



Student Opinion/Evaluation of Teaching Survey (SOTS/SETS) Talking Points

1. SOTS do not evaluate what they were designed to evaluate. SOTS consistently show that student evaluations of course and teaching quality are significantly biased and discriminatory— especially to women and racially marginalized groups. There are many factors which affect SOTS and many of them have nothing to do with teaching of coursework.

2. Problems with SOTS are well-documented. A review of 30 years of published research on SETS and concluded that SETS results are influenced by student demographics (age, gender, race, SES, cultural background), and biases and prejudices, which can be based on the instructor's gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age or disability as well as other marginalizing factors (Heffernan, 2022).

3. The use of SOTS doesn't represent who we are and our values. How can UPEI declare to be a gender equal employer or have an interest in growing a safe, inclusive and diverse workforce if they continue using SOTS/SETs to evaluate course and teacher quality? While UPEI administration insists that SETS/SOTS are an appropriate method for course and teaching quality evaluation, other universities across Canada are recognizing that "that student evaluations are not a barometer with which to judge a professor's teaching effectiveness and should not be used for employment-related decisions such as promotion and tenure" (2018 Ryerson/Toronto Metropolitan University arbitration ruling).

4. Student voices are important and there are other methods to evaluate course and teacher quality that reduce bias. We agree that student feedback is important and learning how to engage in meaningful feedback is a critical skill for student development. Here are some directions which universities have found success in evaluating course and quality of teaching:

- "Students as partners" initiatives: Implementation of use of focus groups and student interviews. Heffernan (2022) documented positive experiences at some universities with this approach.
- Peer review of teaching: The 2021 Special Senate Committee for Evaluating Course and Teaching Effectiveness at MUN recommended optional peer review

of teaching for instructors, combined with a significantly-reimagined approach to the design and usage of course experience questionnaires.

- Using multiple methods and sources for informing teaching: [Oregon University administration](#) created a system for gathering information about course and quality of teaching that included student feedback at various points of the semester, asked instructors to complete self-reflections, and created systems for in-class peer review.

References

Heffernan, T (2022). Sexism, racism, prejudice, and bias: A literature review and synthesis of research surrounding student evaluations of courses and teaching. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 47(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1888075>

Memorial University of Newfoundland Special Senate Committee for Evaluating Course and Teaching Effectiveness. (2021) Developing a comprehensive system of evaluating courses and teaching effectiveness.

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