. (Rated on a 1 (worst) to 5 (best) scale).*
 - *In presenting course material how organized was your instructor and how were complex concepts presented?*
3. The SOF **should NOT**:
- a. **Ask students to judge instructors on aspects of teaching that are beyond most students' ability to assess accurately or objectively.** The following are inappropriate topics, questions:
- i. Appropriateness of an instructor's objectives
 - ii. Instructor's knowledge of the subject matter
 - *Did the instructor demonstrate mastery of the course material?*
 - *Rate your confidence in the instructor's command of subject.*
 - iii. Currency and accuracy of course content
 - iv. Appropriateness and level of difficulty of the course and of the teaching and assessment methods used in its delivery
 - *My instructor for this course gave tests, quizzes, etc. that assessed knowledge regarding the most important points in the course.*
 - *Please rate the difficulty of the labs, projects, homework, quizzes, and exams.*
 - Consistency between course content/objectives and course's intended curricular role.
 - *Please comment on the subject matter of the course.*
 - *The instructor uses an appropriate combination of teaching skills to achieve course objectives.*
 - v. Quality and appropriateness of assessment methods
 - *Comment on your instructor's grading policies (clarity, fairness).*
 - *Comment on your instructor's quizzes, homework, exams.*
 - vi. Appropriateness of grading standards
 - *Please comment on testing and grading of student learning and work.*
 - vii. Overall rating of instructor or course (as in, "excellent, good, fair, poor")

The overall effectiveness of the teaching was: Excellent, good, fair, poor

7. **Use only appropriate, parallel and balanced scales when following Likert. Define every point on the scale.** Only use "Neutral" or "Don't Know" as a middle option if it has a specific meaning with respect to the item.

- i. POOR EXAMPLE: *response choices of "Not at all", "Met expectations", "Great", "One of the best" as the options*

Every point on the rating scale must be defined. Do *not* use a scale where only the end points are defined. With such a scale you can never be sure what the student is thinking when they pick a number.¹

- ii. POOR EXAMPLE: *"WORST 1 2 3 4 5 BEST"*

8. **The SOF should NOT solely rely on fixed response items.** Afford the midshipmen the opportunity to write thoughtfully about the impact of the instructor. Solicit explanations/comments after every item to help understanding of the rating.

Sample areas and questions that are important for feedback relevant to P&T and annual performance evaluations include:

Instructor Clarity and Communication

- The instructor explained course material clearly.
- The instructor presented course material in a manner that facilitated understanding.

Teacher-Student Interaction, Rapport, Accessibility

- The instructor created a respectful and encouraging class environment.
- The instructor communicated a positive and supportive attitude.
- The instructor was accessible to students.

Stimulation of Interest in Course and Subject-Matter

- The instructor communicated the importance and significance of the subject matter.
- I could see the relevance of most of what we were taught.

Feedback on Student performance

- It was clear to me what was expected in the assessed work for this course.
- The feedback on my performance helped me improve my learning.

Course Organization and Planning

- The course schedule allowed students to stay up-to-date in their work.
- Tests and projects covered the most important points of the course.
- This course was well organized.

Intellectual Challenge and Critical Thinking

- The instructor inspired students to set and achieve challenging goals.
- I felt sufficiently challenged in this class.

Course Difficulty, Workload

- This course required more work than most other courses.
- This course material was more difficult than most other courses.

Student Self-Rated Learning

- I have learned a lot from this course.
- This course helped me develop intellectual skills.
- This course helped me develop professional skills.
- I would recommend this course to other students.

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