

TCU SPOTS

FAQ 1

New Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) survey forms

What questions will be included in the new SPOTs?

- The proposed items will be “standard”, to be used campus wide (please see proposed draft).
- Colleges, departments, programs, and individual instructors can devise their own items to supplement the standard items. Results associated with the items created by individual instructors will NOT be automatically accessible to administrators.
- For classes with 4-7 students enrolled, numerical rating scales will not accompany the questions because descriptive statistics such as averages may misrepresent the data when group size is small. Instead there will be a “qualitative” version, asking for the same information but prompting student comments only, rather than ratings. This alternative version is currently being developed. Faculty desiring quantitative SPOTs for classes with this enrollment range may choose to use the standard form.
- For classes with 3 or fewer students, departments will be responsible for determining how best to gather feedback from students regarding courses as well as collecting and analyzing the data.

How was the new SPOT instrument developed?

- The Evaluation Committee drew upon more than 30 years’ worth of established, credible research on student surveys and looked at item banks used by a number of other universities. We also gathered suggestions from students.
- To establish a framework for the eventual construct validity of the instrument, before developing individual items, we decided on the teaching categories that helped characterize a model of quality teaching. During item-writing we used criteria for evaluating item quality as suggested by resources on faculty evaluation in higher education.
- In addition to the teaching quality categories, we added a section requesting student information, to allow for better interpretation of results. Since creating these student items we later found out that the software system can incorporate additional demographic information on students without having to query the students directly, while also maintaining student confidentiality and remaining in compliance with FERPA guidelines. For example, we may wish to view separate results for 1st year students versus sophomores, juniors and seniors, or for transfer students.
- The Academic Excellence Committee then reviewed and edited the drafted items, reaching consensus that the draft was ready for further review.
- In May, 2011, selected TCU students piloted the instrument and provided focus-group feedback stating that the items were clear, fair, and comprehensive. They commented that the new items worked better than the current SPOTs for indicating their perceptions.
- During the summer and fall of 2011 we submitted the draft instrument to an independent review, conducted by TCU instructors and professors representing all Colleges and ranks. The judging panel members were nominated by their department chairs. Their college teaching experience ranged from 2-17+ years (see list of panel members). They independently reviewed the SPOT items using the same item-quality criteria as had been

consulted during item writing. The panel then met face-to-face and online to come to consensus on the wording of each item and on the adequacy of the item categories. They completed their review and revision during the fall of 2011 and recommended that the draft be proposed for campus wide approval.

Who decides which SPOT questions will be used as part of summative decision-making (i.e. high-stakes considerations such as tenure, merit pay, and promotion)?

- Final decisions regarding the “standard” items that may be used in decision-making will be reached by consensus among stakeholders, but ultimately determined by policy. Using standard items does not imply that we must implement a one-size-fits-all policy, however. What we hope to achieve this spring (2012) is the consensus phase.
- Departments vary in the ways they emphasize the importance of different types of information. We desire that flexibility for departmental decision-making will be maintained. For example, the software system can allow some questions to be “tagged” as not applicable upon request.

What are some ways to prevent misinterpretation or over-interpretation of SPOT data, by both faculty and administrators?

- We should remind ourselves that SPOT ratings reflect *student perceptions of teaching*, and as such they do not and should not constitute the sole source of information for evaluating teaching. They should be corroborated by a variety of other indicators of teaching quality. Each department should determine how SPOT results are weighted relative to other evaluation approaches such as peer observations of teaching, self-ratings, student performance assessments, alumni surveys, or examination of teaching materials via portfolio. Further guidelines and policy statements regarding evaluation of teaching are being crafted by the Faculty Senate and will soon be distributed to departments by the Provost.
- Guidance and information on how to effectively interpret numerical data for making fair and well-founded decisions was offered to department chairs and other interested administrators and faculty in April, 2011. Informational materials and a delivery system for sharing this type of information should be developed and updated regularly.
- The software system has many built-in, optional features that assist users in disaggregating data and “digging deeper” than merely reviewing overall means and standard deviations. Ratings and associated student comments can be grouped, for example, by gender, class size, class level, majors/non-majors, etc. The system can prompt students to elaborate, following any negative ratings. If desired, the system can also identify student response patterns. For example, it can indicate how many students answered uniformly negatively or positively versus showing greater rating variability across items. Results obtained from students who have steadily and perhaps indiscriminately rated most of their courses negatively (the hard graders) can be identified. These are options that are up to TCU users, at our discretion.

How can we assure validity of SPOT information?

- At first we will be relying on the face validity of the instrument as has been the case for SPOTs in the past. However, with online administration we can begin to accumulate sufficient data that will enable us to conduct item analyses as well as reliability and validity studies that will assist in revising the instrument as needed to improve its trustworthiness.

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FAQ 2

New online SPOT survey method

The Evaluation Committee has worked collaboratively with the Academic Excellence Committee and with the Faculty Senate to facilitate a convergence of many process factors that should support our transition away from the paper SPOTs that had been in use for decades. We have endeavored to make this transition as thoughtful, as inclusive, and as transparent as possible.

The factors that have created some positive synergy toward the transition are as follows:

1. People should be less fearful of “SPOT malpractice” with the new emphasis on triangulating course and instructor evaluations via additional approaches.
2. We are ready to propose a revised SPOT instrument that has been in development for over a year and vetted by representative faculty.
3. A policy is in place to allow for qualitative SPOT information where class sizes are too small for statistical validity.
4. The new software offers sophisticated feedback options for individual instructors and is wonderfully flexible for custom application as needed by departments and programs. Demo sessions last week were well-received.
5. Departments who opted to try online SPOTs at end-of-semester achieved decent student response rates.

To us, it makes the most sense to start using the new SPOTS instrument at the same time as we implement SmartEval.

1. Why is TCU planning to transition to online SPOTs?

- Timely feedback for instructors → improved teaching and learning
- Flexible capability for employing “standard” questions along with individually designed custom items
- Student response anonymity and instructor confidentiality
- Richer student feedback
- Capability for customizing reports and using the data more appropriately
- Capability for longitudinal analyses

- Sustainability -- We currently use over 100,000 pieces of paper each year in SPOT forms, plus the printouts that get mailed with results.

When will the online transition take place?

- Several trial runs have already allowed for working out “bugs”. A simulation will be run in January. About 1/3 of departments across campus elected for online SPOTs in fall, 2011. If results continue to run smoothly, we may be ready for full implementation (online and with the revised SPOTs instrument) in summer 2012.

How will the online system work?

- The system notifies students via email and provides links to their surveys
- The system also provides instructors with response rate information throughout the survey period
- Faculty will receive email notification when reports are complete (within days after grades are submitted)
- Faculty may store their data across semesters for longitudinal analysis

How does the system safeguard anonymity for students, and confidentiality for faculty members?

- Student ratings will be reported in summary format (frequency counts, means, standard deviations); written comments will be collated and will appear in text format (it will also be possible to view individual surveys to correlate numerical data with textual feedback).
- The system prevents student IDs or names from being associated with their responses
- Instructors receive a personalized link to their results via email notification. Results are stored on a secure server. Access to results is restricted to the faculty member, his/her specific department chair, dean, and the provost. Access to results on customized items will be restricted by request by instructors, departments, program faculty or other groups.

Where can I find research and resources on evaluations of teaching (via student surveys and using other methods)?

- The Center for Teaching Excellence offered informational sessions in the fall of 2011 and has housed this information on its website.
- Visit <http://tcuespot.wikispaces.com/> and click on the left-hand link “Resources for teaching and course evals”.

Where can I voice my concerns and opinions, and learn what others have to say?

- Members of the University Evaluation Committee welcome your emails, calls, or informal conversations.
- Communicate with members of the Faculty Senate Academic Excellence Committee, who are acting as liaisons and additional support, or share ideas with faculty senators.

- Use our online site created specifically as a forum for eSPOT discussion <http://tcuespot.wikispaces.com/>.

What if student participation patterns (or non-participation) skew my results?

- Student buy-in will be a key factor in preventing low or invalid response patterns. The Evaluation Committee, in concert with other committees such as the Faculty Senate Student Relations Committee, plan to collaborate with student organizations to begin building a culture of responsibility and willingness to provide quality feedback.
- Research from other universities using online systems shows an initial drop in response rates followed by a recovery to pre-existing rates, especially if instructors have encouraged student feedback earlier in the semester and demonstrate a willingness to listen and adjust to reasonable student concerns
- If/when feasible, faculty could send students to nearby computer labs to complete eSPOTs during class, or ask students to bring laptops, tablets or smartphones to class
- Discussion on creating incentives for strong student participation is ongoing.