Summary of Course Evaluations at Purdue

Purdue started using student evaluations of teaching in the 1920s, largely at the behest of Purdue seniors who advocated for greater scrutiny of instructors and student involvement in curricular decisions. In the 1940s, students pushed for and succeeded in getting almost all instructors to “voluntarily” provide evaluation forms to students[[1]](#footnote-1). Starting in 1967, students published an annual handbook of course and instructor evaluations[[2]](#footnote-2).

Instructional Data Processing, as part of Purdue’s Center for Instructional Services, conducted course evaluations using scantron forms. In 1974, this became the Purdue Instructional Course Evaluation System (PICES) catalogue. There were [five standard questions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JW2fEqnYIM61dGSG21fSjxqaJiEMsC2cbfScEWcmuEw/edit?usp=sharing) for each course[[3]](#footnote-3). Department heads were required to approve all requests, but custom questions are allowed and eventually resulted in 602 questions in the official catalog. Course evaluation results were sent to department heads approximately 2-3 months after students completed them.

Following several months of work from a University Senate task force, in 1997 the University Senate Teaching Evaluation Committee provided recommendations for new evaluation system, including peer evaluation, instructor self-evaluation and two common questions for all undergraduate courses with 7 or more students. These two questions (Overall, I rate this course & Overall, I rate this instructor) were added to the existing question catalog. By 2005, the PICES catalog had 644 distinct questions.

In 2007 and 2008, Purdue introduced online course evaluations, using the CoursEval software, with a phased rollout. By fall 2010, the entire campus was using CoursEval. Online evaluations provided a much quicker response time for instructor feedback, though with a decreased global response rate from 69% on paper to ~50% for all online surveys. However, every semester since fall 2008 more than 70% of students have completed at least one evaluation. Department heads have retained the right to request IDP to conduct evaluations and to view student responses. The maximum number of questions (44) per evaluation remained as a legacy of the limits of scantron paper forms.

In response to [University Senate Resolution 16-05](https://www.purdue.edu/senate/documents/meetings/Senate%20Document%2016-05%20Course%20Evaluation%20Resolution.pdf), the Teaching Evaluation Task Force provided suggestions to the Provost Office, and in fall 2020, [ten (10) new core evaluation questions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JW2fEqnYIM61dGSG21fSjxqaJiEMsC2cbfScEWcmuEw/edit?usp=sharing) replaced the two common questions. These questions were instituted along with a shift to a new software, Course Evaluations & Surveys, formerly EvaluationKIT. The maximum survey length was reduced to 15 questions. Departments retain the right to request evaluations and see the results for instructors and courses in their department.

In fall 2021, the Student Course Evaluation Advisory committee modified the [ten common questions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JW2fEqnYIM61dGSG21fSjxqaJiEMsC2cbfScEWcmuEw/edit?usp=sharing) to reflect the increase in learning experiences outside of a traditional “classroom.”  Compound questions were modified to enhance clarity and mirror scholarly literature on survey question design.

1. Gelber, S. M. (2020). *Grading the College: A History of Evaluating Teaching and Learning*. Johns Hopkins University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Purdue University. Measurement Research Center. (1974). [*Institutional Research Bulletin.* 74(1](https://www.purdue.edu/idp/Documents/1974_Institutional_Data_Report.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)