

REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE ONLINE STUDENT RATINGS SYSTEM

(Prepared by the Office of the Provost, February 1, 2006)

THE INSTRUMENT

CONCERN 1: Several questions have no validity because two questions are asked but only one response allowed.

The AY04-05 committee was concerned about the length of the questionnaire and put closely related items together. The Senate voted to accept the questions.

Current choices:

- accept existing double-barreled questions, or
- split into 2 questions, or
- delete those questions and replace them with others.

IT is prepared to change the wording at any time; however, they suggest making such changes between semesters so that the instrument does not change mid-stream.

CONCERN 2: There are too few questions about an instructor's performance to draw any conclusions about an instructor's ability to teach and promote learning.

An AY04-05 committee recommendation was passed on to the AY06 committee, which, in September 2005 recommended 11 questions relating to instructor performance.

Current choices:

- consider replacing the existing questions with the questions proposed by the committee
- make the proposed questions available as optional questions for selection in UAS Online

NOTE: The Univ of Washington paper forms had ~10 questions about instructor performance, ~10 questions about the course design/delivery, ~8 questions about student's involvement in the course, and ~3 global questions about the instructor and course.

The Faculty Senate subcommittee proposed to have a library of "model" questions to assist faculty. IT is prepared to add this functionality to the current system once the change has been approved and model questions are drafted.

CONCERN 3: Programs should be able to add their own questions for all courses offered in that program.

This was the original intent of the Senate in AY04. In AY04 and AY05 the Senate passed: a standard questionnaire to include questions about the instructor, core competencies, technology (as possibly influencing instructor ratings), library + program-specific section.

The questionnaire is currently designed to accommodate a set of program-specific questions.

Current choice: a program can implement the addition of a set of questions for all courses it offers.

Additional functionality was added to the system during the Fall 2005 semester to support this effort. Faculty or program support staff may now duplicate settings and questions across multiple courses using the "import" tool in UAS Online.

CONCERN 4: There should be questions about a student's involvement in the course to gauge their level of commitment to the course.

An AY04-05 committee recommendation was passed on to the AY06 committee, which, in September 2005 recommended adding a single question at the top of the questionnaire:

"How would you rate your involvement in this course (interacting with the instructor and classmates, doing assignments, completing course-related work)?" LowHigh

Current choice: Consider adding this question or variant(s).

Perhaps this could be addressed with the model question library.

CONCERN 5: If I add questions to the questionnaire, they get added at the end. I don't think students will persist long enough to complete the questionnaire if it's too long, and I want to be able to add questions to the instructor performance section instead.

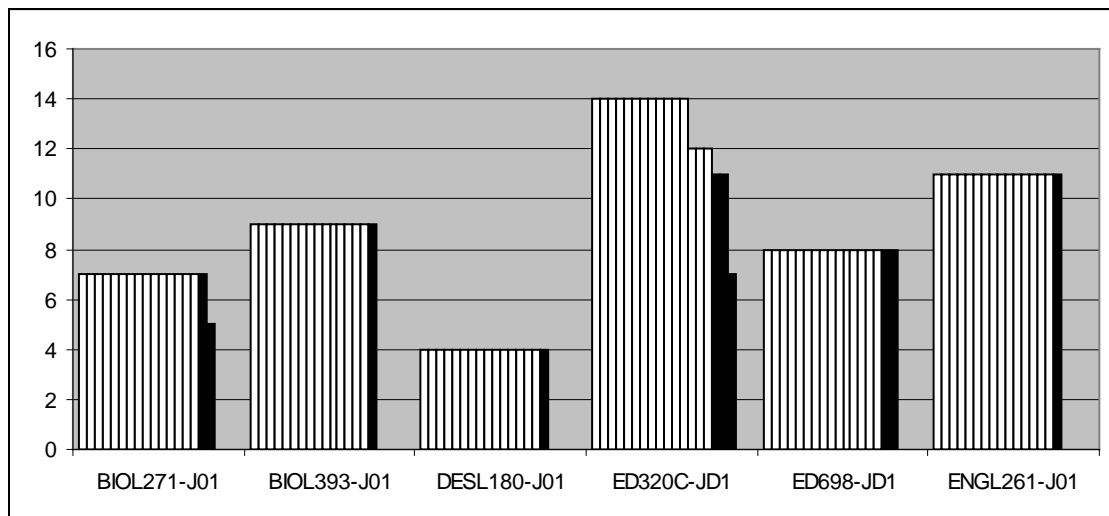
If there is variability in the numbers and types of questions posed in the instructor performance section, this would affect the reliability of the instrument.

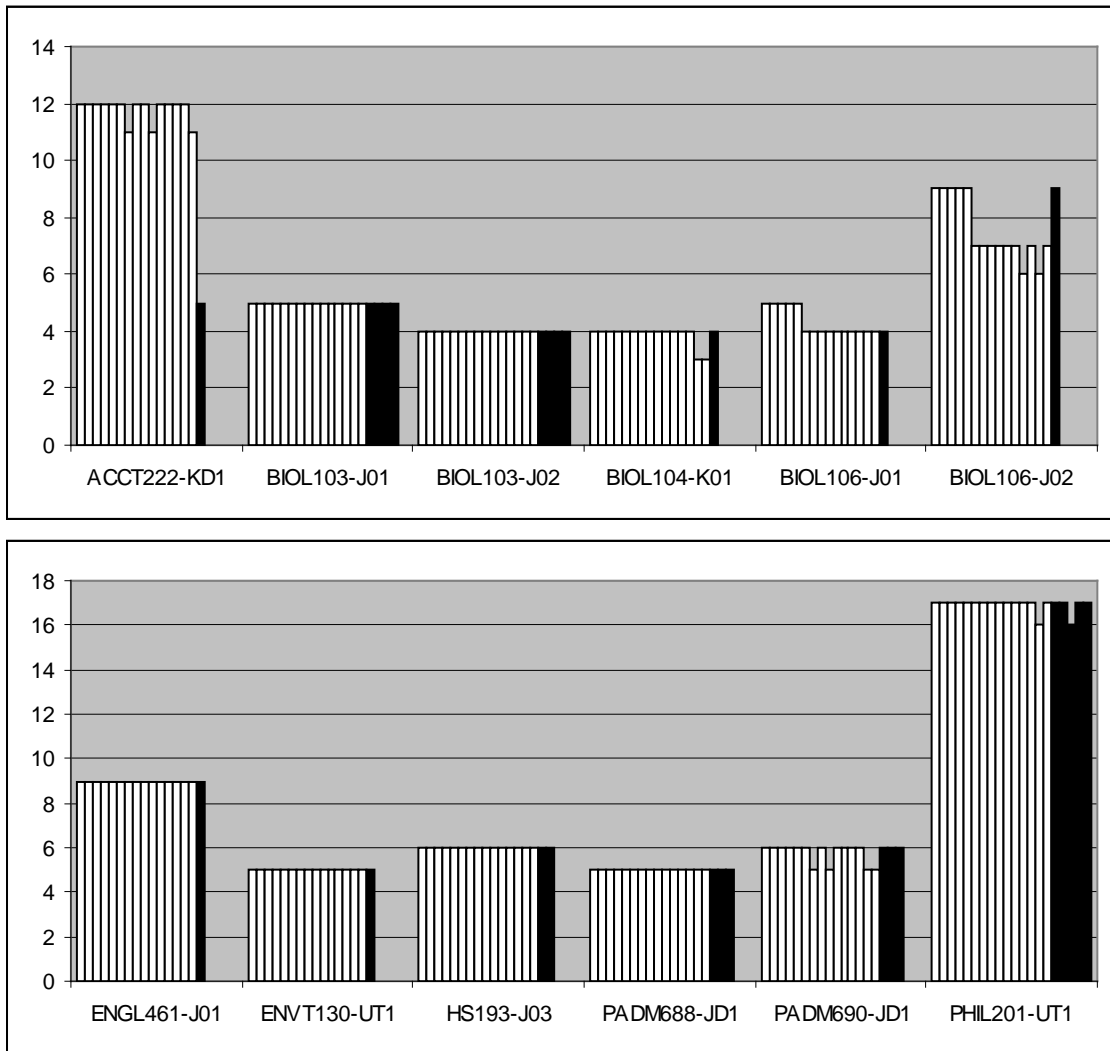
If instructor-added questions were melded with standard instructor-performance questions, reports could not be generated which extract the instructor-added from the standard questions. Consequently, all questions appearing in the instructor performance section would go into a faculty member's employment/review file.

Current choices:

- Place instructor-added questions immediately after the current instructor performance section.
- Should instructor-added responses be included in faculty evaluation files?

Persistence is a serious instrumentation concern. To analyze this question, IT pulled the data from the Spring 2005 courses that included supplementary questions. The graphs below illustrate the number of responses per question. The light bars are the standard questions and the dark bars indicate the additional questions. The results indicate that students consistently answer questions at the end of the survey.





CONCERN 6: If I add questions once, I want them to reappear automatically in the course questionnaire the next time I teach that course.

This functionality already exists and has been implemented at faculty request.

This concern is similar to the desire for “program” questions. The “Import” capability can be used by faculty to carry forward questions from prior semesters.

CONCERN 7: Many of the currently used core competency questions are irrelevant for my course, and rather than using the N/A option, students assign low ranks to questions that they feel are inappropriate. I want to be able to remove questions that I feel are irrelevant to my course.

The AY06 committee considered this option and decided that:

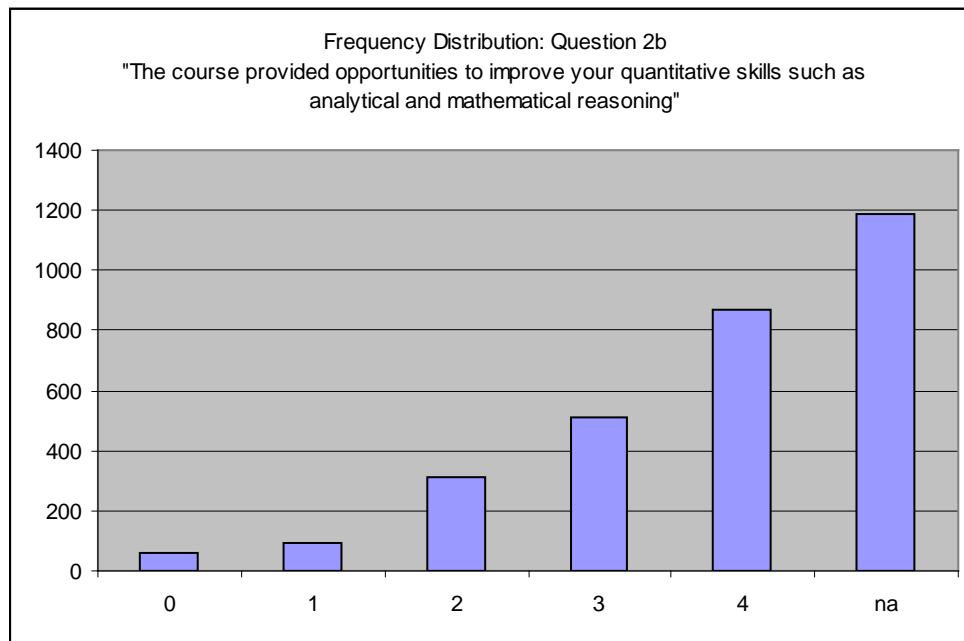
- results of the core competency questions do not necessarily have to go into a faculty member’s file (at Senate’s discretion) but are included for the benefit of programs
- low ratings on the core competency questions do not necessarily reflect on an instructor’s performance
- adding instructions about the N/A choice would suffice

In September 2005, the committee recommended adding a statement:

“The following items address the UAS core competencies. Please respond with ‘Not Applicable’ to those you believe were not relevant to this course.”

Current choice: Consider adding the above-mentioned statement or variant(s) to the questionnaire.

This concern is difficult to quantify; however, it is possible to analyze if students are using the “NA” option. The following graph illustrates the frequency distribution for Question 2b. The graph indicates that a plurality of students felt that this question did not apply to their course.



The form does not instruct students when to use the NA option. It has been suggested to add wording to the form to clarify this.

CONCERN 8: The rating scale should be 1-5 instead of 0-4, since responses are compiled as numerical values.

Rating scales on the University of WA paper forms varied depending on the questions asked: 0-5 (very poorexcellent), 1-7 (much lower.....much higher), 1-4 (slight.....extensive)

Changing to another scale at this time would necessitate insertion of a disclaimer in employment/review files indicating the change and the effective date.

Current choice: Change the rating scale to 1-5 from 0-4 and add a disclaimer to faculty employment/review files.

Numerical values do not appear on the survey instrument. Students are presented with a range of “radio buttons” between two statements.

Example:

6	Critical Thinking	strongly disagree						strongly agree
	This course forced me to think about things that I would not normally otherwise think about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		

Numerical values do appear on the summary reports. These values range from zero to 4. This practice is consistent with both the previous University of Washington instrument and the grading values we assign to our students.

CONCERN 9: The current instrument is used to accomplish an excessive number of tasks, inhibiting useful information reflecting *faculty* effectiveness (I.T. Services, Library Services...).

The instrument was conceived to accomplish the tasks of collecting student ratings of faculty effectiveness as well as the effectiveness of IT and library services because data are needed for both reviews of faculty performance (BOR and accreditation requirement) and improvement of academic support services (accreditation requirement). The intent was to be efficient and effective in the collection of data while not over-surveying students who already participate in other surveys: Your First College Year, College Student Inventory (biannual), National Survey of Student Engagement (biannually).

Current choices:

Should the questionnaire only include instructor-performance questions?

If so, what other instruments could collect information efficiently and effectively about students' awareness of

- core competencies
- technology
- library resources and services

If so, when and how should additional surveys be administered to reveal correlations with courses and programs?

This concern appears to be based on the concern above regarding persistence. Students appear to be willing to complete all questions on the survey, including any additional questions provided by faculty.

QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTRATION

CONCERN 10: The default evaluation period is too short/too long. The instructor should be able to determine when the questionnaire becomes available and for how long.

The current default length is eight days. This length was selected in order to diminish the impact of opening dates falling on weekends. Faculty are able to reduce or expand the duration; however, they are not currently able to make the period shorter than five days. The following table summarizes the current behavior:

Course Length	> 10 weeks	> 7 Weeks	<= 7 Weeks
Default Start	3 weeks before end	2 weeks before end	1 week before end
Default End	Start + 8 days		
Earliest Start	4 weeks	3 weeks	Second Day
Latest End	1 week before course end date		
Shortest Duration	5 days		

CONCERN 11: Some students complain that they didn't know about the questionnaire until after it was no longer available to them as registrants in a class. During finals week, they ask for access to the online questionnaire.

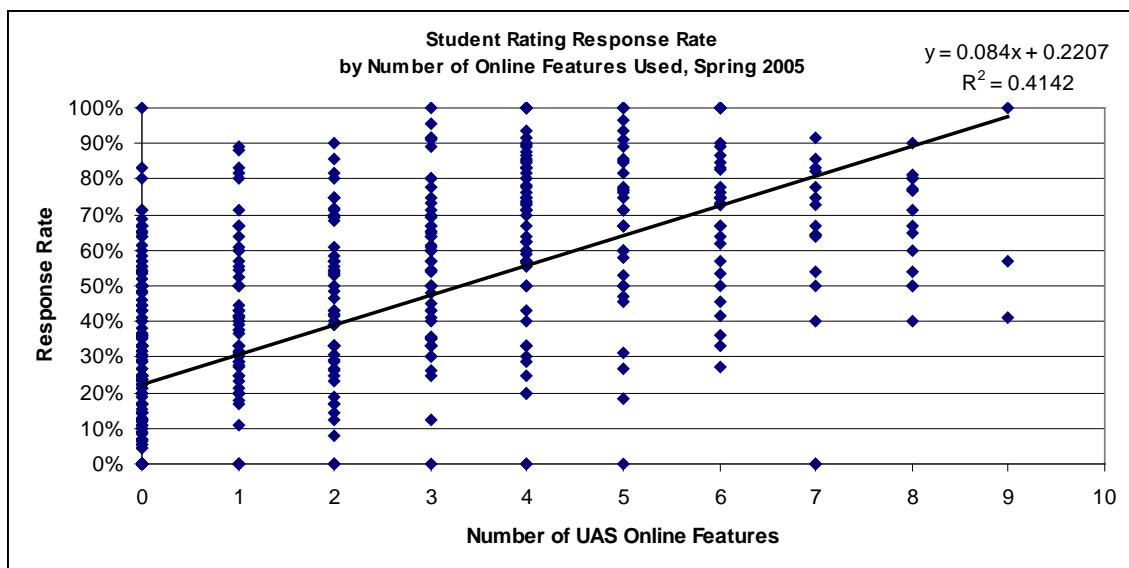
The current prohibition during finals week is a hold-over from the paper process. IT is ready to change this limitation, pending a consensus recommendation to do so.

CONCERN 12: Laptops or spaces in computing labs are not available at times when I want students to complete the online questionnaire. I get poor participation in the process when I just tell students to go online at their convenience.

Reserving class time to complete collect student ratings can help to raise response rates. However, many classes are achieving high response rates by repeatedly encouraging students. There will never be sufficient campus facilities (laptops, labs, etc.) to make this the norm.

CONCERN 13: I am at a disadvantage because students in my course don't need to use computers to complete their work. I get poor participation in this evaluation process because students aren't used to going online and don't know where to go.

This was a fundamental concern when UAS began collecting student ratings online. The current system has been built with a number of features to address this potential problem. The overall impact may be measured by comparing the number of online features used and the response rate:



While there is a trend line which supports the concern, the data do not fit the trend line very well. The correlation is very weak, and classes using the most features begin to show a lower response rate.

CONCERN 14: Email reminders are sent to students' UAS-assigned email address, but many students do not use this address and fail to receive the reminder.

The issue of using email for official correspondence is of great concern and has resulted in the following notice in the student handbook:

Official University Correspondence via Email

Email is an important tool and is considered an official form of communication at UAS. University-sponsored email accounts are provided to all students, faculty and staff and are recognizable by the address @uas.alaska.edu. The UAS IT Helpdesk can provide you with assistance accessing your email through the web or with University provided email software.

If you wish to have your email redirected to another email address (e.g. MSN, AOL, or Hotmail), you may do so, but at your own risk. UAS faculty and staff expect that you will check their email regularly and take responsibility to assure that you receive and read time-critical University communication.

The reminder to complete evaluation, however, is not sent to the UAS email address. Email reminders are sent to the preferred email addresses supplied by the student. These may be the student's UAS account, but in many cases it is not.

CONCERN 15: Students who haven't shown up to class in weeks are still notified about the availability of the online questionnaires. My results are skewed by a few malcontents who rarely attend class.

Access to the survey is restricted to students currently enrolled in class. Faculty are encouraged to review their class rosters and the survey tool to ensure that it is accurate. If students have stopped attending, faculty may have them removed from the class list using the faculty initiated withdraw process.

CONCERN 16: Students should have incentives to complete the online questionnaires.

Incentives may encourage higher return rates. Research in this area indicates that publishing rating results is a powerful incentive.

CONCERN 17: Faculty members should have instructions available to show them how to add questions to the questionnaire, change default settings, access their results, etc.

The faculty handbook should be the authoritative source for some of this information. An email reminder is sent out to faculty and to students to explain the system. These messages contain links to the online pages. (See sample below.)

In addition, the faculty reminder now contains an FAQ that attempts to address some of these concerns. This FAQ could be expanded if more detail is needed.

XXXXX,

Course evaluation is scheduled to start in one week. The course evaluation system allows you to adjust the start and end dates, release of evaluation results, and add supplementary questions. However, once evaluation starts, only the end date may be modified.

Please take a few minutes to review your evaluation settings and the list of evaluators. Please notify IT Services if you have any discrepancies. You can review your evaluation settings using the Instructor Tools for your course in [UAS Online](#). If you wish, you can go directly to the course evaluation settings:

[Introduction to Old School Disco](#)
[Advanced Apple Peeling](#)

FAQ:

Q: How do students know when to evaluate?

A: Faculty are responsible for notifying students about course evaluation. As a supplement to faculty notification, an e-mail reminder is sent to students on the first day of evaluation. They will also receive a second email reminder two days before the end date of their evaluation.

Q: How do students access the form?

A: Once evaluation has started, students access the evaluation form through their UAS Online course homepage. For convenience, students may access the evaluation by clicking on the link in their email.

Q: How secure is the system?

A: Students must sign in with their computer account to take the evaluation. Only students on the official roster may submit a response, and the system will not allow students to submit more than one response. Finally, once submitted, students may not change their responses.

Q: How is it confidential if we can track who responds?

A: The system will track if a student has submitted a form; however, the evaluation response is not stored with this information.

Q: When can I see the results?

A: Evaluation results are available two weeks after the course ending date.

Q: What will people see if I provide access to summary results?

A: The system will provide descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for each question. However, the system will not release any narrative comments or individual responses.

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

CONCERN 18: The output should include not only means and standard deviations but also frequency distributions.

Frequency distributions were provided during the pilot of the online system. Some faculty had requested that the reports be streamlined, so these details were removed. IT is prepared to replace these statistics if there is a consensus to do so.

CONCERN 19: I only want data on the instructor-performance questions to go into my employment file. The other questions (skills, I.T., library) and comments don't reflect my performance and shouldn't be there.

At the direction of the Senate, it would be possible to generate reports from the online course evaluations in separate sections:

- instructor performance
- skill development

- IT
- Library
- instructor-generated questions
- program-generated questions

with each report having a defined distribution associated with it.

As with the Univ of WA paper forms, the default for custody of instructor-specific data is set to be the instructor, his/her supervisor (Dean/Director), and the Provost, EXCEPT for Adjunct and Term faculty, whose reports are sent to Deans and Chairs, who may share the data with program faculty. Otherwise, only composite data at the program level is currently available to anyone else.

Current choices:

- Affirm the current default for custody of data.
- At Senate direction, ask programs to determine the default for reporting instructor-performance ratings – instructor-only or among program faculty.

IT is prepared to modify the reports. At present, reports are provided to the Dean and the Provost.

CONCERN 20: An instructor should have the option of making his/her ratings available to students alongside other instructors' ratings, so students can use that information to choose courses.

The functionality could be implemented to make the instructor-performance data available publicly (e.g., in an Excel spreadsheet available at a website for consultation by colleagues, Chairs, students), but *only* if the instructor changes the default setting, which is currently the instructor, his/her supervisor (Dean/Director), and the Provost.

Current choice: Ask IT to implement options for making reports available at the instructor's discretion.

CONCERN 21: The data - numbers of courses/sections and respondents, response rates, ratings - for each academic program should be available from year to year, so we can see how our program compares with others.

The Provost and IT are currently working on making this data available.

These capabilities can be added to the system if there is a decision to do so.