

Front End Tool

Tool Label:

Student Course Evaluation Committees (based on a Formative Evaluation scheme)

References and Resources:

Rossett, A. (1987) Training needs assessment. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Jonassen, D. H., Hannum, W. & Tessmar, M. (1999) Task analysis methods for instructional design. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Dick, W. (1980) Formative evaluation in instructional development. JID: 3(3), 3-6.

Primary Purpose:

Allows user to conduct a needs assessment and learner analysis to directly evaluate existing courses or curricula in order to create new or revised course or curriculum plans.

Allow for collection of data over time in order to refine the student need description and determine relevant expressed and felt needs that can be addressed in redesign of curriculum.

Allow for students to contribute input into the design and development of courses and curriculum.

Student course evaluation committees have the ability to turn ineffective and negative criticisms from students into effective course evaluations and needs assessment data.

Student committee members have a chance to develop professional leadership skills and possibly earn education or leadership credits for their participation.

Comments:

Why use an evaluation scheme?

Understanding students and student needs as they relate to their primary and elective coursework is important in planning both courses and curricula. Most faculty or course evaluations are based on short and narrow summative evaluation data collected either just before or at the end of a course. Much of the data that are collected are irrelevant for the purpose of revising or creating new and meaningful instruction. Often students provide only negative criticism and speak overly broadly about a course.

This, however, does not devalue the impact that students can and should have on the courses that they take or the curriculum in which they participate. A proposed student formative evaluation committee would consist of several students from a current course, series of courses, or even from an entire curriculum (e.g. a college major or minor). The students would meet over the length of the course and discuss their comments and concerns about the class AND act as representatives for the larger class. Students would be guided on how they could turn their insight into positive and constructive data that could generate important learner analysis for reconstruction or revision of a course.

Evaluation usually occurs after the planning and implementation of instruction. By employing a well-designed formative evaluation plan, curriculum committees will receive data about existing instructional plans. Curriculum committees will also have access to data about learner needs already available in the event that a new instructional plan will be designed.

Why use a formative evaluation scheme instead of a summative evaluation scheme?

	Summative Evaluation	Formative Evaluation
What is the time frame for the course evaluation?	At the end of a course	Ongoing
Types of data that are collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retrospective - End achievement - Results - Evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prospective - Strengths and weaknesses - Feedback

As this small chart shows, formative evaluation provides ongoing evaluation about a course. The data that are collected might be much more useful when conducting a learner analysis and identifying student needs. Also, the ongoing nature of formative evaluation makes students focus on the course as the course unfolds. Summative evaluation might not be as helpful because student reflections about the course may not be as complete or focus on problems that were temporal earlier in the course.

Benefits of a Student Evaluation Committee:

Increase student participation.

Students take ownership of their learning environment.

Faculty develop a strong base of suggestive and positive feedback for decision-making.

Weaknesses:

This is a time consuming process.

Students might not want to be involved for a number of reasons (time, credit, fear of retribution).

Potential Implementation of the Tool:

The best way to discuss the implementation of a Student Course Evaluation Committee is to provide an example of how the committee might work. The following example is based on a college department that offers a two-part introductory level course. This course sequence fills a general education requirement for the college and receives a large enrollment on a yearly basis. For the purposes of this example, part one of the course will be offered in the fall semester and part two is a spring semester course.

Department X decides that they are going to revise their current introductory course offering. The entire faculty is supportive of the revision. Department X seeks to revise the course offerings in a one to two year time frame.

Overall, student need is not very well understood by the faculty. Upon examination of several years worth of summative course evaluations, some concerns about student need are noted. There is little consensus about student need, especially in regards to how this sequence of courses is related to students' needs for their own major. The majority of the data collected by the evaluations is punitive towards certain instructors. Many of the comments do not offer a constructive basis to support change.

In order to better understand the needs of the students that participate the course, Department X decides to form a Student Course Evaluation Committee (SCEC). The SCEC consists of several students that are asked to participate. The makeup the students selected for the SCEC is based on cursory observations in the first few weeks of classes. The committee is selected to have several students that perform average, several students that perform above average, and several students that perform below average.

The students involved with the SCEC initially meet with the professor and graduate assistant that are in charge of conducting the learner analysis for the project. This initial meeting takes place about two weeks into the course. This meeting consists of several tasks. First, the committee selects four times to meet during the semester. Next, the professor and the graduate student outline the roles and goals of the committee members:

1. Serve as speaker for all of the students in the course.
2. Evaluate the instructional methods of the instructor or instructors that teach the course.
3. Evaluate the content in the course and how it relates to the members of the committee and to the rest of the students in the course.
4. Develop a method for converting criticisms and comments into constructive prescriptive statements.
5. Complete several evaluations of the course based short spans of course delivery (e.g. prepare a evaluation that coincides with every two or three units of instruction).
6. Deliver a completed executive summary of main concerns and the smaller evaluations of units to the course revision committee at the end of the semester.

The students then elect a leader that will serve as a representative to the department. For the rest of the semester, the graduate student serves as the facilitator for the group.

This tool allows for flexibility in the implementation of the data collection. The facilitator has several methods that could be employed in order to collect the data. Several examples would include detailed surveys that make the students look deeper into the current content in the course than a summative evaluation at the end of a course. The facilitator could conduct focus groups at every meeting of the SCEC in order to guide the students into the “right” direction. The facilitator could conduct interviews with the SCEC or the facilitator could just observe the meetings. This flexibility allows the user of the tool to become very involved or just stand as a witness to the process. Certain applications of the tool could be very time consuming.

Department X will probably need to offer the students some incentive based on the amount of time and effort the students apply to the SCEC. This is an important dilemma to consider before implementing this tool. The students will be gaining several types of experience if they sit on the SCEC committee. These experiences include:

1. Educational Leadership
2. Professional Teamwork
3. Project Management
4. Teamwork Skills

Any of these skills could be packaged into a one-credit course for which the members of the SCEC could receive credit. For example, if Department X was a Department of Biology, the members of the SCEC could receive one credit hour for “Educational Leadership in Biology.” Credit offerings like this may be very attractive for any student that needs to have professional skills as part of a resume, students that plan on majoring education, or students that seek management experience for their major.

The above stated incentives would require a certain amount of faculty commitment and administrative support. The benefits of conducting this sort of learner analysis is crucial when looking into the minds of the students that college educators serve. This evaluation scheme would be time consuming, but has the potential to increase student and faculty awareness. Faculty will gain a new respect for a more constructive and prospective evaluation while the students on the SCEC will gain valuable leadership, management, and professional skills as a result of the project.

