



# PAIDEIA

TEACHING & LEARNING AT MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY  
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PURDY CRAWFORD TEACHING CENTRE

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## A SPECIAL ISSUE ON TEACHING EVALUATIONS

In September 2009, the University Senate passed a new policy on teaching evaluation that sought to bring consistency and greater student participation to this process. In developing the policy, the Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluations consulted the research and examined best practices at other universities. The Committee recommended and the Senate approved, among other things, that

- The University adopt a paper evaluation system that uses Scantron “bubble sheets” to record students’ ratings and feedback;
- A standard Mount Allison evaluation form be used consistently in all courses; the form should contain core questions asked in every course but also provide opportunity for professors to add their own questions;
- Teaching evaluation remain primarily formative; that is, that professors use the students’ feedback to monitor, maintain, and enhance the quality of their teaching; and
- A system be developed whereby professors can, *if they choose*, grant permission for others (e.g., Deans and Heads) to receive a copy of their numerical teaching reports.

For several years prior to the new policy, many professors had taken advantage of online teaching evaluations. There had seemed to be many benefits when this system was first implemented: it was paperless, students could complete their evaluations outside class time, and professors received all of the data electronically, making it easy to compile, archive, and use as evidence. However, there were serious drawbacks to this system.

First, a robust system of teaching evaluation depends to a large extent on full, honest and constructive participation by students. With online evaluations, the student participation rate was very disappointing (in some classes fewer than 10 percent responded) and so the comments and ratings were not representative. Mount Allison is not alone in this: the research literature shows that plummeting response rates are very common when evaluations are conducted online. Second, the University’s switch from WebCT to Moodle meant that we no longer had a platform to support anonymous online evaluations.

This special issue of PAIDEIA is meant briefly to complement and highlight the evaluation material on the PCTC website [http://www.mta.ca/pctc/course\\_evaluations.html](http://www.mta.ca/pctc/course_evaluations.html) and to provide another resource for professors as they plan to conduct and use student evaluations.



Mount Allison University  
<http://www.mta.ca/pctc>

## EVIDENCE OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

**R**atings and comments from students, though a valuable source of evidence, are but *one* useful measure of teaching effectiveness. The literature on evaluation of teaching supports the view that teaching evaluation should be based on evidence gathered from a *variety of sources*.

Also, best practice in teaching evaluation involves using various measures contextualized over time, especially when the goal of the evaluation is formative; that is, to maintain or improve the quality of teaching. For this purpose, student evaluation data alone are insufficient. Student evaluations need to be complemented by consultation and by data gathered from other sources, such as peer review, ongoing self-assessment and reflection.

At Mount Allison University, teaching evaluation is primarily formative; it is conducted to provide individual faculty members with the information they require to monitor, maintain, and develop the quality and effectiveness of their teaching and their courses.

However, teaching evaluation at Mount Allison has summative applications; i.e., information gathered from evaluation provides evidence of accomplishment in personnel decisions, such as hiring, promoting, granting tenure, and even adjudicating teaching awards. Sound personnel decisions should be based on evidence from various sources: for example, student evaluation data (both numerically scored and narrative); peer reviews; and materials provided by the professor, such as syllabi, sample course handouts, and reflective statements about teaching strategies and outcomes. All of this evidence is best presented within a teaching portfolio.

## Using Teaching Evaluations to Improve Teaching

The key to using teaching evaluation data as a springboard to improvement is, quite simply, to monitor your evaluations over time and look for patterns. It is also useful to conduct midterm evaluations—such as one-minute-papers, stop-start-continue—rather than waiting for the end-of-term results.

For two useful resources on responding to student evaluations for formative purposes, see the following issues of PAIDEIA:

*Responding to Student Evaluations of your Teaching* (Volume 4, Number 2, Jan, 2009), pp. 6-7.

<http://www.mta.ca/pctc/publications/jan,%202009.pdf>

*Reading your Student Teaching Evaluations* (Volume 3, Number 3, Feb, 2008), pp. 2-4.

[http://www.mta.ca/pctc/publications/Feb\\_2008\\_Compiled.pdf](http://www.mta.ca/pctc/publications/Feb_2008_Compiled.pdf)

## Using Teaching Evaluations for Summative Applications

Without context, teaching evaluation data alone are not sound evidence of teaching effectiveness. That context can be provided in various ways: a description of the instructor's goals for the course, the number of students in the class, the instructional activities, and so on. Similarly, other corroborative evidence, such as materials developed by the instructor, can help readers to interpret the students' responses.

Finally, one set of evaluations from one class is not enough evidence. Evaluation evidence collected over time, in a variety of contexts, is the most persuasive. Again, this is best done in a teaching portfolio.

For more information, visit the University of Saskatchewan's Teaching Portfolio website: <http://www.usask.ca/gmcte/drupal/?q=node/183>.



## MAKING IT EASY: SOME ESSENTIAL POINTS

1. Read the material on the PCTC website < [http://www.mta.ca/pctc/course\\_evaluations.html](http://www.mta.ca/pctc/course_evaluations.html)>.
2. Choose the date for your course evaluation, normally within the last two weeks of classes and tell you departmental secretary.

**Note: It is strongly recommended that you evaluate your courses early in the evaluation period rather than waiting until the last day of classes.**

3. Designate a student evaluation assistant from the class to distribute the forms and to collect and return them to the Departmental Office. Make sure that the student understands the importance of his/her role. See the separate **Student Instruction Sheet** on the PCTC website.
4. Pick up from your Departmental Office the envelope which includes your name, e-mail address, and the course name and number; the re-useable evaluation questionnaires; and blank Scantron sheets.
5. Complete and sign the **Permission Form** (see below) if you are granting others access to your numerical report and place it in the envelope.

### JUST BEFORE CONDUCTING THE EVALUATION

6. Write your surname and the course number on the board so that the students record them accurately on their forms: e.g., BIOL 1001, FREN 2401, COMP 3503.
7. Have your five supplemental questions ready for display; make sure the student evaluation assistant knows about your additional questions and how to display them.
8. Leave the room before the evaluation begins, making no comments, except to clarify procedures, if necessary.
9. The students' feedback is returned to you after final grades are submitted:
  - a. The numerical report will be e-mailed to you, and to any others whom you have designated (See a sample **numerical report** on the PCTC website);
  - b. The students' written comments are returned to you on the Scantron forms themselves.
  - c. Keep you teaching evaluations in a safe place; they are your property. Departmental Support Services will not be archiving them or storing them on a University server.

PERMISSION FORM	
By completing and signing this form, you are opting to grant permission for those whom you have specified to receive a copy of the numerical teaching evaluation report for the designated course only.	
Professor _____	Print/Enter Name)
Course Title/Course Number/Term _____	
I hereby authorize Departmental Support Services to send a copy of the evaluation results for this course to the following (check appropriate box):	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dean of Arts <a href="mailto:deanofarts@mta.ca">deanofarts@mta.ca</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dean of Science <a href="mailto:deanofscience@mta.ca">deanofscience@mta.ca</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dean of Social Sciences <a href="mailto:deanofsocialsciences@mta.ca">deanofsocialsciences@mta.ca</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Department Head/Program Director _____@mta.ca (Print/Enter Email)
Signature _____	Date _____



## ADDING QUESTIONS TO THE EVALUATION FORM

The standard Mount Allison evaluation form contains 11 core questions that focus on common measures of effective teaching; however, individual professors may wish to add supplemental questions to gather feedback tailored to their particular course(s) or instructional goals.

The form gives you the opportunity to create up to five numerically scored questions. These are numbered 18-22 on the Scantron form.

### Why add questions?

You may add questions, for example, because

- You have specific instructional goals not reflected in the 11 core questions;
- Your specific disciplinary context requires the addition of these questions;
- You have tried something new in your course and want particular feedback about it; or
- You want to discover something about the learners or learning in your class that the other questions do not address.

### How to add questions

If you wish to add questions, you may

- Copy them from another teaching evaluation form
- Use some from the Online Question Bank on the PCTC site
- Create them for yourself

**Keep a copy of the additional questions for your own files. They will be recorded nowhere else.**

- Prepare your questions ahead of time
- Have them ready on evaluation day
- Decide on the best way for them to be displayed so the students can see and answer them easily:

- Put them on a PowerPoint slide
- Copy them on an overhead transparency
- Write them on the board

### NOTE

*The teaching evaluation reports are your property and will be returned only to you unless you have signed a permission form that permits others—most likely your Dean or Head—to receive a copy. You must sign the permission form for each course evaluation you are opting to share. See page 3*

## THE PURPOSE OF TEACHING EVALUATIONS

**Here are some ideas you can use to encourage thoughtful participation from your students:**

*Information gathered from student evaluations of their courses and professors contributes to maintaining the overall quality of education at the University.*

*Professors at Mount Allison conduct teaching evaluations primarily to gather student feedback which they use to improve or maintain the quality of teaching and student learning.*

*Generally, professors are most interested in students' written comments because those contain the most specific feedback. They use these comments when they prepare to teach the course again. Therefore, it is most important that students answer the written questions and do so honestly, constructively, and respectfully.*

*Also, whenever professors are applying for tenure or promotion at the University, they are asked to present evidence of their accomplishments in teaching, research, and service. Student feedback, accumulated over time in a variety of courses, can be a valuable component of that evidence.*

