

A Draft Policy on the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SEOT)ⁱ

(September 2011 revised October 2016)

Introduction and Goals

The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) seeks to achieve instruction of the highest quality in order that students can learn to their maximum potential. One way to help achieve this goal is for each offered course (Certificate, Diploma, Undergraduate, Graduate, Post-Graduate) to undergo an evaluation by students. As active participants in the teaching and learning process, students' perspectives and their thoughtful input on the organization and effectiveness of curriculum and courses are critical. Thus, the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SEOT) is regarded as an integral part of the overall teaching experience that incorporates self and peer assessments, as well as other forms of assessing the teaching and learning process; and UTT's efforts at strengthening institutional effectiveness. The Student Evaluation of Teaching has the following goals:

- To ensure that students have an optimal learning experience.
- To advise instructors about the effectiveness of their teaching and suggest ways of pedagogical improvement.
- To inform administrators and other stakeholders about the overall quality of courses and instructor performance, including but not limited to, assessment of faculty for merit and/or performance awards, promotion and institutional recognition.

Guiding Principles

1. The University (all its courses/programmes and the responsible faculty) must be subject to monitoring and reporting mechanisms that are integral to the means of enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and optimal student experience and institutional effectiveness. Student evaluations should be considered as part of an overall teaching evaluation system that includes regular peer review, faculty self-assessment, and other forms of assessment, as appropriate.
2. The University will gather and report on student feedback using confidential, ethical, reliable, and systematic methods, processes and procedures.
3. The teaching performance of all instructors, regardless of their academic rank, is subject to student ratings and peer evaluation.

4. The Student Evaluation of Teaching should be administered in every course section at UTT every time (term/semester) it is offered.
5. Educational and promotional programmes driven by faculty, along with incentives, should be developed to encourage a high rate of participation in the Student Evaluation of Teaching.
6. The Student Evaluation of Teaching shall ensure students' confidentiality, e.g., the students will not be required to provide their name and/or student number.
7. The Student Evaluation of Teaching should be student-centered (i.e., ultimately improving the learning experience) and it must provide a mechanism for receiving reliable and valid data from students on a range of topics related to their learning experiences.
8. A rating scale of 1-5 should be adopted for all evaluation questions, with 5 being the most positive response.
9. In addition to the formal summative evaluations by students, faculty members are strongly encouraged to seek formative feedback during the course, using methods of their own choice.
10. Carefully planned dissemination, feedback, and response strategies are needed, so that the data can be used to improve the learning environment.
11. The principal method for the administration of the Student Evaluation of Teaching campus-wide should be online (web-based) as opposed to paper-based.

Courses to be Evaluated

The Student Evaluation of Teaching is to be administered in every course with a UTT course code every time it is offered. Exceptions to this requirement are courses of an independent nature (independent study courses, special research projects, thesis, music studios, professional development, etc.) or courses with very small enrollments as defined by each programme, where other means of obtaining student feedback may be more appropriate. Data can still be gathered from small courses but should not be used for the ascribed goals though they can provide useful information for instructors in the absence of a more appropriate tool.

The Evaluation Instrument

Standard university-wide questions are included on each university-approved evaluation instrument. The queries concern the overall rating of a course, the students' learning experience and the instructor's effectiveness. In addition to quantitative questions, a series of open-ended questions are included on each evaluation instrument.

Directions given on the online student rating questionnaires shall include the following statement:

Your thoughtful written comments are especially requested, and may help your instructor improve future course offerings. Your responses to this questionnaire are important because

they will be used in promotion and salary decisions for your instructor. The results of this rating will not be returned to the instructor until after the final grades are submitted for this course.

On those specific occasions due to extenuating circumstances in which paper-based is used in lieu of the online (web-based) evaluations, the paper forms shall carry an additional statement stating:

Students may wish to print their comments to avoid recognition of their handwriting.

The Evaluation Platform

The online SEOT software application or academic management database/system (evaluation platform) is called CoursEval; a web-based survey-application used to evaluate courses, instructors, students, peers, etc. CoursEval is the official teaching and learning evaluation software of UTT. Instructors can log in to their CoursEval faculty web portal from any device that has internet access including mobile devices. Similarly, students can log in to their CoursEval student portal from any internet ready device.

Procedure

The University provides each programme with a set of general guidelines on the administration of the SEOT. Ultimate responsibility for implementing the provisions of this policy and protocol, and preventing abuses, rests with Academic Administrators or designates. UTT's **Student Information System (SIS) is the official data source of UTT's online SEOT survey, exclusively.** This is so, primarily due but not limited to the following reasons:

- SIS is UTT's official repository of student enrollment data and provides the students with official Microsoft Office 365 UTT email addresses for UTT staff/faculty to use for official communication following the directives by the Office of the Registrar, Provost and President.
- The manual process academic programmes followed to populate excel templates for the online SEOT was unanimously considered tedious and arduous for the administrative staff; a counter-productive and unsustainable method to collect data for the online SEOT survey.
- According to our Vision Statement, UTT is supposed to 'bring and keep T&T in the vanguard of technology'; which at least implies that UTT should be utilising technology to computerize (automate) manual job processes as much as possible in order to improve job efficiency and minimise inaccuracies and inefficiencies arising from monotonous, labor-intensive activities.

Each term/semester, course and student data is electronically transferred from the SIS and uploaded to the CoursEval application. Presently, the online course evaluation system consists of:

- An online form/survey that students complete for each course for which they are registered.
- Email announcements to faculty (for notification and student encouragement) and invitations and reminders for students to access the online student portal and complete the survey. Access to

the student portal is available from any internet ready device and from multiple UTT enterprise platforms such as JICS and the Canvas - Learning Management System (LMS). An online faculty portal complete with a comprehensive, configurable Reporting System allowing faculty and Programme Professors (and their designees), to view and access the results of their course evaluations on demand.

Student Participation

Student participation from as large a number of the student population as possible is highly desired and required since their full contribution to the online SEOT process is extremely valuable in UTT's efforts towards improving students' learning experiences and promoting institutional effectiveness. Students are ensured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. When a student submits a course evaluation, his/her identity is separated from the evaluation. A flag is entered into one file containing the student's identity. This tells the SEOT system whether a student has completed the evaluation for a particular course. The content of the evaluation is entered into a separate table that does not include the student's identity. These two tables cannot be linked. This process is completed automatically and not subject to human intervention. It is therefore impossible for any instructor to see individual student results since no student information is associated. Students must be made aware that their ratings will also be used in making personnel decisions.

Initial Data Analysis

A basic report consists of descriptive statistics including, but not limited to, response rates, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics may be delivered upon request.

Use of Data

- Data and information from student ratings should not be used in isolation from peer and self-evaluation, assessment of research and service delivery and the performance appraisal in evaluating instructional staff.
- The results must be shared with the instructor being reviewed.
- The information collected pursuant to this policy to evaluate teaching effectiveness for personnel decisions remains confidential.
- Access to information on a specific instructor is restricted to those responsible for decisions on reappointment, promotion and salary adjustments and will only be published with the expressed permission of the instructor.
- Instructors must always be allowed to respond in writing to the Programme Head where student rating results are used for performance evaluation.

- The University will use data from the Student Evaluation of Teaching to improve the learning environment and pedagogical strategies and practices.
- The University will use this data for operational purposes, including but not limited to, assessment of faculty for promotion, tenure and institutional recognition.

Dissemination of SEOT results

The Student Evaluation of Teaching shall be disseminated according to the following guidelines:

- Programmes shall make aggregate data available to the Office of the Provost annually.
- Programme Professors or their equivalents will have access to all the information contained in the Student Evaluation of Teaching for their programmes.
- Instructors will receive:
 - A summary of the course evaluations for each course taught;
 - A computed numerical rating(s) of their teaching performance together with any written comments authored by students and;
 - No results until after they have submitted final marks for the course or courses in which they are being evaluated.
- Each Programme will annually provide its students with a summary report of the general quality of teaching.

Assignment of Responsibilities

Student's Responsibilities

- The University has repeatedly affirmed the importance of and necessity for students to be able to provide confidential and timely feedback to faculty members regarding their teaching. This feedback comprises part of the information which is used to assess faculty performance, and is considered in reappointment and promotion decisions. As such, UTT believes that participating in the online evaluation of teaching is a student responsibility which should be approached with due seriousness and diligence each and every time evaluations are offered.

University Administration Responsibilities

- The Provost shall report annually to the Board of Governors on teaching quality, effectiveness, and evaluation, and the extent to which the University is reaching its learning goals.

- The University will support a central repository of information about the student evaluation of teaching that contains such things as policy, historical information, best practice guidelines, etc., to facilitate professional development, information gathering, and scholarly discourse as well as avoid duplication of effort.
- UTT shall develop policies and procedures that ensure access for their Professors, Instructors and Teaching Assistants to peer-based teaching development programs.

Unit Administration of Evaluation Responsibilities

- The Learning Centre (TLC), by mandate, is the unit responsible for the administration of UTT's online SEOT. More specifically, TLC is responsible for implementing UTT's course evaluation policy, processes and procedures for the online SEOT.

Unit Enrolment Data Dissemination Responsibilities

- The SIS Administrator is responsible for providing, in the approved electronic template form and in a timely manner, complete and accurate student enrolment data for each academic term or period in which the evaluation is to be conducted. This enrolment data is the source data for CoursEval, the web-based survey-application. The SIS Administrator is also responsible for correcting all inaccuracies and incompleteness of student data provided to CoursEval.
- At present, Student Records unit staff is responsible for accurately entering, verifying and updating student related enrolment data, in a timely manner, in the SIS for each Programme.

Programmes/Unit Shared Responsibilities

- Each Programme shall establish clear, written criteria which will be used to assess satisfactory teaching performance. These criteria shall be made known to anyone who is working in a teaching capacity.
- Programme Professors and members of relevant committees shall periodically review the procedures and instruments for the evaluation of teaching in their units and ensure that they are consistent with the statements made in this policy document.
- Programme Professors shall take action in response to results which show less than satisfactory teaching performance, and a report of such action shall be included in the Programme report submitted annually to the Provost.
- Each unit head must be responsible for ensuring that the criteria are set high enough to motivate teachers to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

- All units shall give serious consideration to establishing a committee whose function is to monitor the processes whereby teaching is evaluated and whose membership includes student representation.
- Each Programme shall establish clear guidelines which will be used to disseminate student enrolment data to SIS accurately, in a timely manner. These guidelines shall be made known to anyone working in an academic administrative assistant capacity.
- Unit administrative staff is required to assist the evaluation of teaching process liaising between SIS, faculty, students and TLC, providing timely, complete and correct information to encourage student participation and appropriate feedback.

Programme Professor or Programme Leader

Each Programme Professor or Programme Leader is strongly urged to avail themselves of services offered through UTT's teaching and scholarly service units in order to understand how they can use the Student Evaluation of Teaching to better inform and improve their instructors'/unit's teaching approach and practice.

Programme Professors or their delegates, shall use the results of teaching evaluations as one component in assessing teaching performance when recommending annual merit/performance salary adjustment increases for faculty, and for the purposes of recommendations concerning promotion. This data will be used by UTT employees designated with the authority for the assessment of faculty for merit and/or performance adjustment salary awards, promotion and institutional recognition.

Note: In the near future, heads of teaching units or their delegates shall ensure that faculty whose teaching is being assessed by students is given the opportunity to provide or withhold consent to their Student Evaluations of Teaching data being released to the students.

Instructor Responsibilities

- Anyone teaching a course at UTT is responsible for familiarising themselves with the policies and expectations related to the Student Evaluation of Teaching.
- Anyone teaching a course at UTT is strongly urged to avail themselves of services offered through UTT's teaching and scholarly service units in order to understand how they can use the Student Evaluation of Teaching to inform and improve their teaching approach and practice.
- Anyone teaching a course at UTT is the primary stakeholder responsible for the encouragement and facilitation of student participation in the online SEOT; and should promote student participation in the online SEOT process through professionally and ethically acceptable methods of encouragement and facilitation (e.g. allocating class time for students to do their course evaluations).

Note: It is understood that some evaluation data sets may be skewed in particular for:

- *Classes with very small numbers of students.*
- *Evaluations with very low response rates.*
- *First-time courses given on an experimental basis.*
- *Instructors in their first year of teaching.*

The basic tenet and expression of this draft policy is adopted from a policy document published on the web by the University of British Columbia.