

2016

Student Rating of Teaching surveys (SRTs) report

Faculty and P&A Affairs Committee

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FACPAAC SRT Sub-Committee

The interpretation of Student Rating of Teaching surveys (SRTs) is an important input for instructor self-evaluation, the promotion and tenure process, and the annual review process. During the 2015-2016 academic year the UMM Faculty and P&A Affairs Committee has reviewed the University of Minnesota's SRTs. Various discussions have been held and pertinent documents have been reviewed. Feedback was sought from the UMM division chairs and dean. Dr. David Langley of the University's Center for Educational Innovation (CEI) has met with us twice. Our discussions dealt with the numerical results, the comments, and the effects on teaching and morale. Several UM documents dealing with SRTs are linked to this summary and references are given for other documents.

SRT Numerical Results

Presently the mean, median, and standard deviation are reported on the SRT Individual Reports for each class taught by an instructor. Averages grouped by division and class size are available for SOTs (2003 – 2008) and SRTs (2008 – 2015). (See the links at the end of this document.)

There is extensive literature on student evaluation of instruction. Various researchers, including Dr. Betsy Barre of the Rice University Center for Teaching Excellence, have examined the effects of grades, workload, student interest, class size, discipline, and instructor gender on student evaluations with mixed results. See link below. While student evaluations are used extensively in higher education few of the surveys used have been shown to be valid and reliable as survey instruments. Because of possible biases and the lack of statistical validity and reliability, SRT numerical results should be viewed with some skepticism. Dr. Barre concludes that SRTs, or their equivalent, should be one of multiple measures of teaching effectiveness and that evaluators of SRT results "must be trained to interpret the results of these complex instruments appropriately." The UMM division chairs echoed Dr. Barre's conclusion indicating, "SRT are just one instrument in the evaluation of faculty's teaching..."

Dr. Langley has concluded based on his review that faculty members' SRT scores should be used for self-comparisons over time. One would expect an instructor's SRTs to improve and stabilize with experience and the standard deviations would decrease. A self- or external evaluator can examine the SRT record for trends over multiple offerings of specific courses. SRTs may change/decrease if a faculty member experiments with new teaching methods or technologies. SRT inertia should not prevent instructors from

continuing to implement new ideas throughout their careers and instructors should be encouraged to experiment with innovative approaches to instruction.

To support UM instructors in working to improve teaching effectiveness and SRT scores, the CEI has developed a manual of teaching tips entitled, "Connecting Your Teaching Practices with the Student Rating of Teaching Form" linked below.

SRT Comments

Dr. David Langley has consulted for the UM Crookston administration on the appropriate interpretation of SRT comments with respect to faculty evaluation. He made three recommendations with respect to comments.

Recommendation #1: Place comments in perspective compared to other measures of evaluation

Multiple techniques for evaluating teaching effectiveness are necessary. Student comments should not provide a primary source of source of teaching evaluation.

Recommendation #2: Use themes to more fairly represent the population of comments.

Individual (usually negative) comments can bias the evaluators' impression of the faculty member's SRTs. Compiling the comments into "positive" or "negative" categories may reduce the bias generated by one, or a few, strongly expressed student comments. "Categories for student comments demonstrate the weight (or lack thereof) of an issue and are preferred as the unit of analysis."

Recommendation #3: Use the instructional history of the faculty member as the source of comparison rather than other faculty.

The overall recommendation was to use student comment data PRIMARILY for formative purposes (improving teaching) and SPARINGLY for summative purposes (annual evaluations or promotion/tenure issues).

As with the SRT numerical results Dr. Langley concluded that faculty members' SRT scores should be used for self-comparisons over time. UMM division chairs wrote that, "The numerical values in the SRT are always/often considered together with narrative comments (if faculty include them in their files)."

The Effects of SRTs on Teaching and Faculty Morale

Relatively low SRT scores and negative comments can adversely affect faculty morale promotion and tenure reviews, and annual reviews. We encourage faculty and administrators to consider the ideas and materials referenced in this report when interpreting SRT results. It is our hope that this review of SRT results can improve the student and instructor response to SRTs, improve teaching effectiveness, and that evaluators can more accurately interpret SRT results.

Resources to interpret and address SRTs

Linked below are several documents that may assist in the interpretation and evaluation of SRT scores and comments.

FACPAAC has requested that during the 2016 UMM Fall Professional Development Day or at some other venue, Dr. Langley be on campus to lead a session on the interpretation of SRTs. The Faculty Development Committee is considering that request. Issues raised at that session could be placed on the agendas of the 2017-2017 UMM Faculty and P&A Affairs Committee and UMM Faculty Development Committee.

- [UMM SRT Compilations](#)
- [Dr. Betsy Barre \(Rice\) Student Evaluation Literature Review PowerPoint Presentation \(2-page\)](#)
- [Dr. Betsy Barre \(Rice\) Student Evaluation Literature Review PowerPoint Presentation](#)
- [Connecting Your Teaching Practices with the Student Rating of Teaching Form \(CEI\)](#)
- [Interpreting SRTI Results: A Guide for Instructors, University of Massachusetts](#)