



RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE  
COURSE AND TEACHER EVALUATIONS  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mandate of the Course and Teacher Evaluation Committee (CTEC) was to examine McMaster University's system for evaluating teaching in relation to instructional quality, instruction improvement and course and departmental/program administration as well as for the purposes of instructors' advancement through the tenure, permanence and promotion processes.

As part of its mandate and over the course of a two-and-a-half-year period, the Committee undertook wide-ranging consultations with the major stakeholders in the McMaster community and examined the academic literature concerning the evaluation of teaching and learning. Stakeholders expressed a number of concerns that led the Committee to conclude that the current system of Course and Teacher Evaluations is not serving the McMaster community nor the individual stakeholders as well as it should. The most significant concerns included the perceived lack of reliability in the current evaluation system (both systematic bias and lack of statistical reliability) as well as the limited information provided by the summative question for the tenure, permanence, promotion and other administrative processes and the overall use (or lack thereof) of the evaluation data.

Based on its consultations and research, the Committee recommends the implementation of a new and comprehensive teaching and learning evaluation process. This new evaluation process will require continuing action from the University involving four areas:

1. Policy, including the adoption of a new course evaluation instrument
2. Infrastructure
3. Governance structure
4. Communication strategy aimed at all members of the McMaster Community.

Based on this broad and extensive revision to the teaching and learning evaluation process, the Committee recommends the following measures be undertaken on an initial and immediate basis:

1. The adoption of a new policy on the evaluation of teaching and learning at McMaster;
2. The creation of a new teaching and course evaluation instrument based on a cascading evaluation system approach that incorporates university wide and common assessment (consisting of nine questions) as well as specific faculty, departmental, program and individual instructor selected questions;
3. The implementation of a range of specific measures detailed in this report to increase student response rates.

These recommendations represent the initial step in changing the teaching and evaluation system. Further work will be needed to address the remaining policy and other issues.

## Introduction

The Course and Teacher Evaluation Committee (CTEC) began its work in 2014 to explore, from both formative and summative perspectives, the role of student-completed course evaluations as well as the evaluations' role in the professional development of instructors and their use in CP/M and T&P decisions. The Committee also provided a vehicle for instructors, students, administrators and staff to provide input on the process and the status of course and teaching evaluations – an inclusive approach in keeping with the spirit of *Forward With Integrity*.

The CTEC met regularly with and heard from various members of the McMaster community – all of whom expressed at least some level of dissatisfaction with the current process used to engage students in the evaluation of teaching. Student leaders expressed that students felt disengaged from the evaluation process and often did not complete course evaluations because they believed their feedback was neither considered important, nor taken seriously. Some professors perceived the evaluation process to be biased, unreliable and in many cases unfair. Personnel committees were criticized for overemphasizing one or two summative data points during merit, tenure and promotion decisions. Administrators struggled to balance these views in light of institutional priorities to measure teaching effectiveness. Together, these conditions pointed to a course and teaching evaluation system challenged by concerns about fairness, credibility and trust.

The Committee also heard concerns about changing the culture of teaching and learning. Specifically, the Committee received suggestions to recognize and reward teaching through more nuanced and richer ways, to find ways of improving the peer evaluation of teaching, and to think of the wider implications on program and curriculum review driven by more evidence-based and effective teaching practices. Questions were also raised about clarifying expectations regarding the scholarship on teaching and learning from teaching-stream professors as well as existing limitations on the use of evaluation data for pedagogical research purposes. For a complete list of meetings and presentations from various stakeholders, please see Appendix I.

Other Canadian universities share many of these issues and concerns. Some have responded by drawing on best practice and evidence drawn from the literature that guides the design of an effective course and teacher evaluation system. Practically, effective evaluation systems involve four intersecting areas to create continuous improvement in learning and teaching. These areas are: (1) Policy; (2) Governance (3) Infrastructure and a robust (4) Communication Strategy.

The first domain lays a foundation based on a set of clear policies and procedures derived from principles, goals and responsibilities that engage all stakeholders. Administrative policies and procedures drive the operational systems used to implement and sustain good practices and provide the underlying framework for continuous improvement in teaching and learning across the institution. The second element is a governance model that encompasses operational systems that ensure the implementation and sustainability of the system. The third element is a reliable technology infrastructure. Finally, the fourth element requires that all stakeholders be engaged through a central communication strategy. Centralized and consistent communication is indispensable to the process of establishing cultural change at an institutional level.

While several elements of the four areas can be phased in, the areas are interconnected; weaknesses in any one of these four areas will undermine confidence and devalue the entire course and teacher evaluation system. This is why it is critical for all four areas to be adequately supported and resourced.

This report identifies three specific recommendations to begin the process of establishing a new system for course and teacher evaluations at McMaster University. The first recommendation focuses on a new University policy that describes the underlying principles and values. The second recommendation provides an evidence-based course evaluation instrument consisting of up to 15 questions. These questions include nine common institutional questions and up to six questions determined at the faculty and instructor levels. All questions will be drawn from a validated item bank. The third recommendation suggests changes to existing course evaluation practices to increase overall student participation.

This report also identifies basic frameworks for the remaining areas: governance, operational responsibilities, technology infrastructure, and communication strategies. These frameworks are not operational plans, so the Committee recommends that the Provost identify the appropriate individuals and/or work groups required to build brief reports or guides in each of these four areas in order to provide a level of operational detail not provided in this document.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Provost provided the CTEC with a strong mandate to make recommendations to enable the continuous improvement of teaching at McMaster, with a particular emphasis on innovation in teaching and learning. These recommendations were to be based on combining best practices, evidence-based research findings and broad University-wide input to develop pedagogical support mechanisms and make the most effective use of teaching evaluation data. The Provost also encouraged the CTEC to consider and pursue bold recommendations in order to better assess effective teaching and use information from the evaluation process to improve the quality of programs and student experiences in general.

## COURSE AND TEACHER EVALUATIONS COMMITTEE (CTEC)

The Committee worked in two phases. Committee members are listed alphabetically.

### Consultation Phase (January 2015 – November 2016)

- Arshad Ahmad, AVP Teaching & Learning and Director, MIETL
- Narayanaswamy Balakrishnan, Professor, Mathematics and Statistics
- Carlos Filipe, Professor & Chair, Chemical Engineering
- Greg Flynn, Assistant Professor, Political Science
- Hanna Holmes, Assistant Professor, Economics
- Anna Moro, Associate Dean, Humanities
- Alan Neville, Associate Dean, Health Professional Education
- Spencer Semianiw, MSU Vice-President (Education)
- Susan Searls Giroux, AVP Faculty (Chair)
- Sarah Symons, Associate Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Science

### Report Writing Phase (November 2016 – May 2017)

- Arshad Ahmad, AVP Teaching & Learning and Director, MacPherson Institute (Chair)
- Carlos Filipe, Professor & Chair, Chemical Engineering
- Greg Flynn, Assistant Professor, Political Science
- Anna Moro, Associate Dean, Humanities
- Alan Neville, Associate Dean, Health Professional Education
- Blake Oliver, Ryan Deshpande, MSU Vice-President (Education)
- Sarah Symons, Associate Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Science

The Committee is grateful to the many colleagues who presented their valuable insights (Appendix I). It is also indebted to the several directors of teaching and learning centres across Canada who provided reports and advice, including the framework from University of Toronto, which assisted significantly in the development of key sections of this report. Also, facilitation by Erin Aspenlieder and Amy Gullage from The MacPherson Institute and administrative support from Sylvia Avery and Cara Jane Dempsey was appreciated.

## TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

One of the underlying tensions in developing a common course and teacher evaluation framework at McMaster is the existing silos within departments, programs and faculties with little shared understanding or consideration of what effective teaching means. Deploying best practices to build a shared understanding requires opening new lines of communication for multiple stakeholders to engage and document existing practices. We also believe that it means encouraging flexibility in the evaluation system so that it is able to recognize diverse perspectives on approaches to teaching while also accommodating disciplinary distinctions and other differences.

As departments and programs take stock of existing evaluation structures and processes and develop transparent metrics to communicate what effective teaching means, there is a significant body of research to guide their efforts. The research findings identified in Appendix II provide an effective starting point for those conversations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report identifies three recommendations for immediate adoption as well as recommendations that will require additional thought, research and reports to provide context and the details required for their implementation.

### Initial Recommendations

1. Adopt the policy described in this report (page 6) on course and teaching evaluations.
2. Adopt a cascading system to develop a total of 15 items in the course evaluation instrument. This is comprised of nine University wide questions (Appendix III) and up to six questions drawn from a valid question bank by faculties and departments as well as individual instructors. Access to a valid item bank and related requests for data, its security, storage and other concerns are addressed in item 1 below.
3. Implement the suggestions made to *Increase Student Response Rates* by raising awareness about course evaluations and adding required information on course outlines (Appendix IV).

### Subsequent Recommendations

1. Create the Provost's Guidelines on Course and Teacher Evaluations to include the following:
  - a) Governance and responsibilities
    - Institutional (system administration, reporting functions, training, etc.)
    - Faculty/Departmental (guidelines, reporting, data verification, etc.)
    - Shared (transition, timing, etc.)
    - Data (access, requests, opting out, security, storage, retention, etc.)
  - b) Infrastructure
    - Selecting Database: technical capabilities, anonymity, credentials, permissions
    - User interface: laptop, tablet, smartphone
    - Response times: accessibility, browsers, operating systems, hardware
    - Automation to collate, tabulate, quantitative and qualitative analysis
    - External vendor

2. Create a culture change by developing robust central communication strategies across the University to:
  - a) Faculty (all instructional positions)
    - Underlining the importance of the evaluation of teaching
    - Communicating transparently what teaching effectiveness means
    - Establishing guidelines for using course evaluation data for course development and pedagogical research
    - Communicating the importance of faculty engagement with the course evaluation process, particularly to students
  - b) Students
    - Working with students as partners to provide valuable input
    - Alerting students to possible areas of implicit bias
    - Interpreting course and teaching evaluation data when available
  - c) Administrators
    - Communicating transparently how hiring and personnel committees will use data to evaluate teaching effectiveness
    - Establishing procedures that enable course evaluation data to be available for program review development and pedagogical research
    - Identifying specific provisions in the Yellow Document and CP/M to address concerns raised by faculty, students and staff highlighted in this report and in Appendix I
    - Open new communication channels to address ongoing issues related to any/all aspects of course- and teacher-evaluation processes

As part of the communication strategy, a short guide for each stakeholder group (faculty, students, and administrators) should be created to gather rationale, best practice, FAQs and resources.

## POLICY ON COURSE AND TEACHER EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Course evaluations are part of McMaster University's comprehensive teaching evaluation framework that includes regular peer review, instructor self-assessment, the use of teaching portfolios, cyclical program review and other forms of assessment, as appropriate. As part of this framework, course evaluations are a particularly useful tool for providing faculty and students with an opportunity to provide feedback on their own learning experiences. Course evaluations are also a means to promote accountability and transparency. Responsibility for this policy would rest with the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic.

McMaster University recognizes the need to conduct course evaluations for the following reasons:

1. To provide instructors with formative information to continuously improve their teaching.
2. To provide students with information about instructors and courses at McMaster.
3. To provide summative teaching evaluation data as partial input for administrative purposes such as annual merit, tenure and promotion review.
4. To provide data used by departments and faculties for course and program review.
5. To provide a database of course information for continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this policy document is to outline the principles and considerations that guide the evaluation of courses at McMaster University. The specifics of how the course evaluation process will be executed in particular contexts will be outlined in the Provost's Guidelines on Course and Teacher Evaluations. The Provost's Guidelines will provide additional details on the administration, use and interpretation of course evaluation at McMaster. Additional Faculty Guidelines developed at the faculty level will indicate the specific approach taken to course evaluation within an individual faculty. The actual course evaluation instrument will include institutional questions, Faculty/Department questions and instructor-selected questions. This policy, and the Provost's Guidelines on Course and Teacher Evaluations, form McMaster University's institutional course evaluation framework.

### **Principles**

McMaster University's institutional course and teacher evaluation framework should:

1. Gather information from students about their learning experiences.
2. Provide opportunities for both formative and summative feedback on teaching. Formative refers to both time –when the course is ongoing as well as improvement, whereas summative refers to the end of the course and is associated with evaluation.
3. Reflect institutional teaching and learning priorities that combine best practices and evidence-based research findings.
4. Recognize the diversity of teaching priorities and strengths across the institution.
5. Be equitable, consistent and transparent in the collection, use and interpretation of data.
6. Protect the anonymity/confidentiality of student respondents.
7. Provide reliable and meaningful data to instructors, administrators and students.
8. Provide guidance to department, program chairs and administrators on aspects of instructor feedback and course evaluation processes.
9. Consider multiple sources of information including course evaluation data and other relevant items in a teaching portfolio in order to schedule, assign and allocate courses.
10. Ensure the course evaluation instrument is statistically robust.
11. Encourage faculty to innovate and take risks without penalizing their tenure and promotion progress.
12. Support pedagogical research to improve evidence-based approaches that can be applied at McMaster University and in broader academic communities.

## Responsibilities

The McMaster University community acknowledges the importance of formative feedback, summative evaluations and peer review of teaching as critical processes in enhancing the University's courses and programs.

- **The Institution**—McMaster University has a responsibility to oversee the implementation of this policy and provide education as well as support to students, instructors and administrators about the use and importance of teacher and course evaluations.
- **Our Faculties**—Each faculty has a responsibility to develop its own guidelines that are aligned with the institutional frameworks.
- **Administrators**—The dean/chair/principal/director is responsible for reviewing course evaluation data including quantitative and qualitative data, as available, as one component in assessing teaching effectiveness and in understanding the guidelines for interpreting course evaluation data. They are also responsible for ensuring that a robust peer evaluation system is in place within their areas of supervision and that it is part of the overall system for evaluating both courses and teaching.
- **Instructors**—All instructors are responsible for understanding the role of formative feedback and summative evaluations at McMaster University; explaining the importance of both forms of feedback and evaluation to students; reviewing their own instructor feedback and course evaluations regularly; discussing these results with their department/faculty head and including the required paragraph in course outlines on course evaluations as per the undergraduate course management policies (See Appendix IV for guidelines).
- **Students**—Have a responsibility to participate thoughtfully in the formative and summative evaluation processes by providing constructive feedback and recognizing the importance of giving feedback and course evaluations as an opportunity to influence the quality of their experience in both current and future courses.

## Formative Feedback

Every course instructor is responsible to conduct formative feedback each time a course is offered. Support for this type of activity is available centrally (e.g. through the MacPherson Institute) and within some faculties, (e.g., FDA in Engineering; PFD & CASCADE in Health Sciences). Each instructor shall determine the nature of the formative feedback inquiries to be made with students, including consideration of both course delivery and course content and the overall student learning experience. Once instructors receive the formative feedback, they may elect to release this data to academic administrators and/or to students.

## Summative Evaluation

Each course will be assessed on a summative basis each time it is offered but could be waived in certain exceptional circumstances. Faculties will make provisions for obtaining student feedback by alternative means in courses of an individual/independent nature (e.g. independent study courses, music studios, practica) or courses with very small enrolments as defined by each faculty. In courses with teaching assistants or multiple instructors, evaluations will also assess the individual contributions of each of the members of the teaching team.

Summative course evaluation data will not be released until the official approval of final grades. Summative evaluations will be available to:

- **Instructors**—will have full access to all quantitative and qualitative data from course evaluations conducted in each course they have taught. Quantitative data will be made available publicly unless the instructor opts out for a given course and semester. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the institutional-based questions will normally be made available to the McMaster University community in keeping with the purposes of this policy.
- **Academic Administrators**—will have access to data except from instructor-selected questions.
- **Students**—Students will normally have access to numerical data and/or written comments unless they have opted out of the process.

## **Peer Review of Teaching**

According to a recent literature review (Thomas et. al., 2013) the Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) is an effective strategy to kick-start transformational reforms across disciplines and cultures within an institution, especially if this is done collaboratively through the use of teaching portfolios. The same literature review identified a number of confounding factors including the thin line between consensus and conformity in agreeing to the criteria that constitute effective teaching as well as the training required for PRT skills.

McMaster stakeholders agreed that the policy in this area as expressed in the “Yellow Document” is adequate, but the implementation and interpretation of the policy is an area where there are striking differences of practice between departments and from faculty to faculty. In concert with new guidelines for the interpretation of student course evaluation data, The MacPherson Institute should take a lead to developing similar appropriate guidelines.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

The Committee encountered a great deal of common ground in the educational literature, in consultations with other institutions, and in its engagement with the McMaster community. For example, a universal challenge with course and teacher evaluations is the tension between global institutional priorities/interests and local practices which vary considerably from one department/faculty to another. This tension can be resolved by adopting a cascading system of valid questions starting with a common core and adding more that are selected by faculty/departments and instructors.

More importantly, course evaluation data are valuable only if they are used within a broader framework of the evaluation of teaching. Cherry picking one or two data points from the course evaluation instrument is insufficient to assess teaching and often trigger concerns about fairness, credibility and trust. The Committee has responded to these concerns by encouraging more training for those engaged in the process of evaluation and the use of data to inform a more sophisticated assessment (see next steps below). Additional steps that can be implemented right away have also been suggested.

One of these steps is to strongly encourage formative practices. Formative data provides valuable feedback for instructors to take immediate action so students can benefit before the course is completed. This practice is one of the most important determinants of increasing student response rates.

Student response rates are also influenced positively by short questionnaires, as most students will participate in several formative evaluations throughout the course and will be completing five or six questionnaires in a short time frame just before preparing for final assessments. This explains the limit of 15 questions – nine common questions and up to six additional questions from faculty/departments and instructors.

Finally, an effective course and teacher evaluation system must simultaneously consider four areas that this report has identified, including the adoption of the policy outlined in the report and the simultaneous creation of mechanisms for responsible governance, technology infrastructure and communication. While elements of each of these areas can be phased in as outlined in the implementation plan below, the functioning of the entire system must guide each of the elements. Weaknesses in any one of these four areas can undermine confidence and weaken the entire course and teacher evaluation system. This is why it is critical for each domain to support the other so that McMaster University can realize the benefits of continuous quality improvements in teaching and learning.

The CTEC recommends that a task force/working group be set up to implement recommendations. Such a task force should include members critical for the implementation from the perspectives of infrastructure, governance and communication.

## APPENDIX I—COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### Meetings and Presentations:

- January 26, 2015—Consultation Committee members
- February 23, 2015—Rafael Kleiman, MUFA President
- March 11, 2015—Deans Feedback at Provost’s Council
- March 17, 2015—Rodrigo Narro Perez, VP, Education, MSU
- March 31, 2015—Del Harnish, Faculty of Health Science
- April 30, 2015—Spencer Nestico-Semianiw, VP, Education, MSU
- July 21, 2015—John Bell, Humanities Media & Computing
- September 11, 2015—Denise Chalmers, Visiting Professor, University of Western Australia and Mick Healey, Visiting Professor, University of Gloucestershire
- September 14, 2015—Consultation Committee members
- November 23, 2015—Consultation Committee members
- December 4, 2015—Consultation Committee members
- December 15, 2015—Consultation Committee members
- January 28, 2016 – Barb Bloemhof, Chief Steward, Unit 2, CUPE
- March 22, 2016—David Wilkinson, Provost
- April 28, 2016 – Peter Vilks, Assistant Professor, DeGroot School of Business
- June 1, 2016 – Krista Madsen, Assistant Professor, Kinesiology
- October 5, 2016—Torgny Roxa, Visiting Professor, Lund University presented to PC
- November 30, 2016—Reporting Committee members
- February 14, 2017—Reporting Committee members
- March 1, 2017—Chair met with MUFA membership
- March 15, 2017—Reporting Committee members
- April 5, 2017—Reporting Committee members
- April 12, 2017—Reporting Committee members
- April 17, 2017—Reporting Committee members
- May 4, 2017—Reporting Committee members
- May 15, 2017—Reporting Committee members

In general, the presentations highlighted comments in the following key areas:

- McMaster University Tenure and Promotion Policy
- Peer review of teaching
- Program and curriculum review
- Culture of assessment
- Student viewpoints
- Teaching practices
- Scholarship on teaching

The McMaster community has clear concerns that need to be addressed as part of the implementation, and has indicated a strong organizational readiness for change.

## APPENDIX II—TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

### Complexity

Entwistle (2010) provides an excellent overview of influential theories and models of teaching effectiveness in *Taking stock: Research on teaching and learning in higher education*. He substantiates what is widely accepted – that effective teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects, about teaching practices and about how students learn. He reiterates the current view that teaching effectiveness is contextual and grounds this in conceptions of learning outcomes and “ways of thinking and practicing in the discipline or professional area” (p. 4). Still, there is a disconnect between what is practiced and what is known to identify and evaluate teaching effectiveness.

There is, however, agreement in the literature that guides our general concepts of the approaches, behaviours and traits of effective teachers (Knapper, 2010, 2013). These points of agreement provide a starting point for individuals and groups within departments and programs to articulate, contrast and shape their conceptions of what effective teaching means today and how this might change and develop over time.

### Key Findings

Effective teaching is universally accepted to embody several principles. These are best articulated in one of the most widely cited documents by Chickering and Gamson (1987) and include: encouraging contact between students and faculty, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning; giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

Generally, effective teachers move away from a traditional focus on the transmission of facts, heavy emphasis on content, and assessments that encourage students to engage in surface approaches and rote learning characterized by superficial understanding (Biggs, 1987; Biggs, Kember, Leung, 2001, Marton, 1976). Instead, effective teachers engage in learner-centred teaching which encourages students to engage in deep approaches to learning characterized by more critical thinking, self direction, integration and intrinsic motivation (Marton & Sääjö, 1997).

Much has been written about learning-centred teaching (Barr & Tagg, 1995) which shifts the focus from the teacher to what the students do, recognizing the importance of prior learning, intellectual development, etc. See, for example, the influential work of Dewey (1904/1965), Perry & Smart (1997) and Vygotsky (1978).

There is a vast array of literature supporting effective teaching strategies including inquiry-based approaches (Justice, et. al, 2009), problem-based learning (Neufeld et al., 1981; Woods, 1983; Jenkins, 2007; Neville & Norman, 2007), service-based learning (Boyer, 1996; Ward & Lisa, 2000) and case-based learning (Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994). Also see, for example, meta-analyses that find a positive effect of teaching strategies on academic achievement (Prince & Felder, 2006; and Springer, Stanne & Donovan, 1999). Another recent effective teaching strategy is associated with threshold concepts in the discipline, which transform the student’s prior understanding of the subject. By focusing on these thresholds, which are also described as “portals” or “transformative waypoints”, instructors can create a context in which student learning can be significantly accelerated (Land, Meyer & Smith, 2008; Meyer & Land, 2006).

## APPENDIX III—INSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS

### Introduction

We propose to use the model used at the University of Toronto, a model that provides for a set of universal questions that reflects the overall teaching and learning priorities of the entire institution. In the McMaster implementation, nine institution-wide questions will be used for every section of every course offered, regardless of faculty, school or department. The Course and Teacher Evaluation Committee (CTEC) developed these questions. These questions begin every course evaluation form, and are seen by every student in the institution.

Following the institution-wide question, the survey forms will cascade to as many as three questions that are specific to a particular faculty/ division and/or department. The dean or central committee of any faculty, seen only by students in that faculty or division, and used to gather faculty- or division-specific data, will develop these questions. Finally, the survey forms will cascade to as many as three questions specific to a particular instructor and selected by instructors to be answered only by students of that instructor. All questions are drawn from a validated question item bank.

This model combines the benefits of both a centralized and decentralized approach, satisfying the need for consistent institution-wide data, while collecting more granular information from each different division, department and instructor. It provides for both global and local concerns and strikes a fine balance between institutional and local teaching and learning priorities.

### Validated and Reliable Questions

The course evaluation administration must create and maintain a master list of every item allowed on any course evaluation, commonly called an “item bank”. Any faculty, department, or instructor can submit new items, but every item must be thoroughly examined and validated before being added to the bank. This ensures that every item at every level aligns with assessment principles for valid results. For example, any double-barreled, inconsistent, or unclear questions must be revised or discarded, either by the course evaluation team or by outside experts who can help with this task.

The literature points to many best practices for creating an effective item bank. For example, if the assessment priority is for students to provide information on the extent to which the institution’s teaching expectations was part of their learning experiences, the items should then be expressed as declarative statements. Students should be asked to what extent each item was part of their learning experience (i.e. not at all, somewhat, moderately, mostly, or a great deal). Using response scales that correspond directly with the intent of the assessment priority has been shown to generate far better data than asking students to simply agree or disagree with a set of statements (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). Of course, all of this takes time and expertise. Any institution looking to save time on their implementation, while ensuring that all items are thoroughly validated, can explore licensing an existing item bank, rather than reinventing the wheel at much higher cost.

## **Institutional Questions**

Using the five-point scale below, indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements that evaluate your course and instructors.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

1. The instructor made the subject interesting
2. Overall, I found that the quality of instructor's teaching in this course was excellent.
3. Course projects, assignments and tests and/or exams provided an opportunity for me to demonstrate my understanding of the course content.
4. Compared to other courses, I found the workload for this course to be challenging.
5. Overall the quality of my learning experience in this course was excellent.
6. I would recommend this course to another student.

### NOTES:

- The total number of questions should not exceed 12 questions plus an open-ended "Please feel free to make any additional comments" section at the end.
- Up to three questions are to be determined by the faculty/department as common to all their courses and up to three more questions may be selected by the instructor on a per-course basis. This will allow instructors and programs to address questions of particular interest for each course.

## APPENDIX IV—INCREASING STUDENT RESPONSE RATES

### Findings

Relevant educational literature identifies a number of strategies that have proven to be effective in increasing student response rates in course and teacher evaluations:

1. Persuading instructors and administrators about the importance of course evaluations
2. Persuading students that their recommendations will be acted upon
3. Persuading students that their feedback will inform course and instructor changes
4. Demonstrating implementation of feedback by using mid-semester evaluations and making changes based on feedback
5. Making numeric results of evaluations available to students
6. Explaining how the institution uses feedback from evaluations
7. Asking instructors routinely to share how past feedback has informed their decisions regarding texts, assignments, format; doing so throughout courses
8. Using incentives for participation as a last resort only after exhausting other approaches such as dedicating time in class, providing examples of past changes based on evaluations, using formative feedback and announcing response rates
9. Explaining how different class sizes require different response rates to be meaningful – see table from the University of Saskatchewan report:

<b>Margin of Error</b>	<b>Class Size</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
+/- 10%	25	20	80% (20/25)
+/- 10%	50	33	66% (33/50)
+/- 10%	100	49	49% (49/100)
+/- 10%	200	65	33% (65/200)

A commonality in the discussion of student response rates from other universities and colleges that have changed their course evaluation process is that student engagement with the evaluation process is heavily dependent on instructor engagement. Even strong communication campaigns directed at students cannot overcome any perception of apathy among instructors.

### Recommendation 1—Course Outlines

Subject to approval from Senate, the Revised Undergraduate Course Management Policy re. course outlines should include the following paragraph:

“Towards the end of this course, you will be invited to complete an online course evaluation form. The evaluation consists of a set of questions about the effectiveness of the course and its instruction in the context of your learning experiences. Student feedback is a valuable part of ensuring that the pedagogical quality of courses remains high across the University. We request that you take part in evaluating all courses that you are taking and respond thoughtfully to the questions. Your answers will be anonymous and will be used for course improvement and instructor evaluation purposes.”

## **Recommendation 2—In-Class Information**

To support a better understanding of the importance of course evaluations, each instructor is encouraged to use a slide deck that will address the following questions to be reviewed in five minutes and/or posted online for students. The slide deck will be part of the communications strategy developed centrally.

1. What course and teacher evaluations involve?
  - a) Screenshot of accessing system
  - b) Screenshot of typical evaluation form
  
2. Why do we evaluate courses and teachers?
  - a) Evidence-based teaching
  - b) Improvement, flexibility and inclusivity
  - c) Enhanced course and better teachers
  
3. How is course and teacher evaluation data is used?
  - a) Instructor feedback and career progression
  - b) Course improvement
  - c) Quality assurance
  - d) Institutional data
  - e) Need a substantial response rate so that results are significant
  
4. How is course and teacher evaluations benefit you?
  - a) Opportunity to comment
  - b) Open results mean you can make better-informed choices of courses
  - c) Community participation
  
5. What are we really evaluating?
  - a) Notions of quality of teaching
  - b) Warnings of bias
  - c) Professionalism
  - d) Space for instructors to give examples of how they've used evaluations, possible discussion of changes made this year

## **Recommendation 3—Suggested Room Protocol**

This protocol has been found to be effective in increasing online student response rates at other institutions:

1. Announce that a particular class will include a brief time to conduct course evaluations and ask students to bring a tablet, laptop, phone or device that allows them access and ensure the classroom has Wi-Fi.
2. Set aside 15 to 20 minutes at beginning of class, preferable during a 'peak attendance' day.
3. Instructor/TAs introduces course evaluation and leaves class.
4. Appoint student to tell Instructor/TAs when to return.

## APPENDIX V—REFERENCES

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