

FAQ
TCU eSPOTS
Student Perceptions of Teaching

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.

2. When will the online transition take place?

- The timeframe is flexible, depending on time needed for trial runs and working out “bugs”
- Midterm pilots will be offered in Spring 2011, using faculty-designed questions and with results going only to faculty
- The new software can accommodate paper forms as needed while we acclimate to the online environment

COLLECTION of the DATA

3. How will the online system work?

- The system notifies students via email and provides links to their surveys
- 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

4. 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
- 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 on-campus server. Access to results is restricted to the faculty member, his/her specific department chair, dean, and the provost.

QUALITY / VALIDITY of the DATA

5. What questions will be included in the SPOTs?

- Some items will be “standard”, to be used campus wide. The Evaluation Committee will draw upon more than 30 years’ worth of established, credible research on faculty evaluations to propose these items. We will also gather suggestions and seek consensus from all stakeholders (faculty and administrators).
- Departments, or groups of faculty teaching similar course sections, or individual faculty members can devise their own items to supplement the standard items. Results associated with these questions will NOT be automatically accessible to administrators.

6. What if student participation patterns (or non-participation) skew the 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 to class
- Discussion on creating incentives for strong student participation is ongoing.

USE of the DATA

7. 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.
- Departments vary in the ways they emphasize the importance of different types of information, regardless of the SPOT administration format. Flexibility for departmental decision-making will be maintained.

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

- We should remind ourselves that SPOT ratings reflect student perceptions of teaching, and as such they should be corroborated by a variety of other indicators of teaching quality
- Guidance and information on how to effectively use and interpret numerical data will be offered to department chairs and other interested administrators and faculty. Informational materials and the delivery system for sharing information are currently being developed.

INFORMATION SHARING

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

- The Center for Teaching Excellence will offer a series of opportunities, beginning November 17, to learn about evaluations of teaching in higher education
- Visit <http://tcuespot.wikispaces.com/> and click on the left-hand link “Resources for teaching and course evals”.

10. 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 Academic Excellence Committee, who are acting as liaisons and additional support
- Share ideas with faculty senators.
- Use our online site created specifically as a forum for eSPOT discussion <http://tcuespot.wikispaces.com/>.
- Attend Conversations on Teaching Evaluation with Provost Donovan. The first conversation began at the Senate Faculty meeting on November 4, and others are planned.

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