

Frequently Asked Questions: the IDEA Evaluation Process

1. How do we interpret the IDEA summary reports?

If instructors have not attended one of the on-campus workshops or information sessions on IDEA, there are two sources of information that can help you become more knowledgeable about interpreting the IDEA summary reports. The first source of information is a user's guide. You can get a copy of this cd-rom from either the Office of Assessment or the Center for Teaching and Learning.

The second source of information is the IDEA website where you can download a copy of the IDEA Interpretive Guide for the diagnostic form used by USD. Click the following link. Then click on client resources at the top of the screen. From there you will go to interpreting results. (<http://idea.ksu.edu/pilot/index.html>).

2. Is the IDEA evaluation valid?

The IDEA Center website (<http://idea.ksu.edu/resources/index.html>) has many resources and papers which address questions like this one. Specifically, [IDEA Paper No. 20](#), written by William E. Cashin at Kansas State University in 1988, addresses the topics of validity and reliability.

In general, validity refers to whether a measurement actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Unfortunately, there is no single, agreed upon measure of effective teaching. Dr. Cashin (1988) suggests that, "theoretically, the best criterion of effective teaching is student learning."

According to Dr. Cashin (1988), past studies indicate that the median correlation between instructor's self ratings and student ratings is .49. Moreover, there are fairly high correlations between student and administrative ratings, as well as between student and colleague's ratings. For more information, please go to the IDEA website. You can print a copy of this paper free.

A technical report by Donald Hoyt and Subashan Perera also provides updated research ([Research Report #2](#)) on the question of the validity of student ratings.

3. How much weight should be given to student evaluations when evaluating teaching?

According to the IDEA Center, student evaluations should only comprise 30-50% of the overall evidence used in assessing teaching effectiveness. Other factors should supplement the IDEA evaluations.

The IDEA Center recommends using a variety of sources of evidence when evaluating instructors' teaching effectiveness. Examples of other sources of information could include: portfolios of teaching materials such as tests, quizzes, assignments, lectures, videos, guest lecturers, in-class exercises, and syllabi; peer review of their in-class presentation; department chair review of in-class teaching methods; out-of-class activities that are expressly designed to increase student learning, evidence of scholarship/research and service/outreach as they pertain to teaching, etc.

[IDEA Center Research Paper #36](#) is titled “Appraising Teaching Effectiveness: Beyond Student Ratings” by Donald P. Hoyt and William H. Pallet. This paper provides information on alternative measurements that could be used in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

Another IDEA resource is [IDEA Paper No. 32](#): The Research Revisited by William Cashin

4. How should I decide which teaching objectives to select?

A good place to start, when trying to determine which teaching objectives are most appropriate, is to talk with colleagues and the department chair about the objectives they think are the most important for the course(s) being taught. Often there are agreed upon objectives for courses at a certain level. Think about the objectives listed in the syllabus. How do they correlate with the teaching objects listed on the FIF form?

Other sources of information include documents on [Directions to Faculty: IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction](#), [Some Thoughts on Selecting IDEA Objectives](#), and Disciplinary Selection of Learning Objectives. You can find these documents in IDEA client resources under Administering IDEA.

5. What’s the difference between identifying teaching objectives as “essential” and “important?”

Essential objectives are double weighted in the calculations of progress toward meeting objectives. To determine which objectives are really essential, instructors should think about the things they test over and spend the most class time covering. If instructors spend a large portion of time trying to teach students to apply course material, then this is an essential objective. If instructors assign students to work on applying the course material in groups periodically during the semester, then acquiring skills in working with others as a member of a team may be an important objective.

The IDEA Center does not recommend selecting only one objective. Instructors should be true to their courses. They should look at their course objectives. If an instructor has more than one course objective listed on his/her syllabus, then he/she should choose more than one teaching objective.

A good source of information is [Directions to Faculty: IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction](#).

6. Is the IDEA Evaluation an accurate reflection of an instructor’s teaching?

Dr. Amy Gross, Vice President for Integrative Client Services at the IDEA Center suggests that people asking this question read the [Overview of Student Ratings: Value and Limitation](#)

Dr. Gross notes that the IDEA instrument was designed with 2 basic assumptions:

- Types of learning must reflect the instructor's purpose
- Effectiveness is determined by student progress on objectives stressed by the instructor.

The IDEA instrument asks students to reflect on their learning and what the instructor "did" in the class. So, to the extent that there is agreement on the second assumption above, Dr. Gross believes that IDEA can be **one** indicator of teaching effectiveness or suggest when someone needs some additional teacher

training. It can also facilitate individual reflection about what students are learning and what the instructor might be doing well, or might do differently related to that learning.

Another source of information is [Research Note #1: The Excellent Teacher Item](#). This paper summarizes some research that demonstrated the relationship of the teaching methods to student ratings of that item. The research found that what an instructor "does" influences student perceptions of the teacher. Dr. Gross reports that "Our research [at the IDEA Center] has also found that instructors, who employ the 20 teaching methods frequently, also have students who report more progress on the relevant learning objectives. So, to the extent that the methods are employed, the students will likely report not only more learning, but have a positive impression of the teacher."

Each institution has to determine and define teaching effectiveness and then determine how best to assess those components - both for formative and summative purposes. IDEA can be **one** indicator of effectiveness and can be a source of information to guide personal reflection. But other sources should be employed as well.

7. What other factors are taken into account in interpreting the results of the evaluations?

Five factors are controlled in the adjusted progress on towards objectives scores. They are:

- a) Student Work Habits (#43)
- b) Student Motivation (#39)
- c) Class Size (Enrollment, FIF)
- d) Student Effort (multiple items)
- e) Course Difficulty (multiple items)

The IDEA Center provides [Research Report #6](#), which address how these extraneous variables are controlled.

Other factors also need to be kept in mind when administrators interpret teaching effectiveness including, but not limited to: whether the person has had extra responsibilities during the semester, health or personal issues, changes in how the course is being taught, whether this is the first time the faculty member has taught this course, etc.

8. How reliable are IDEA evaluation results?

Reliability is viewed as the likelihood of getting the same results from the same group of students. According to the IDEA Center, reliability is always going to be a problem for smaller classes, regardless of the instrument. Reliability of results depends on the size of the class and the response rate. The IDEA Center maintains that classes with fewer than 10 respondents are unreliable. The larger the class and response rate, the greater the reliability.

A summary report that is deemed unreliable because of the small number of students is not necessarily invalid or untrustworthy. Instead, it means that there is not a high degree of confidence in the ability to be able to replicate those results. Confidence in being able to get the same results with the same students decreases from 83% with 15 students to 69% with 10 students, according to [IDEA Research Paper #32](#).

9. Why do we use the IDEA Evaluation?

The IDEA evaluation is designed to be used across disciplines. Over the years it has been used by many institutions of higher education across the nation. As a result, the IDEA Center has been able to develop normative data for a range of disciplines/departments. The Board of Regents (BOR) and a committee of individuals selected to help choose a method of evaluation, looked at three instruments that were nationally normed. The IDEA Evaluation was chosen. The BOR has mandated that all instructors at all of the Regent's institutions to have their classes evaluated each semester.

For an overview of the IDEA Evaluation go to <http://www.idea.ksu.edu/StudentRatings/index.html>.

10. What should instructors do if they feel that the questions on the IDEA diagnostic are getting at the information they want?

Instructors are welcome to ask additional questions to the end of the evaluation. The evaluation administrator may hand out questions typed on an additional sheet and provide instructions for students to answer them on the back of the diagnostic answer form. Instructors can get a copy of an excel file showing the answers to their questions from the Director of Assessment. They should keep a copy of the additional questions.

Instructors can also add questions to online courses in the following way. When the instructor receives the e-mail regarding IDEA Student Ratings FIF, they should open it and click the link to the online FIF form. At the bottom of the screen there will be two options: [Manage Additional Questions](#) | [Complete Faculty Information Form \(FIF\)](#). To add additional questions click the first choice and enter your questions according to the parameters on the page. You must add your questions before the student survey becomes active. Once the student survey becomes active, you cannot change the additional questions. The Director of Assessment will receive the answers to these questions when IDEA returns the scanned evaluations and the summary reports.

11. What about small classes? Is there any way to get significant results—or will they always be unreliable?

Small classes will always be viewed as unreliable. However, if class evaluations for the same course are consistent over time, there is reason to believe that the pattern is a good indication of whether the instructor is meeting expectations.

Instructors who teach two small sections of the same course (or a graduate and undergraduate course) can sometimes combine the evaluations to increase the reliability of the results.

12. How can the evaluations be best used in a team-taught course?

Instructors who team-teach a course should each administer teaching evaluations. If there are two instructors and one person teaches during the first half of the semester and the other instructor teaches the second half of the semester, evaluations should be administered midway through the semester and at the end of the semester.

Additional information on this question can be found at the following website:
<http://idea.ksu.edu/StudentRatings/index.html>.

13. Are converted scores always lower than the raw scores?

No. Sometimes the converted scores are equal to or higher than the raw scores.

14. Can we make a case for looking more at the raw scores?

Sometimes it is more appropriate to look at the raw scores. According to the Interpretive Guide (<http://idea.ksu.edu/resources/index.html>) on the IDEA Center website, one may consider focusing on the raw scores when the progress and overall ratings are very high (4.2 or higher). According to the IDEA Center, when the progress toward objectives and overall ratings are high, the adjusted ratings will generally much lower. The lower adjusted ratings are more a reflection of the larger impact of extraneous factors in promoting student achievement of class objectives than a lack of teaching effectiveness.

15. What does the gray shaded area on the first page of the summary report represent?

According to the IDEA Center, if an instructor's scores fall in the gray zone of the table on the first page of the summary report, that instructor is felt to be an effective teacher. He or she is meeting expectations. The gray area encompasses all instructors in the IDEA database whose scores fall within the middle 40% of the total distribution. The converted score is compared to all the classes in the IDEA database. Instructors can look below the table on the first page to see the average scores for instructors in their discipline, as well as at their institution.

For more information, go to the IDEA Center website. Instructors who are interested in how the raw scores are converted can find additional information on the training module (cd-rom) that was distributed during the CTL presentation. Instructors, who did not attend the workshop, can get a copy of the training module from the Office of Assessment.