

Open forum on Student Experience of Instruction

September 2021

Overview

On Sept. 28, 2021, we provided an overview of Senate-endorsed changes to the Student Experience of Instruction process, and of the work undertaken by the SEI Implementation Committee to take these changes forward.

For nearly two years (24 months), there has been significant work underway across both campuses on how teaching is evaluated at UBC. In May 2020, 16 recommendations about student evaluations of teaching were endorsed by Senates on both campuses. Among those recommendations were to change the name of the process to "**Student Experience of Instruction**," and to revise the university module questions on the end-of-course surveys.

The September 2021 forum primarily focused on changes to those university module questions; they had been rigorously tested over the previous year and were endorsed by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee at UBCV and the Senate Learning and Research Committee at UBCO in August 2021. These questions were implemented in the SEI surveys starting in the 2021/22 fall term.

Find more information on the *Student Experience of Instruction* at seoi.ubc.ca.

Open forum panel

The panel for the Sept. 2021 open forum was:

- Simon Bates, Associate Provost, Teaching and Learning, UBC Vancouver
- Sara-Jane Finlay, Associate Vice-President, Equity and Inclusion
- Tanya Forneris, Associate Director & Associate Professor of Teaching, School of Health and Exercise Sciences, UBC Okanagan
- Christina Hendricks, Academic Director, Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, UBC Vancouver
- Stephanie McKeown, Chief Institutional Research Officer, Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR)
- Marion Pearson, Chair, Senior Appointments Committee
- Doug Thorpe-Dorward, Managing Director, Faculty Relations & Support Services
- Mark Trowell, Director, Faculty Relations
- Brad Wuetherick, Associate Provost, Academic Programs, Teaching and Learning, UBC Okanagan
- Abdel-Azim Zumrawi, Statistician, Planning and Institutional Research


Slides from the forum

Below are several slides shared during the event, and notes with the main points of what was said about them.

Changes to SEI University Module Items

The following slides describe the process for changing the common set of questions on all SEI surveys, and the resulting new questions.

Recommended changes

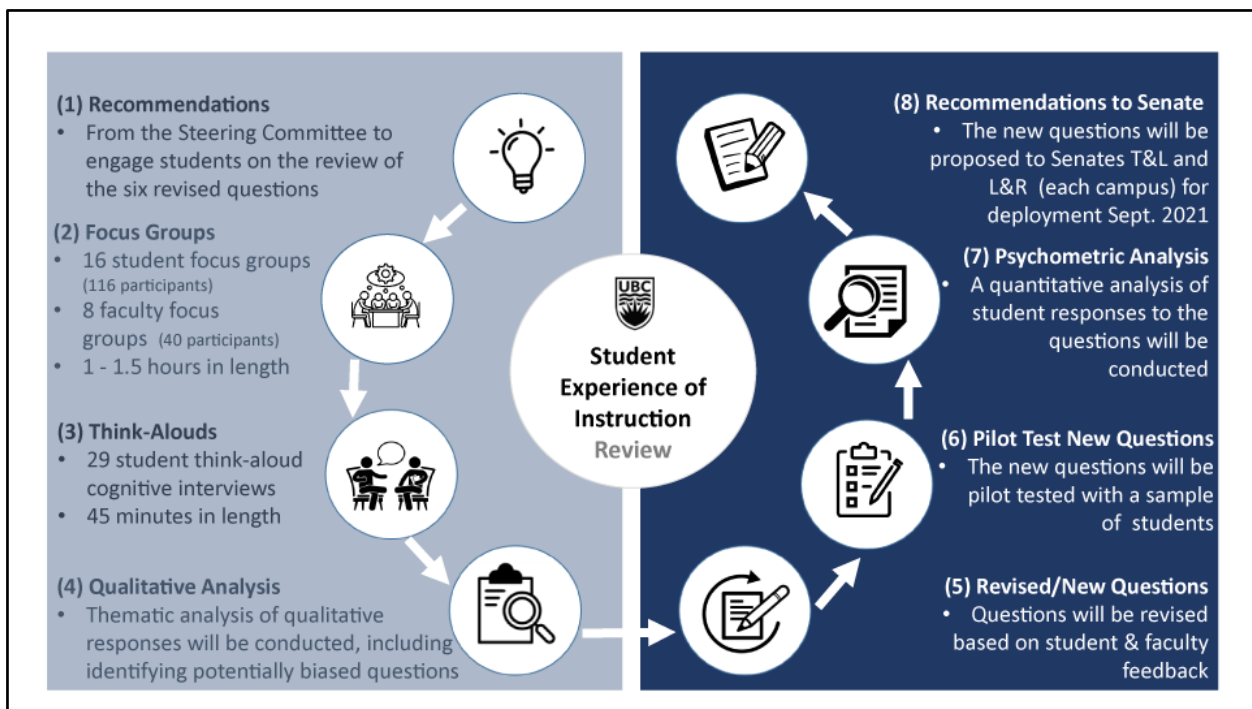


1. The instructor made it clear what I was expected to learn.
2. The instructor engaged me in the subject matter.
3. I think that the instructor communicated the subject matter effectively.
4. I have received feedback that supported my learning.
5. I think that the instructor showed concern for student learning.
6. Overall, this instructor was effective in helping me learn

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Slide 5 displays the six university module items (or UMIs) that were proposed by the SEOT Working Group in May 2020 (found in [the final report from the Working Group](#)). They were similar to the questions in use at UBC Vancouver, with the exception of question 4, which used to ask about fairness with regard to assessments; the Working Group suggested changing this question to ask about feedback. There was also a recommendation from the Working Group to align the questions asked in Vancouver with those in the Okanagan, which meant that UBCO surveys would reduce from 19 questions to six.

The SEI Implementation Committee was tasked to further develop and refine these proposed questions, by collecting feedback from faculty and students across both campuses.



Slide 6 outlines the eight-stage process we used to evaluate and test the proposed core university questions. From January to August 2021, the SEI implementation and project teams worked on further developing the above proposed UMI questions put forward by the SEOT Working Group in May 2020.

In January 2021 we invited students across both campuses, all year levels, and a diversity of programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, to participate in focus group discussions. We had a great response from students to our invitations, and as a result we were able to hold 16 one-hour focus group sessions, involving 116 students. In addition, we conducted 29 one-on-one think-aloud interviews with students who had not participated in the previous focus group sessions. We also held eight one-hour focus group sessions with 40 faculty members from both campuses.

During the focus group sessions and interviews, we asked participants to identify any possible confusion that might occur in terms of different interpretations or understanding of the questions, including in different environments such as large or small class settings or different types of courses. We also asked for suggestions on how to improve the questions, including possible ways to reword them.

In the Qualitative Analysis stage (step four in the slide above), we transcribed all of the sessions and conducted a qualitative analysis of the information collected, identifying themes that emerged from the analysis.

Overall, participants in the focus groups and interviews supported writing the questions as student-centered, but they felt this approach had not been consistently applied in the previous version of the questions from the working group. They argued that just adding “I think” in front of a sentence did not make a question student-centered.

There was also overwhelming support for the shorter survey length from Okanagan participants, changing from 19 questions to six core questions.

We also often heard that there were different interpretations of some of the terms used in the questions, which led to confusion on the meaning behind the question. In addition, terms such as “concern” or “communicated” could potentially lead to biased responses.

Much of the feedback from participants suggested that more clarity and specificity was required in the questions to reduce the potential ambiguity and multiple meanings that could be inferred from certain statements.

As a result of this feedback, we refined the questions for further pilot-testing in May/June 2021 using an online survey with student volunteers. We had 333 students participate in the survey. We conducted a technique called differential item functioning (DIF) to see if students responded differently across groups, such as gender, class size, etc. We also analysed the data using item response theory (IRT) to see how each of the items contributed to the survey information as well as how individuals interacted with the questions. We compared the results of the IRT models for the new UMI questions with a random sample of the same size with data from the existing UMI questions in Vancouver from 2020/21.

Based on the aforementioned work, we made recommendations for a new set of University Module questions in August 2021 to the Senate Teaching and Learning committee (UBC Vancouver) and the Learning and Research committee (UBC Okanagan) for deployment in Winter 2021 Term 1 and onward. The new questions were endorsed by both committees.

Please see [the report on the process of testing the new questions](#), presented to the Senate committees in August 2021 for more detailed information.

New Questions endorsed by Senate Committees



- Throughout the term, the instructor explained course requirements so it was clear to me what I was expected to learn.
- The instructor conducted this course in such a way that I was motivated to learn.
- The instructor presented the course material in a way that I could understand.
- Considering the type of class (e.g., large lecture, seminar, studio), the instructor provided useful feedback that helped me understand how my learning progressed during this course.
- The instructor showed genuine interest in supporting my learning throughout this course.
- Overall, I learned a great deal from this instructor.

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Slide 7 shows the newly worded UMI questions, which are based on qualitative and quantitative analysis. These are the questions that were endorsed by both the Senate Teaching and Learning committee in Vancouver and the Learning and Research committee in the Okanagan in August 2021.

Overall, the results of the quantitative analysis through the pilot survey indicated that these new UMI questions showed improvement in the relative contributions to the overall survey information across all questions compared with the existing questions. For the previous UMI questions, much of the survey information was overly represented by the last question, UMI 6. The new questions also appeared to have improved their relative discrimination among students with varying levels of endorsements.

Although we did feel that we reached an adequate sample size for our quantitative analyses, we did have a small number of responses and small number of survey questions. Therefore, further analysis will be conducted on a larger data set collected during the fall 2021/22 deployment of the SEI to further test the accuracy of item-parameter estimates and the detection of DIF for the newly-worded survey questions.

We conducted this review and analysis only for the six core UMI questions. We have been asked to look at other possible questions that can be used to build an item bank, which would provide a pool of items that can be used by Faculties and Departments to add their questions to the common set of UMI. There are many questions that are unit- or faculty-specific and we will start working on developing a broader set of questions that can be provided as options for units to select.

Statistical information provided on SEI reports

The following slides discuss changes that have been made in the past few years to the statistical information on SEI reports, with new metrics replacing the mean and standard deviation.

Change to reported metrics



Recommendation:

"Reporting of quantitative data should include an appropriate measure of centrality, distributions, response rates and sample sizes, explained in a way that is accessible to all stakeholders, regardless of quantitative expertise."

- Interpolated median rather than mean
- Dispersion index rather than standard deviation
- Add percent favourable

Already implemented on reports

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Current Instructor Report

University Module Questions

University Module Questions

Question	N	n	SD	D	N	A	SA	N/A	IM	DI
The instructor made it clear what students were expected to learn.	71	37	0	0	0	11	26	0	4.8	0.2
The instructor communicated the subject matter effectively.	71	37	0	0	0	13	24	0	4.7	0.2
The instructor helped inspire interest in learning the subject matter.	71	37	0	1	0	6	30	0	4.9	0.2
Overall, evaluation of student learning (through exams, essays, presentations, etc.) was fair.	71	37	0	0	1	6	26	4	4.9	0.2
The instructor showed concern for student learning.	71	37	0	0	1	9	27	0	4.8	0.2
Overall, the instructor was an effective teacher.	71	37	0	0	0	8	29	0	4.9	0.2

Question	%Favourable
The instructor made it clear what students were expected to learn.	100%
The instructor communicated the subject matter effectively.	100%
The instructor helped inspire interest in learning the subject matter.	97%
Overall, evaluation of student learning (through exams, essays, presentations, etc.) was fair.	97%
The instructor showed concern for student learning.	97%
Overall, the instructor was an effective teacher.	100%

Impact of Data Metrics Changes



- Better representation of distribution of responses through the IM rather than the mean
- Faculty or units preparing dossiers for promotion and tenure can request previous results with the mean to be translated into IM
- Units and Faculties can request reports of aggregate data

The SEoI website has information on these services: seoi.ubc.ca

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One of the recommendations of the SEoT working group in 2019-2020 focused on reporting quantitative data. It recommends the use of appropriate measures which describe data centrality and distribution, within the context of sample size and response rate. Such measures should be presented and explained in a way that is accessible to all stakeholders, regardless of quantitative expertise.

Quantitative measures already implemented in instructor reports include:

- interpolated median as a measure of centrality (replacing the mean);
- dispersion index, a measure of data spread (replacing the standard deviation); and
- percent favourable, a measure of responses that are higher than neutral, e.g., responses of 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' on a 5-point Likert scale.

Academic units can request previous data results be translated into the new metrics for year-over-year comparative purposes.

Detailed information on these measures, and how to request conversion of previous data into these metrics, can be found on the Student Experience of Instruction website: seoi.ubc.ca.

Integrative approach to evaluation of teaching

The slide below describes steps taken and planned to support a more integrative approach to evaluating teaching at the institution.

Integrative approach to Evaluation of Teaching



- New dual-campus working group to be formed Fall 2021
- Discussion paper in preparation for the working group (May-September 2021):
 - Background & Literature Review
 - Learn from other institutions highly engaged in this work
 - TEVAL group ([UKansas](#), [UColorado](#), [UMass](#)), U of Oregon, Simon Fraser
 - Practices at UBC
 - Focus groups with Associate Deans, Heads, Faculty Peer review leads
- Goal: To have a strong set of recommendations for the working group to advance this work

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One of the SEoT Working Group recommendations is to support academic units to adopt a more scholarly and integrative approach to the evaluation of teaching as well as to review/develop a broader policy on the evaluation of teaching writ large.

In the 2021/2022 academic year, a cross-campus working group will be formed to embark on moving these recommendations forward. Over the summer of 2021, a smaller subgroup of the SEI Implementation Committee with representation across both campuses wrote a discussion paper that will be presented to this working group. The paper provides:


- Background on evaluation of teaching and what an integrative approach to teaching is (e.g., including integrating together multiple sources of data about multiple aspects of teaching).
- Information on how other institutions have adopted an integrative approach, gathered by meeting with institutions highly engaged in this work, including those involved in the large [TEVAL project in the US](#) the University of Colorado Boulder, University of Kansas, University of Massachusetts Amherst. We also spoke with individuals from the University of Oregon, which has a large project underway from the Provost's Office and, more locally, with Simon Fraser University. These meetings were quite valuable in understanding what has led to successful adoption or change in practice as well as barriers/challenges present in this type of work.
- We also held a number of focus groups here at UBC with Associate Deans, Heads, and faculty involved in peer reviews within UBC to better understand current practices related to the evaluation of teaching across units.

This paper also provides a set of recommendations that the integrative evaluation of teaching working group can begin with, in order to advance efforts to support a broader and more integrative approach to evaluating teaching at UBC.

Next steps

The following slide describes next steps in implementing the recommendations from the SEoT Working Group.

Next steps



Review of Senate policies

- Work beginning this year through the aforementioned working group

Analysis of text comments using natural language processing

- Piloting a UBC system using data from volunteers

Further demographic data collection & analysis for bias

- Better data set for analyses with the new Employment Equity Survey
- Will work with the Equity and Inclusion Office on bias analyses when we have this data

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Senate policy working group

As discussed above, a dual-campus working group sponsored by Senate committees at UBCV and UBCO is being organized, to review and recommend revisions to Senate policies on evaluation of teaching. One of the recommendations from the May 2020 Senate report was:

- “The Vancouver Senate should review the policy on Student Evaluations of Teaching and consider a broader policy on the evaluation of teaching writ large. The Okanagan Senate should develop a similar policy for the Okanagan campus.”

The reason for this is that the UBCV policy from 2007 about student evaluations of teaching says very little about how to integrate student feedback with other evidence to make judgments about effectiveness of teaching; it is really only about the student surveys, whereas there are other sources of data that should be considered as well when evaluating teaching.

This working group will review the recommendations from the integrative evaluation of teaching discussion paper, consult with the UBC community, and propose recommendations for a broader Senate policy on evaluation of teaching—either a joint policy for both campuses or aligned policies for each.

Text comments

Another of the SEI Senate recommendations was:

- “UBC should prioritize work to extract information from text/open comments submitted as part of the feedback process.”

Many faculty report that the free-text comments often provide richer information for reflecting on their teaching than just the numerical scores. Yet, particularly when there are a large number of such comments, it can be difficult to easily get a sense of patterns or outliers.

The Implementation Committee is working with a group of researchers in the Department of Computer Science (UBC Vancouver) to pilot test a natural language processing system that can sort comments according to either a pre-defined or an auto-generated list of categories based on key words or phrases, and can also sort the comments according to positive or negative sentiments. The purpose of such a system would be to help individual faculty more easily glean meaning from the text comments by having access to a dashboard that sorts them to reveal patterns and outliers.

During the Fall 2021 term, the Implementation Committee will connect with a few faculty who agree to submit their text comments data for testing this system. Depending on the outcome of the pilot test, we may then investigate the possibility of broadening out to test with more volunteers, and eventually make a recommendation to the university on whether to invest in such a system on a broader scale.

A number of faculty also report that text comments can include abusive, harassing, discriminatory or other harmful comments. Currently these can only be removed after the fact, often after a faculty member has seen them and a Dean’s office has requested their removal. An automated way to flag such comments earlier in the process does not yet exist, but is an important area to continue investigating.

Further demographic data collection and analysis for bias

The May 2020 Senate report also stated that “UBC needs additional and regularized analysis of our own data to answer questions related to potential bias, starting with instructor ethnicity, as it is frequently highlighted as a potential source of bias in the literature on student evaluation of teaching.”

The Implementation Committee has been in discussion with the Equity and Inclusion Office about how to move forward with this recommendation, and we agreed that analyses for possible bias in SEI data needed to wait until better demographic data for faculty is available.

Employment Equity data

The slides below provide information about the Employment Equity Survey at UBC.

Employment Equity @UBC

- The Employment Equity survey is the **ONLY** institutional mechanism for collecting disaggregated equity data.
- Workday does not hold any existing equity data.
- Response rates have dropped to an unacceptably low rate.
- A high level of participation is essential to allow sharing of disaggregated and intersectional data.
- Everyone should be encouraged to fill out the survey even if they have only recently completed the onboarding survey.
- Updated questions to respond to feedback and encourage self-identification



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Employment Equity Data

Updated and revised questions

- Gender question includes **non-binary**
- Includes question on **trans experience**
- Separate question on **sexual orientation**
- Revision of language from Aboriginal to **Indigenous**
- Visible minority question rephrased – **racialized, visible minority, person of colour**
- Disaggregated race/ethnicity data asked of all using **census** categories
- Revised question on disability to focus on **functional limitations** and **environmental barriers**



None of this information is currently available in WorkDay

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The [Employment Equity Survey](#) at UBC is the only institutional mechanism that we have for collecting disaggregated identity data from faculty and staff. It's a survey that is completed by people when they begin their work at the university. Every five years, we have a big push to ask people to complete the survey in case they had not done so.

We've also noticed that over the last five years since our last census, response rates have dropped to an unacceptably low rate. So, where we had attained about a 72% response rate in 2016, it's now hovering at about 60% (UBCV) and 65% (UBCO), which makes it difficult to trust the data in terms of using it for further analysis.

We have updated the questions in response to feedback that we've received from the community, and we want to encourage people to complete the new self-identification section part of the survey. There is a real desire and strategic commitment to the collection of disaggregated data to enable us to do exactly the kinds of analyses we're talking about with SEI.

We've made some changes to the language of the questions that were being asked on the Employment Equity Survey, in response to feedback from the community around how they didn't see themselves represented in the questions. We hope that, moving forward, people will recognize themselves and be more willing to self-identify. For example, the gender question used to have the categories of "man" and "woman." Moving forward, it will include a category for people whose gender is non-binary. There is a question on trans experience, and a separate question on sexual orientation.

Additionally, we've brought the language up to date on the questions about Aboriginal identity, to now ask the question around Indigenous identity. However, we have to maintain the phrase of 'visible minority' which comes out of the federal Employment Equity Act, although we've updated that now to ask people if they consider themselves to be racialized and visible minority, or a person of color, because this is the language that people actually use to identify themselves.

The disaggregated population subgroup question tracks to the census categories, which allows us to look at external data and make comparisons, but it also allows us to make comparisons with other institutions. Another important piece of feedback was that we heard that the language around disability was exclusionary and that people didn't see themselves in the way in which disability was being defined in the employment equity census. We have now changed that to focus more on functional limitation and environmental barriers, rather than reflecting specific terminology of 'disability', though still consistent with the definition reflected in UBC's Policy LR7, Disability [Accommodation Policy](#).

The revised Employment Equity Survey will be rolled out in Fall 2021, and the SEI Implementation Committee and PAIR will work with the Equity and Inclusion Office to access that data to use in aggregate analyses to test for bias in SEI data. The more faculty who fill out that survey the better these analyses will be.