

QTI Practical, Mixed-Methods Guide to Evaluating COVID-Era Teaching Using FCQ's

University teaching has been hard hit during the COVID19 pandemic, yet state, university, and regential policies require performance evaluation—pandemic or not. Evaluations typically impact personnel and employment in decisions about tenure, promotion, reappointment, and salary increases even though many departments historically have imperfect evidence by which to make significant decisions on quality of teaching.

However, COVID19-caused budget cuts mean that there will be no merit raises in 2021, disentangling evaluation from salary increases. This change to the evaluation landscape means that departments can use the 2020-21 reviews to think differently about teaching quality.

Well before COVID, CU launched changes to how students evaluate instruction through the Faculty Course Questionnaire (FCQ's). The revised instrument will be used in spring 2021 for evidence on quality of instruction.

This new questionnaire is unfamiliar, specific items lack statistical validation, and departments await robust recommendations for how to use the data. FCQ responses *are* data, even with limitations, *and yet* these data may be the only evidence a department has available.

In this landscape, departments need tools to understand and evaluate current instructional practices, identify tools and processes to improve evaluation, and set goals for instructional improvement. This guide offers suggestions for doing just that.

This guide offers practical suggestions for how departments can

- Operate equitably and transparently;
- Learn about the instructional work of faculty;
- Use limited available evidence to make decisions;
- Recognize that substantive decisions cannot be based solely on this process;
- Identify needs for future change to departmental evaluation of instruction.

One approach toward using Spring 2021 FCQ's in evaluating instruction

1. Three Buckets

Assume that folks gave their best, given current conditions. Make three buckets: exceptional, commendable, needs improvement. Everyone starts in the commendable bucket; the rationale for moving anyone out of commendable must be compelling and well documented.

2. Mapping the Terrain

Review a sample (8-10) of FCQ's from several different instructors to "take the temperature" of responses. *Do not look solely at the item average*; rather, look at individual responses to see if they suggest patterns. Scan the open-ended responses (if present) to learn what *really* mattered to students. Taking brief notes might be helpful, but keep it short and simple.

3. Grouping Responses

Identify groups of questions to which students responded and cluster items together *qualitatively*, not *quantitatively*. These groupings will illuminate the classroom climate and culture, and students' learning experiences. For example, do you see response patterns in groupings such as "classroom management" (starts/ends on time; returns assignments in a timely fashion); "inclusivity" (treats all students with respect; uses diverse examples)? Are these groupings higher/lower than the instructor's average or different than the department average? What do the individual item responses suggest about student experiences? Was the instructor's total response rate high, low, virtually non-existent?

4. Locating

Make note of the departmental averages for the groupings you created in #3. With your terrain map, now review a specific instructor/course/section. Contextual details can be helpful. For example, if the instructor is teaching for the first time at CU, has just launched a new course, or replaced the originally assigned instructor at the last moment, students may react strongly to factors that are largely beyond the faculty member's control. *Evaluate the instructor, not the situation.*

Open-ended responses can shed light on the scaled items that you have clustered together. Some evidence will probably fall at one end or the other of a range and "bracket" the student feedback. Make note of extremes. Such feedback may indicate nothing more than a student venting about—or glorying in—a classroom experience. More than a couple such responses warrant attention.

The rationale for moving anyone from "commendable" must be compelling and well documented. A very low/high quantitative score deserves attention, yet it should not be the exclusive evidence for evaluation. Compare your findings from this FCQ process against other evidence you have for evaluation of instruction. Does that evidence confirm, disconfirm, or confound your FCQ analysis?

5. Future Orienting

Based on your overall evaluation, suggest opportunities and set goals for the instructor's professional growth. Also identify how well did this process work for students, faculty, you, and the university? What could make the process better in the future? What needs to happen and by when to make sure that next year's process will serve everyone better?

This structured, evidence-based process allows units to have thoughtful, relevant evaluations of teaching and can begin to offer instructors relevant feedback on areas in which to improve. This approach uses existing tools, offers both formative and summative aspects to evaluations, *and* offers a roadmap for how units can improve evaluation of instruction for the future.