



Report on the Student Course Evaluation Instrument

May 2018

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Executive Summary

In 2017-18, a committee of faculty, students, and staff from the Offices of the Dean of the College and the Dean of the Faculty conducted a review of the University's course evaluation instrument with the goal of assessing current practices and developing a revised instrument. Updating the course evaluation system to reflect current research and best practices is in line with Brown's objectives to offer an excellent and rigorous education to all students. The Committee considered key aspects of the current tool with a focus on format, content, and diversity and inclusion, and considered the instrument within the broader context of evaluation of teaching at Brown.

The report offers several recommendations for the continued use and enhancement of student ratings data at Brown, beginning with the implementation of a new Course Feedback Form in Spring 2019, with slight variations for faculty and for graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants. The new form and subsequent data should be reframed as an important piece of information about the student experience of teaching and considered for formative feedback alongside other measures for the summative evaluation of teaching at Brown. The Committee also advocated for a learning-centered instrument, i.e., students should be prompted to reflect on their own learning in order to frame their feedback on the course and the instructor. Third, the new Course Feedback Form should reflect the institution's values of inclusion and academic integrity through the use of open-ended items on these topics, and the Committee further recommends that the new instrument actively mitigate potential bias in two ways: first, the new form should include more questions that focus on the instructor's specific behaviors (rather than relying on a student's broad judgment of the instructor), and second, the instrument should include a preface directing students to be mindful of their language use in their responses (Bauer & Baltes, 2002; Yale College Teaching and Learning Committee, 2016).

In order to improve transparency, the Committee recommends that select responses from the new Course Feedback Form be made visible to members of the University community via password protection. As a complement to the new form, the Committee further recommends encouraging academic units to use *at least one other source of data* to assess teaching effectiveness (e.g., peer observation of teaching, direct measurement of learning outcomes, peer examination of student work). Finally, in order to ensure that the new Course Feedback Form aligns with current and emerging research on student ratings data and to assess effectiveness and potential bias, the Committee recommends that the Form be reviewed in five years' time. These recommendations are elaborated further in the Recommendations section at the end of this report.

Report on the Student Course Evaluation Instrument

May 2018

In September 2017, the Dean of the College convened a committee of faculty, students, and staff from the Offices of the Dean of the College and the Dean of the Faculty to review Brown's online course evaluation instrument and to develop a new instrument to be piloted in Spring 2018 and implemented in Spring 2019. Conducted ten years after the launch of the College's first online student ratings system, this review was inspired by four key factors: first, Brown's self-study and reaccreditation review prompted a conversation about the ways in which the University assesses teaching at a cross-institutional level; similarly, the University's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and the University's commitment to ensuring an inclusive learning environment more broadly, served as a second catalyst for re-examining the course evaluation system. In what ways might course evaluations gather information about the degree to which the institution is achieving its goals around equity and solicit feedback on topics related to climate? And how should Brown think about the potential for course evaluations, in themselves, to be sites of bias against instructors holding particular racial, gender, or other identities? Third, research on course evaluations systems has increased considerably since Brown launched its current course evaluation in 2006. Updating the University's system to reflect current research and best practices is in line with Brown's objectives to offer an excellent and rigorous teaching program to all students. Finally, following questions from individual faculty members, the Faculty Executive Committee requested a review of the current system to ensure that it provides the most constructive and helpful feedback possible for instructors, for academic units, and for the broader institution. In light of these questions, the committee was asked to consider the following key aspects of the current tool: its format and content; diversity and inclusion; data collection and assessment; and the future evaluation of teaching at Brown.

Background

In 2006, the College Curriculum Council began to develop a flexible course evaluation system. The first online evaluation form was piloted in seven courses in Spring 2008. By Spring 2010, 22 departments were using the system; as of Spring 2017, all departments were using the system for some, if not all, of their courses.

Integrated within self-service Banner, the current course evaluation system ([Appendix A](#)) contains five forms for different types of courses (humanities and social sciences; physical and natural sciences; laboratory sections; introductory, intermediate, and advanced (0100-0600) foreign language courses; and performance and applied fine arts courses). Questions in each of the templates were developed with input from the relevant departments. A combination of five Likert scale and open-ended questions, focusing on the overall effectiveness of the course and the instructor and the student's learning and intellectual growth, cannot be modified or disabled.

Departments may add questions to their base forms and delete other standard questions on the templates. In practice, few departments modify the base templates.

One of the concerns raised about the initial adoption of an online form was whether moving to an electronic system would lead to lower completion rates as students would no longer be completing forms disseminated and collected during class time. A “grade block” was implemented to encourage higher completion rates, requiring students to either complete the evaluation form or opt-out of doing so in order to see their final grade in a course.

Access to Student Ratings Data

Until now, access to student ratings data has been restricted to course instructors, department managers and chairs, and/or academic center directors, although certain data are shared systematically with the University’s Tenure, Promotions, and Appointments Committee (TPAC), the Provost, and the President at the moment of contract renewal and promotion. In addition, the Dean of the Faculty occasionally requests access to a particular set of teaching evaluations at the time of salary review or annual review for untenured regular faculty members (the lecturer tracks and assistant professors). Certain units, such as Engineering, regularly share data regarding course evaluations across the unit’s faculty as a way of maintaining a high quality of teaching throughout the unit. Overall, these restrictions to course evaluation data are highly unusual among our peers (see [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#) for peer practices), and have likely encouraged the development of Brown’s student-run Critical Review.

Committee Process

Chaired by the Dean of the College, Maud S. Mandel, the Committee was informed by the expertise around assessment and evaluation of teaching of the staff in the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning -- namely, the director, Mary Wright, and the assistant director for assessment and evaluation, Marc Lo. A complete list of Committee members, representing each division of the University as well as faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students, is available in [Appendix D](#) of this report.

The Committee met bi-monthly throughout the Fall 2017 semester and monthly throughout the Spring 2018 semester to discuss possible questions for the new course evaluation instrument, informed both by best practices in the field of teaching evaluation and instruments used by peer institutions, with a focus on core elements of teaching effectiveness: perceived learning, quality of instruction (e.g., clarity, organization, engagement), quality of course (e.g., assessment design, level of challenge), and course climate¹; the Committee also had many discussions about issues of bias (and evidence-based strategies for potentially mitigating such bias); best practices for comprehensive evaluations of teaching; and whether to grant access to course evaluations to

¹ A detailed list of question topics is available in the Committee Work Plan in [Appendix E](#).

members of the University community. In addition, the Committee also hosted a faculty forum on course evaluations in collaboration with the Faculty Executive Committee. Following up on recommendations made by the Committee to Review Brown's Academic Code Policies and Procedures, an item was added about teaching practices to cultivate academic integrity, and four motivational items (largely maintained from the existing instrument) were used to gather information on reported reason for electing the course, attendance, and out-of-class preparation. With minor adjustments, these questions were mirrored for Graduate and Undergraduate Teaching Assistants.

To inform discussions about whether to make student ratings visible to the University community, Dr. Lo conducted a benchmarking study in summer 2017 (see [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#)). In summary, of the ten selective liberal arts and Ivy League institutions under review, all share responses to at least some items with students, all share data with university leadership, and some (4) make results visible to the university community more broadly. Responses to close-ended questions are most frequently shared, but if open-ended questions are made visible, it is most typically the item that is aimed at a student audience (e.g., recommending a course to a future student) that is made visible. All institutions that make comments visible have some recourse for faculty with a compelling reason to request that a comment be removed from public view. One institution allows faculty to opt out of making their student ratings public, and another only shares data about faculty who have been teaching at the institution for longer than three years. For students, sharing data raises concerns about Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the European General Data Protection Regulation, which prohibits sharing of unique identifiers for all international students studying in US universities.

Prior to piloting the revised form, feedback was gathered from the Undergraduate Council of Students and the Graduate Student Council. Additionally, Dr. Lo conducted two focus groups with undergraduates to understand if (a) items were read as intended; (b) students preferred the previous or revised instrument; and (c) there were other suggestions about ways to gather information about the student experience at Brown. After this feedback process, a pilot instrument was administered in the Spring of 2018 to a select number of courses across divisions and of various sizes. The Committee met after the pilot was administered to review data from the pilot.

Pilot Study

For the pilot administration of the new Course Feedback Form, the committee recruited fifteen faculty representing a broad range of disciplines, course formats, and student audiences (both undergraduate and graduate) at Brown. [Appendix F](#) details the reach of the survey.

Dr. Lo facilitated the pilot administration, which began on Monday, March 19, 2018, and concluded on Friday, April 6. Two email reminders were sent, and incentives to respond

involved one raffle per course for a \$75 Amazon.com gift card. Sixteen faculty across fifteen courses agreed to participate, reaching 984 enrolled students. 447 surveys were completed for a response rate of 45% (more details are available in [Appendix G](#)).

Statistical analyses of the Likert-type questions yielded evidence that the questions chosen for the instrument are a psychometrically valid measurement of students' experiences of teaching. Items were reasonably correlated, and all loaded onto a scale (see [Appendix H](#)). Given concerns raised by committee members, one item – “I put in enough effort to learn in this course” – was determined to be better utilized as a mechanism for cueing student reflection on their own participation in the course. Subsequently, this item was relocated to immediately after the question on the amount of time students spent on the course outside of class (analyses also provide initial evidence that these two items are related).

Faculty participants were invited to offer their feedback via email and/or an in person meeting, and 10 of the 16 responded to or met with Dr. Lo. Overall, faculty participants reported that the new questions were an improvement, with particular emphasis on the quality of feedback provided by the open-ended items. Although some faculty participants questioned the utility and clarity of the item on academic honesty, the Committee decided to keep the item because of its philosophical and pedagogical value, choosing to adopt one person's feedback to substitute the phrase “academic integrity” for “academic honesty.” Lastly, the Committee decided to reduce the number of options on the original instrument's question about time spent on course. However, given faculty feedback that the options did not offer enough differentiation, the question broke up the option for 3-9 hours of effort into two options: 3-6 hours and 6-9 hours. A summary of faculty feedback may be found in [Appendix I](#).

After further discussion, the Committee also chose to move questions regarding student motivations and course effort to the beginning of the survey. While the Committee acknowledges that making this change after the pilot's administration may affect the form's psychometric properties, the general consensus was that students should consider their own engagement with the course before evaluating their experiences with course instruction. All of these recommendations are included in the final version of the proposed Course Feedback Form, available in [Appendix J](#).

Committee Recommendations

After a wide-ranging process that included a review of student ratings research and practices and consultations with faculty and students, the Committee proposes a series of recommendations for the continued use and enhancement of student ratings data.

1. **Reframe the process:** The Committee advocates for the continued use of student feedback at Brown because information about students' experiences in a course are an

important component in a rich system for the review of teaching. Although useful, student ratings should not be considered “evaluations” of teaching; instead, assessment of teaching effectiveness is the purview of academic units and of TPAC, ideally using multiple sources of evidence or measures of student learning (Linse, 2016). To emphasize the importance of reframing student ratings, the Committee recommends changing the name of the instrument from “course evaluation” to the “Course Feedback Form.”

2. **Revise the form, with enhanced options for tailoring:** In response to positive student and faculty feedback about the new instrument, we propose implementing a single new Course Feedback Form in Spring 2019, with slight variations for faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and undergraduate teaching assistants. (See [Appendix J](#) for form.) Because they have been tested as a cohesive unit, we recommend a single main form and that all questions be required. However, we suggest that faculty and graduate TAs have the option of adding questions from an item bank. (See [Appendix K](#) for optional questions suggested during our planning process.) Further, because most faculty do not take advantage of the ability to customize their Course Feedback Forms, we suggest technical enhancements to facilitate ease of use. Outreach about these features should be ongoing.

3. **Mitigate potential for bias:** The committee discussed at length the role of bias in student ratings and strategies for mitigating such bias. We do not question that Course Feedback Forms -- like any human evaluation system -- likely contain an element of bias. However, international scholarship is still emerging about the potential role of bias in Course Feedback Forms and implications for effect size and interpretation.² Informed by extant research, the questions that were piloted were developed with the goal of mitigating bias to the greatest degree possible (while acknowledging that it may be impossible to completely eliminate bias from any student ratings instrument). The instrument should include questions that ask students to focus on specific instructional behaviors (rather than relying solely on a student’s holistic judgment of the instructor) and reflection on their learning, cited in other personnel studies and ratings reports as a mechanism to mitigate bias (Bauer & Baltes, 2002; Yale College Teaching and Learning Committee, 2016). For example, of the two required Likert-scale questions on the previous instrument, both are very broad evaluative items (e.g., Please indicate your evaluation of the effectiveness of the course overall; Please indicate your evaluation of the instructor's overall effectiveness). Instead, in building to these global items, we suggest additional questions to prompt student reflection about specific behaviors associated with teaching effectiveness (e.g., questions about clarity and organization, with specific examples of ways these could be expressed) and students’ reflections on their learning gains (e.g.,

² Studies have examined how different factors may affect bias, including: faculty at different career stages, an instructor’s identity (or perceived identity) in relationship to course content, and alignment between a student’s identity and their perception of the instructor’s identity (e.g., Basow & Martin, 2012; Linse, 2016; Mengel, Sauer mann, Zölitz, 2018).

questions about level of challenge and new understandings attributed to the course). We also recommend that the new instrument ([Appendix J](#)) include a preface reminding students of the professional nature of Course Feedback Forms and the importance of offering specific feedback in response to open-ended items.

4. **Ensure that the instrument reflects University values:** In alignment with the University's priorities to cultivate diversity and inclusion, as well as academic integrity (as recommended by the Committee on Reviewing Brown's Academic Code Policies and Procedures 2018), we recommend the addition of two open-ended items:
 - Did the instructor foster an environment where all students - including yourself - were treated with respect and their questions and perspectives welcomed? How did the instructor accomplish this?
 - In what ways did the instructor communicate the expectations for academic integrity (e.g., sufficient citations of source material, clarity on collaboration policy)? What additional steps could the instructor have taken to communicate these expectations?

5. **Make responses visible to the University community:** The committee recommends greater transparency of Course Feedback Form responses:
 - Make responses to all close-ended items and comments available to senior administrators, deans, directors, and chairs to allow for institution-wide evaluation and assessment of the student experience of teaching at Brown.
 - Make summarized responses to all close-ended items (questions 1-9) and all responses to one open-ended item (What would you like to say about this course to a student who is considering taking it in the future?) available via password protection to all members of the Brown community. Student ratings feedback should be visible for courses taught by faculty who have been at Brown for more than three years (six terms); others may also opt in. Ideally this display will be located in Banner, and a summary will be available in Courses@Brown (alongside the Critical Review). Faculty should have the option to petition the Office of the Dean of the College to remove comments that are offensive or violate Brown's code of conduct. Due to student records concerns, we recommend that results about teaching assistants and graduate instructors not be made public.

6. **Enhance Brown's approach to evaluating teaching.** In alignment with recommendations made by the NEASC visiting team and consistent with many of our Ivy+ peers ([Appendix L](#)), the Committee recommends a multi-modal approach to evaluation of teaching at Brown, encouraging all departments to use Course Feedback

Forms and at least one other source of data addressing teaching effectiveness (e.g., peer observation of teaching, direct measurement of learning outcomes, peer examination of student work). Extant literature recommends evaluating different dimensions of teaching effectiveness, including content expertise, engagement, and course design (Theall & Arreola, 2006). The Committee also recommends that the University consider enhancing the annual review template to allow instructors to enter pedagogical goals and related professional development. This may be another important avenue for the university to mitigate potential bias. Research suggests that instructor identity significantly impacts time allocated to teaching-related activities (O'Meara, Kuvaeva, Nyunt, Waugaman, & Jackson, 2018); such efforts are often undervalued or unrecognized.

7. **Revisit the Course Feedback Form regularly.** We suggest that the instrument be reviewed again in five years, in the interest of keeping it up to date with new scholarship of teaching and learning, as well as to study questions of bias.

References

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Appendices

Appendix A: Current Course Evaluation Instrument

Templates exist for courses in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Life and Physical Sciences, Labs, and Languages. Required questions are denoted with an asterisk (*).

Student Information

1. Please indicate how often you attended class.
 - a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Less than half of the time

2. Please indicate the number of hours per week you spent on this course outside of class.
 - a. 0-2 hours
 - b. 3-4 hours
 - c. 5-6 hours
 - d. 7-8 hours
 - e. 9+ hours

Effectiveness of Course

1. *What knowledge or skills did this course help you develop? Please comment on your own learning and intellectual growth. (Open-ended)

2. *Please indicate your evaluation of the effectiveness of the course overall. (Likert scale)

3. *Please elaborate on your responses above, or on anything else you wish to discuss about the course design and content. (Open-ended)

Effectiveness of Instruction

1. *Please indicate your evaluation of the effectiveness of the instruction overall. (Likert scale)

2. *Please elaborate on your responses above, or anything else you wish to discuss about the teaching in this course. (Open-ended)

Appendix B: Benchmarking of Ratings Practices at Ivy+ Peers

	Brown	Columbia	Cornell	Dartmouth	Harvard	UPenn	Princeton	Yale	Chicago	MIT	NWestern	Stanford
Home-grown	Yes ³	Yes ⁴	Yes ²	Yes ²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ⁴	Yes	Yes ⁵	No ⁶	Yes ⁴
Administered centrally	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes ^{6,7}	Yes	Yes	Yes ⁸	Yes	Yes ⁹	Yes
Administrator	Department	VP of the College	School	Registrar	Registrar	VP of Ed.	Registrar	Registrar	Registrar	Registrar	eXplorance ⁸	VPTL
Shadow Ratings	No ¹⁰	No	Yes ¹¹	No	No	No	No	No.	No	No ⁷	No	Yes
Access to ratings data:												
Instructor	Yes ¹²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department Leadership	Yes ¹³	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Students	No ¹⁴	Yes ¹⁵	Yes	Yes ¹⁵	Yes	Yes	Yes ¹⁶	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University Leadership	No	Yes	Yes	Yes ¹⁷	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University-wide	No	No	Yes	No	Yes ¹⁸	Yes ¹⁹	Yes ²⁰	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes ²¹
Online Dashboard	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ²²	Yes	Yes ²³	Yes	Yes
T&P use	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies ²⁴
TT Faculty	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies
Adjuncts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, for Lecturers	Yes ²⁵	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies
	Brown	Columbia	Cornell	Dartmouth	Harvard	UPenn	Princeton	Yale	Chicago	MIT	NWestern	Stanford

³ Fully customizable at the departmental level. 5 versions exist: HMSS; the sciences; lab sections; foreign languages; performance and applied fine arts courses.

⁴ Individual faculty can also add custom questions.

⁵ Differs for STEM vs. HASS(HMSS) courses.

⁶ [Blue by eXplorance](#), additional questions allowed.

⁷ With school-level support.

⁸ With college-level oversight... They may opt to use their own instrument.

⁹ eXplorance integrates with SRS and LMS via collaboration with Registrar's Office.

¹⁰ Departments determine which courses are evaluated.

¹¹ Ratings for new courses are held until the second time the course is taught.

¹² TAs may only access questions specific to TA instruction.

¹³ Department heads have instructor-level and aggregate access.

¹⁴ Students run their own system. See: <http://www.thecriticalreview.org/about/history>

¹⁵ With instructor consent.

¹⁶ Students access restricted to comments about "advice" for students interested in taking the course.

¹⁷ Departmental custom questions are restricted.

¹⁸ Select open-ended comments, only. Graduate Teaching Fellow Data is restricted due to FERPA.

¹⁹ A question about "cheating" in the course is restricted.

²⁰ Restricted to "advice" for students interested in taking the course.

²¹ Quantitative data only. Only students have access to an open-ended questions regarding "advice" for other students considering taking the course.

²² Faculty have access to both aggregate and individual (de-identified responses).

²³ Level of detail restricted by role (i.e. an instructor of record can see de-identified individual responses; TAs only aggregate responses and comments.)

²⁴ Stanford discourages the use of course evaluations as the sole source of evidence of good teaching for the purposes of tenure, promotion, and reappointment, but it is likely that they are still used as a primary document.

²⁵ Alongside peer classroom observations

Appendix C: Background on Public Ratings Information at Ivy+ Peers

Compiled by Dr. Mary Wright

I received responses from seven Ivy+ center for teaching and learning directors about visibility of student ratings comments:

- Yale makes available three open-ended questions. Faculty may respond to a comment (which will also be visible) and petition to have a comment removed by the Registrar.
 - What knowledge, skills, and insights did you gain by taking this course?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of this course and how could it be improved?
 - Would you recommend this course to another student? Please explain.

- Caltech and Harvard make the comments available for the student-to-student item:
- At Caltech, the Registrar's Office screens comments in advance.
- At Harvard, if a comment is flagrantly offensive, a faculty member can ask the Office of Undergraduate Education to remove it.
- At Dartmouth, faculty "opt in" to sharing their data for any item.
- MIT makes comments available to faculty and chairs only.
- UPenn and UMichigan do not make comments public. At UMichigan, quantitative sum results are visible for courses taught by faculty who have been teaching for more than three years (six terms). Graduate Student Instructor ratings are not displayed because they are considered student records.

Appendix D: Committee Charge and Membership

Rationale

The formation of a 2017-18 committee to review Brown's online evaluation system is timely due the following factors:

- Brown's accreditation review, which will take place in 2018-19, requires that the University speak to how it assesses teaching at a cross institutional level.
- The 2016-17 Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan commits the University to ensuring an inclusive environment for all community members inside the classroom and out. Course evaluations provide one mechanism to gather information about whether or not we are achieving these goals.
- Research on course evaluations systems has increased considerably since Brown launched this initiative in 2006. Updating our system to reflect current research and best practices is in line with the University's objectives to offer an excellent and rigorous teaching program to all students.
- Following questions from individual faculty members, the Faculty Executive Committee requested review of the system to ensure it is providing the most constructive and helpful feedback possible.

Charge

The Committee on Evaluating Teaching at Brown will assess Brown's online course evaluation system and address the following questions:

- *Format and Content:* Does the current course evaluation system ask the most useful questions for assessing teaching quality and supporting instructional improvement at Brown? Does the current form have the appropriate number, type, and sequence of required questions?
- *Diversity and Inclusion:* Should Brown add additional required questions to assess classroom climate? Is there a way to mitigate for potential bias directed toward professors in the way questions are formulated? Should certain groups of faculty be exempt from the course evaluation system or be able to document effectiveness in different ways (e.g., faculty implementing a significant teaching innovation, faculty in their first year)?

- *Data Collection and Assessment:* Should departments continue to limit access to course evaluation content or should Brown, like many universities, make some or all of the content visible to other members of the campus community? If piloting a new form, what would the committee hope to see to know that it improves upon the previous system?
- *Future Evaluation of Teaching:* Should a future committee address the evaluation of teaching more broadly (e.g., use of teaching portfolios or other sources of information about teaching effectiveness) and if so, what topics might it consider?

Committee Membership:

- Laura Bass, Hispanic Studies
- Emily Contois, GS in American Studies
- Alison Field, Epidemiology
- Christopher Kahler, Behavioral and Social Sciences
- Philip Klein, Computer Science
- Marc Lo, Sheridan Center
- Maud Mandel, DoC
- Brian Meeks, Africana Studies
- Sarah Mullen, DoC
- Raphaela Posner '18, UG in English
- Besenia Rodriguez, DoC
- John Stein, Neuroscience
- Anne Windham, DoF
- Mary Wright, Sheridan Center

Appendix E: Committee Work Plan
Committee for Reviewing Brown's Course Evaluation Instrument
2017-2018 Meeting Schedule

Meetings convene in 218 University Hall

Friday, September 29, 2:00 - 3:30 PM | Overview

Agenda

- Introductions
- Review [committee charge](#) and meeting schedule
- Discuss pre-circulated readings, including current Brown evaluation instrument (below)

Guest: Chris Keith, CIS

Readings, available [here](#):

- University guidance on assessing teaching (Brown University Dean of the Faculty)
- Current Brown course evaluation instrument
- Grids reviewing teaching evaluation and student rating practices at peer institutions
- Linse, A. (2016). Interpreting and using student ratings data: Guidance for faculty serving as administrators and on evaluation committees. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*.
- Benchmarking (*skim for a general overview*), incl.:
 - Yale: 2016 recommendations to revise course evaluation survey
 - Stanford: 2013 course evaluation committee report

Tuesday, October 10, 8:30 - 10:00 AM | Crafting questions regarding student learning outcomes

Readings:

- [Peer Course Evaluation Questions](#)

Prior to each meeting, Marc Lo will send a survey with sample questions pertaining to that week's topic. Each committee member should indicate which questions should be considered, discussed, or dismissed.

Monday, October 23, 8:45 -10:15 am | Crafting questions regarding quality of instruction

Readings:

- [Quality of instruction](#)

Monday, November 6, 2:00pm-3:30pm | Crafting questions regarding quality of the course

Readings:

- [Quality of course](#)
- [SRI practice collection processes](#)

Wednesday, November 8, 4:00 - 5:40 pm (Faculty Club) | Faculty Executive Committee's Faculty Forum

Tuesday, November 28, 12:30pm-2:00pm | Crafting questions on classroom dynamics

Friday, December 15, 2:30pm-4:00pm | Review of the draft Course Feedback Form / discussion of pilot process

Readings:

Friday, February 2, 2:15 pm-3:45pm | Discussion of course evaluation instrument with students

Guests: Student representatives from the Undergraduate Council of Students & Graduate Council

Readings:

1. Brown University CEI Draft 12_18_2017.docx [View](#) [Download](#)
2. CEI Focus Group 1_16_2018.docx [View](#) [Download](#)
3. CEI Focus Group 1_29_2018.docx [View](#) [Download](#)
4. CEI Revisions for Consideration from Focus Group Findings.docx [View](#) [Download](#)

Thursday, March 1, 10:30am-12:00pm | Sharing student ratings data and evaluating teaching at Brown going forward

Agenda:

1. Quick update on the pilot CEI
2. Discussion of recommendations for making public Brown student ratings*
3. Discussion of recommendations for how teaching should be evaluated at Brown going forward
4. Preview of next steps

Readings:

1. [Ivy+ Teaching Evaluation Exploration](#)
2. [Paulsen \(2002\) Evaluating Teaching Performance](#)
3. [Student Ratings Practices at Ivy+ 8 3 2017](#)

Friday, April 27, 12:00pm-1:20pm | Review data from the pilot; discuss recommendations
16 copies of our revised course evaluation were administered from March 19th through April 6th. 447 of 984 surveys were returned, for a completion rate of 45%. Of those 51% of responses were from the Humanities and Social Sciences; the remaining 49% were from STEM fields.

Agenda:

1. Review of pilot findings
2. Discussion on bias (guests: Gerald Diebold & Kathy Hess)
3. Continued discussion re: public comments

You will find the following materials for next week's meeting on the [Committee Google Site](#).

- An *overall report* of the pilot (PDF), with selected responses from the open-ended prompts. Representative responses and questions of some debate amongst the committee and/or faculty participants are included. Potential bias in the comments is highlighted in **red**.
- A *snapshot of the relationships* between items ("Brown University CEI Item Tests"), which indicates that we are asking good questions; they are all correlated and come together to form a solid "scale" for evaluation of courses.
- *De-identified feedback* from faculty participants, which found that the instrument was useful, that open-ended questions added the most value, and that there are some questions regarding the utility of the academic honesty question.
- *Student focus group feedback* (for re-review), which emphasizes questions about inclusion and advice for future students.
- *Insights from peer institutions* about how evaluation data is made available.

Monday, May 7 | Review and discuss draft report

Appendix F: Pilot Administration Timeline and Sampling Frame

To effectively a) collect pilot data in a timely manner and b) limit interference with end-of-term course evaluations, the following pilot process is proposed for the revised Brown Course Experience instrument:

- Late January: Focus group with undergraduate students re: usability
- February 2: Meeting with Graduate Student Council reps to collect feedback
- February 28: Participating faculty identified
- March 12: Rosters for participating faculty collected/due for upload to Qualtrics
- March 19-April 6: Pilot administration
- April 10: Reports shared with faculty participating; Feedback collected via brief survey/individual consultation
- Week of April 23: Findings from pilot presented to committee

Faculty will be *invited* to participate in the pilot and will ideally help fill categories that intersect across a variety of disciplines and course formats. After a cursory review of courses offered in the spring semester, there are multiple classes whose student enrollment will meet the minimum number in the table below, while also aligning with the disciplinary and course format categories outlined on the axes.

	Large Lecture	Small Lectures	Course with a lab, recitation, or studio	Graduate-Level course	Total
Arts & Humanities	200	20	20	10	250
Social Sciences	200	20	100	10	330
Life Sciences	200	18	40	10	268
Physical Sciences	200	20	100	10	330
					1178

*Please note that some of these numbers are based on current course enrollments for classes not yet at capacity, and there will be fluctuations during shopping period. Response rates will affect the complexity of analyses.

Appendix G: Pilot Distribution Across Disciplines, with Response Rates

	Total Enrollment	Responses	Response Rate
Arts & Humanities	176	48	27.3%
Social Sciences	448	178	39.7%
Life Sciences	62	34	54.8%
Physical Sciences	312	187	59.9%
Total	998	447	44.7%

Appendix H: Validity of Likert-Type Items

Table 1. Correlation Matrix of All Items and Their Composite

This table explores the extent to which each question is related to its peers. All correlations are significant ($p < .05$). Anything above .70 indicates that the questions might a little too closely related and therefore redundant.

Item:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. The instructor was well prepared for each class (e.g. lectures, discussions, and/or in-course activities were well organized).	1										
2. The instructor effectively engaged students in class (e.g. elicited student interest in the lecture; encouraged student participation; was responsive to questions; offered opportunities for discussion in pairs or small groups).	.48	1									
3. The instructor effectively engaged students outside of class (e.g. kept electronic resources up-to-date; was available during office hours; was responsive to requests to meet).	.47	.53	1								
4. The instructor made course material clear and understandable (e.g. was effective in explaining more abstract content).	.60	.39	.47	1							
5. This course challenged me to develop new skills, ideas, concepts, or ways of thinking.	.53	.45	.42	.55	1						
6. This course helped me develop a better understanding of the principles, theories, and/or facts in this area.	.54	.41	.43	.72	.69	1					
7. The assignments in this course have helped me learn.	.44	.37	.47	.56	.57	.65	1				
8. I put in enough effort to learn from this course.	.33	.40	.29	.28	.47	.34	.32	1			
9. Overall, I rate this instructor as effective.	.66	.53	.51	.82	.61	.68	.55	.35	1		
10. Overall, I rate this course as effective.	.50	.36	.42	.72	.59	.74	.66	.36	.73	1	
11. Composite of All Items	.73	.65	.67	.82	.79	.84	.76	.54	.86	.83	1

Brown University Course Experience Instrument Item Reliability

Tests were conducted to explore the reliability of the items in our instrument, weighting and controlling for discipline.

First, while the prior table indicated significant correlations, more advanced analyses ask the question: do they actually like to “hang out together” and contribute to something larger than themselves, such as the evaluation of a course?

Table 2. Item Loadings for All Questions

An alpha (α) value over .80 is generally considered good.

Item:	$\alpha = .91$
1. The instructor was well prepared for each class (e.g. lectures, discussions, and/or in-course activities were well organized).	.90
2. The instructor effectively engaged students in class (e.g. elicited student interest in the lecture; encouraged student participation; was responsive to questions; offered opportunities for discussion in pairs or small groups).	.91
3. The instructor effectively engaged students outside of class (e.g. kept electronic resources up-to-date; was available during office hours; was responsive to requests to meet).	.91
4. The instructor made course material clear and understandable (e.g. was effective in explaining more abstract content).	.90
5. This course challenged me to develop new skills, ideas, concepts, or ways of thinking.	.90
6. This course helped me develop a better understanding of the principles, theories, and/or facts in this area.	.90
7. The assignments in this course have helped me learn.	.90
8. I put in enough effort to learn from this course.	.92
9. Overall, I rate this instructor as effective.	.89
10. Overall, I rate this course as effective.	.90

Additional Analyses Found:

- Items 1, 2, and 4 are most predictive of overall rating of the instructor (item 9).
- Items 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are most predictive of overall rating of the course (item 10).

Appendix I: Faculty Participant Feedback from Spring 2018 Pilot

1. 40% (N=4) of faculty offering feedback on the Course Feedback Form pilot commented on the overall utility of the instrument, opining that the data presented painted a clear picture of students' experience with the course, and that they found most (if not all) of the questions worthwhile.
 2. 20% (N=2) of faculty offering feedback on the pilot Course Feedback Form felt as though the instrument was not much different than what they currently receive. Both faculty couched their feedback within the context that they collect their own feedback from students in the middle of the semester.
 3. 60% (N=6) of faculty offering feedback on the pilot Course Feedback Form did not provide feedback on the overall instrument (instead, specific comments were offered – see item 6 below).
 4. 100% (N=10) of faculty offering feedback on the pilot Course Feedback Form provided some observation that the open-ended questions offered a level of specificity about course content and format that was particularly helpful in considering changes for future semesters beyond what was offered by the Likert-type questions.
 5. 40% (N=4) of faculty offering feedback on the pilot Course Feedback Form were concerned about the question regarding academic honesty as it seemed out of place, and that student responses were not as useful as the other open-ended questions. The remaining 60% (N=6) did not raise a concern about this question.
 6. There were a number of specific suggestions regarding wording of different items, including:
 - Change “academic honesty” to “academic integrity”
 - Maintain the current order of the Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree; the pilot reversed the order to Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree, in alignment with current practice in survey design)
 - Expanding wording on questions to be inclusive of multiple representations of material (e.g. content vs. readings and papers)
- Increase the differentiation in the number of weekly hours spent in the course (the pilot reduced the options to 3)

Appendix J: Recommended Instrument

The purpose of this form is to provide useful feedback on this course to the instructor and to the University, and to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning at Brown. As you reflect on your experience in this course, please be mindful of any prejudgments or expectations you may have held about the course and its instructor. Please think carefully about your responses and consider specific examples to justify your response selections and to compose your narrative comments. You may wish to compose your comments as though you were speaking directly to the instructor. Thank you for providing feedback about your experience in this course.

These questions ask you to evaluate your motivations for attending the class and the amount of time spent attending and preparing for class.

1. Please indicate your reason(s) for taking this course (check all that apply):
 - Pre-requisite for other course(s)
 - Requirement for concentration
 - Required for graduate school
 - Elective within a concentration
 - Elective outside concentration
 - Reputation of instructor
 - Interest in topic
2. Please indicate how often you attended class:
 - Always
 - Frequently
 - About half of the time
 - Less than half of the time
3. What proportion of out-of-class preparation and assignments (e.g. reading; papers; problem sets) did you complete?
 - Some optional tasks in addition to everything that was required
 - Everything that was required
 - Most of what was required
 - About half of what was required
 - Less than half of what was required
4. On average, how many hours per week were spent on this course outside of class time?
 - More than 9 hours per week
 - 6-9 hours per week
 - 3-6 hours per week
 - Less than 3 hours per week
5. Reflecting on your efforts during and outside of class time, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: I put in enough effort to learn from this course.
 - Agree, Strongly
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Disagree, Strongly

Reflecting on your experiences of this course and its instructor(s), please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements on a scale of Agree, Strongly to Disagree, Strongly.

	Agree, Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree, Strongly
1. The instructor was well prepared for each class (e.g. lectures, discussions, and/or in-course activities were well organized).	<input type="radio"/>				
2. The instructor effectively engaged students in class (e.g. elicited student interest in the lecture; encouraged student participation; was responsive to questions; offered opportunities for discussion in pairs or small groups).	<input type="radio"/>				
3. The instructor effectively engaged students outside of class (e.g. kept electronic resources up-to-date; was available during office hours; was responsive to requests to meet).	<input type="radio"/>				
4. The instructor made course material clear and understandable (e.g. was effective in explaining more abstract content).	<input type="radio"/>				
5. This course challenged me to develop new skills, ideas, concepts, or ways of thinking.	<input type="radio"/>				
6. This course helped me develop a better understanding of the principles, theories, content, and/or facts in this area.	<input type="radio"/>				
7. The assignments in this course have helped me learn.	<input type="radio"/>				
8. Overall, I rate this instructor as effective.	<input type="radio"/>				
9. Overall, I rate this course as effective.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please take some time to reflect on each of the following questions and use the text box provided to write a response that best describes your thoughts.

1. Think about the overall course and its content:
 - a. What has been particularly effective about the instructor's approach to teaching in this course?

b. What specific advice would you have for this instructor about changes that would enhance your learning?

2. In what ways did the instructor communicate the expectations for academic integrity (e.g. sufficient citations of source material; clarity on collaboration policy)? What additional steps could the instructor have taken to communicate these expectations?

3. Did the instructor foster an environment where all students - including yourself - were treated with respect and their questions and perspectives welcomed? How did the instructor accomplish this?

4. What would you like to say about this course to a student who is considering taking it in the future? (Please be mindful that your response to this question is also meant for other students, and it will be made available to the Brown University community. Although your comment will be anonymous, if it is deemed inappropriate, it may be removed by the Office of the Dean of the College.)

For a course with a Graduate Teaching Assistant:

	Agree, Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree, Strongly
1. My teaching assistant was prepared for laboratory, recitation, problem solving sessions, and/or field trips.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My teaching assistant effectively engaged students (e.g. encouraged student participation in the laboratory, recitation, or problem solving session; was responsive to questions; offered opportunities for discussion in pairs or small groups).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My teaching assistant was responsive to students outside of laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions (e.g. was available during office hours; was responsive to questions; was responsive to requests to meet).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. My teaching assistant made laboratory, recitation, or problem solving session content clear and understandable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. My teaching assistant provided clear feedback that improved my learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Overall, I rate this teaching assistant as effective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. What has been particularly effective about this teaching assistant's approach to teaching in this course?

8. What specific advice would you have for this teaching assistant about changes that would enhance your learning?

For a course with an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant:

	Agree, Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree, Strongly
1. My undergraduate teaching assistant was prepared for laboratory, recitation, problem solving sessions, and/or field trips.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My undergraduate teaching assistant effectively engaged students (e.g. encouraged student participation in the laboratory, recitation, or problem solving session; was responsive to questions; offered opportunities for discussion in pairs or small groups).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My undergraduate teaching assistant was responsive to students outside of laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions (e.g. was available during office hours; was responsive to questions; was responsive to requests to meet).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. My undergraduate teaching assistant made laboratory, recitation, or problem solving session content clear and understandable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Overall, I rate this undergraduate teaching assistant as effective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. What has been particularly effective about this undergraduate teaching assistant's approach to teaching in this course?

7. What specific advice would you have for this undergraduate teaching assistant about changes that would enhance your learning?

Appendix K: Optional Question Banks

N.B.: The Committee recommends that additional question banks be created for courses that involve travel, community engagement, and for language courses.

Optional Item Bank (For Any Course)

Likert-Type Questions (Agree, Strongly, to Disagree, Strongly Scale):

1. I received clear feedback that improved my learning.
2. This class stimulated my interest in the subject.
3. I put in enough effort to learn from this course.
4. Discussion has helped me understand the key ideas of this course.
5. The assignments in this course have helped me learn.
6. The readings in this course have helped me learn.
7. Instructor feedback was useful.
8. I feel comfortable approaching the instructor with questions or comments.
9. This class was open to a variety of different student experiences and perspectives.
10. Course content was inclusive of diverse perspectives
11. Students were open to hearing diverse opinions.

Open-Ended Questions (Text Box Response):

1. How did the instructor encourage participation and learning?
2. Which course assignments have helped you understand the topic or stimulated you to be more interested in the topic? Which assignments have been least interesting?
3. Please comment on the course assignments. Have they been well designed? Has feedback been helpful? What have you learned from the feedback?
4. Describe the quality of feedback received for this course.
5. What background (other classes, skills, or knowledge) did you find supported your success in this course?
6. Would you recommend this course to another student? Why?
7. What has the instructor done that has helped you learn? What specific advice do you have for this professor about things he or she could do to help you learn better?
8. Evaluate your own work in this course. What have you done well? What could you do to improve your learning?
9. How do you prepare for class discussion? What could the professor do to help you feel more prepared?
10. Have assignments in this course allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned? How?
11. Which course assignments have helped you understand the topic or stimulated you to be more interested in the topic? Which assignments have been least interesting?
12. How does your TA contribute to your learning in this course? What would you like to see them do differently?

13. In what ways has the clinical instructor helped you to learn relevant skills? What could they do to improve your learning?
14. Have in-class instruction and activities prepared you for solving problems on your own? Why or why not?
15. What has the instructor done to communicate their grading standards? Do you feel you understand those standards? Why or why not?
16. What has your instructor done during lab experiments that has helped you learn from experiments? What else could your instructor do?
17. What would you suggest to the professor to improve this course?
18. How comfortable do you feel asking questions in class? How comfortable do you feel asking outside of class? What has the professor done to encourage or discourage questions?
19. Do you find the professor accessible? Why or why not?
20. How open was the class to a variety of perspectives?
21. What did the instructor do or not do to facilitate this kind of open discussion?
22. Please provide feedback on the course and instructor in general. What have been strengths of the instructor and course? What could the instructor do to improve the class?
23. Would you like to provide any other comments about this course?

Lab/Recitation/Problem Solving Session Optional Item Bank

Questions about the Overall Lab/Recitation/Problem Solving Session (All on a Likert-type Scale: Agree, Strongly, to Disagree, Strongly):

1. Time spent in laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions supported my learning in this course.
2. Work in laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions prepared me to do well on the exams.
3. The experiments, projects, problems, and/or demonstrations in this course help me in working other problems on my own.
4. The experiments, projects, problems, and/or demonstrations in in this course helped me understand the ideas and concepts from class.
5. The laboratory or recitation lectures were helpful in understanding the purpose of the experiment, project, demonstration, or problems.

Questions soliciting Student Reflection on Effort:

1. I sufficiently prepared for laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions in this course. **(Likert-type)**
2. What steps did you take to prepare for laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions in this course? **(Open-ended)**

Questions about the Instructor:

1. The instructor's instructions before the laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions were sufficient for me to perform the task. **(Likert-type)**
2. The instructor's expectations for the laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions were clearly outlined. **(Likert-type)**
3. The instructor emphasized the importance of safety during laboratory sessions. **(Likert-type)**
4. The instructor effectively engaged students in the laboratory, recitation, or problem solving session (e.g. encouraged student participation; was responsive to questions; offered opportunities for discussion in pairs or small groups). **(Likert-type)**
5. The instructor's comments during laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions helped my understanding of key steps in the experiment, project, demonstration, or problem. **(Likert-type)**
6. What has your instructor done during laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions that has helped you learn? What else could your instructor do during laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions to help you learn? **(Open-ended)**

Questions about Teaching Assistants:

1. My teaching assistant was accessible during the laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions. **(Likert-type)**
2. My teaching assistant took initiative in soliciting questions from students. **(Likert-type)**
3. My teaching assistant effectively answered questions about the laboratory, project, or problems covered. **(Likert-type)**
4. My teaching assistant provided sufficient instructions before the laboratory or problem session began. **(Likert-type)**
5. My teaching assistant emphasized the importance of safety in the laboratory. **(Likert-type)**
6. My teaching assistant was effective in answering questions about laboratory procedures (e.g. equipment use, clean up, collection of data). **(Likert-type)**
7. My teaching assistant promoted an atmosphere, which was motivational and conducive to my learning. **(Likert-type)**
8. My teaching assistant effectively answered subject-related questions. **(Likert-type)**
9. My teaching assistant effectively answered my equipment-related questions. **(Likert-type)**
10. My teaching assistant effectively answered questions. **(Likert-type)**
11. My teaching assistant was effective in supporting my learning in laboratory, recitation, or problem solving sessions. **(Likert-type)**
12. My teaching assistant gave helpful feedback on laboratory reports or problem sets. **(Likert-type)**

13. My teaching assistant was interested in my progress in the laboratory work. (**Likert-type**)
14. Laboratory presentations were organized. (**Likert-type**)
15. Graded work was returned promptly by my teaching assistant. (**Likert-type**)
16. What were the TA's strengths as a teacher? Please be specific. (**Open-ended**)
17. What are your recommendations for how the TA could improve his/her teaching effectiveness? (**Open-ended**)
18. What were the teaching assistant's strengths in teaching the laboratory? Please try to give specific examples. (**Open-ended**)
19. What were the teaching assistant's weaknesses in teaching the laboratory? Please try to give suggestions for improvement. (**Open-ended**)

Appendix L: Benchmarking of Teaching Evaluation Practices at Ivy+ Peers

Evidence:	Brown	Columbia	Cornell	Dartmouth	Harvard	UPenn	Princeton	Yale	Chicago	MIT²⁶	NWestern	Stanford
Statement of Teaching/Philosophy	Req.	Req.	Req.	Req.	Req.	Rec.		No	Req.	Varies	Req.	Req.
Professional Development	Opt.	Opt.	Opt.	Opt.	Req.	N/A		No	No	Varies	Opt.	Rec.
Peer Review of Teaching	Opt.	Opt.	Req.	Opt.	Opt.	Opt.		No	No	Varies	Opt.	Req.
Samples of Student Work	Opt.	Opt.	Req.	Opt.	Req.	N/A		No	No	Varies	No	No
Syllabi	Opt.	Req.	Req.	Opt.	Req.	N/A		No	No	Varies	No	Req.
Course evaluations	Req.	Req.	Req.	Opt.	Yes ²⁷	Req.		Yes ²⁷	No	Varies	Req.	Req.
Student Letters	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Req.		No	No	Varies	No	Req.
Enrollment Matrix	No	No	No	No	Req.	Req.		Req.	Req.	Varies	No	Req.

²⁶ Colleagues from MIT have been quite clear that there is no standard practice for evaluating teaching.

²⁷ Student ratings are printed out with the enrollment matrix.