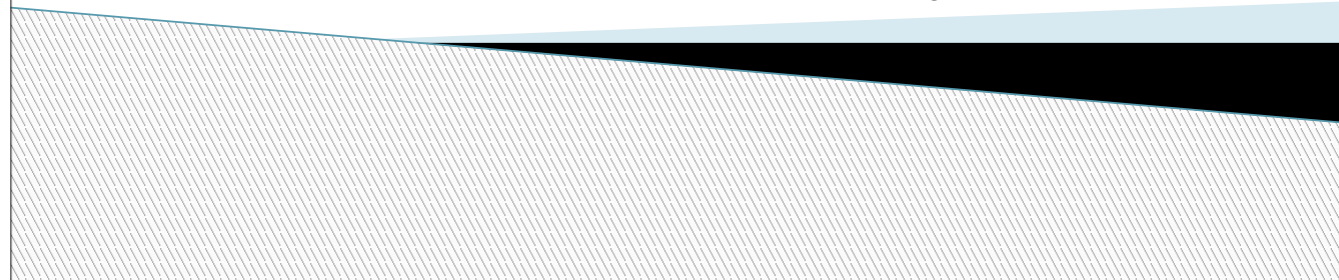


# Leveraging Course Evaluations to Empower Students and Improve Teaching

2019 Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference  
George Mason University

Alexandria Zylstra, Associate Professor  
Esperanza Roman-Mendoza, Associate Professor  
Jennifer I. Hathaway, Assistant Professor



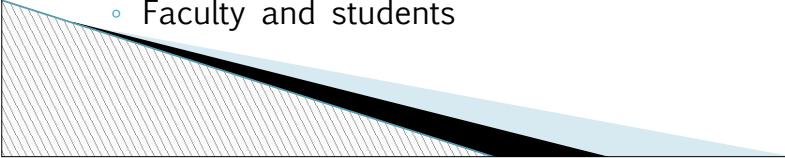
## Leveraging Course Evaluations to Empower Students and Improve Teaching

- ▶ What comes to mind when you think of the current course evaluation system?
  - Please complete a three-question survey at:
    - <https://pollev.com/alexandriazy211>

## Guiding Questions

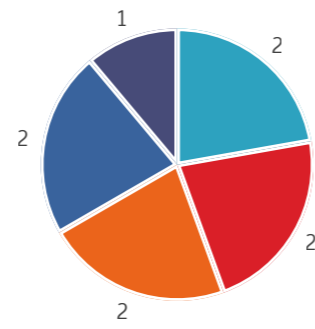
- ▶ Does our current system reflect missed opportunities?
  - In the way it is used (or perceived)
    - by the university: increasing reliance and importance placed on form for making decisions regarding: tenure, contract renewal, salary, etc.
    - by the faculty
    - by the students:
      - Lack of knowledge regarding the use/importance of the form
      - Lack of trust in anonymity (particularly with the online form)
- ▶ What are other methods to obtain student feedback during the course to empower student voices and improve teaching?

## Addressing Needed Changes in Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Form

- ▶ Effective Teaching Committee is tasked with reviewing the SET form and making revision recommendations to Faculty Senate, as well as reviewing existing faculty evaluation policies and recommending improvements in evaluation of effective teaching
  
  - ▶ To accomplish SET revision, committee spent five years researching best practices regarding course evaluations and teaching effectiveness, to revise current form, while working with:
    - Stearns Center for Teaching & Faculty Excellence
    - Provost's Office
    - Office of Institutional Research & Reporting
    - College Deans & Directors
    - Faculty Evaluation Committees
    - Student Senate
    - Faculty and students
- 

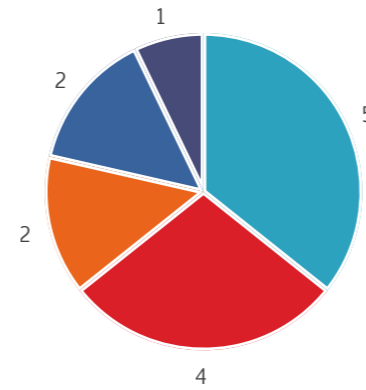
# New Form - Empowering Students to Improve Teaching

## Old SET Form



- Student Engagement
- Respect
- Prep/Organization
- Learning Outcomes
- Communication

## New SET Pilot Form



- Student Engagement
- Respect
- Prep/Organization
- Learning Outcomes
- Communication

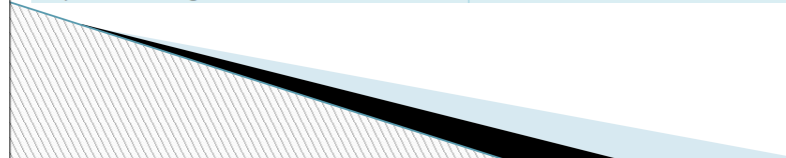
# Policy Recommendations -

How to Utilize the SET to empower students and improve teaching

- ▶ The Effective Teaching Committee made a series of recommendations to the Faculty Senate in April 2019.
  - ▶ At the university level
  - ▶ At the program
  - ▶ At the instructor level

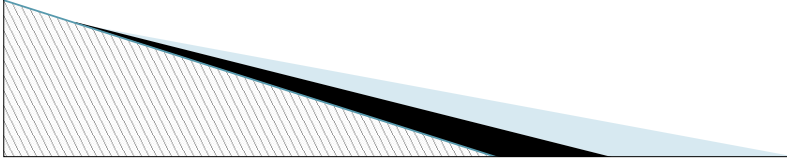
**Policy Recommendations – Faculty Evaluation at Mason**

INSTITUTIONAL/UNIVERSITY LEVEL	PROGRAM & COLLEGE LEVEL	INSTRUCTOR LEVEL
1. Administer <b>Course Evaluation Forms in class</b> to retain or enhance response rates	8. <b>Primary purpose</b> of faculty evaluation (and of the Course Evaluation Form), should be <b>formative</b> , i.e., the improvement of teaching effectiveness	12. Educate <b>students</b> on the importance, purposes, and uses of the Course Evaluation Form
2. Establish strategies to <b>increase response rates</b> for Course Evaluation Forms administered online	9. Educate <b>students</b> on the uses of the Course Evaluation Form	13. In face-to-face courses, use <b>class time</b> to allow students to complete the Course Evaluation Form
3. Engage in education of the <b>faculty</b> on how to communicate uses of the Course Evaluation Form to students	10. <b>Secondary purpose accountability</b> , using multiple measures for this process, including peer review	14. Conduct <b>multiple informal, mid-semester, anonymous</b> , course evaluations
4. Engage in the education of <b>students</b> on how the results from Course Evaluation Forms are used in the faculty evaluation process	11. <b>Educate instructors</b> on migration from paper to online Course Evaluation Forms	
5. Provide <b>increased accessibility of data</b> to course instructors		
6. Ensure that all <b>buildings</b> allow for Internet access during the period designated for students to complete the Course Evaluation Forms		
7. <b>OIRE collaborate with faculty</b> to conduct research on how results of Course Evaluation Forms are used to evaluate faculty and improve teaching		



# Policy Recommendations -

## Instructor Level

- ▶ Course instructors should educate students on the importance, purposes, and uses of the Course Evaluation
  - ▶ Course instructors of face-to-face courses should use class time to allow students to complete the Course Evaluation Form
  - ▶ Course instructors conduct multiple informal, mid-semester, anonymous, course evaluations
- 



# Formative vs. Summative Assessment

	Formative	Summative
Purpose	to monitor and guide a process while it is still in progress	to judge the success of a process at its completion
Time of Assessment	during the process	at the end of the process
Use of Assessment Information	improve and change a process while it is still going on	judge the overall success of a process; to generate a grade/evaluation

when & why administered

from: Airasian, P. W., & Russell, M. K. (2008). *Classroom assessment: Concepts and applications* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: McGrawHill. (p. 124)

## What does effective feedback on your teaching sound like?



“Praise keeps you in the game; real feedback helps you get better. Feedback tells you what you did or did not do and enables you to self-adjust” (Wiggins, 1998, p. 46).

## Effective feedback...

(Brookhart & Nitko, 2015; Chappuis, 2015; Schimmer, 2014; Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning)

- ▶ directs attention to the intended outcome, pointing out strengths and offering specific information to guide improvement.
- ▶ occurs during a process, while there is still time to act on it.
- ▶ is specific and understandable.

If you want to receive effective feedback, you need to model providing effective feedback.

Feedback should be directed at [the work/teaching](#), not the teacher.

But, it's important to remember that "*Giving* feedback does not cause improvement. *Acting* on it does." (Chappuis, 2015, p. 94)

# Tips for Gathering Feedback

- ▶ You can elicit feedback from students at any point in the semester, and as many times as you wish.
- ▶ Explain your purpose for asking for feedback.
  - Suggest that students write *TO* you rather than *ABOUT* you.
- ▶ Plan to share the main points of feedback you receive with students.
- ▶ Ensure students that their responses will be kept confidential.
- ▶ Make sure the format elicits the type of feedback you desire.
  - Are you looking for evidence of student learning or feedback on your teaching?
- ▶ Provide time during class (preferably at the beginning) for students to provide feedback.

# Formats for Gathering Feedback

- ▶ questionnaires (usually open-ended)

The purpose of this feedback form is to gather input so that I can improve this course and how it is taught and therefore help you improve your learning. I am the only one looking at your responses, and I will report back to you on the feedback I receive.

1. What aspects of this course are helpful to your learning? In other words, what contributes most to your learning?
2. What specific suggestions do you have for changes that I can make to improve the course or how it is taught?
3. Is the pace of the course:  
                  too fast                   just right                   too slow

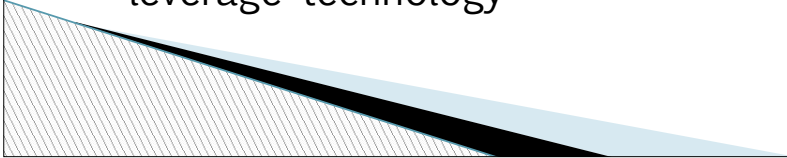
from: <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assessteaching/early-course-feedback.html>

## ▶ surveys

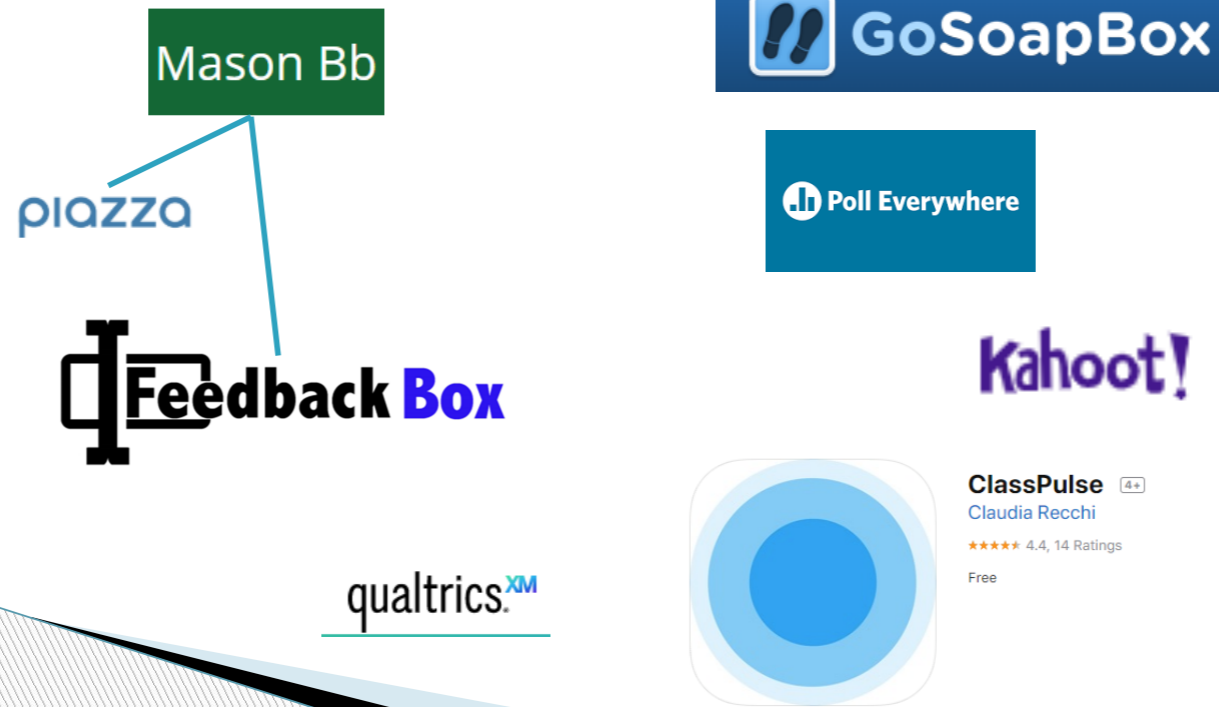
HOW IS THE PACE OF THE COURSE FOR YOU?	TOO SLOW 1	2	FINE 3	4	TOO FAST 5
How is the course's level of challenge for you?	Too easy 1	2	Fine 3	4	Too hard 5
Do the lectures help you better understand the material?	No 1	2	Some 3	4	A lot 5
Do the assignments help you better understand the material?	No 1	2	Some 3	4	A lot 5
Do the discussions help you better understand the material?	No 1	2	Some 3	4	A lot 5
Is the text useful to your understanding of the course material?	No 1	2	Some 3	4	A lot 5
Does our class group work help you better understand the material?	No 1	2	Some 3	4	A lot 5
Do the online resources for this class help you better understand the material?	No 1	2	Some 3	4	A lot 5

from: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/classroom-assessment-techniques-cats/>

# Formats for Gathering Feedback

- ▶ questionnaires (open-ended)
  - ▶ surveys
  - ▶ one-minute paper/exit ticket
  - ▶ cloudy/clear
  - ▶ interviews (individual or small group)
    - The Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning will support you with the Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) process.
  - ▶ leverage technology
- 

# Technology to Support the Gathering of Feedback





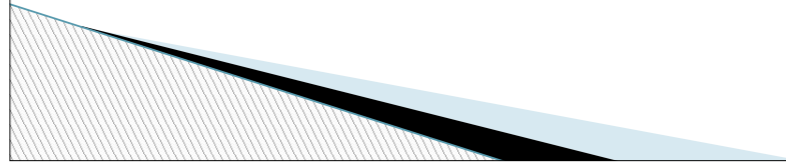
## After students have provided feedback...

- ▶ As you review students' feedback, stay focused on potentially constructive changes.
  - Consider categorizing students' responses into groups such as strengths, ideas for change, & issues beyond my control
- ▶ Don't forget that you need to share and discuss the feedback with your students.
  - You don't have to share everything—instead focus on the major ideas that were present in students' feedback.
  - Try to balance the positive feedback you report with areas where you may plan to make changes based on their feedback.
  - Explain your thinking behind changes you might propose or reasons why there may be changes you cannot make.
  - Keep the tone positive.
- ▶ Consider involving students in efforts to make adjustments in your teaching or the course based

*“Giving [or receiving] feedback does not cause improvement. Acting on it does” (Chappuis, 2015, p. 94)*

# Where do we go from here?

- ▶ What other methods do you use in your courses to empower student voices and improve teaching?



# Contact Information

- ▶ Alexandria Zylstra
    - [azylstr2@gmu.edu](mailto:azylstr2@gmu.edu)
  - ▶ Esperanza Roman-Mendoza
    - [eromanme@gmu.edu](mailto:eromanme@gmu.edu)
  - ▶ Jennifer I. Hathaway
    - [jhathaw2@gmu.edu](mailto:jhathaw2@gmu.edu)
- 