

Student Ratings of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTE)

The Student Ratings of Teacher Effectiveness (SRTEs) are Penn State's locally developed instrument for gathering feedback from students at the end of the term for the purposes of tenure, promotion, and annual review. The SRTEs were legislated by the University Faculty Senate in 1985 and are administered by the [Office of the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs](#). Spring 2011 will mark the full transition to online administration of SRTEs throughout the University.

The Schreyer Institute manages the SRTE process and helps facilitate appropriate use of SRTE data. This process is delineated in the University Faculty Senate's [Statement of Practices for the Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness for Promotion and Tenure](#)
http://www.psu.edu/dept/vprov/pdfs/srte_statement.pdf.

Contact a [Schreyer Institute consultant](#) <<http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/Help/Liaisons/>> for:

- help interpreting your SRTE results
- responding to students' comments
- use your SRTEs as a baseline for teaching improvement

Go to the [SRTE website](#) <<http://www.srte.psu.edu/>> to:

- view your SRTE results
- identify College and Campus SRTE Representatives
- learn about the SRTE process
- view available [SRTE question choices](#) <http://www.srte.psu.edu/SRTE_Items>

Additional Resources:

- [Analysis of Online SRTE Data from Select Semesters \(2009-2010\)](#), Penn State internal report <http://www.srte.psu.edu/pdf/Online_vs_Paper_Fall2010.pdf>
- [A Guide to Using and Analyzing the SRTE](#), Penn State internal report <http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Guide_to_Using_and_Analyzing_the_SRTE_R2.pdf>
- [Student ratings of teacher effectiveness: Recommendations for use by departments and faculty](#), Penn State internal report <<http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/SRTEUseRecommendations.pdf>>
- [Kansas State IDEA Center Resources](#), IDEA Papers No. 20 and No. 32, used with permission <<http://www.theideacenter.org/IDEAPapers>>
- [Making Sense of Student Evaluations](#), Lehigh University <<http://www.lehigh.edu/~infkli/FD-evaluations.htm>>

Correlations between Student Evaluations and Grades

Review of the extensive body of research literature on student ratings indicates that there is widespread agreement that students' grades are positively correlated with student evaluations. What is not agreed upon is the meaning or the strength of the correlation. The most commonly cited correlation is 0.2–0.3, but researchers working in both field (real classroom ratings) and laboratory settings report correlation coefficients that vary from 0.1–0.5. Many of the studies use the variable “Expected Grade” as a reasonable proxy for actual grades because most student ratings forms are completed by students before they receive their final grades. The degree and direction of the correlation for any one course, instructor, or student will vary depending on the instructional context.

Many of the researchers cited below urge extreme caution when interpreting the meaning of the correlation. Higher grades might represent, student learning, grading leniency, or students' characteristics unrelated to instruction. Most researchers, even those investigating grading leniency, agree that *when students perceive that they are learning they usually evaluate instructors more highly* (and reasonably so). Note that none of the works that claim grading practices artificially inflate student ratings is widely accepted by the student ratings research community. In fact, some of the research indicates poor teachers who try to increase their scores by boosting students' grades may result in lower ratings (i.e. poor teachers may not be able to fool students by 'giving away' high grades).

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Test Your Assumptions about Student Evaluations

- T F 1. More difficult courses, with a greater workload, receive slightly higher student evaluations than do easier/lower workload courses.
- T F 2. Male instructors generally receive higher evaluations than do female instructors.
- T F 3. In general, age and years of teaching are moderately, significantly, and negatively related to student evaluations.
- T F 4. Research productivity is negatively related to student ratings of teaching.
- T F 5. There is a very small negative relationship between class size and student evaluations.
- T F 6. The academic field or discipline is unrelated to student evaluations.
- T F 7. Generally, there is a small positive correlation between the expected grade in the class and student evaluations.
- T F 8. Signed ratings are more positive than anonymous ratings.
- T F 9. Research has found a slight same-gender preference: male students give higher ratings to male instructors, and female students give higher ratings to female instructors.
- T F 10. Instructors' warmth and enthusiasm are generally unrelated to ratings of teaching competence.
- T F 11. Ratings in lower-level courses tend to be slightly higher than ratings in upper-level courses.
- T F 12. The scores on many specific items provide better data for personnel (summative) decisions than do a couple of global items.
- T F 13. There are high positive correlations between student and alumni ratings of global teacher competence.
- T F 14. Student evaluations are better measures of satisfaction with, and the effectiveness of, the course than the instructor.
- T F 15. There are moderate positive relationships between student achievement and student ratings of several instructor skills.

* McKinney, Kathleen (1997) What Do Student Ratings Mean? *The National Teaching & Learning Forum* 7(1): 2-4.
http://www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9712/rwatch_1.htm

Test Your Assumptions about Student Evaluations

Answer Key

- T 1. More difficult courses, with a greater workload, receive slightly higher student evaluations than do easier/lower workload courses.
- F 2. Male instructors generally receive higher evaluations than do female instructors.
- F 3. In general, age and years of teaching are moderately, significantly, and negatively related to student evaluations.
- F 4. Research productivity is negatively related to student ratings of teaching.
- T 5. There is a very small negative relationship between class size and student evaluations.
- F 6. The academic field or discipline is unrelated to student evaluations.
- T 7. Generally, there is a small positive correlation between the expected grade in the class and student evaluations.
- T 8. Signed ratings are more positive than anonymous ratings.
- T 9. Research has found a slight same-gender preference: male students give higher ratings to male instructors, and female students give higher ratings to female instructors.
- F 10. Instructors' warmth and enthusiasm are generally unrelated to ratings of teaching competence.
- F 11. Ratings in lower-level courses tend to be slightly higher than ratings in upper-level courses.
- F 12. The scores on many specific items provide better data for personnel (summative) decisions than do a couple of global items.
- T 13. There are high positive correlations between student and alumni ratings of global teacher competence.
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Guidelines for Reporting Student Ratings for Review

Annotate Your Student Ratings (~ ½ page)

Course Data

Course Title & Number
Instructor
Term(s) and year(s)
Enrollment
Respondents (#, %)

Course Description

- brief description of course content, goals, etc. (1 short paragraph)
- primary teaching methods (1-2 lines)
- class format (# sessions/week; duration of each session)
- brief description of students (e.g. % juniors/seniors, % non-majors, etc.)

Student Ratings

- Is the response rate representative?
- What were the primary issues raised by students?
- Identify themes from the summary data report and student comments. This is your opportunity to direct reviewers' attention to particular results or comments that are most useful or informative. Help reviewers read and interpret your results rather than leaving it up to them to identify significant themes and appropriate responses.
 - strengths (2-3 themes)
 - challenges (2-3 themes)
- What changes did/will you make to address student concerns?

Analyzing your Results

Identify areas that students see as needing improvement in your quantitative results. Compare these to themes that appear in students' written comments. A quick approach for identifying themes is to build a list of topics that repeatedly arise as you read students' comments. Keep a cumulative tally of the comments that could be assigned to each theme. Let the frequency of the comments under each theme guide your course revisions.

Another method is to create an electronic document with all of the students' answers to each question. Reading students' responses in electronic form rather than handwritten comments, can help create the distance necessary to focus on the underlying content rather than personal criticisms. Sort student comments into groups based on similarity and label the group with a subject heading. Then rank the groups based on the frequency of comments in each. Some common themes include: Labs, Homework, Groupwork, Lecture, Instructor Style, Availability, Textbook, and Exams.

Student Ratings Annotation Example

ME 346: **Advanced Mechanical Engineering Analysis**
Fall Semester 2009

<i>Enrollment</i>	60
<i>Respondents</i>	32 (53%)

Course Description

Mathematical modeling, analysis, and design of physical dynamic systems involving energy storage and transfer by lumped-parameter linear elements. Time-domain response by analytical methods and numeric simulation. Laboratory experiments. Prerequisites: Linear Algebra, Differential Equations, Probability & Statistics, Engineering Dynamics.

This is a 15-week advanced lecture and laboratory course that meets in three 1-hour time blocks and one 2-hour lab (taught by TAs). The 1-hour sessions include lectures about the primary theoretical material of systems dynamics, with derivations of fundamental principles, followed by worked examples similar to assigned homework problems. The lab sessions include 7 lab assignments and 7 discussion sessions. The lab assignments require students to conduct hands-on experiments relating to problems discussed in the large class sessions. Students are also required to devote time outside of class to assigned readings, lab write-ups, and homework.

Students: The course is a required undergraduate course for mechanical engineering majors and is a prerequisite for many of the required capstone sequences. About 50% of the students were juniors, 45% seniors, and 5% new graduate students.

Student Ratings

Students appreciated that expectations were clear and grading processes were systematic and implemented fairly. They also took advantage of my frequently scheduled office hours those of my Teaching Assistants. Students' written comments provide similar information. For example, "Availability of Prof & TA is good" "Office hours & e-mail help a lot; lots of communication with students," "very approachable, very positive attitude."

Students wanted more opportunities to practice analysis and evaluation. In their written comments, students requested more time in class to practice solving problems similar to those in their homework assignments. For example: "More interaction, but not as intense/involved as lab" and "More interaction w/ lecture notes prior to class, so we can expect more out of lecture."

Changes

One change I plan to make in this course is to decrease the amount of time I spend lecturing and provide time at the end of each session for student questions. Rather than solving every derivation in class, I will leave a portion of it incomplete and revisit it during the next class when I will ask students to help complete the solution. A number of the topics covered in this course are particularly challenging for students, thus I will occasionally provide opportunities for students to work tough problems in class, when the TAs and I are there to provide guidance.

Individual Feedback Form

I. What helps you learn in this course? Please explain or give an example for each.

Things that help me learn

Explanation/Example (i.e. why?)

1.

2.

3.

4.

II. What changes would make the course more helpful? Please suggest specific ways the changes could be made.

Things that could be changed

How could this be done differently?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Faculty Name
Section #

Course Name
Course Number

Semester Year
responses / # enrolled

Student Comments

**Note: the questions and themes below are only examples.
Different questions are asked by different academic units.
Different themes will emerge for each course and/or instructor.**

1. What helps you learn in this course? **OR** The strengths of the course/instructor are:

Common Themes (use the themes as headers with student comments listed below each header; sort themes from most frequent to least frequent to identify key components or issues.)

Instructor Knowledge

Class Discussion

Teaching Methods

Instructor Style / Enthusiasm / Approachability

Projects

Homework

Course Content

Supporting Materials (e.g. website, handouts)

Readings

Misc.

2. What suggestions do you have for improving this course? **OR** What could be done differently to improve your learning?

Common Themes (use the themes as headers with student comments listed below each header; sort themes from most frequent to least frequent to identify key components or issues.)

Organization

Workload & Assignments

Grading/ Grading Criteria

Clarify Expectations

Lectures

Misc.