



Interpreting Student Course Evaluations

The Importance of Student Evaluations

Students are a fantastic source of ideas for improving a course, but often we can be left feeling unsure of what students mean in their course evaluations or how to respond to the information. However, Student course evaluations give students a voice in their own education and have many benefits, they can:

- Provide feedback on a new assignment or class activity
- Highlight trends in your instruction you may not always be aware of e.g. talking too fast
- Provide evidence of the students' experience in your class
- Support your promotion and inform teaching award selection
- You need them for your teaching portfolio!

Bonus: We strongly encourage faculty to use [mid-course evaluations](#) as an earlier source of student input. This provides time to discuss feedback with your students and implement changes. In fact, research suggests that using mid-course evaluations is associated with more positive end-of-course evaluations.

Resources to Assist with Interpreting Student Evaluations

- OTL are happy to meet with faculty to discuss course evaluations and help you make a plan for addressing input; contact us for support at SmithTeach@umd.edu.
- Below is an evaluation strategy based on [an article by Buskit and Hogan \(2010\)](#)

Feedback Review Step	Example
Throw out the off-the-wall comments that do not provide you with useful information and forget about them.	"She needs a haircut"
Set aside positive comments that don't share anything specific.	"Best class ever"
Divide the negative comments into two groups: those you can change and those that you cannot change.	Can Change: "the final is worth over 70% so we have no idea how we're doing in class and it's too stressful." Cannot Change: "it's unfair to prevent phone-use in exams."
Work on perceptions and learn to be explicit.	As we look at our evaluations, we often think, "But I do that!" If we feel we are doing the things that students say we are not doing, then we may need to address students' perceptions or clarify.
Savour the comments that let you know that you are doing your job (even the ones that are meant to be negative!)	"This class was so hard, I really had to think", "I've never read so much!"
Review your list of items you 'can change' and 'cannot change' - on items that cannot be changed , consider where clarity may be needed e.g. expectations in syllabus and first lecture - on items that can be changed , add change to syllabus first!	Review your syllabus, canvas site, and course materials to consider and make any changes you feel will be beneficial - OTL can help with this step!