

Guidelines for Those Interpreting Student Evaluations of Teaching

- Though an important source of information, teaching evaluation scores are only one piece of the picture. Do not rely on them as the sole source of evidence.
- Do not look at the teaching evaluations from a single courses in isolation; instead, wherever possible, look for patterns and alignment across several courses over a number of years—five courses (or more if class size is small).
- Do not be persuaded, simply by the power of the decimal point, that a 4.3 score is better than a 4.2; small differences may not be important distinctions. Instead, consider the numerical evaluation scores in the context of other information. There are numerous sources of such information: for example, the students' written comments on the evaluation form, the professor's teaching goals, students' final course grades, and so on.
- Be careful to separate the feedback on *teaching* from the feedback on things over which the instructor may have had little control: the text book, the classroom, the schedule, and so on.
- Always contextualize teaching evaluation scores in the other course information the instructor provides: e.g., the size of the course, its level, instructional innovations; whether it's required, a newly developed course, and so on.
- Compare the teaching evaluation scores and comments with other material the instructor provides, for example within a teaching portfolio. Such material could include the teaching philosophy or statement of instructional goals, sample course materials, or feedback from others (peers, colleagues).
- Do not compare one instructor to another based on teaching evaluation data alone. Teaching styles, subject matter, course contexts, instructional goals, and many other variables make such comparison questionable.
- Evaluating teaching does not in and of itself maintain or improve the quality of teaching or of students' learning. Look for evidence that the instructor reads and heeds the teaching evaluation scores and comments. This does not mean that he or she has to make changes, only that he or she can explain what changes were made as a result of student evaluations and why (or why not).

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