

Recommendations of Faculty Development Committee 2019-2020

2019-2020 Members:

Prof. Bala Maheswaran, COE, Committee Chair
Prof. Natalie Bormann, CSSH
Prof. Nate Derbinsky, Khoury
Prof. Therese O'Neil-Pirozzi, BCHS
Prof. Wendy Smith, COS

2019-2020 Charge to the FDC Committee:

1. The FDC shall evaluate and, if necessary, revise and/or recalibrate the TRACE instrument, including consideration of customized TRACE surveys for online courses, labs, DOCs, etc.
2. The FDC shall make recommendations on optimal administration of TRACE and of NUPath survey questions. The Office of the Chancellor should be consulted about NUPath survey logistics.
3. These recommendations should be made before February 2020 so that any revisions can be used in Spring 2020. If appropriate, the FDC could recommend addition of SGA-suggested diversity/inclusion queries to the TRACE survey starting in Fall 2019, with a report deadline of October 16, 2019.

These charges overlap with one of the Charges to the Academic Policy Committee (APC).

Summary of outreach by the FDC in fulfillment of our Charge:

- Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Debra Franko (history of TRACE, rationale for 2019-2020 charges to FDC Committee)
- Dr. Hilary Schuldt, Director of Project and Team Strategy and Dr. Michael Sweet, Director of Design and Integration of Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research (CATLR; use of TRACE to date, expertise and advice on evaluation of faculty instruction and student learning, recommended readings about student surveys including evidence for gender and racial biases)
- Professor & Vice-Chancellor for Learner Engagement, Katherine Ziemer (assessment of NUPath)
- Student Government Association
 - Review of survey by SGA regarding TRACE evaluations (from over 200 student responses)
 - Review of recommended revisions to TRACE provided by SGA President Chris Brown
 - Committee visit by SGA Vice-Presidents Kangbeya and Nuttall (student opinions of course evaluations (number, type), student interest in questions related to diversity and inclusion)
- Director of the Global Experience Office (GEO), Marina Markot, and Professor & Vice Chancellor for Global Learning Opportunities, Chris Gallagher (discussion of design and use of separate survey for Dialogues of Civilization, importance of administering only one survey)
- Professor and Chair of Academic Policy Committee (Villanova University), Christopher Kilby (discussion of implementation of student evaluation questions related to diversity and inclusion)
- Academic Policy Committee (APC; defining areas of responsibility for our two related committees)

Recommendations 2019-2020

1. TRACE should be retained but with the following recommendations regarding its use:

- a. The Committee affirms the importance of TRACE as a vehicle for students to express their opinions and to enhance course improvement and faculty development. But, the committee strongly supports existing Faculty Handbook guidelines that TRACE not be the sole means by which teaching is evaluated.
- b. When analyzing TRACE, "Instructor Effectiveness" should not be the sole metric used for merit, tenure, and/or promotion. Furthermore, the committee recommends that all TRACE questions and resulting metrics to be used are reviewed for statistical validity and avoidance of discriminatory effects on subpopulations. The committee sees integration of this review with an introductory narrative for students (see #3) and faculty training as crucial for a positive and effective cycle of soliciting honest and useful feedback with continuous course and instruction improvement.
- c. While data from TRACE may ultimately be useful for a student, faculty, and university goals beyond a specific instructor and course, TRACE questions should not be designed solely for the use of accreditation.

2. TRACE should be shortened and otherwise revised, in specific ways:

- a. The number of questions and overall length of surveys that students are asked to complete should be minimized. On the one hand, a single instrument such as TRACE serves as an anchor for campus-wide educational goals. On the other hand, trying to accomplish too much with TRACE creates a risk of students losing a sense that TRACE serves as their primary mechanism for instructional evaluation. The SGA has recommended that TRACE be shortened and that repetitive questions be eliminated.
- b. In response to a specific request by the SGA (referred to in Charge number 3 to this Committee), and in keeping with stated goals of Northeastern 2025, questions should be added to evaluate the inclusivity of learning environments. The students have suggested the following two Likert-scale questions, and one open-ended question, which should be evaluated by student and faculty focus groups and CATLR, and revised if necessary, before rollout for Summer or Fall 2020.
 - i. The instructor facilitated a respectful and inclusive learning environment (Likert Scale)
 - ii. The instructor encouraged and supported students, regardless of their views or how they identify (Likert Scale)
 - iii. In the open response section, please expand on the instructor's strengths and areas for improvement in facilitating inclusive learning
- c. Depending on the NUPath assessment plan that is under development, TRACE might include targeted learner outcome questions for those courses that receive NUPath attributes, balancing issues of accreditation, instrument length (particularly for courses with multiple NUPath attributes), and effective evaluation practices. For example, programmed algorithmically for each NUPath course, the TRACE eval could additionally display one learner outcome question per approved course category using the *same Likert rating scale as for all other TRACE survey questions* (see example in Appendix 1).

- d. The course-related questions of TRACE should be customized based upon common categories of classes, including lecture, online/hybrid, labs, popups, and DOCs. Given the dynamic nature of Northeastern course offerings, a student/faculty focus group, in consultation with CATLR, should evaluate each new category and decide an appropriate set of questions. An outcome might be that TRACE is an ineffectual instrument given the unique characteristics of a course.
- e. If a separate instrument aside from TRACE is deemed best to evaluate a course, care must be taken that TRACE evaluations are NOT requested from that class on top of the specially designed instrument. Furthermore, the Faculty Senate should oversee the design and execution of the alternate instrument, as well as ensure that students have access to results in a timely and effective manner.
- f. In light of our recommendations, the committee has appended to this report an example of a shortened, lecture-oriented TRACE revision that includes NUPath integration (Appendix 1). Pending Faculty Senate review and approval of our recommendations, this example may serve as a basis for future iterations developed in consultation with CATLR and relevant members of the University community.

3. An introductory narrative and other communications should be used to enhance understanding, engagement, and use of TRACE (see also complementary APC recommendation)

- a. A narrative should be added to the start of the TRACE questionnaire, highlighting the purposes for which it will be used. The goal of the narrative is to enhance student and faculty understanding of and expectations for completing and using TRACE surveys. Faculty should be strongly encouraged to discuss this narrative with their classes, to recommend that TRACE be completed, and to articulate what TRACE means to them. Such conversations have been shown to enhance rates of survey completion. Faculty should be further encouraged to include this narrative in the syllabus.
- b. We recommend emphasizing that students are evaluating their *own* experience/perception of the class/learning/instructor, not that of *others*.
- c. Importantly, given recommendations regarding adding questions about inclusion/diversity, we recommend emphasizing the existing policy on TRACE redaction with respect to the purpose of TRACE; particularly, “student comments will be considered for redaction if they ... raise allegations of professional impropriety ... on behalf of the instructor ... such allegations may ... may be referred to appropriate University authorities for investigation.” We strongly recommend directing students with these concerns to appropriate authorities.

4. Faculty should solicit mid-term, anonymous feedback in each class they teach (see also complementary APC recommendation)

- a. While we recognize that only some units currently require, and not all faculty administer, mid-term course evaluations, faculty should be strongly encouraged to administer at least one brief, anonymous check-in in each course they teach. Faculty should be encouraged to include these results in merit evaluations (e.g., in order to demonstrate effective strategies for improvement). [Samples](#) of such evaluations, and administration procedures, are available through CATLR, and some departments and colleges have crafted and are using their own: <https://learning.northeastern.edu/midterm-course-evaluation/>. See example in Appendix 2)

5. TRACE should be, and should be seen as, a student-faculty partnership

- a. Conversations with CATLR highlighted that active involvement of students in the collecting of feedback has a positive impact on students' experience in the class and subsequently on evaluations. Students report a greater sense of partnership in the course and appreciate the instructor's investment in student feedback. We recommend considering a greater degree of student integration in the soliciting of TRACE, for example, through the creation of 'student feedback teams' or 'student management teams'. Examples may be found here: <https://learning.northeastern.edu/collaborating-with-learners-on-gathering-feedback/>

APPENDIX 1 TRACE Example

Students play a critical role in the university's commitment to quality teaching and academic excellence when they participate in the evaluation of courses through TRACE (Teacher Rating And Course Evaluation). TRACE data are important in the process of course design and improvement, as well as in the process of faculty evaluation. Students are expected to participate in TRACE with constructive feedback that is relevant to teaching and course content.

TRACE also allows students to share their experience with other students. TRACE results from previous terms can be found on the [myNortheastern web portal](#).

Student Self-Assessment of their Effort to Achieve Course Outcomes

1. % attendance rate at all scheduled class meeting times
2. The number of hours per week I devoted to this course outside scheduled class meeting times
3. What I could have done to make this course better for myself (open-ended):

Course Related Questions

1. The syllabus was accurate and helpful in delineating expectations and course outcomes.
2. Required and additional course materials were helpful in achieving course outcomes.

Learning Related Questions

1. In-class sessions were helpful for learning.
2. Out-of-class assignments and/or fieldwork were helpful for learning.
3. This course was intellectually challenging
4. I learned a lot in this course.

Instructor Related Questions

1. The instructor came to class prepared to teach.
2. The instructor used class time effectively.
3. The instructor clearly communicated ideas and information.
4. The instructor provided sufficient feedback.
5. The instructor fairly evaluated my performance.
6. The instructor was available to assist students outside of class.
7. The instructor facilitated a respectful and inclusive learning environment.
8. The instructor encouraged and supported students, regardless of their views or how they identify.
9. Please expand on the instructor's strengths and areas for improvement in facilitating inclusive learning.
10. The instructor displayed enthusiasm for the course.
11. What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?
12. What were the course's and/or instructor's strengths?
13. What could the instructor do to make this course better?

NUPath: [programmed algorithmically for each NUPath course, the TRACE eval will additionally display one learner outcome question per approved course category using the *same Likert rating scale as for all other TRACE survey questions*]

1. **Engaging with the Natural and Designed World:** this course provided me the opportunity to use scientific principles and practices to evaluate issues raised by the interplay of science, technology, and society.
2. **Exploring Creative Expression and Innovation:** this course provided me the opportunity to evaluate experimentation, failure, and revision in the creation of innovative projects.
3. **Interpreting Culture:** this course provided me the opportunity to recognize and identify a variety of cultural practices and creations and the ways in which they are created and developed over time.
4. **Conducting Formal and Quantitative Reasoning:** this course provided me the opportunity to recognize when to use problem solving techniques and analyses that use formal reasoning.
5. **Understanding Societies and Institutions:** this course provided me the opportunity to evaluate social, political, or economic theories by applying them to local and global phenomena.
6. **Analyzing and Using Data:** this course provided me the opportunity to use mathematical methods and/or computational tools to perform analysis.
7. **Engaging Differences and Diversity:** this course provided me the opportunity to compare approaches to cultivating and leveraging diversity.
8. **Employing Ethical Reasoning:** this course provided me the opportunity to apply ethical theories to moral dilemmas.
9. **Integrating Knowledge and Skills Through Experience:** this course provided me the opportunity to integrate and use my existing knowledge to continue to learn in my academic program.

APPENDIX 2 'Checking In' Example

CHECKING IN | MY LEARNING IN THIS CLASS

Please answer the questions below and help me understand your learning experience in this class.

What is helping me most to learn in this class?

What can I do to improve my learning in this class?

What can my Professor do to improve my learning in this class?
