

**Faculty Council Task Force On  
The JMSB Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire**

Members:

Arshad Ahmad (Committee Chair, Finance), Tracy Hecht (Management), Kelly Gheyara (Accounting), Raafat Saade (Decisions Sciences & Management Information Systems), Brent Pearce (Part-Time, Marketing), Moncef Lemdasni (CGSA), Stephanie Ciotti (CASA), Olivia Rovinescu (CTLS)

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## Background & Summary

It has been over ten years since the previous Task Force submitted recommendations to Faculty Council to overhaul course evaluations. At that time, significant progress had been made as Concordia University subsequently adopted 8 questionnaires from 72 that were in use. In addition, the Faculty of Commerce & Administration reduced the number of questions from twenty-nine to the sixteen that are used today.

Like other assessment instruments, course evaluations are a work in progress. They have been used in universities for over 40 years, and are one of the most common tools used to assess teaching (Wright 2006, Seldin, 1999). However, they continue to be controversial and highly debated. Since all faculty members have expertise in teaching, it is not surprising that almost everyone has strong opinions on appropriate measure(s) for evaluation.

Our task force recognizes that data gathered from course evaluations is, in and of itself, incomplete to make evaluation decisions. It must therefore, be supplemented by other evidence suitable for the exercises that are used. Using other evidence is especially important in light of practices where data from a single question or two is used as a proxy for teaching effectiveness, which, by all accounts, is multidimensional.

Although the work of this Task Force began with a request to consider appropriate questions for online courses and to explore recommendations for improving low student response rates, we soon realized that attending to these issues in isolation was problematic.

A comprehensive document published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2008), suggested significant changes in course evaluation practices. We felt compelled to revisit our existing course evaluation not only because of what we learned from best practices in other universities, but also because most issues are inter-related which must therefore consider the purpose of the instrument and what the data are typically used for.

Like other progressive universities, we feel it is time to clearly separate the dual purposes that course evaluations serve - for personnel decisions *and* for teaching improvement. If these two purposes and their use is mixed in practice, it is not surprising that both faculty members and students shy away from the important role they can play.

In this document, we discuss our mandate and scope of work, share our discussion and findings, suggest 7 questions and one response scale that would improve current practice and offer 16 recommendations that we hope will be adopted and implemented in a timely manner.

We do not pretend to have devised bullet proof questions nor feel that our recommendations are comprehensive, but instead believe that JMSB can set a good example by moving in the right direction. In the spirit of continuous quality improvement, we hope other faculties will follow our lead.

We thank Faculty Council for this opportunity and respectfully submit our report for your consideration.

## Mandate & Scope

### Faculty Council

Following a discussion on lower student response rates arising from online course evaluations initiated a year and a half ago (**Appendix A: JMSB-2008-07A-04**), and a request to approve course evaluation questions for online courses (**Appendix B: JMSB-2008-07A-14**), the Council struck this Task Force on November 7, 2008. It is comprised of representatives from all departments, graduate and undergraduate students, and the Director from the Center for Teaching and Learning.

The mandate of this task force is to consider the above documents as well as any related issues that would improve the course evaluation process. The Committee was also encouraged by the President of CUFA and the Vice-Provost, Teaching & Learning, to be mindful of the Collective Agreement and to consider the implications of changing questions that may be helpful to other Faculties at Concordia.

### The Collective Agreement

The pertinent **Article 14.01.4** states:

"A teaching evaluation questionnaire approved by the relevant Faculty Council shall be administered in all courses. All aggregate statistical information generated from them for members shall be submitted as a part of the teaching dossier. The Provost and the President of CUFA shall agree on four questions common to all evaluation questionnaires".

We learned that there are 8 different questionnaires currently in use across faculties at Concordia (3 in Arts and Science; 1 in Engineering; 1 in Fine Arts; 1 in JMSB; 1 for Part Time and 1 in Continuing Education). While these evaluations share similar questions including three global or "overall" questions that aim to measure comparable aspects, there are also differences in the categories and number of questions (See **Appendix C**).

### The Main Uses of Teaching Evaluations

As the issues began to multiply, the Task Force kept its focus on the main uses of teaching evaluations. According to a recent summary of the literature on course evaluations (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2008), by a wide margin, course evaluations are used for *summative*, as opposed to *formative* purposes.

*Summative* refers to the use of course evaluation data that is part of the evidence used to assess teaching effectiveness in personnel decisions including hiring, promotion, merit and tenure. *Formative* refers to data that is intended to improve teaching and course development.

The committee felt that the course evaluation should make this important distinction apparent in the revised instrument. Furthermore, the new instrument was guided by the principle of standardizing summative questions while encouraging departments to select appropriate formative questions. We defer the discussion of formative questions later in this report.

## Discussion

The Task Force exchanged several emails amongst its members, solicited comments from a national Forum for Teaching & Learning in Higher Education ([STLHEL@LISTSERV.UNB.CA](mailto:STLHEL@LISTSERV.UNB.CA)), contacted several Directors of Teaching & Learning Centers across Canada, and held 3 face to face meetings (minutes are summarized in **Appendix D**).

As the minutes highlight, the Task Force felt strongly that the faculty should use one course evaluation irrespective of the course platform, modality, or intensity of technology used for instruction. Since all courses, offline or online assume an active role of the instructor and since all courses strive to increase student learning, the same (summative) questions should be used to evaluate teaching effectiveness and learning. We therefore advocate that these questions should be *common across all courses* offered at Concordia University.

One questionnaire would serve to increase consistency in evaluation exercises across departments. It would also provide valuable information for comparative assessment of learning exercises. Equally important, students would most likely find it easier to use the same criteria to judge the same constructs that underlie effective teaching irrespective of courses they take. Although these summative questions reflect student perceptions of multidimensional aspects of teaching and learning, there is strong support in the literature that their use provides helpful information for evaluation purposes.

According to Cashin (1995), there are six elements that commonly appear on evaluations if they attempt to capture the central aspects of effective teaching. These elements include questions about: 1) course content; 2) instructor's communication skills; 3) student-teacher interaction; 4) course difficulty and workload; 5) assessment practices in the course; and, 6) student self-assessment questions.

More recently, the University of British Columbia has implemented six common questions, administered online, that are mandatory for all assessment exercises across the university. In an analysis report presented to the Provost at UBC in March, 2008, these (six) summative items tapped into central aspects of effective teaching and learning and were sufficiently comprehensive to provide an adequate assessment of the important facets of instruction (See Executive Summary of this report in **Appendix E**).

The Task Force was also attentive to psychometric properties of questions, which are not only easily understood by students, faculty and other users, but should also be constructed in a manner so that they can be inspected for reliability, consistency, and validity.

Taking these concerns into consideration and mindful of the various course evaluations in use at Concordia, we developed 7 summative questions that we feel can be used in personnel decisions including hiring, promotion, merit and tenure. We emphasize that data gleaned from these questions by themselves do not suffice in capturing all aspects of effective teaching and learning. This data must be used in conjunction with other evidence deemed appropriate for such evaluation exercises, such as teaching portfolios.

## Seven Summative Questions & One Scale

Having consulted several questionnaires used across Canada and especially the ones used at Concordia, we selected seven summative (global) questions. These questions deliberately avoid the instructor's personality traits, teaching behaviours, and other formative aspects of teaching and learning.

As mentioned earlier, each of the following seven elements tap into central aspects of effective teaching and learning which are multidimensional by nature. Students are asked to rate these elements by making holistic judgments based on their experience in a given course.

We have tried to use language that can be easily understood by students and kept the number of questions sufficiently short. This also allows students to better discriminate amongst questions. Considering that most students will rate multiple courses in a relatively short period of time, fewer questions are more likely to elicit thoughtful responses.

All of the questions use one response scale which is easier for the user than multiple scales common in existing questionnaires. Similarly, the interpretation of results is significantly improved by using a common scale.

### QUESTIONS:

Overall,

1. this course has been:
2. the instructor has been:
3. my learning has been:
4. communication of the course content has been:
5. the grading has been:
6. the student-teacher interaction has been:
7. the teaching methods have been:

### RESPONSE SCALE:

- 1 = Excellent
- 2 = Very Good
- 3 = Adequate
- 4 = Poor
- 5 = Very Poor

## Formative Questions

As mentioned earlier, course evaluations are also used for formative purposes, the goal of which is to improve the quality of teaching. It is not surprising that when evaluations are used for such developmental purposes, positive changes can result in increased student learning (Barnett & Matthews, 1997; Aleamoni, 1999).

Moreover, the literature is clear in emphasizing the importance of making this purpose clear to students who then value the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback that will result in improved teaching and a better course (Giesey, Chen & Hoshower, 2004; Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002).

Students on this Task Force not only echo these findings but emphasize that much of the apathy in getting them to participate stems from not knowing what faculty do with their ratings and the widespread perception that no matter what they say, nothing is likely to change.

Furthermore, faculty are aware that there are profound differences among courses, modalities, integration of technologies, class sizes, and a host of other situational factors that make many of the standardized questions inapplicable and sometimes meaningless in the evaluation exercise. Similar arguments about real differences in teaching and learning practices across departments are also common and in many cases supported in the educational literature (Abrami, 2001; Marsh, 2007). In fact, many faculty members have resisted the validity of course evaluations because both summative and formative aspects were being standardized in one instrument.

While it may be appealing to design separate instruments for formative purposes, an inconsistent implementation of untested formative questions may create more problems than it is intended to solve.

Considering these challenges, we propose that a given Department or equivalent unit is in the best position to choose appropriate questions that will reflect the developmental aspects its members regard as important. Accordingly, each Department is encouraged to select formative questions from a pool of valid/reliable questions that will be identified by CTLS. In addition, there is room in the questionnaire to include questions from individual instructors who may feel that additional items should be included to reflect unique aspects that may enhance their practice and student learning.

We have not explored specific inventories of formative questions that we understand are available, but feel this step requires a more decentralized approach than we are able to offer given our mandate and timeline. On the other hand, we hope that these formative questions will not be more than 5 or 6 in number so that the entire questionnaire is not seen to overwhelm students. The questions could, however, change over time as circumstances warrant.

## Student Response Rates

The cost effectiveness and efficiency of administering evaluations online provides significant advantages which have been considerable in our brief experience at Concordia. For example, some 250,000 pieces of paper are saved annually, as well as time spent on distributing, collecting, scanning, typing, etc. As well, data is processed quickly and more customized reports are made available including macro data on how students generally rate courses, programs departments, etc. Also, online evaluations do not use up class time and some studies have found that qualitative responses provided in online forms are more extensive (Donmeyer et al, 2004).

The primary concern of course evaluations administered online relates to response rates. While some of the response rates that were provided in **Appendix A: JMSB-2008-07A-04**, appear disconcerting, initial analysis at IITS that covers a longer period is revealing. Overall, Concordia's response rate of about 59% so far is higher than other universities in this initial phase. Furthermore, the average ranking of Faculty is not significantly different compared to past paper evaluations. Finally, several institutions report an increase in the response rate over time if there is a concerted strategy to encourage students to participate in the evaluation process.

The Task Force spent some time discussing ideas which would (1) promote and create awareness of course evaluations; (2) improve communication with students; and (3) adhere to keeping the summative and formative aspects distinctive and easy to complete.

Specifically, we suggest that the following be considered:

- Include a statement in the course outline that stresses the importance of the course evaluation in making a difference in personnel decisions and course development.
- Whenever possible, report to students specific changes that have been made in the course as a result of past evaluations.
- Assure students that their comments will remain anonymous. A message from the Office of the President or Provost might reiterate the importance of course evaluations and that student responses will remain anonymous.
- Get students attention by communicating directly via student email addresses which provide a link to their portals to complete a particular evaluation(s).
- Expand Concordia's successful sustainability campaign to emphasize the part students are playing when they participate in online evaluations vs. paper based forms.
- Link student participation in course evaluations with ongoing Assessment of Learning processes that help to maintain JMSB's accreditation status.
- Promote the importance of Teaching Evaluations in student newspapers (eg. The Link) and through student associations (eg. CASA, CGSA, etc).

## **Recommendations**

1. Use one single course evaluation questionnaire for all courses irrespective of platform, modality or intensity of technology used for instruction.
2. Use multiple strategies to increase student response rates.
3. Adopt seven suggested questions on Page 6 and the supporting response scale.
4. Using data gathered from the seven summative questions, conduct a follow up study to test the psychometric properties and item analysis including all aspects of consistency, validity and reliability.
5. Conduct periodic studies across departments, programs and faculties and report to respective Councils of emerging trends, average rating of courses, instructor effectiveness and student learning.
6. Clearly distinguish sections that group summative from formative questions in the single questionnaire.
7. Briefly explain on each questionnaire the purpose of the summative and formative evaluations.
8. Boldly indicate an assurance of student anonymity on each questionnaire.
9. Use summative questions for personnel decisions (for eg. hiring, promotion, merit and tenure).
10. Use formative questions to improve teaching and course development. This implies that formative data would not have to be submitted for personnel decisions.
11. Use the same set of summative questions across all departments in the JMSB faculty and ideally across all units at Concordia University.
12. Adopt one response scale to rate all summative questions.
13. Generate formative questions collaboratively at the Departmental or Unit level drawing from a common pool of reliable, validated questions.
14. Determine a deadline for developing formative questions.
15. Provide space in the questionnaire for an individual question (or two) formulated by instructors.
16. Avoid long lists of either summative or formative questions.

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Office of the Provost  
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**Online Course Evaluations Project  
Progress Report**

CUFA's teaching evaluations have been done online, while CUPFA's teaching evaluation on paper.

▪ **CUFA Online Course Evaluation - Response Rates:**

<b>Arts and Science - Winter 2008 Overall Response Rate = 57.03%</b>												
Departments	COMM STUD.	ENG	ETUDES FRAN.	HIST	JOUR	CMLL	PHIL	THEO	ECON	EDUC	GEO	PHYS
Response Rate	60.6%	48.2%	75.4%	56.6%	56.7%	56.2%	45.8%	70.8%	51.8%	63.5%	56.4%	47.6

  

Departments	PSY	REL	SOAN	AHS	BIO	EXER.SC.	CHEM	MATH	PHYS	LAC	SC. C.	SCPA	SBI
Response Rate	61%	64.5%	53.1%	56.4%	54.64%	56.9%	55.5%	53.2%	48.3%	67.8%	75.1%	57.5%	53.1%

<b>Fine Arts - Winter 2008 Overall Response Rate = 56.15%</b>										
Departments	DFA	Art Hist.	Cinema	Music	Theatre	St. Arts	Cont. Dan.	Design Arts	Art. Educ.	CAT
Response Rate	47.8%	48.2%	56.1%	52.4%	39.5%	58.1%	43.7%	50.4%	79%	63.1%

<b>JMSB - Winter 2008 Overall Response Rate = 56.31%</b>							
Departments	DC	ACC	MANA	FIN	MARK	DSMIS	EMBA
Response Rate	28.8%	56.1%	60.2%	57.1%	66.1%	53.2%	39.2%

<b>ENCS - Fall 2007 Overall Response Rate = 54.92%</b>						
Departments	ECE	MIE	CS	BCEE	GECS	CISE
Response Rate	58.7%	48.8%	57.9%	58.5%	48.9%	73.1%

The overall online response rate for all CUFA courses is 56.15%.

▪ **Recurring Concerns:**

- Some students were concerned about their privacy and we had to reassure them that the system is secure.
- Some professors expressed their concerns about the lower response rates and the fact they cannot control the timing of course evaluations.

**Participation rates for online teaching evaluation questionnaires**

Department	Fall 2007			Winter 2008		
	Average	Range for Undergraduate Courses	Range for Graduate Courses	Average	Range for Undergraduate Courses	Range for Graduate Courses
	Accountancy	57.7%	30% - 84%	24% - 79%	56.5%	39% - 94%
DS & MIS	56.1%	39% - 95%	44% - 85%	53.3%	39% - 81%	61% - 85%
Finance	52.8%	30% - 81%	62% - 100%	57.1%	35% - 82%	50% - 90%
Management	62.1%	35% - 90%	50% - 100%	60.2%	41% - 86%	58% - 89%
Marketing	56.8%	29% - 85%	64% - 100%	66.1%	34% - 83%	75% - 100%

JMSB Course Evaluations

Proposed version for on-line courses

Existing version

<p><b>Scale: 1=Agree Strongly 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Disagree Strongly</b></p> <p><b>Course</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The course outline/syllabus is clear and complete (e.g., learning objectives, course topics, evaluation method.)</li> <li>The methods used for evaluating student work are fair and appropriate.</li> <li>The subject matter of this course is something that I consider useful.</li> <li>Overall, I have learned a great deal in this course.</li> </ol> <p><b>Scale: 1=Excellent 2=Very good 3=Good 4=Fair 5=Poor</b></p> <p>5. Overall, this course is</p> <p><b>Instructor</b></p> <p><b>Scale: 1=Agree Strongly 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Disagree Strongly</b></p>	<p><b>Scale: 1=Agree Strongly 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Disagree Strongly</b></p> <p><b>Course</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The course outline/syllabus is clear and complete (e.g., learning objectives, course topics, evaluation method.)</li> <li>The methods used for evaluating student work are fair and appropriate.</li> <li>The subject matter of this course is something that I consider useful.</li> <li>Overall, I have learned a great deal in this course.</li> </ol> <p><b>Scale: 1=Excellent 2=Very good 3=Good 4=Fair 5=Poor</b></p> <p>5. Overall, this course is</p> <p><b>Instructor</b></p> <p><b>Scale: 1=Agree Strongly 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Disagree Strongly</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes the student feel welcome in seeking help in or outside the classroom.</li> <li>Is enthusiastic about teaching the course.</li> <li>Covers the scheduled material and/or activities within the allotted time.</li> <li>Is well prepared for classes.</li> <li>Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the subject matter.</li> <li>Clearly explains the course concepts</li> <li>Provides useful feedback on assigned work.</li> <li>Uses instructional methods (lecture, case-based, media, etc.) that are effective.</li> <li>Is accessible to students</li> <li>Creates a learning environment that encourages student participation.</li> <li>Overall, the instructor performed effectively.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Scale: 1=Agree Strongly 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Disagree Strongly</b></p> <p><b>Course</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The course outline/syllabus is clear and complete (e.g., learning objectives, course topics, evaluation method.)</li> <li>The methods used for evaluating student work are fair and appropriate.</li> <li>The subject matter of this course is something that I consider useful.</li> <li>Overall, I have learned a great deal in this course.</li> </ol> <p><b>Scale: 1=Excellent 2=Very good 3=Good 4=Fair 5=Poor</b></p> <p>5. Overall, this course is</p> <p><b>Instructor</b></p> <p><b>Scale: 1=Agree Strongly 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Disagree Strongly</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes the student feel welcome in seeking help.</li> <li>Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the subject matter.</li> <li>Course concepts are clearly explained.</li> <li>Provides useful feedback on assigned work.</li> <li>Uses instructional methods (lecture, case-based, media, etc.) that are effective.</li> <li>Is accessible to students (response time to questions)</li> <li>Encourages student participation.</li> <li>Overall, the instructor performed effectively.</li> <li>Website is easy to navigate.</li> <li>Website is rich in content.</li> <li>There is sufficient help available to resolve technical issues.</li> <li>There are sufficient tools to promote interaction with course materials.</li> </ol>	

Code:

## Appendix C: COURSE EVALUATION COMPARISON OF QUESTIONS

### COURSE EVALUATION COMPARISON OF QUESTIONS

#### OVERALL RATINGS

- FA 1. **Overall, this course has been:**  
SCI 17. Overall, how would you rate this course?  
SS 19. Overall, I would consider this course to be a good course.  
H 20. What is your overall rating of this course?  
ENCS 9. Overall, this is an excellent course.  
JMSB 5. Overall, this course is  
CUPFA 1. Overall, this course has been  
CCE 6. Overall, this has been a good course.
- FA 2. **Overall, the instructor has been:**  
SCI 8. Overall, how would you rate this professor?  
SS 17. Overall, this professor is an effective teacher.  
H 19. Overall, how would you rate this professor?  
ENCS 20. Overall, the professor is an effective teacher.  
JMSB 16. Overall, the instructor performed effectively.  
CUPFA 2. Overall, the instructor has been  
CCE 16. Overall, the instructor has been
- FA 3. **Overall, my learning has been:**  
SCI 13. How much do you feel you have learned from the course?  
SS 18. Overall, my knowledge of the subject has increased.  
H 18. Overall, I have learned a great deal in this course.  
ENCS 8. Overall, I am learning a great deal in this course.  
JMSB 4. Overall, I have learned a great deal in this course.  
CUPFA 3. Overall, my learning has been  
CCE 19. Overall, I have learned a lot in this course.

- FA 17. Instructor is accessible to students during office hours or after class.
- SCI 6. Is the professor available for help or consultation?
- SS 16. The professor is accessible to students outside of class.
- H 8. **The professor is accessible to students (e.g., during office hours, after class, or by voice/e-mail).**
- ENCS 18. The professor is available during office hours for consultation.
- JMSB 14. The instructor is accessible to students (office hours, after class, voice/e-mail).
- CUPFA 13. The instructor is approachable.
- CCE 9. The instructor provided help when asked.

### COURSE ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

- FA 6. Required readings/texts were valuable.
- FA 8. Reading, homework, workshops contributed to appreciation and understanding of subject.
- SCI 15. The course material (textbook, assigned readings, etc.) is effective at explaining the subject matter.
- SS 6. The course materials (textbook, assigned readings, etc.) are relevant to the course.
- SS 7. **The course material (textbook, assigned readings, etc.) contributed to my understanding of the subject.**
- H 2. The course material (textbook, assigned readings, etc.) is effective at explaining the subject matter.
- ENCS 3. I find the course materials (such as class notes) useful.
- ENCS 4. I find the textbook useful.
- CUPFA 5. Course materials, textbook or readings are useful or relevant.
- CCE 2. The course materials/books used in this course were very useful.
- CCE 4. The course materials were interesting.
- FA 7. Proposed objectives agreed with those actually taught.
- SCI 9. Have the topics in the course outline been covered?
- SS 8. The professor covers all of the topics described in the course outline.
- H 3. The professor adequately covers the topics described in the course outline.
- CUPFA 7. **The course met the objectives as stated in the course outline.**
- CCE 3. The assignments/tests/class work were related to the goals of the course.

- FA 9. **The pace of the course was suitable.**  
 SCI 5. Does the professor make full use of class time?  
 H 16. The professor makes effective use of class time.  
 ENCS 13. The professor gives the lectures at an appropriate pace.  
 ENCS 14. The professor makes effective use of class time.  
 JMSB 8. The instructor covers the scheduled material and/or activities within the allotted time.  
 CCE 8. The instructor started and ended classes on time.
- FA 10. **The amount of work required was appropriate for the number of credits.**  
 SCI 10. Is the amount of work required appropriate?  
 H 15. The amount and level of work expected by the professor are appropriate.  
 ENCS 7. I am satisfied with the amount of material covered in this course.  
 CCE 1. The amount of work required is appropriate for this course.
- SS 5. **The course outline/syllabus clearly describes course topics, objectives, and course requirements.**  
 H 1. The course outline/syllabus is clear and complete (e.g., learning objectives, course topics, evaluation method).  
 ENCS 1. The course outline/syllabus provided sufficient information on the course content.  
 ENCS 2. The distribution of marks (tests, assignments, labs, final exam) was clearly stated in the course outline.  
 JMSB 1. The course outline/syllabus is clear and complete (e.g., learning objectives, course topics, evaluation method).  
 CUPFA 4. Course outline and syllabus are clear, complete and well explained.
- SCI 16. Answer this question only if there was a lab associated with the course. Were the laboratory exercises integrated with the classroom material?
- JMSB 3. The subject matter of this course is something that I consider useful.  
 CCE 5. I would recommend this course to a friend.

## INSTRUCTOR

- FA 4. Individual classes were well organized.  
SCI 4. How well organized is the professor in class?  
H. 4. **The professor is well prepared for classes.**  
ENCS 10. The professor is well prepared for the classes.  
JMSB 9. The instructor is well prepared for classes.  
CCE 11. The instructor was well-prepared for each class.
- FA 5. Course materials were well prepared and carefully explained.  
SCI 2. How effectively does the professor communicate the course material?  
SS 11. **The professor explains the subject matter clearly.**  
H 5. The professor clearly explains the course subject matter.  
ENCS 11. The professor presents the material clearly.  
JMSB 11. The instructor clearly explains the course concepts.  
CUPFA 9. The instructor's explanations are clear.  
CCE 13. The instructor gave clear explanations.
- FA 11. Instructor presented the background or origin of ideas/concepts developed in class.  
FA 12. Instructor presented points of view other than his/her own when appropriate.  
FA 13. Instructor adequately discussed current developments in the field.  
SCI 3. How well does the professor appear to know the subject matter?  
SS 10. **The professor demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the subject.**  
H 7. The professor demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter.  
JMSB 10. The instructor demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the subject matter.  
CUPFA 8. Instructor demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter.

- FA 14. Instructor was dynamic and energetic in conducting the course.  
 FA 15. Instructor's style of presentation held my interest during class.  
 SCI 1. Is the professor enthusiastic about teaching the course?  
 SS 12. **The professor stimulates interest in the subject matter.**  
 H 11. The professor stimulates interest in the subject matter.  
 ENCS 12. The professor generates interest in the subject.  
 JMSB 7. The instructor is enthusiastic about teaching the course.  
 CUPFA 6. I have found this course intellectually challenging and stimulating.  
 CCE 14. The instructor tried to make the course interesting.
- FA 16. Instructor made students feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside of class.  
 H 14. The professor treats all students with respect.  
 H 17. The professor is responsive to students.  
 ENCS 15. The professor is concerned that students understand the material.  
 ENCS 19. **The professor is helping me to learn a great deal in this course.**  
 JMSB 6. The instructor makes the student feel welcome in seeking help in or outside the class.
- FA 18. Students were encouraged to participate in class discussion.  
 SCI 7. Does the professor encourage participation?  
 ENCS 16. **The professor encourages students to participate in class.**  
 JMSB 15. The instructor creates a learning environment that encourages student participation.
- FA 19. Students were encouraged to ask questions, which were addressed meaningfully.  
 FA 20. Students were encouraged to express their own ideas and knowledge.  
 SS 15. **The professor creates a classroom climate in which students feel free to express their ideas.**  
 H 12. The professor creates a climate in which you feel free to ask questions, disagree, express your ideas.  
 CUPFA 11. Students are encouraged to ask questions.  
 CUPFA 12. Students are encouraged to share their ideas and knowledge.
- H. 6. The professor rarely arrives late, leaves early or cancels class.  
 CCE 8. The instructor started and ended classes on time.
- JMSB 13. The instructor uses instructional methods (lecture, case-based, media, etc.) that are effective.  
 CCE 7. The instructor cancelled classes without making arrangements.

## ASSESSMENT

- FA 21. **Feedback on graded assignments was valuable.**  
SCI 12. Did you get effective feedback in this course?  
SS 13. The professor provides timely feedback on assigned work.  
SS 14. The professor gives informative feedback on assignments.  
H. 10. The professor provides timely and informative feedback on assigned work and examinations.  
ENCS 17. The professor provides timely and effective feedback regarding the tests and assignments.  
JMSB 12. The instructor provides useful feedback on assigned work.  
CUPFA 10. The instructor provides feedback in the form of exams and/or assignment grading.  
CCE 10. The instructor returned assignments/tests/class work within a reasonable amount of time.  
CCE 12. The instructor gave me enough information/feedback about my course work.

### FA 22. **Methods of evaluating student work were fair and appropriate.**

- FA 23. Examinations/graded materials tested course content as emphasized by the instructor.  
SCI 11. Are the grades assigned fairly?  
H 9. The methods used for evaluating students are clear and appropriate.  
H 13. The professor is fair and impartial in his/her dealings with you.  
ENCS 5. The assignments help me understand the material.  
ENCS 6. The tests correspond to what was covered in class.  
JMSB 2. The methods used for evaluating student work are fair and appropriate.  
CCE 15. Overall, the instructor treated all students fairly.

### SCI 14. Did the course meet your expectations?

- SS 20. Overall, I would say that I am satisfied with this course.

### SS 21. **Given the feedback you have received from the professor, what grade do you expect? A B C D F**

**DEMOGRAPHIC**

- SS 1. How many credits have you completed to date?
- SS 2. What degree are you enrolled in?
- SS 3. In which program(s) are you enrolled?
- SS 4. Is this course a requirement in your program?

**STUDENT SELF-RATINGS**

- CUPFA 14. Overall, my involvement in this course has been
- CUPFA 15. What was your level of knowledge of the subject prior to taking this course?
- CUPFA 16. What was your level of interest in the subject prior to taking this course?
- CUPFA 17. What was your reason for taking the course?
- CCE 17. I attended class.
- CCE 18. I did the work that was required in this course.
- CCE 20. I found the level of this course to be

**OTHER**

- CUPFA 18. How do you find the facilities for this course (e.g., air, seating, temperature, class size, etc.)?
- CCE 21. How do you find the facilities for this course (e.g., air, seating, temperature, class size, etc.)?

## Appendix D: MINUTES

### Minutes of Meeting 1

We revisited input from committee members who identified their top 3 issues and discussed other matters raised by those attending. We agreed to focus on the following in the order below:

1. Distinguish between online and offline courses
2. Discuss the advantages of a unified questionnaire vs. having different questionnaires for online/offline courses
3. Consider specific questions in the existing and proposed versions of JMSB course evaluations tabled at Faculty Council.
4. Attend to other concerns that have to do with methodology, implementation, communication, trust, transparency, etc.

We agreed that the two main objectives/purpose of the questionnaire is to (a) rate teaching effectiveness that could be used in conjunction with other evidence, for promotion, tenure and other evaluation exercises and (b) provide feedback to the instructor that would hopefully improve the quality of teaching which would increase student learning.

In addressing item 2. above, we had an animated discussion on how we might distinguish an online course from the traditional offline course. This distinction was made in light of exploring whether the committee would be constrained in using questions that would apply to any course, regardless of the medium used for delivery.

We agreed that the essential differences between online and offline courses included (1) physical presence of the instructor; (2) differences in the use of technology and (3) differences in the learning experience. While there was little debate on (1), it was also noted that significant differences in (2) and (3) are also abundant within courses offered online or offline.

The committee agreed that a uniform questionnaire might be the way to move forward. We looked at the example of UBC from the HEQ report (page 21). After much deliberation, UBC has agreed to use 6 questions that are used university-wide. These 6 questions are mandatory for all instructors and apply to all courses irrespective of the delivery platform.

Using these 6 questions, we found some degree of correspondence with 8 questions currently being used at the JMSB (Numbers 1,2,3,6,8,11,15 and 16).

We then proceeded to see whether any of the remaining questions could be kept in the spirit of a uniform questionnaire that would apply to all courses. We decided that some version of questions 12 and 14 should also be retained.

It became clear to the committee that moving towards a uniform questionnaire that would apply to all courses would resolve many outstanding issues and offer several advantages including:

### 1. Simplicity

Given the multidimensional nature of constructs that questions try and capture and given the misconceptions from both students and faculty despite the widespread use of reliable and valid questions, we feel that less is more.

### 2. Consistency in Interpretation

a) For Instructors, it would be difficult if not impossible to compare and interpret results from different questionnaires especially when one considers the blurring of technology use in offline and online courses.

b) For students, different questionnaires would add to confusion and increases distrust and possibly variance in response rates.

### 3. Easier to Implement

The administrative concerns to implement one (as opposed to two) questionnaires decreases dramatically as does data gathering, dissemination, cost, etc.

### 4. Multiple Use

A uniform questionnaire can be used at the department, faculty and university levels (in conjunction with other evidence) for various exercises including merit, promotion, tenure, awards, etc.

### 5. Flexibility

By agreeing to fewer basic questions, faculty might be encouraged to add questions appropriate for their courses that help them to gather valuable feedback for the purpose of continuous quality improvement. Note: Our existing questionnaire allows faculty to add questions, but we believe that this is rarely done.

The committee also wanted to take advantage of the extensive research that has demystified persistent myths and misconceptions about evaluation instruments and use the experience of other universities that have spent extensive time and effort in resolving related issues that tend to be similar across institutions (as documented in the HEQ report).

If we have consensus in moving towards a uniform questionnaire that applies to all courses taught at the JMSB (and possibly Concordia), here are the next steps that were proposed.

1. Articulate a clear rationale for using a uniform questionnaire, parts of which are mentioned above.

2. Take a close look at the 6 questions from UBC, the 10 questions from the existing JMSB questionnaire and the corresponding ones in the proposed questionnaire. Reflect on how we

might formulate questions for a new uniform set. The three sets of questions are reproduced below for your convenience.

3. Take another at the questions we have dropped (Numbers 4,5,7,9, 10 & 13 in the existing questionnaire and corresponding numbers plus 14,15,16,17 in the Proposed) and prepare reasoned explanations why these questions should not be used in a unified questionnaire.

4. React and discuss a draft of the unified questionnaire and aim to finalize the wording by the end of our next meeting. To get us started, I will come up with a draft version and circulate the draft shortly.

5. While everyone is encouraged to suggest ways in which we can deal with other concerns (implementation, communication, trust, transparency, etc.), we hope to devote our third meeting exclusively to these issues.

### Minutes of Meeting 2

1. Explored and brainstormed a half dozen ideas on how to improve student respond rates.
2. Agreed that our committee should only focus on 4 or 5 summative (global) questions that apply to all courses regardless of platform. These questions will include 4 questions that the Collective Agreement specifies.
3. Agreed that Departments are in a better position to identify an additional 5 questions that will help their faculty to improve.
4. If Council wishes, Task Force 2 can identify a pool of (formative) questions Departments can draw from.
5. Identified the scale and chose 3 summative questions we plan to recommend:

### QUESTIONS:

1. Overall, this course has been:
2. Overall, the instructor has been:
3. Overall, my learning has been:

### SCALE:

- 1 = Excellent
- 2 = Very Good
- 3 = Adequate
- 4 = Poor
- 5 = Very Poor

### Next Steps

\* Choose two more summative questions after consulting the attachment (comparison of questions.doc) and the 6 draft questions i had sent in my previous email (pasted below for

your convenience). Please circulate your choices by Wednesday afternoon so that we come prepared with our reflections on Thursday.

\* Respond to ideas on how we might improve response rates - to be circulated soon.

\* Respond to the headings in the outline of our Task Force Report - to be circulated soon. Please pay particular attention to (a) the rationale for our approach and (b) recommendations.

**APPENDIX E: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM UBC'S REPORT**

**REPORT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC AND PROVOST  
ON THE  
NEW UNIVERSITY-MODULE ITEMS AND  
THEIR ONLINE ADMINISTRATION AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

A. RALPH HAKSTIAN  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

*WITH ASSISTANCE FROM*  
CATHERINE D. RAWN, MA  
*AND*  
CARRIE CUTTLER, MA  
PHD STUDENTS IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, UBC

13 MARCH 2008

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Catherine Rawn wrote all of Section 2 of this report. Carrie Cuttler did all of the data analyses as well as some editing. Both should be regarded as co-authors of this report. Russell Ball provided much-needed editing assistance.

Work like this is not done in a vacuum. The comments along the way and the writings of Gary Poole, Director of UBC's Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth (TAG), have helped to inform this report.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *BACKGROUND*

An examination was undertaken, on behalf of the Vice President Academic and Provost, of the performance of the new *University-Module Items (UMIs)* administered at the University in the Fall term, 2007. The scope of the investigation included evaluation of psychometric characteristics of the UMIs and of the similarity of item performance from paper to online administration of student-evaluation inventories. Another aspect of the University initiative—that of the posting of the student-evaluation results to a password-protected website for access by students and faculty—is considered. Recommendations for future student-evaluation activities at the University are provided.

The implementation of the UMIs followed several Senate recommendations for a uniform student-evaluation process, with the most recent recommendation also urging the online publication of teaching-evaluation results. The body most closely responsible for the implementation of these recommendations is the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SEoT) Committee.

Student evaluations of teaching at colleges and universities have been ubiquitous for the past 40 years or more. Research on student evaluations has shown them to be useful for the purposes of teaching improvement and not merely a reflection of instructor popularity. The research evidence on paper- vs. online-administered student evaluations has revealed that both produce comparable results, and, with increasing familiarity with computers and the Internet by students, online administration is increasing. Research has also revealed certain extraneous factors that can affect student evaluations. At UBC, student evaluations have, for some time, been used across campus for both formative and summative purposes. Although administration of the inventories has for the most part been in paper format, some administrative units have experimented with online presentation and some, in addition, have, in the past, published student-evaluation results. At present, only the Faculty of Arts publishes these results on a website.

### *ANALYSES PERFORMED*

The six UMIs were examined for a number of performance characteristics. Inspection of item content and scores revealed that the UMIs measured instructional themes and produced score levels and distributions very similar to those seen in the past with existing items. The items were seen as tapping into central aspects of effective teaching and learning and were sufficiently comprehensive to provide adequate assessment of the important facets of instruction.

Further, the UMIs were found to be of comparable reliability to existing items, in terms of both stability over time and internal consistency. The question of inter-rater reliability of mean item results (the unit used for formative and summative purposes) was addressed, and this form of reliability was seen as fully adequate as long as the means were based on at least 10-15 student raters.

Validity of the UMIs was assessed by correlating scores on them with those on existing items that were designed to measure the same aspects of teaching. Results indicated that the UMIs provide valid assessment of what have been identified as central aspects of teaching.

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The question of the effects of changing from paper administration of the student evaluation inventories to online administration was addressed by an examination of the student response rates under the two formats, as well as that of the general level of results obtained under each. Results of analyses of student response rates in four administrative units for which online data were available indicated very little, if any, reduction in response rates for the online presentation format. Similarly, comparisons of mean item ratings showed no systematic differences favouring one format over the other. There is no evidence from the present evaluation, therefore, to suggest that online administration of the UMIs (along with other faculty- or department-specific items) will cause a decline in response rates or any change in the general level of ratings awarded by students.

Several factors that can be expected to affect student evaluations were investigated. The relationship between class grades and mean ratings, that between class grades and student response rates, and that between mean ratings and response rates were all examined. Very low correlations were found in analyses across nine administrative units, with those between class grades (actually awarded) and mean UMI scores the highest—averaging .27. Although low, this correlation raises the question of whether grading leniency affects student ratings, but this relationship can be explained in several ways, with grading leniency only one possibility. This topic deserves further research, but the correlations found with extraneous factors do not undermine the use of the UMIs (or any items) for reliable and valid student evaluation of teaching.

#### ***DISCUSSION OF POSTING OF RESULTS***

The subject of the posting of student evaluation results on a University website is discussed. Although no data have been collected in this regard and no local empirical findings inform this discussion, prior experience with posting evaluation results is available and suggests some ways in which the goals of Senate—in providing systematic, reliable, and valid course-planning information—can be realized.

#### ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

A number of recommendations are made, based on the findings of the present investigation. It is generally recommended that each administrative unit consider adding items to the UMIs that reflect the specifics of teaching in that unit. More specifically, a number of recommendations are presented that concern tasks to be performed in the short term—in time for the Fall, 2008 administration of student evaluations. In addition, a list of recommendations is provided containing tasks that can be completed over a longer period of time. The intention of these recommendations is to aid the University in systematically developing, over the next few years, fully effective procedures by which student evaluation of teaching is made more precise, more useful, more widely-accepted and optimally-used, and more clearly tied to pedagogical upgrading opportunities available on campus than it currently is.

One summary observation that deserves mention is the generally high regard that UBC students have for the quality of their teaching. In the various analyses performed, mean scores falling between “Good” and “Excellent” were routinely found, indicating that students have reported that teaching is generally at a high level at UBC.

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