University of Minnesota

Connecting Your Teaching Practices with the Student Rating of Teaching Form

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Introduction

This instructional support manual is an expanded and edited version of an earlier manual completed for the Center for Teaching and Learning by Flash, Tzenis, and Waller in 1997. The current document is designed to specifically address the six core items that comprise the new Student Rating of Teaching form approved by the Faculty Senate in December 2007. Because the manual has gone through marked change and considerable editing due to the new form, we issue it with a new title and format.

Each item is followed by a host of ideas that focus on how the instructor can improve teaching practices in relation to that item. Most instructors, however, would benefit from incorporating only a few key ideas suggested in the manual. Ultimately, implementing the suggested approaches relies on the professional judgment of the teacher. Your judgment on “what will work” in your classroom is key, with the caveat that any adjustment to one’s course requires practice and sensitivity to the specific context of a class.

Origins of the Student Rating of Teaching (SRT) Form

In 2006, the Senate Committee on Educational Policy and the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs charged an ad hoc committee to address the efficacy of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) form used by the University of Minnesota. The essential structure of the SET form had remained intact for more than a decade despite periodic attempts at revision. The committee began its work in October and produced a report on March 1, 2007.

The goals for item selection focused on resolving two questions: 1) What items are most likely to be universal across different instructional formats? 2) Is there a research basis to connect each item to principles of effective teaching and learning? Both criteria provided strong constraints on the pool of potential items. After extensive deliberation, six core items were chosen (see form on page 25).

The conceptual framework for the SRT is the university’s Student Learning Outcomes, a unique approach for assessing instructional performance. In essence, the seven outcomes serve as categories for aligning student-rating statements. Two valued ends are simultaneously achieved through this approach: a) instructional performance is deliberately tied to student learning, and b) rating scores represent one form of a systematic, campus-wide assessment of student learning outcomes. It is important to note, however, that the focus of the SRT statements can also accommodate the goals of most graduate education coursework.
Table 1 lists the current student learning outcomes, while Table 2 displays both the research support for the items and the alignment of items with the learning outcomes. As a bank of additional items are developed over time, teachers may be able to draw closer parallels between the intent of their course and the assessment of the course by choosing additional items that match the goals of the course.

Finally, student-rating forms usually focus on whether the instructor was knowledgeable, accessible, or other teacher characteristics. Appropriate changes in the wording of a rating statement, however, can help students examine their role as learners at the end of the semester.

Table 3 compares the basic differences between teacher-centered statements and learning-centered statements. Because student learning is a joint responsibility of the student and the instructor, the core items reflect both types of statements.

**Interpreting the Results of Student Rating Systems**

In an earlier version of this manual, the following was stated:

> Student evaluations are **one** measure of an instructor’s teaching effectiveness… High ratings are not guaranteed indicators of effective instruction, and low ratings, likewise, do not always guarantee ineffective instruction. What they do provide you with is an indication of how students feel about some of the specific teaching practices and activities you use. In addition, the results can inspire you to ask yourself questions about the teaching and learning objectives you have selected for a class… (Flash, Tzenis, and Waller, 1997, p. 4)

Debates about student rating systems often center on issues of validity and reliability. A large body of evidence indicates that rating systems can provide useful information to faculty, administrators, and students if they are properly constructed, properly administered, appropriately analyzed, and used as an element of a more comprehensive evaluation system (Marsh, 1987). Nevertheless, the debate continues because the issue of validity “has more to do with process and day-to-day practice than with the psychometric properties of the instruments used” (Theall, 2005, p. 1). In particular, faculty often express concern with the over-emphasis of student rating results in assessing their instructional performance.

Despite the cautions that have been raised about using student-rating results in formulating personnel decisions (Arreola, 2006), it is unlikely that administrators and personnel committees will ignore these data. The recommendations below are provided in the spirit of reducing the
“high stakes” value placed on student ratings within (far too many) departments and colleges at the university.

1. **Avoid having the student rating scores serve as the sole measure of teaching performance.** Student ratings are not an absolute measure of the quality of teaching. Use multiple measures of teaching performance, in particular a more robust peer review system.

2. **When rating scores are presented, place the scores in perspective.** Regardless of the scale or rubric, there may be little difference in functional teaching performance with scores that are one standard deviation or less apart. As well, do not minimize real differences; scores that are two or more standard deviations apart should garner closer scrutiny by the instructor.

3. **Assume a progressive pattern of development for new faculty.** New faculty need time to develop their own sense of comfort and style with teaching. View each year’s scores as next steps in building a foundation for outstanding teaching.

4. (For chairs and deans) **Encourage a strong instructional development component for all faculty in the department.** Every teacher needs ongoing development. Allow faculty time to experiment with new pedagogies or new course designs without fear of being penalized if (initially) low rating scores are the result. Faculty and instructional staff will make appropriate decisions about instructional development given time, opportunity, and useful feedback.

5. **Reconsider the interpretation of scores that are at or slightly below the department mean.** If the department mean on all core items is reasonably high, values slightly below the mean are hardly clear demarcations of incompetence. Use alternative methods of reporting scores (below) as well as other approaches such as peer review to place these values in perspective with the overall assessment of teaching expertise.
The instructor was well prepared for class.

Ken Bain (2004) contends, “highly effective teachers design better learning environments…because they conceive of teaching as fostering learning” (p. 67). Preparation for teaching—whether for a full course or a single lesson—is widely acknowledged as the most time consuming activity for new teachers (Boice, 2000). In addition to course design, student perceptions of preparation might also focus on related constructs such as organization, order, and perhaps even your ability to think on your feet when responding to student questions.

Being well prepared suggests that students are detecting your ability to anticipate their needs each week as well as within a single class. Preparedness also breeds confidence as a teacher. The trick, as Boice (2000) alludes, is to avoid obsessive concerns about covering all the material and to thereby make sensible choices on the pace and focus of instruction.

**PRIOR TO THE FIRST CLASS**

**1.1 Address some initial questions about student learning.**

Bain (2004) indicated that the best college teachers ask themselves a series of questions about student learning during the design phase. Five of these key questions are outlined below:

a. **What big questions will my course help students answer?** (More on this later)

b. **How will I create a “natural critical learning environment”, using authentic tasks that arouse their curiosity?**

c. **What misconceptions about the content will students bring to class, and how should these misconceptions be addressed?**

d. **What information will my students need to know to answer the important questions of the course?**

e. **How will I spell out the intellectual and professional standards to be used in assessing their work?**

**1.2 Align course objectives with the university’s undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes.**

A common approach to write objectives is to list content or topics—what the teacher hopes to cover. Instead, write goals that facilitate student learning and deeper thinking. If you are teaching an undergraduate course, use the university’s new student learning outcomes as a framework to help structure learner centered, course-specific goals.

The SLO’s portray the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students are expected to attain before the baccalaureate degree is conferred. These outcomes indicate that students:

a. **Can identify, define, and solve problems**

b. **Can locate and critically evaluate information**

c. **Have mastered a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry**

d. **Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies**

e. **Can communicate effectively**

f. **Understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines**

g. **Have acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.**
Not all SLO’s need to be found in your syllabus, but consider which outcomes are best connected to your course. See the tutorial on *Syllabus Development* on the CTL website to help you translate your potential course objectives into learner-centered language and connect the statements with the university’s stated outcomes.

1.3 **Design backwards, starting from where you want students to be at the end of the course.**

Another way to emphasize the importance of learning outcomes is to consider “backwards design”, a term coined by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Briefly, the phases of design are:

a) *Identify desired results.* What specific knowledge and skills should participants master? What enduring understandings should students remember after they’ve forgotten the details of the course?

b) *Determine acceptable evidence.* What will you accept as evidence that students are making progress toward the learning goals of the course?

c) *Plan learning experiences & instruction.* What are the best tasks, problems, or questions for developing each student’s ability to meet your learning goals?

1.4 **Be judicious in your decisions about textbooks and other reading materials.**

Teachers commonly ask, “Why don’t students read the text before class?” McKeachie and Svinicki (2006, p. 31) suggest that students come to class unprepared because “they don’t see what difference it makes”. Thick textbooks or an otherwise high volume of reading are daunting to any student, but they also become irrelevant if teachers end up summarizing all the main points to be covered in the course.

Quality reading materials are important anchors for most courses. *How* you choose to use them is at least as important as *which* materials are most relevant to students.

1.5 **Draft your syllabus with a realistic idea of depth and breadth.**

The syllabus is an important point of interaction between you and the student—a learning tool that reinforces the intentions, attitudes, and strategies for effective learning (O’Brien, Miller, & Cohen, 2008). Syllabus design is often labor intensive because the completed document becomes public and open to much scrutiny by students, administrators, and personnel committees. Careful attention is needed in the design of a comprehensive syllabus (see the CTL’s web tutorial on *Syllabus Development*).

An important decision that confronts all teachers is the depth vs. breadth issue. One of Shulman’s (1999) reminders about teaching is that students forget much of what instructors deliver in a course because we provide students with too much content. This is a sobering comment on not only our course but also higher education in general. How will *you* address the “amnesia problem” in your students?

1.6 **Prepare lesson plans with big ideas in mind.**

Big ideas are the “enduring understandings” mentioned earlier by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Big ideas should be well known for every topic within a discipline, though they are also shaped
by the biography of the instructor. Big ideas are sometimes labeled as *principles or concepts.* Consider them as the “take home messages” that you want to leave with your students at the end of the day.

1.6 Match the teaching method to your daily or overall goals.
Consider a wide range of assessment methods (e.g., essay tests, term papers, short-answer quizzes, homework assignments, lab projects, problems to solve) in order to ensure that you test for the type of learning you want from students. As well, visit the classroom that has been assigned. If you want an interactive classroom, how will you create an interactive environment if the room has auditorium-style seating?

1.7 Gather some feedback from a colleague on the direction and focus of your course.
Each of us invariably benefits from the feedback provided by another set of informed eyes or ears. Talk to a trusted colleague--one you would label as a “critical friend”--and be prepared for the inevitable adjustments that arise from the feedback you receive. If you don’t want to know, don’t ask!

1.8 Welcome students prior to class via email. It’s a simple gesture, easily worked out through a course management system such as Web Vista. A welcoming message sets a tone for the class from the beginning and tells students that you are looking forward to the semester. Many students enter class with some degree of nervousness about the structure, focus, and workload for the class. Disarm them with a welcoming message, and expand upon the message in your first class.

1.9 Be explicit about how students should prepare for your class. Tell students up front about your expectations. What readings should they complete prior to class? Should they review their notes from last week? Are there some key points, questions, or terms that should be studied or reviewed before a class session?

1.10 Prioritize and limit the number of points you plan to explore in a single class session.
Select carefully the content you present. Ask yourself “Why do I want my students to know this?” “What do I expect them to do with it?” “Is this the most appropriate time to get this information?” “Do I need to give them this information, or would it be more valuable for them to work it out for themselves?”

1.11 Refer to your syllabus when planning a class session. Draw explicit attention in class to the way the session fits into the course as a whole, which goals it addresses, etc. In situations where you must deviate from the course schedule, make it clear when and why you are doing so.

1.12 Practice the presentation. A rehearsal will help you judge timing and your own comfort with the material. Pay particular attention to the opening and closing parts of your lesson--students will!
SRT Core Item 2

The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.

This item can assess the manner in which material is organized and communicated in a clear manner. Communication problems can include difficulties with delivery, such as a soft voice, monotonic delivery, illegible handwriting, or an unfamiliar accent. Ratings on clarity can also reflect the degree to which an instructor explicitly communicates objectives, priorities, and plans for the day’s activities, i.e., letting the students know what they are supposed to be learning and why.

Finally, this item can relate to an instructor’s misconception about what students really need or want to know. In these instances, low ratings may indicate that the instructor is going into too much or too little detail, providing insufficient explanation of organization or rationale, or is giving students inadequate opportunity to request clarification.

During class

2.1 Give students a road map. Put a brief outline on the board or provide a handout that will help students follow along. Refer to the outline to alert students to transitions and to the relationships between points. Some instructors give students a list of questions to be addressed during the class. Handouts can also include new terms, complex equations, formulas, and copies of detailed overhead transparencies or slides shown in class (Davis, 1993, 120).

2.2 Avoid making assumptions about what students know. Assuming that students know nothing about your topic eases class planning but can damage student motivation and sacrifice rich internal sources of information. Conversely, assuming students know too much about your topic leads to frustration for those who don’t. Assess students’ background, preconceptions, or grasp of terminology through a knowledge survey (Nuhfer & Knipp, 2003) at the start of the semester or a unit.

2.3 Allow students to orient to the topic. At the beginning of the class period, have pairs of students briefly paraphrase the previous lecture or a reading assignment or ask them to come up with one or two questions that they hope will be answered during the class session. These paraphrases, questions, or lists can be brought into a larger group, handed in to the instructor, or left with the individual students for self-reference.

2.9 Use verbal cues to:

a) Introduce a topic and provide context. For example, “Today we’ll learn three strategies for……. These strategies are part of our larger discussion on ……..”

b) Order your ideas. For example, “The first strategy involves….The second strategy…”

c) Provide or ask for a summary. “We’ve discussed three tools: Questioning, Note Pairs, and Three-Minute Papers. Each of these strategies can be used in a variety of courses when an instructor’s objective is to find out the degree to which students are understanding the material.”

d) Highlight important points as you make them. For example, “The most important thing to remember is…” or “This is so important that every one of you should have it engraved on a plaque hung over your bed,” or “This is something you will use many times so it’s worth your special attention.”
e) *Explicitly refer to connections between lecture or discussion and course text.* For example, where in the text is the topic discussed? Are you restating, elaborating, presenting an alternative viewpoint, or challenging the viewpoint of the text?

f) *Be explicit about your lecture organization so students can organize their thinking as they listen.* Examples of organizational structures are below:
   i. **Cause-Effect**: Two or more events or occurrences are cited and their relationship is explored.
   ii. **Chaining/Sequential**: Ideas/concepts are arranged chronologically or in a form that implies order.
   iii. **Compare and Contrast**: Elements of two or more related topics are examined for their similarities and differences.
   iv. **Hierarchical**: Information about a topic is placed in a classification scheme with the unifying feature as the main header.
   v. **Network**: A series of related ideas or topics are fully linked in a complex fashion into a single larger entity.

See Donald Bligh’s (2000) excellent book on lecture organization and other key points about this form of presentation.

2.4 **Whenever possible, demonstrate or ask students to demonstrate rather than describe.** Instead of telling students how to present a logical argument, *present* a logical argument and help them analyze it. Instead of describing how to solve a problem, *solve* the problem on the board, labeling the steps as you go along (Davis, 1993).

2.5 **Use memorable examples.** Students tend to remember images longer than they remember words, so be liberal in your use of stories, metaphors, analogies, and vivid images in examples. Spend time developing a repertoire of examples that link ideas and images. Use examples that do the following (Davis, 1993, p. 122).
   a) **Represent a phenomenon in multiple ways.** For example, to explain aerodynamic oscillation, an instructor cites a scarf held out a window of a moving car, a thin piece of paper placed near an air conditioner, and a suspension bridge battered by gale winds. (See more on this concept on p. 18).

   b) **Draw upon your students’ experiences.** For example, to explain *depreciation*, an instructor uses the price of new textbooks versus used textbooks.

   c) **Dramatize concepts.** For example, in defining a particular body organ, an instructor compares its size or texture to familiar objects, such as a walnut or grapefruit; an economics professor illustrates a trillion by saying “It takes 31,700 years to count a trillion seconds.”

   d) **Engage students’ empathy.** For example, “Imagine yourself as Hamlet. How does the poison feel? How does it affect your speech?”

2.6 **Check student understanding regularly.**
   a) **Ask for questions.** Ask for student questions in a way that makes it clear that you not only encourage them, you expect them. Instead of asking “Are there any questions?” try “Which points can I clarify for you?” or “What questions do you have?”

   b) **Assign brief reflective writing.** Distribute 3x5 cards (or require students to always bring blank cards to class) and give students a couple of minutes to summarize the material presented so far or draw associative concept maps. When turned in anonymously, these cards can provide you
with valuable direction.

2.7 Answer relevant student questions concisely. If you are uncertain of a precise answer to a difficult question you might tell students that you need a chance to think about or research a response and that you will let them know what you have come up with at the next class meeting. Alternatives include asking if another student can answer the question or telling the students where and how they might find the answer themselves.

2.8 Provide comprehension and assimilation tasks for students to do at certain points of a lecture or discussion.

a) Use discussion pairs. Break for two or three minutes to allow students in pairs to discuss a question, come up with a question, summarize, or compare and share notes. This mutually beneficial strategy will allow students to clarify or expand their understanding of material and will allow you to assess their understanding.

b) Give students an application problem to solve or a chart or diagram to complete. Students can do these either individually or with a partner. Application tasks allow students to practice a task with an eye on relevance and also make difficult ideas come alive in class.

2.9 Pay particular attention to clarity of directions for in-class tasks and homework assignments. If a task involves several steps, provide written and oral directions as well as examples of correct answers. For assignments you expect students to complete outside of class, you might ask students to discuss their understanding of the assignment and possible procedures involved in completing the task with a partner.

Toward the end of the class

2.10 Assign “Minute Papers.” Every few weeks, ask students to write for three minutes on the following two questions: “What is the most significant thing you learned today?” and “What question is uppermost in your mind at the end of today’s class?” The resulting information can provide invaluable aid in allowing you to evaluate how well the class understands the material or whether it is time to move on to another topic (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p.148).

2.11 End with an upbeat message. Avoid the fade-out ending where packing backpacks and sliding chairs drown out your voice. Intentional endings will reverberate in students’ minds as they walk out. Even when students are working independently, as they are in a lab-type course, it is essential to bring them back together for a wrap-up. Summarize main points, refer to session goals, or fit the session into course goals or into the discipline as a whole.

After class

2.12 Review your class plan immediately. Right after class is often the most effective time to sit down and reflect on what went well, what didn’t go as planned and why, ideas for alterations, and so on.

Additional Comments

2.13 Address language or delivery difficulties.

a) Face students when talking to them.

b) Use visual or written aids. You can refer to pictures, diagrams, or a written outline of your presentation during your presentation.

c) Watch and listen to yourself on videotape. Watching yourself can allow you to assess physical
gestures, eye contact, board work, and interaction patterns as well as delivery issues of volume, tone, and pace. You might not like what you see, but the experience will be burned into your memory banks.

d) Request help from your students. For example, if you know that you tend to speak softly, ask your students to give you a sign when you need to increase your volume. Alternately, don’t be afraid to reconfigure students’ seating patterns in order to draw them closer to you.

2.14 Encourage students to form study groups. “Invite representatives of the study groups to meet with you to discuss any difficulties with the subject matter. Study groups provide students with opportunities to learn from one another, and some students may find it easier to seek assistance as a group rather than as individuals” (Davis, 1993, p. 351).

2.15 Gather information from students early in the semester regarding your clarity and how they feel it might be improved. Use the university’s midterm rating forms and related questions to learn about your capabilities in order to make appropriate adjustments before the final rating form is distributed in the last weeks of the course.

SRT Core Item 3

The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.

Thoughtful and timely feedback is vital to a learner’s progress (Light, 2001). It is not possible to learn without some form of feedback; students need to know themselves as learners and adapt continuously to the many forms of information that arise in the learning environment (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Instructional feedback, however, is strongly driven by our ideas about the nature of learning. What we provide to students as feedback is directly related to both how we teach and what we believe students should achieve in our courses.

Low ratings on this item may reflect a perceived lack of guidance or support and may indicate a class where formal evaluation measures, such as tests, papers, and quizzes, provide the only feedback a student gets. Independent learning and internal motivation are facilitated by specific recognition of what is done, identification of possible weaknesses, and suggestions on how those aspects might be strengthened.

3.1 Provide feedback frequently. Feedback on how well students are meeting the objectives of the class should be provided early and often. Below are some strategies for providing students with frequent feedback on their learning.

a) Give students quizzes they can grade themselves, either individually or for each other in base groups.

b) Create quizzes online that allow students to get immediate feedback on their answers.

c) Sequence papers and projects so students can turn in theses or hypotheses, outlines, and drafts before the final deadline. Asking that these brief assignments be turned in via e-mail can expedite the process.

3.2 Give clear, precise feedback that guides students on how to improve.

a) Provide clear oral comments. It is a common observation in many classes that much instructor feedback can be characterized as acceptance (OK, Uh-huh). These comments may be interpreted
as affirming their contribution or as simply acknowledging that the contribution was heard. Instead use comments such as, “I think you may be confusing X with Y. Look at ...”.

b) **Use a well-established grading rubric.** A grading rubric is a scoring guide that lists the criteria and the achievement levels for evaluating student performance. Show students the rubric before an assignment is due, and use the rubric to both assess performance and educate students on your standards or expectations for high performance.

c) **Comment wisely but sparingly.** A few well-chosen, carefully articulated comments will draw attention to salient parts of an assignment more effectively than dozens of corrections and remarks scattered throughout the assignment.

d) **Provide comments on the overall quality rather than focusing only on details.** When providing feedback on written work, comment on meaning first. When reading through a paper for the first time, view it as a reader, rather than a proofreader or editor. If you find grammatical errors too distracting, you may want to reverse the order, making the editorial corrections first, then reading for meaning, organization, and flow, but make sure the comments on overall quality are the first thing the student sees.

e) **Use questions and suggestions when commenting on written work.** Comments such as “awkward,” “unclear,” and “vague” are not particularly helpful to students since they may refer to organization, content, or mechanics. Be more specific in your response to fuzzy passages: “How else would you describe this?” “Why is this so?” “Are you saying this is necessary?” “I don’t understand this sentence. Are you saying…?” “What about…” (Davis, 1993, p. 227).

f) **Suggest specific strategies for improvement.** Light (2001) recommends that students check the organization of a paper by writing an outline that consists of a single summary sentence for each paragraph. To identify awkward phrases or words, students can read the paper aloud or have someone read it to them (Davis, 1993, p. 227).

g) **Use a personal informal style.** Speak personably when making oral or written comments about a student work. These occasions are not the appropriate time to model highly formal language.

### 3.3 Consider possible cultural differences when providing feedback on writing by non-native students.

Sheryl Holt, coordinator of First Year Writing at the U, notes the following problems and possible strategies for improvement:

a) **Many non-native writers have fewer written connections between ideas.** The rhetorical patterns of some cultures dictate that one not insults the intelligent reader by “stating the obvious.” American readers, on the other hand, want an entire line of reasoning stated in black and white. It may help to provide some examples of connective sentences to illustrate what an American writer would say to connect the two ideas.

b) **Teachers frequently complain about the non-native speakers’ lack of critical thinking.** Culturally, many non-native speakers have a very high regard for what is written by someone else. They are taught that using someone else’s words in a paper is more important than their own interpretations. In some cultures, students are seldom asked to criticize, evaluate, or critically examine an authority’s written words. Asking leading questions like, “Why do you think…?” gives students permission to make inferences about another’s thoughts.

c) **“Logical development” is culturally defined.** What an American considers logical in an
academic paper may not be logical in another culture. Because of cultural training, some non-native speakers will have trouble sticking to a thesis, narrowing a thesis sufficiently, and proving a thesis concretely enough for an American audience. Comments about logical development should be stated in clear direct sentences.

3.4 **Tie your response to the course or assignment goals.** A written assignment might have the learning objective of writing to learn, writing to communicate, writing to show control of composition mechanics, etc.

3.5 **Budget your grading time.** Rushed grading does not lead to thoughtful feedback. Many instructors find that they need to set time and quota limits for reading and responding to student work.

3.6 **Give students an opportunity to use your feedback to improve their performance.**

For example, ask students to turn in at least one draft before writing the final paper. If a homework assignment indicates that a student had difficulty solving a particular kind of problem, the student could be given a new problem of the same type to do for the next day. Remember that if you are giving students an opportunity to raise their grade by improving their performance, all students must be provided with the same opportunities.

3.7 **Balance positive and negative comments.**

Take stock of your comments every so often: what’s the balance of praise to constructive criticism? Avoid too many demoralizing “but” clauses. If you find little to praise, make your critical comments constructive: “This application problem is interesting, but it doesn’t use all the elements of the original model. Try working with it; it’s close!”

3.8 **Avoid sarcastic, impatient, or punitive comments.**

Sarcasm is not the most effective way to help students learn. If you become frustrated or disappointed while grading a student’s work, take a break to refresh your perspective.

3.9 **Provide examples of success.** Discussing examples of reports, papers, etc., during class can help students recognize the kind of work that meets expectations. Be sure to remove all identification of the student who provided the work.

3.10 **Avoid taking over the text or report.** It’s the student’s work. Privilege the student’s intentions as they develop and become more refined. Compel the student to make choices. Show that uncertainty is a good and natural part of writing by suggesting options.

3.11 **Make yourself available to consult with students individually or in small group sessions.**

Providing students with in-person feedback can be especially important at the time of major projects or exams. If possible, schedule extra office hours or appointments during this time. In-person conversations allow students to ask for specific feedback; some instructors schedule one short conference with each student sometime during the semester.

3.12 **Assess the helpfulness of your feedback to students before the midterm of the semester.** Use the university’s midterm rating forms and related questions to learn about your capabilities in order to make appropriate adjustments before the final rating form is distributed in the last weeks of the course.
SRT Core Item 4

The instructor treated me with respect.

The premise of this rating item is that all individuals learn most effectively when they feel included in a course’s curriculum and in its activities. Scores on this item may reflect the degree to which students from different groups feel that they are welcome in the classroom, can participate fully, can work with materials and information that reflect diversity, are recognized as individuals, and are treated fairly.

The demographic makeup of the traditional college-going population has undergone marked changes over the last three decades. Populations who have been previously underrepresented are now enrolling in significantly larger numbers. Previously invisible populations are now coalescing into visible communities. These changes in demographics have caused both students and instructors to challenge the assumptions of the traditional classroom and require conscious effort to implement on a daily basis.

4.1 **Know your students.** Unless class size is prohibitive, spend some time early in the first few classes learning students’ names and finding out about their interests and concerns. Learn who they are and their backgrounds in relation to the course to help situate your understanding of their capabilities as students.

4.2 **Include diverse materials and varied styles of presentation to accommodate different cultural backgrounds.** Create a syllabus that includes materials from diverse populations of scholars or reflect diverse positions.

4.3 **Speak up promptly if a student makes a distasteful remark, even jokingly.** Explain why a comment is offensive or insensitive. Let your students know that racist, sexist, and other types of discriminatory remarks are unacceptable in class. For example, “What you said made me feel uncomfortable. It could be interpreted as saying...” (Davis, 1993, p. 46).

4.4 **Deal with controversial issues constructively.** In a class that is going to be engaging in a lot of discussions and anticipates some controversy, spend some time negotiating discussion guidelines or ground rules. Examples include restating someone’s idea if it is not clear or listening to everyone’s ideas even if you don’t agree. Prepare students ahead of time for conflict by starting out with less controversial topics in order to build trust. When a controversial issue or question arises, use analytic methods to keep the focus on ideas, not people.

4.5 **Avoid singling out students as spokespersons.** It is unfair to ask a student to speak for his or her entire race, culture, or nationality. This reinforces the mistaken notion that each member of a minority group is an authority on the group and also ignores the fact that there are wide differences of opinion among members of any group (Davis, 1993, p. 47).

4.6 **Examine your own assumptions.** Stereotyping often influences teacher expectations and behaviors in unconscious ways. These behaviors in turn, send a strong message to students. Do a radical, honest, self-examination of your biases and their sources.

4.7 **Keep channels of communication open.** Ask students to tell you if you unintentionally offend them. Likewise, tell them that you will let them know if they offend you. If you are in a large class, consider asking for student representatives with whom you will plan to meet.
regularly. Students who are hesitant to report behavior that has made them feel uncomfortable may be more likely to report it to a representative who will then carry it anonymously to you.

4.8 **Poll student viewpoints regularly.** Use instant polls (e.g., personal response systems or “clickers”) and integrate student responses into lectures.

4.9 **Monitor your behavior in responding to students.** As you teach, try to be conscious of the following matters:
   a) **Calling on or hearing from only members of one gender or ethnic group.**
   b) **Listening attentively and responding directly to students’ comments and questions.**
   c) **Addressing students by name, with correct pronunciation.**
   d) **Giving students time to answer a question before moving on.**
   e) **Interrupting students or allowing them to be interrupted by their peers.**
   f) **Crediting student comments during your summary.**
   g) **Making eye contact.** (Davis, 1993, p. 45-46).

4.10 **Use language patterns and examples that do not exclude or demean any group.**
   a) Use terms of equal weight when referring to parallel groups, such as, “men” and “women” rather than “men” and “ladies.”
   b) Use both “he” and “she” during lectures, discussions, etc.
   c) Recognize that your students may come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds by avoiding remarks that make assumptions about your students’ experiences, such as, “Now, when your parents were in college…”.
   d) Avoid comments about students’ social activities that tacitly assume that all students are heterosexual, such as “When you get married and become a father (mother)…”.
   e) Draw case studies, examples, and anecdotes from a variety of cultural and social contexts. (Adapted from Davis, 1993, p. 41)

4.11 **Respect the individual needs of the learners.** Treating students equally does not necessarily mean treating all students the same way. For example, a non-native English speaker may be allowed to use a dictionary when taking a test, or a student with a disability may be allowed more time or the help of a reader when taking a test.

4.12 **Get an outside opinion.** Because the differences in the ways in which we treat groups are often unintentional, you may wish to have your teaching observed as part of a teaching consultation. To arrange an observation, call the CTL or visit the website under the Consultations and Customized Workshops header.

4.13 **Assess the climate of your classroom throughout the semester.** Use the university’s midterm rating form and related questions to learn about your capabilities in order to make appropriate adjustments before the final rating form is distributed at the end of the course.

**SRT Core Item 5**

**I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.**

For many students and faculty, item #5 is the primary goal of any course in that it addresses the broad issue of human learning. Cognitive psychology and neuroscience have taught us much
about the nature of human learning. For example, based on his theory of multiple intelligences, Gardner (2006) contends that one of the most important ways to develop deep learning for students—and to change past habits of thinking—is to represent the content in multiple ways. These multiple ways include:

a) **Narrative**—telling stories about the topic and the people involved
b) **Quantitative**—using numerical examples connected to the topic
c) **Graphic**—placing material in a figural representation
d) **Logic**—identifying key elements and exploring their logical connections
e) **Hands-on**—working directly or experientially with tangible examples
f) **Cooperative** or social—engaging in projects with others where each makes a distinctive contribution

All topics do not require six or more multiple representations, but teachers are likely to strongly affect student learning if multiple formats are used flexibly and imaginatively (Gardner, 2004).

Because the entire Manual examines a host of issues that ultimately affect student learning, this section is confined to a series of principles on human learning based on a task force report completed in 1998 by the American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The edited list appears below.

### 5.1 Learning is fundamentally about making and maintaining connections—biologically through neural networks; mentally among concepts, ideas, and meanings; and experientially through interaction between the mind and the environment.

*Students learn more when they have:*

a) **learning** materials that stimulate comparisons and associations, explore relationships, evaluate alternative perspectives and solutions, and challenge students to draw conclusions from evidence.

b) opportunities to integrate classroom experiences with purposeful activities outside of class.

c) pedagogies emphasizing critical analysis of conflicting views and requiring students to make defensible judgments about and demonstrate linkages among bodies of knowledge.

d) curricula integrating ideas and themes within and across fields of knowledge and establishing coherence among learning experiences within and beyond the classroom.

### 5.2 Learning is enhanced by taking place in the context of a compelling situation that balances challenge and opportunity, stimulating and utilizing the brain’s ability to conceptualize quickly and its capacity and need for contemplation and reflection upon experiences.

*Students learn more when they are:*

a) asked to tackle complex and compelling problems that invite them to develop an array of workable and innovative solutions.

b) asked to produce work that will be shared with multiple audiences.

c) offered opportunities for active application of skills and abilities and time for contemplation.

d) placed in settings where they can draw upon past knowledge and competencies while adapting to new circumstances.
5.3 Learning is an active search for meaning by the learner—constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it, shaping as well as being shaped by experiences.  
Students learn more when they have: 
- a) instructional methods that involve students directly in the discovery of knowledge. 
- b) learning materials that challenge students to transform prior knowledge and experience into new and deeper understandings. 
- c) responsibility for their own learning. 
- d) been encouraged to seek meaning in the context of ethical values and commitments. 
- e) been assessed based on students’ ability to demonstrate competencies and use knowledge.

5.4 Learning is developmental, a cumulative process involving the whole person, integrating the new with the old, starting from but transcending personal concerns and interests.  
Students learn more when: 
- a) curricula are additive and cumulative, building upon prior understandings and knowledge toward greater richness and complexity. 
- b) intellectual growth is viewed as a gradual process, with periods of rapid advancement followed by time for consolidation. 
- c) assessment of learning encompasses all aspects of the educational experience.

5.5 Learning is done by individuals who are intrinsically tied to others as social beings, interacting as competitors or collaborators, constraining or supporting the learning process.  
Students learn more when teachers:  
- a) take into account students’ personal histories and common cultures. 
- b) feature opportunities for cooperative learning, study, and shared research. 
- c) cultivate a climate in which students see themselves as part of an inclusive community. 
- d) use the residential experience as a resource for collaborative learning and for integrating social and academic life. 
- e) use school, work, home, and community as resources for collaborative learning and for integrating social and academic life.

5.6 Learning requires frequent feedback if it is to be sustained, practice if it is to be nourished, and opportunities to use what has been learned.  
Students learn more when they are: 
- a) expected to meet high but achievable standards and provided timely information on their progress toward meeting them. 
- b) engaged in a recurring process of correction and improvement. 
- c) encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes. 
- d) taught how to be constructive critics of each other’s work. 
- e) required to demonstrate their learning accomplishments through active problem solving, applying concepts to practical situations. 
- f) refining skills through frequent use. 
- g) asked to test theory against practice and refine theory based on practice.
5.7 Learning is grounded in particular contexts and individual experiences, requiring effort to transfer specific knowledge and skills to other circumstances or to more general understandings and to unlearn personal views and approaches when confronted by new information. 

*Students learn more when they:*  
a) encounter alternative perspectives and others' realities.  
b) grapple with educational materials that challenge conventional views.  
c) confront novel circumstances that extend beyond their own personal experiences and that require the application of new knowledge or more general principles.

5.8 Learning involves the ability of individuals to monitor their own learning, to develop strategies for learning based on discerning their capacities and limitations, and to be aware of their own ways of knowing in approaching new bodies of knowledge. 

*Students learn more when teachers:*  
a) use multiple pedagogies suited to the content or skills to be learned and reaching students with different approaches to learning.  
b) use educational technologies as a tool for collaborative learning and encourage reticent students to participate.  
c) ask students to observe and record their own progress in learning.  
d) continue to learn what factors affect student cognition and learning and to design learning experiences responsive to learning differences.

**SRT Core Item 6**

**My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.**

The concept of interest or curiosity is central to motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000), two well-known theorists on motivation, note that “to be motivated means to be moved to do something”. When students are interested in the subject matter of a course, they are moved to persist in their learning and to display greater effort to achieve a result. Instructors are well aware of the value of modeling interest and enthusiasm in class. For instructors, being interested in their content is a given, but awakening and sustaining student interest is too often an ongoing challenge.

Demonstrate respect for students’ values, background knowledge, and experiences by eliciting and using contributions during a class and involving them in course decisions. Each of these actions can have a positive effect on students’ intrinsic motivation levels. The ideas expressed below point to the creation of a motivating instructional environment that is well within the reach of all teachers.

**6.1 Show enthusiasm and energy.** Give reasons why you’re interested in the subject. Share your passion in an honest and forthright manner (Nilson, 1998). Students connect your verbal and non-verbal behavior as signs of your commitment to them and to the course material.

**6.2 Grab attention with your opening.** Begin with a thought-provoking question, mention a recent news event that relates to the topic of the day, or start with an interesting example that stirs the emotions of students (Davis, 1993, p. 112).
6.3 Place course material in context.

a) **Tell students why you have organized the course and individual class sessions around your selected learning goals.** Describe the ways in which assignments are relevant not only to the course but also to future professional experience.

b) **Ask contextual questions.** To help the students place course materials in context, ask questions like: “Why are biologists interested in this topic?” “What goes through a mathematician’s head when she tries to solve a problem she’s never seen before?”

c) **Provide application examples.** Show how the concepts students are learning apply to real life, to the discipline, or to future or past classes. Case studies provide an excellent vehicle for getting students to apply concepts within an appropriate context.

d) **Highlight different perspectives and different value systems.** For example, some students would be motivated to learn a business strategy because it could increase a company’s profit. Other students would be more motivated to learn the same strategy because it could increase the services provided by a nonprofit agency such as the Red Cross.

6.4 Use examples that relate to the students’ interests and backgrounds. Learn a bit about your students and their backgrounds. Start your examples from what they know, and slowly move them toward examples that require students to stretch or transfer course material to new contexts. Students should also be put on the hook for generating examples as well—a good sign of their deepening connection to course material.

6.5 Use students’ names. Directing comments or questions to individual students by name can go a long way toward making students feel recognized and involved in the class.

6.6 Represent the content in multiple ways. See the preamble to Core Item #5 (p. 18) for a good rationale and examples behind this suggestion.

6.7 Structure frequent opportunities for active student participation. There are many ways to generate and sustain student interest through their active involvement. For example, if you are using student involvement activities in a lecture format, give the students a three to four minute discussion task every 10-15 minutes. This corresponds to the length of time people can attend to a lecture before they need to process what they are learning.

6.8 Use cooperative learning formats. Cooperative learning is one of the most powerful and well-researched methods for generating student involvement in class (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006). Once you become familiar with class members, you can assign students to small groups of three-four members that regularly work together for the duration of the course. The primary responsibilities of these groups are to provide support, encouragement, and assistance in completing assignments.

6.9 Give students choices. Student input and choice usually affects their level of investment and responsibility for learning (Nilson, 1998). With regard to course requirements, for example, you could allow students to choose between writing a report or giving an oral presentation; writing one longer paper or two shorter papers; working alone on a project or with a partner; or selecting from among a number of journal articles to review.

6.10 Gather information from students at regular intervals.

Understanding how students experience the course is the most important knowledge teachers need to do good work (Brookfield, 2006). Getting early and regular assessments on what’s
working in class keeps your finger on the pulse of student interest and enthusiasm.

6.11 Move seats around when appropriate to support interaction. For activities in which you wish to encourage student-to-student interaction, use a U-shape or circle(s) to allow students to see and speak directly to each other. Sit among the students for discussions instead of sitting on or behind a table. Bringing students forward when they are sparsely scattered in a large lecture hall can have a considerable effect on the class climate and demonstrates your interest in their learning.

6.12 Ask questions. Asking students questions, rather than presenting statements of fact, improves learning but also increases interest in learning more about the topic. If discussion is your goal, keep your responses to student comments open-ended as well.
References


University of Minnesota Student Rating of Teaching

INSTRUCTOR: ____________________________ TERM: ____________ CURRENT YEAR: ____________

DEPARTMENT: __________________________ COURSE #: _________ SECTION: ________________

Carefully read each statement and select a response based on the following: 6-Strongly Agree 5-Agree 4-Somewhat Agree 3-Somewhat Disagree 2-Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The instructor was well prepared for class.</td>
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<td>2. The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.</td>
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<td>3. The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course</td>
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<td>performance.</td>
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<td>4. The instructor treated me with respect.</td>
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<td>5. I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of</td>
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<td>this course.</td>
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<td>6. My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.</td>
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Written Comments

1. What did the instructor do that most helped your learning?

2. What could you have done to be a better learner?

(Please use other side for additional comments.)

To preserve anonymity in small classes, the demographic section below will be cut off before the forms are returned to the instructor. Additionally, summary reports will not be sent to the instructor for any category containing fewer than five students.

Cut Here

Did you take this course because it was required or was it an elective?

- Required
- Required, but one of several choices
- Elective

Cumulative grade point average (through last term):

- 3.51 - 4.0
- 3.01 - 3.5
- 2.51 - 3.0
- 2.01 - 2.5
- 1.01 - 2.0
- 0.00 - 1.0
- N/A

Year in school:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Grad/Prof
- Other

Primary way in which the course was delivered:

- Classroom
- Distance (Web-based, correspondence, etc.)
- Combination
Written Comments
3. Additional Comments

Student Release Questions: These questions were selected by the Student Senate to provide future students with information about the course.

1. Approximately how many hours per week do you spend working on homework, reading, and projects for this course?
   - 0-2 hours per week
   - 3-5 hours per week
   - 6-9 hours per week
   - 10-14 hours per week
   - 15 hours per week or more

2. Compared to other courses at this level, the amount I have learned in this course is:
   - Less
   - About the same
   - More
   - I have not taken other courses at this level

3. Compared to other courses at this level, the difficulty of this course is:
   - Less
   - About the same
   - More
   - I have not taken other courses at this level

4. I would recommend this course to other students.
   - Yes
   - No

5. I would recommend this instructor to other students.
   - Yes
   - No

Rate your instructor in terms of the following characteristics:

6. Is approachable
7. Makes effective use of course readings
8. Creates worthwhile assignments
9. Has a reasonable grading system

Course Environment

1. How would you rate the physical environment in which you take this class, especially the classroom facilities, including your ability to see, hear, concentrate and participate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptional</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Very Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>3</td>
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Cut Here
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At the time of receiving a bachelor’s degree, students:</td>
<td>(Examples of related statements logically connected to each outcome)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. can identify, define, and solve problems                                     | a. have developed analytical thinking skills necessary for problem solving  
                                        | b. can identify significant problems that characterize a field of study                                                                       |
| 2. can locate and critically evaluate information                               | a. can access information from a variety of information sources  
                                        | b. know how to work effectively with modern information technologies  
                                        | c. can interpret the value of different information sources in meeting class assignments                                                     |
| 3. have mastered a body of knowledge and mode of inquiry                         | a. know the facts, theories, and concepts that are central to a discipline  
                                        | b. understand the scientific method and other methodologies for developing knowledge                                                          |
| 4. understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies      | a. have insight into the beliefs, values, and attitudes of people from different cultures  
                                        | b. demonstrate tolerance and respect for individuals from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and disciplines                                              |
| 5. can communicate effectively                                                  | a. communicate ideas and information effectively in appropriate formats  
                                        | b. engage in constructive discussion of course content                                                                                           |
| 6. understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines | a. understand the impact of various research findings on daily life  
                                        | b. understand how knowledge results from creative and innovative thinking  
                                        | c. understand how research serves as the basis for developing knowledge in a discipline  
                                        | d. appreciate the impact of the creative arts on society                                                                                       |
| 7. have acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning         | a. understand the nature and importance of responsible citizenship  
                                        | b. display intellectual curiosity and flexibility  
                                        | c. can reflect upon and articulate personal values  
<pre><code>                                    | d. understand and practice professional and ethical behavior                                                                               |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Item</th>
<th>Research Support</th>
<th>Student Learning Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The instructor was well prepared for class.</td>
<td>Research has confirmed the high correlation between class preparation/organization and student achievement (Feldman, 1989; Weimer, 1991).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.</td>
<td>Clarity in a teacher’s instruction and explanations has a powerful impact on student understanding of content (Boex, 2000; Feldman, 1989).</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.</td>
<td>Providing appropriate and timely feedback to students has a long tradition as a necessary teacher practice that impacts student learning (Brophy &amp; Good, 1986; Light, 2001)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The instructor treated me with respect.</td>
<td>Productive teacher/student relationships are vital for continued student growth as a learner (Baxter-Magolda, 2001; Palmer, 1998).</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.</td>
<td>Mastery of content allows students to transfer knowledge to new settings and to place knowledge in appropriate frameworks (Bransford, Brown, &amp; Cocking, 2000).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.</td>
<td>“Interest” (motivation) drives our desire to become competent when we approach new topics (Bain, 2004; Ryan &amp; Deci, 2000).</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Table 3. Examples of Teacher-Centered and Learning-Centered Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Centered</th>
<th>Learning-Centered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.</td>
<td>I was able to effectively use teacher feedback to improve my course performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> The instructor motivated me to do my best work.</td>
<td>I set high expectations for my achievement in this class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> The instructor presented assignments that focused on solving difficult problems.</td>
<td>I am better able to solve difficult problems based on my experience in this course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> The instructor showed enthusiasm when teaching.</td>
<td>I developed enthusiasm and interest to learn more about the subject matter.</td>
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<td>OR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I was inspired to learn more about course topics because of the instructor.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> The instructor covered a wide array of content in this course.</td>
<td>I learned a great deal of factual material in this class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong> The instructor encouraged student involvement in class discussions.</td>
<td>I was an active participant in class discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.</strong> The instructor used real-life problems to help students understand class content.</td>
<td>I was able to relate the assignments to real problems that I expect to encounter in my profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.</strong> The instructor encouraged students to express their point of view in class.</td>
<td>I felt comfortable expressing my point of view in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9.</strong> The instructor provided useful information sources to learn the subject matter.</td>
<td>I learned to identify credible information sources to complete class assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Overall, the instructor was effective in helping students learn the content of this course.</td>
<td>I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter compared to the beginning of the course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>