

# Interpreting Your Course Evaluation Summary

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## 1. INTERPRETING THE THREE SECTIONS OF YOUR COURSE EVALUATION REPORT

*A. Provides background and expectations of the students who completed the evaluation forms, as well as information about their level of participation. See page 2.*



*B. The Elements of Instruction graphs summarize key elements of your teaching. See page 3.*

*C. These graphs and tables detail the averages and distribution of responses within each sub-category. See page 4.*

## A. STUDENT PROFILES AND PARTICIPATION

The top portion of this section contains demographic information about students who took your course. This information can help you determine whether the course attracted the students you expected. Students taking a course for a grade may have different expectations and perspectives than students taking the same course for CR/NC. Another factor that can influence patterns of responses within evaluation categories is whether your class comprised a mix of freshmen through seniors or included both undergraduates and graduates.

### STANFORD UNIVERSITY—Teaching Evaluation Summary

*Is this information correct?*

*General Education Requirement.*

*Since a student might have more than one reason for taking your course, the total % may exceed 100%.*

<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>Year</b>		<b>Area of Study</b>		<b>Expected Grade</b>		<b>Reasons for Course</b>	
<b>Department:</b>	1	%	Science	%	A	%	Major/Minor	%
<b>Course Title:</b>	2	%	Social Science	%	B	%	DR/GER	%
<b>Enrollment:</b>	3	%	Humanities	%	C	%	Reputation	%
<b>Response:</b>	4	%	Engineering	%	D	%	Interest	%
	5	%	Education	%	Credit	%	Other	%
	MA	%	Undecided	%	NoPass/NoCredit	%		
	PhD	%	(no response)	%	(no resp)	%		
	(No Resp)	%						

*Since a high response rate ensures a more reliable assessment of your teaching, you should strongly encourage students to complete and hand in their evaluations.*

The lower portion provides valuable information about the level of student participation.

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Hour/Week</b>	<b>% Valuable</b>
<(less than) 20% %	<(less than) %	<(less than) 20% %
20-40% %	1-5 %	20-40% %
40-60% %	5-10 %	40-60% %
60-80% %	10-15 %	60-80% %
80-100% %	>(more than) 15 %	80-100% %
(no response) %	(no resp) %	(no resp) %

*High attendance suggests that students valued class sessions. Low attendance may be explained by information in other sections of this report.*

*Was out-of-class workload what you had planned?*

*Studies indicate that students' perceived value of time spent out of class correlates highly with their overall course satisfaction.*

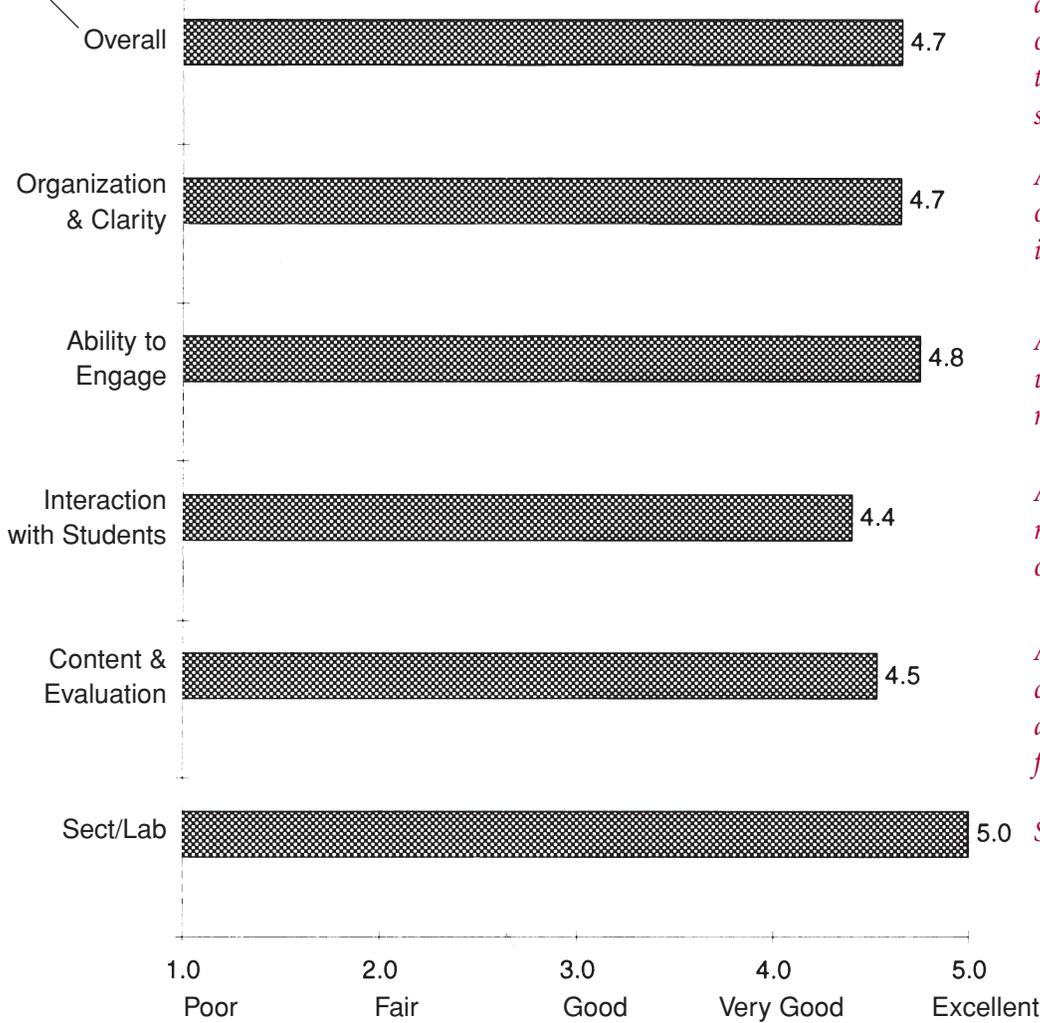
**B. SUMMARY GRAPHS THAT CAPTURE THE QUALITY OF KEY ELEMENTS OF INSTRUCTION: SNAPSHOT OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.**

This graph summarizes the average scores within the six major instructional categories.

*Research suggests that this category is the most valid and reliable indication of students' evaluation.*

**Elements of Instruction**

*Instructor's Mean*



*The Overall rating is the average of all students' responses to overall quality of the course content and overall teaching. It is not an average of other scores.*

*Average score for clear objectives, knowledge of material, clear explanations, distinguishing more vs. less important topics, pacing.*

*Average score for emphasizing conceptual understanding/critical thinking and relating topics to one another.*

*Average score for demonstrating concern, motivating students, and availability out of class.*

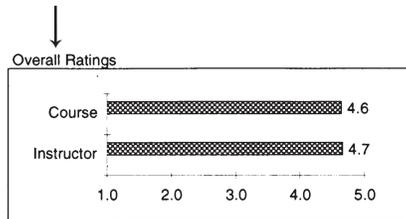
*Average score for worthwhile course content, coherent organization, choice of assignments, clear evaluation criteria, fair grading.*

*Score for section/lab integration.*

**Note:** Beginning in 1999-2000, Course Evaluation Means for each School (Earth Sciences, Education, and Humanities and Sciences) will be calculated and distributed to the faculty annually. (In Humanities and Sciences means will actually be provided for each cluster—sciences, social sciences, humanities—rather than school-wide.) Separate means will be provided for small, medium, large, and extra-large classes.

## C. GRAPHS AND DISTRIBUTIONS OF RATINGS WITHIN EVALUATION CATEGORIES: ARE THERE TRENDS OR CRITICAL AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT?

Graphs of average scores within each of the 6 evaluation categories

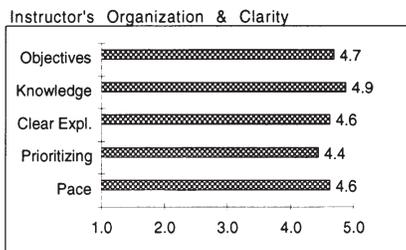


Questions to Which Students Responded

The overall quality of the course content  
The instructor's overall teaching

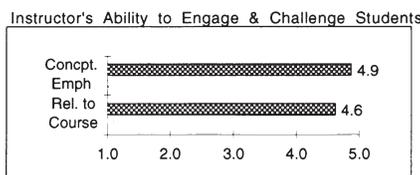
Distribution of raw data within categories gives valuable information to help you interpret trends among student responses. (See "Reflecting on Your Teaching" in this handout).

	5	4	3	2	1	
Ex	Vgd	Gd	Fair	Poor	N/A	
9	5	0	0	0	0	
10	5	0	0	0	0	



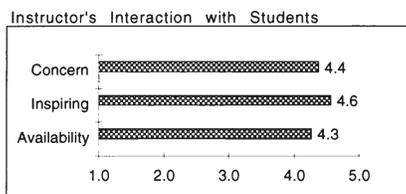
Set out and met clear objectives set out for the course  
Displayed thorough knowledge of course material  
Explained concepts clearly  
Distinguished between more important and less important topics  
Presented material at an appropriate pace

Ex	Vgd	Gd	Fair	Poor	N/A
11	5	0	0	0	0
14	2	0	0	0	0
10	6	0	0	0	0
8	7	1	0	0	0
10	6	0	0	0	0



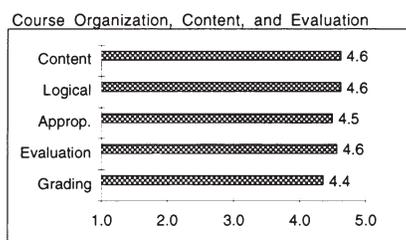
Emphasized conceptual understanding and/or critical thinking  
Related course topics to one another

Ex	Vgd	Gd	Fair	Poor	N/A
14	2	0	0	0	0
11	4	1	0	0	0



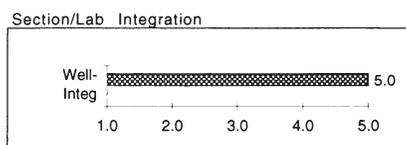
Demonstrated concern about whether students were learning  
Inspired and motivated student interest in the course content  
Was available for consultation outside of class

Ex	Vgd	Gd	Fair	Poor	N/A
10	2	4	0	0	0
12	1	3	0	0	0
9	3	1	2	0	1



Selected course content that was valuable and worth learning  
Organized course topics in a coherent fashion  
Chose assignments that solidified understanding  
Explained clearly how students would be evaluated  
Designed and used fair grading procedures

Ex	Vgd	Gd	Fair	Poor	N/A
11	4	1	0	0	0
10	6	0	0	0	0
10	4	2	0	0	0
12	1	3	0	0	0
8	3	3	0	0	2



Section or lab was well integrated into course structure

Ex	Vgd	Gd	Fair	Poor	N/A
2	0	0	0	0	12

## 2. SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERPRETING STUDENTS' WRITTEN COMMENTS

Students' written responses to the open-ended questions on the back of the evaluation form can provide elaboration or explanation of your quantitative evaluation data. However, because the written comments are not presented or summarized in the structured format that the quantitative data receive, they can be hard to interpret and can even seem contradictory, one student's comments sometimes appearing to cancel out another's. The suggestions below are meant to help you interpret these written comments as well as to raise issues worth thinking about as you review students' responses.

- Some faculty find it easiest to read and compare the comments in a single category separately. That is, read all the responses to the first open-ended question on the back of the form (instructor effectiveness and attitude), then go back and read all the responses to the second question, etc. This allows you to compare mentally student comments about a single topic.
- You may want to correlate the written comments with the overall rating you received from that student. That is, separate the written comments of students who gave you a 4-5 on the course overall, from the students who gave you a 3, and from those who gave you 1-2. By comparing comments from students who were very satisfied with the course with those who were less satisfied, you may be able to identify issues important for changing the course.
- In addition, you might think about organizing the comments in terms of the five open-ended questions students are asked, creating a matrix:

Overall Course Rating Student Gave You	Question 1 on back Effectiveness & Attitude	Question 2 Text(s), Readings, Materials	Question 3 Assignments & Exams	Question 4 Course Overall	Question 5 Instructor's Questions
5-4					
3					
1-2					

Using this format, you may produce a much more fine-grained analysis, despite the sometimes sketchy comments students provide and despite what can seem, on hasty reading, contradictory student comments.

- You may also want to correlate the comments of students with major, year of study, those taking the course graded vs. CR/NC, etc. This might help clarify whether some group of students has a consistent view of the course.
- It is important to resist the temptation to dismiss a criticism from a sizable number of students even if the majority of comments are at odds with their view. There may be a subpopulation of students who could benefit from course modifications or alternative approaches.
- Try to keep your perspective when reading nasty comments. Under the protection of anonymity, students may write negative comments that range from sarcastic to vicious. Not all comments are constructive, and in fact, some may be motivated by pressures and concerns unrelated to your course. If you receive a number of negative comments in a batch of evaluations, you could share and discuss them with a trusted colleague, who can help you keep perspective and suggest ways to address any possible problem in future courses, while keeping your confidence from suffering.
- You will get the most out of your evaluations if you can relate the comments to the quantitative data. After reviewing trends in the graphs and tables of your quantitative data, look to written comments for elaboration and specific suggestions. For example, one professor received low overall ratings in "Instructor's Organization/Clarity" and "Course Organization, Content and Evaluation." Written comments revealed consistent concerns that homework was assigned in a rushed manner in the last few seconds of class, causing confusion and frustration among students. In the quantitative ratings, some students reacted to this under the item "Explained concepts clearly" or "Presented material at an appropriate pace" (in the "Instructor's Organization/Clarity" category), while others reacted to the problem under "Chose assignments that solidified understanding," "Explained clearly how students would be evaluated," or "Designed and used fair grading procedures" (all in the "Course Organization, Content, and Evaluation" category). By exploring links between quantitative and qualitative information, the instructor was able to make a relatively simple adjustment that resulted in much improved evaluations the following quarter.

Written comments are an important component of evaluations and thus are a major reason that we recommend giving students plenty of time to complete the course evaluations. Assistance in analyzing your data and further information about interpreting student comments are available from the Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL, 110 Sweet Hall, Ext. 3-1326). See the "Resources" section of this handout.

### 3. REFLECTING ON YOUR TEACHING: QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND AVAILABLE RESOURCES

#### QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Is my course attracting the students I expected? What adjustments in course objectives and/or materials should I consider?
- Are students' expected grades accurate? If expected grades are lower, higher, or distributed differently than actual grades, should I consider revising grading/feedback procedures? Are students finding the course too easy? Too hard?
- Are students attending the course regularly? If not, do class sessions duplicate the text too much? Is evaluation weighted too heavily toward readings?
- Are students finding the workload reasonable? Are they finding it valuable? If not, are assignments and readings relevant? Are they geared at too low a level, creating "busywork"? Should I consider assignments that are more concept-oriented or that require more critical thinking?
- Looking at the Elements of Instruction graph, are the scores in the evaluation categories consistent? What's working well? If scores are low, in what area/areas should I devote increased attention? Within those areas, what two or three specific adjustments might I consider?
- Looking at the distribution of scores within each category, are the responses consistent? If not, are they highly grouped, indicating the possibility that certain types of students benefit more from the material or approaches used than others? If responses within or across categories are widely distributed, why might this be?
- If a specific category is noticeably low, what two or three strategies might I try to improve in this area?
- Overall, does the pattern of responses tell a story? That is, are there underlying factors affecting scores in a number of areas, or are strengths and weaknesses specific?
- Does my own assessment of my teaching match that of my students? If not, why not?

#### RESOURCES:

- The Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL, 110 Sweet Hall) has compiled a short booklet with specific and practical suggestions for improving your teaching. The booklet, "Effective University Teaching: Reflecting on and Responding to your Course Evaluations," is organized using the same categories as those found in the Course Evaluation Summary. Call 723-1326 to have a copy sent to you.
- Staff at CTL consult with faculty, graduate students, and lecturers (free of charge, of course) about teaching generally, and/or in regard to specific areas of concern. At your request, CTL staff will videotape a class session and review the tape with you. Many have found this process valuable and rewarding.
- CTL has books and videotapes that can address your teaching needs both specifically and generally. Videotapes of teaching award winners at Stanford, reflecting on specific elements of instruction, are especially popular. Articles and books contain practical and conceptual material relevant to leading class discussions, organizing lectures, working with specific student populations, course planning, and interpreting student comments, to name a few of the many areas covered.
- The following web sites have excellent ideas for university teaching:  
Stanford University  
Center for Teaching & Learning  
Web Page for Teaching with Excellence  
<http://www-ctl.stanford.edu/>  
University of California, Berkeley  
A Berkeley Compendium of Suggestions  
<http://uga.berkeley.edu/sled/compendium>

Please retain this brochure for future reference. We welcome feedback on it at 723-2208.