



This introduction provides a useful starting point for instructors and those in leadership positions to think about interpreting and utilizing student feedback. It has been adapted from Linse (2017).

## How does student feedback help teaching development and growth?



- Student feedback (both numerical and written feedback) provides an opportunity to understand students' perceptions of their experience for a specific course. As the purpose of instruction is to benefit students, it is important to know how students assess what they are being taught and how. **Student ratings of their experiences are not the sole measure of teaching quality or student learning.**
- **Constructive feedback from students can identify what's working and what could be modified** to enhance course design, teaching strategies and the learning environment.

## How should student feedback be used?



- **Student ratings provide information** to instructors about students' perceptions of their experience in a course. Feedback can be used to inform decisions about teaching practices and course design. It can also be part of self-reflection and action planning.
- **There is no single source of evidence that determines teaching quality.** Quantitative and qualitative student feedback should be components that are considered along with other sources of evidence, including self-reflection, feedback from peers and research in teaching and learning.
- **Student feedback should not be the sole source of information.** Individual perceptions are one point of data that can be helpful, but do not necessarily reflect the overall reality. For this reason, it is important to look for patterns (not outliers) and consider student ratings along with other factors to provide a complete and balanced overall assessment. Ratings should be put in context with instructor reflections and other sources of information.

## How can leaders encourage academic staff to use student feedback?



- **Promote a culture** where student feedback is treated as information that can help identify areas of strength and improvement, and assist with goal setting and on-going growth.
- **Support academic staff to make meaning of their student feedback.** Encourage reflection on student written feedback and student ratings as one source of information that can inform areas for teaching growth.
- **Encourage ongoing growth and development.** Become familiar with resources to support teaching growth. Refer academic staff to available teaching supports and resources within your academic unit and at the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. Encourage shared learning related to teaching through peer mentorship and peer feedback.

## How can academic leaders create a positive culture for teaching and learning?



- **Actively communicate the importance of teaching and learning.** Provide opportunities for academics to develop quality of teaching and learning experiences. Acknowledge efforts to develop teaching practices and skills. Emphasize the need for using multiple sources of information (students, self, peers) on teaching to be recognized, encouraged and developed. Provide opportunities for colleagues to share teaching practices that are working well.
- **Support mentorship and leadership efforts.** Encourage colleagues to support each other in their teaching reflections, providing constructive feedback to each other and helping each other make meaning of student feedback. Create opportunities for teaching mentorship and recognize mentorship activities.



## Student ratings report student perceptions.



- **Student ratings represent perceptions of their experience.** Rating tools are designed to reflect collective views of students in a particular course. Students provide information on the effects that course design, activities and assessment strategies, and the learning environment had on their learning. USRI ratings can help identify areas of strength and growth in these areas.
- **Student USRI ratings are not designed to provide data that allows for comparisons of academic staff to each other or to a unit average.** Each academic staff member's ratings should be considered individually.
- **A wide variety of factors can influence ratings.** Sources of variation can include differences in the students enrolled in the class, class size, course level, discipline and implicit bias. Consider how these factors might influence ratings in any given case.

## USRI ratings are not a precise measure.



- **USRI ratings are not a precision tool.** Small differences in ratings are common and not necessarily meaningful. A person can teach the same course under similar conditions in a similar way and receive different ratings. It is most meaningful to focus on the distribution of scores in relation to the rating scale and the mode for each item in the USRI.
- **Each item on the rating should be considered when making sense of student feedback.** Individual questions on the USRI should not be used in isolation to make assertions about the teaching and learning experience in a course.
- **Low response rates are not considered.** Ratings are not released for classes that are small (fewer than eight students) and when response rates are low (below 20%).

## USRI ratings should be contextualized.



- **Written student feedback helps contextualize ratings along with instructor self-reflection on the course and feedback.** At the University of Calgary, written feedback is collected through faculty/school questionnaires often at the same time that ratings are collected.
- As with ratings, **written comments represent students' perceptions** of their experience and help identify areas of strength and growth.

## Focus on the distribution of scores across the entire scale and over time.



- **Look for patterns and consistency** within a course and across time for individual academic staff. Do patterns show general improvement or a persistent issue? How have patterns in student concerns been addressed?
- **The frequency distribution of student ratings is typically skewed** with the peak of the distribution above the mid-point of the scale. Mean scores can be misleading because a few low ratings can substantially lower the mean. It is recommended to review the frequency distribution of ratings across the entire scale (% respondents in each category) and the mode for each rating (the value that is chosen most often).
- **Focus on the most common ratings and comments** rather than a few outliers. Student ratings are best designed to reflect the collective views of students. Outliers should not be given more weight than the perceptions of most students.