



TO: Senate Agenda Committee
FROM: TRACE Ad Hoc Committee
DATE: March 18, 2025
SUBJECT: Final report for Faculty Senate

The TRACE Ad Hoc Committee carried out the specific charges assigned by SAC. The committee had 12 committee and 4 auxiliary meetings during the academic year. The committee also met with Senior Vice Provost Deb Franko on November 13, 2024, and March 18, 2025. The committee also engaged with Devyani Anand, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Student Government Association over multiple meeting and email conversations to understand student body feedback on TRACE survey questions. The committee also engaged Margarita DiVall, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Bouvé College of Health Sciences, who summarized several conversations with Bouvé faculty from historically marginalized backgrounds about their concerns about bias impacting their TRACE evaluations, and how this will further influence their ability to get tenured and/or promoted. The committee posed and analyzed questions in the Fall 2024 Faculty Senate survey sent to all faculty at all campuses. The committee posed and analyzed questions to all faculty senators and all college deans. The charges were addressed as follows with recommendations and resolutions.

Charge 1: The committee shall review past Faculty Senate committee reports on TRACE (APC and FDC 2019-20) and determine a method for analyzing and measuring bias in teaching evaluations.

The committee undertook the charge and endeavored to minimize/eliminate bias in our NU teaching evaluations. The committee reviewed and studied the report entitled “Recommendations of Faculty Development Committee 2019-2020”. This report is included herein as Appendix A. This report includes five multifaceted recommendations. Particularly relevant to our charge are that:

1. The TRACE question “What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?” should not be the sole metric used for merit, tenure, and/or promotion.
2. All TRACE questions and resulting metrics to be used are reviewed for statistical validity and avoidance of discriminatory effects on subpopulations.

The committee reviewed and studied the report entitled “Academic Policy Committee Report – Part I” from Spring 2020. This report is included herein as Appendix B. This report includes six findings and four recommendations. Particularly relevant to our charge are that:

1. There is major concern that biases, especially based on instructor gender and race, occur in student responses.

2. There is major concern that survey results are not always statistically reliable due to low student response rate.
3. There is major concern that “overall effectiveness” be inferred by averaging all ratings.

Several additional sources were consulted. The committee also reviewed the open document library within the “Teaching Effectiveness” team hosted by the Microsoft Teams installation at Northeastern University, <https://northeastern.sharepoint.com/sites/TeachingEffectiveness/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>. This library currently contains 106 peer-reviewed research articles since 1984 documenting and analyzing bias in student evaluation of teaching (SET) surveys. The committee also reviewed feedback from the most recent Student Government Association study on SET. The committee also reviewed feedback from the Fall 2024 Faculty Senate survey sent to all faculty that included queries to analyze and measure bias, as well as to determine how to help faculty improve their teaching and student interaction. The committee also reviewed work brought to us by Margarita DiVall, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Bouvé College of Health Sciences. This work comprised several conversations with Bouvé faculty from historically marginalized backgrounds in the last few months about their concerns about bias impacting their TRACE evaluations, and how this will further influence their ability to get tenured and/or promoted.

Particularly relevant to our charge, and not mentioned by the APC and FDC reports, are the following findings.

1. Documented negative bias in SET responses occurs particularly when there are differences between the instructor and class, but especially against instructors with different gender, race, age, geographic heritage, cultural heritage, appearances, and personality traits.
2. Documented negative bias in SET responses also occurs with courses that are: either very easy or very difficult, taught at very early or very late times, part of a required core curriculum, taught in very large class sizes, taught in noisy or less aesthetic classrooms, taught online, and other circumstances that are beyond the instructor’s control.
3. SET responses are further biased when survey questions are ill-posed, i.e., contain words or concepts for which there is no single common or objective definition, or when questions are not precise and unambiguous queries.
4. SET responses are further biased when the survey questions seek evaluation that is beyond a student’s training and background. Specifically, most students are not trained in pedagogy or have limited teaching expertise.
5. Students are given neither a definition, nor a rubric for the meaning and measurement of “effective teaching”.
6. SET responses are further biased when survey questions seek subjective assessment.
7. Students have a legitimate need to preview course outcomes and recommendations from prior years when selecting courses. Furthermore, the availability of online SET enables accountability on instructors. Instructors must have the freedom to experiment, test, and learn from both positive and negative attributes of new methods. SET responses are biased by outdated, historical results made available on-line to students. Therefore, historical SET results after one year are no longer necessarily meaningful. However, students are influenced by reading the SET results of prior years when they evaluate a current year’s course.

8. It is commonly accepted practice in current electronic market surveys, that vendors are provided the opportunity to respond to customer reviews. This reciprocal point of view is essential to provide a fair and balanced perspective to potential customers. Yet, instructors do not have similar opportunities to provide their own responses to TRACE survey data made available to perspective students. Therefore, the potential new students are provided an unbalanced perspective that is shown to be subject to bias.
9. DEIB leaders representing all 4 schools in the Bouvé College prepared a preamble for TRACE surveys. They feel strongly that it is important to educate students about bias impacting student evaluations of teaching, which has been so clearly documented in the literature, and reminding them to check their own biases as they complete evaluations.
10. Teaching effectiveness is generally defined in the literature as instruction that implements effective learning practices (actions) and accomplishes intended student learning outcomes. The current TRACE survey does not define “teaching effectiveness” for the students and contains no queries whether intended student outcomes are accomplished.
11. A meaningful TRACE survey question must be a precise and unambiguous query, appropriate for the students’ training, that focuses on specific behaviors and outcomes, and seek an objective response that does not elicit bias. The TRACE question “What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?” does not conform to this standard.
12. There is significant dissatisfaction among faculty concerning the content and utility of the current TRACE surveys. More specific findings are identified below with Charge 3.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that this single question, “What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?”, be eliminated from the TRACE survey. In accord with the Academic Policy Committee Report – Part I, “overall effectiveness” could be inferred by averaging over all numerical responses and summative responses, however “teaching effectiveness” is multi-dimensional, and component scores are more meaningful than a single, scalar norm.
2. We recommend the TRACE survey revision included herein as Appendix C. It includes a new preamble based on the findings of the Bouvé College DEIB leaders. It is designed to ensure that all questions are well-posed, appropriate for the student’s training, and seeking objective responses. Further, it is designed to query whether intended student outcomes are accomplished. Further, it is designed to contain queries instructors find helpful to improve their teaching and student interaction from the Fall 2024 Faculty Senate survey. Further, it is designed to consider classroom conditions that are beyond the control of the instructor. Further, it contains fewer questions than the current survey.
3. We recommend that the Registrar make available final grades to students who have completed all TRACE survey questions one day sooner than the students who did not complete all TRACE survey questions. This is an automated incentive to increase student participation with thoughtful feedback, so that survey responses are statistically relevant.
4. We recommend that historical SET results be made available to students up to only the 2 prior year’s results, to help students choose courses based on recent data, to enable instructor

accountability, to limit historical bias, and to encourage instructors experimenting with new, improved methods.

5. We recommend that instructors have the optional opportunity to include their own response statements with all historical SET results made available to the students, so that perspective students have a full perspective on TRACE data.

Charge 2: Follow up on Senate Committee APC/FDC 2019-20 recommendations to address issues of gender and racial bias inherent in the TRACE questions and how the results are weighed in the merit and promotion processes for all full-time faculty.

The committee posed and analyzed questions to all faculty senators and all college deans concerning the use of TRACE in college-level merit and promotion processes:

1. Are TRACE survey data used in your college's *annual merit review process* at the college level for all full-time faculty? If so, please identify which TRACE data are used, and please describe how the data are weighted in the process.
2. Are TRACE survey data used in your college's *promotion process* at the college level for all full-time faculty? If so, please identify which TRACE data are used, and please describe how the data are weighted in the process.

The results received are tabulated in Appendix D. Here is a summary of our main findings.

1. None of the respondents indicate existing safeguards to address issues of gender and racial bias inherent in the TRACE survey results.
2. While several colleges use TRACE results in combination with additional teaching evaluation data, some explicitly state their strong emphasis on the question "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?"
3. The FDC 2019-20 recommends "All TRACE questions and resulting metrics to be used are reviewed for statistical validity and avoidance of discriminatory effects on subpopulations." However, none of the colleges that use TRACE surveys indicate that metrics are reviewed for statistical validity.
4. The APC 2019-20 report identifies these issues and recommends TRACE surveys use questions that are learning-based rather than summative. We note that the question "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?" is summative, and there are additional summative questions in today's TRACE survey. Hence the current TRACE survey does not follow the recommendations of the APC 2019-20 report.
5. The APC 2019-20 recommendations would be adequately addressed by adopting this committee's recommendations from Charge 1.

Recommendations:

Addressing gender and racial bias in SETs requires a multi-faceted approach that acknowledges their limitations and promotes equity in faculty assessments. Here is how the university can tackle the issue:

1. **Recognizing Bias in Student Evaluations:** Research consistently shows that SETs are biased against women, faculty of color, and other marginalized groups, leading to systematically lower ratings regardless of actual teaching effectiveness. All units should educate faculty, administrators, and students about these biases and how they can distort evaluations. The processes used to recognize bias should be transparent.
2. **Adjusting the Weight of SETs in Merit and Promotion Decisions:** Reduce the emphasis on student evaluations in merit, tenure, and promotion processes. Use SETs as one component of a broader evaluation system, rather than the primary determinant of teaching effectiveness. The processes used to adjust the weight of SETs should be transparent.
3. **Expanding Assessment Methods for Teaching Effectiveness:** Use peer evaluations of teaching by colleagues trained in equity-conscious assessment. Incorporate teaching portfolios, including syllabi, assignments, and reflections on pedagogical approaches. Consider self-assessments and statements of teaching philosophy that encourage faculty to reflect on their methods. Implement mid-semester feedback that allows instructors to adjust before final evaluations. Use student learning outcomes to gauge effectiveness rather than relying solely on subjective perceptions.
4. **Reforming SETs to Minimize Bias:** Redesign SET questions to focus on concrete teaching behaviors rather than personality traits or subjective impressions. Use inclusive language in evaluation forms and emphasize student responsibility in providing fair and constructive feedback. Conduct training for students on bias awareness before they complete evaluations.
5. **Institutional Oversight and Policy Change:** Establish review committees to monitor for bias in SET results and ensure they are not disproportionately harming faculty from underrepresented groups. Regularly audit evaluation data to detect patterns of bias and implement corrective measures. Offer faculty recourse when evidence suggests that bias has impacted their evaluations unfairly.
6. **Promoting Institutional Culture Change:** Recognize and reward inclusive teaching practices rather than penalizing faculty for student biases. Support faculty development programs focused on equity and inclusive pedagogy. Publicly acknowledge the limitations of SETs in university policies and ensure that they are used responsibly.

Charge 3: Survey faculty on using TRACE beyond the merit evaluation. For example, do the current questions help faculty improve their teaching and student interaction?

The committee composed and analyzed queries for the Fall 2024 Faculty Senate survey sent to all faculty to determine how to help faculty improve their teaching and student interaction. However, the committee also sought to explore and correlate several other issues regarding SET and demographics using both Likert and narrative data. The results received are tabulated in Appendix E in entirety.

The committee received feedback from 493 faculty, spanning all status and rank levels for tenure and faculty, spanning all colleges, all campuses, and over four gender identities. Specific, noteworthy findings are highlighted below:

1. Student comments (73% response rate) are most helpful to improve teaching and interactions with students, which is far more relevant than none (21%) and the Likert scores (6%); however, the current TRACE reports are rated as 42% not helpful, 33% somewhat helpful, 19% harmful, and 7% very helpful.
 2. Currently all historical TRACE reports are available to students online, yet when asked if their TRACE reports should be made available to students online, faculty responded NO (42%), UNSURE (33%), and YES (26%). Common reasons for NO include: students use reviews to extract revenge for bad grades, the results are heavily biased and unfair, old data biases students away from courses that have been recently reformatted and improved, results are often not statistically relevant. Common reasons for YES include: there is a need for transparency and accountability, TRACE is better than 'RateMyProfessor', students need information to select classes. Common reasons for UNSURE that are not already mentioned in NO and YES include: nothing in TRACE questions is specific or concrete enough to implement constructive changes, students typically don't know what makes for a good professor.
 3. Faculty were asked how qualified students are to assess their own mastery of course content, 13% say all are generally qualified, 50% say some are qualified, 17% are unsure how qualified and 20% say all are generally unqualified.
 4. Faculty were asked how qualified students are to assess the effectiveness of the teacher, 23% say all are generally qualified, 45% say some are qualified, 14% are unsure how qualified and 17% say all are generally unqualified. Gender and racial biases are the leading reasons for being unqualified.
 5. Faculty have detected bias in their teaching evaluations based on age, disability, gender, course difficulty, under sampling, teaching style, appearance and attire, and grading rigor. Those who detected bias indicate the bias has affected them by: lowering moral, undermining confidence, planning to leave academia for industry, and preventing promotion.
 6. A significant majority of the faculty reiterate that TRACE reports are not useful to instructors. Those that find some utility for TRACE beyond merit and promotion use survey data for course and instructor improvement, e.g., "I try to adjust my own teaching to account for the constructive comments and suggestions that students provide" and "The comments are advantageous for understanding student needs."
 7. The committee was also made aware that some departments use TRACE survey data to determine when faculty qualify for awards and other forms of recognition and privileges.
- The reader is strongly encouraged to read the more detailed analysis of the survey data in Appendix E.

Recommendations:

Given the widespread, majority dissatisfaction with the current TRACE survey, the committee recommends that the survey be revised. Here are 15 recommendations for revising the TRACE survey based on concerns raised in the faculty survey:

1. Remove the "Overall Teaching Effectiveness" Question: Eliminate the single question "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?" as it does not align with best practices for evaluating teaching.
2. Include a Preamble on Bias Awareness: Introduce a preamble educating students on potential biases in evaluations and encouraging them to provide fair and objective feedback.

3. Ensure Questions Are Well-Phrased and Objective: Redesign questions to focus on specific, observable teaching behaviors rather than subjective impressions.
4. Reduce Emphasis on TRACE in Merit and Promotion: Modify how TRACE results are used in faculty evaluations by integrating them with other teaching assessment methods like peer reviews and self-assessments.
5. Incorporate Student Learning Outcome Assessments: Include questions that measure whether students have met course learning objectives rather than their general impressions of the instructor.
6. Provide Incentives for Higher Student Participation: Encourage more student responses by granting early access to final grades for those who complete the survey.
7. Limit Historical TRACE Data Availability to Students: Make only the prior year's TRACE survey results available to students to prevent outdated feedback from influencing course selections.
8. Diversify Teaching Evaluation Methods: Complement TRACE with peer evaluations, self-reflections, and teaching portfolios to provide a more holistic assessment.
9. Adjust Weighting of TRACE Scores in Promotion Decisions: Develop statistical adjustments for systemic biases and clarify how TRACE data contributes to faculty evaluations.
10. Address Environmental Factors That Impact Evaluations: Incorporate questions assessing external factors (e.g., time of day, class size, course difficulty) that may affect evaluations but are outside the instructor's control.
11. Require Mid-Semester Anonymous Feedback: Encourage faculty to collect and utilize mid-semester feedback for course improvements before final evaluations.
12. Improve Transparency in TRACE Use for Faculty Reviews: Standardize TRACE application in faculty evaluations across departments and clarify its impact on merit and promotion.
13. Ensure TRACE Is Not Solely Used for Accreditation Purposes: Ensure TRACE questions serve faculty development and teaching improvement rather than being tailored only for accreditation needs.
14. Tailor TRACE Surveys for Different Course Formats: Customize evaluations for different instructional modalities, such as online, labs, and hybrid courses, to ensure appropriate feedback.
15. Provide Students with Bias Training Before Completing TRACE: Implement a short educational module on bias awareness for students before they fill out TRACE evaluations.

Resolutions:

The Faculty Senate can help implement the committee's recommendations by passing the following resolutions.

1. WHEREAS students are given neither a definition nor a rubric for the meaning and measurement of "effective teaching", and

WHEREAS a meaningful TRACE question must be composed as a precise and unambiguous query, appropriate for the students' training, that focuses on specific behaviors (actions) and outcomes, and seek an objective response that does not elicit bias, and

WHEREAS the TRACE question "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?" does not meet all these criteria, and

WHEREAS "effective teaching" is defined in pedagogical literature in terms of (1) the instructor using effective teaching practices (actions) and (2) the instructor enabling the achievement of the intended course learning outcomes,

BE IT RESOLVED that the TRACE question "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?" be removed from the TRACE survey, and substituted with multiple questions that query (1) the instructor using specific effective teaching practices (actions) and (2) the instructor enabling the achievement of the intended course learning outcomes, each question being composed as a precise and unambiguous query, appropriate for the students' training, and that focuses on specific behaviors (actions) and outcomes, and seek an objective response that does not elicit bias.

2. BE IT RESOLVED that the TRACE survey be revised to the structure and content presented as Appendix C according to the recommendations provided in this report.

3. WHEREAS student evaluations of teaching have been established to be subject to bias,

BE IT RESOLVED that TRACE survey results be used as one component in more comprehensive assessment of teaching effectiveness in faculty merit, promotion, and tenure processes that includes peer evaluations and instructors' teaching reflections.

4. WHEREAS recent TRACE data aids students in choosing courses and enables instructor accountability, and

WHEREAS distant TRACE data do not necessarily reflect more recent teaching and course outcomes, and

WHEREAS limiting students' access to distant TRACE data limits preconceptional bias and encourages instructors to experiment with new and improved methods,

BE IT RESOLVED that historical TRACE survey results be made available to students for 2 years prior of the current academic year.

5. WHEREAS recent TRACE data aids students in choosing courses and enables instructor accountability, and

WHEREAS distant TRACE data do not necessarily reflect more recent teaching and course outcomes, and

WHEREAS limiting students' access to distant TRACE data limits preconceptional bias and encourages instructors to experiment with new and improved methods, and

WHEREAS TRACE data made available to the students offer a biased perspective because the data do not include supporting response statements from the instructors,

BE IT RESOLVED that instructors have the optional opportunity to include their own response statements with the TRACE survey results made available to the students.

6. WHEREAS high participation rates in TRACE surveys increase statistical validity of results,

BE IT RESOLVED that the university, colleges, departments, and instructors automate incentives to students to submit complete and thoughtful TRACE surveys.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Lustig, Chair, COE - Chemical Engineering

Amy Bryzgel, CAMD - Art + Design

Michael Gonyeau, BCHS - Pharmacy and Health Systems Sciences

Richard Herron, DMSB – Finance

Joanna Weaver, COS – Psychology

APPENDIX A: Recommendations of Faculty Development Committee 2019-2020

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.

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.

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, midterm 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)

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?

example

APPENDIX B: Academic Policy Committee Report – Part I

Academic Policy Committee Report -PART I

Spring 2020

Committee Members: Deb Franko (Provost's Office), David Herlihy (CAMD), Robert McOwen (COS), Enrique Moreno (COS), Harvey Shapiro (CPS), Jack Dennerlein (BCHS)

Charge 1: Review options for multiple ways of evaluating teaching and make recommendations on best practices.

Charge 2: Re-evaluate and, if necessary, revise and/or recalibrate the purposes for which TRACE and other teaching evaluations are used.

Process: We began by conducting a literature review and discussing our findings in our meetings. We invited members of the FDC to attend one of our meetings to coordinate work on our closely related charges; the two committee chairs stayed in close coordination as work progressed. Two of our members also met with CATLR staff to discuss teaching evaluation.

Findings:

There were many, especially concerning Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). But we focused on a few major concerns:

- Bias, especially gender and racial bias: try to make questions learning-based rather than summative.
- Reliability of sample size, especially of a response of less than 10 students or less than 67%.
- Use of the average of all ratings, especially on the summative “overall effectiveness.”
- Formative vs Summative Measures: important to distinguish what purpose the evaluation will be used for.
- Formative Measures: a) Get student feedback during the semester from a midcourse SET or other method. b) Have faculty peers conduct a class observation and/or review of class materials.
- Summative Measures: a) SETs, b) Class observations by faculty peers or trained specialists, c) Review of course syllabi or other materials, d) Self-reflection statements.

Recommendations:

We made several recommendations to the FDC, which was charged with looking specifically at TRACE. In addition, we make the following recommendations:

1. We recommend the use of a midcourse SET or other form of student feedback during the semester. (We note that CATLR provides some resources for this: <https://learning.northeastern.edu/midterm-course-evaluation/>).

2. We recommend the use of peer classroom visits and review of course materials (cf. the

Compensation Module in the Faculty Handbook)

3. We recommend that all faculty create an annual Teaching Portfolio for administrative purposes (merit review, promotion, etc). This should include TRACE scores (using median or mode or other score distribution), but may include other evidence of teaching quality, such as course syllabi, self-reflection statements, peer classroom visits and review of course materials.
4. We recommend that all faculty and academic units make an effort to raise TRACE participation rates above 66%. (Currently, the university response rates for TRACE are between 60 and 65%.)

APPENDIX C: Recommended Revised TRACE Survey Questions

You are encouraged to evaluate this class based on *its content, your engagement with the material, and your mastery of intended course outcomes*, and the *instructor's actions*, rather than any unrelated attributes. Given the intended use of the TRACE to enhance teaching, we welcome student comments that are thoughtful, professional, constructive, and considerate.

Student reflection

1. How often did you attend this class?

- 80-100%
- 60-80%
- 40-60%
- 20-40%
- 1-20%

2. The number of hours per week I devoted to this course outside scheduled class meeting times.

- More than 10
- 8-10
- 5-7
- 3-4
- 0-2

3. What could I have done to make this course better for myself?

Course-related questions

4. The syllabus was accurate and helpful in delineating expectations and course outcomes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. Required and additional course materials were helpful in achieving course outcomes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Learning-related questions

6. Class sessions (in person or online, or any other type of class meeting) were helpful for learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree

- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. I met the learning outcomes for the course.

- Met all
- Met most
- Met some
- Met few
- Met none

8. My grades in this course reflect my mastery of the course learning outcomes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. This class had the expected amount of rigor in relation to the learning outcomes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. The classroom conditions (i.e., time of day, class size, exterior noise, less aesthetic environment) negatively impacted my learning and achievement of learning outcomes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Instructor-related questions

11. The instructor explained how I would be graded in this course.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. The instructor helped the class identify ways to master the learning outcomes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. The instructor created opportunities for me to be engaged in class.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. The instructor promoted a classroom environment that enables learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. The instructor clearly communicated ideas and information.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. What did the instructor do well?

17. What could be improved about the course?

APPENDIX D: How TRACE survey results are weighed in the merit and promotion processes at the College level for all full-time faculty.

Bouvé College of Health Sciences

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
<p>Most departments (or likely all) use TRACE evals as part of the merit review process. Some departments have very specific rubrics that focus on overall teaching effectiveness scores. Most departments require faculty to submit full TRACE evals as part of the review.</p> <p>We have 8 departments and likely all of them use it differently – you would need to ask department chairs for that level of specificity. The college and the faculty handbook encourage other forms of teaching evaluations such as self-reflection and peer evaluations of teaching to supplement student evals.</p> <p>For co-op and nursing faculty in Bouve College, a TRACE summary sheet is used focusing on certain questions most relevant to the co-op course, and response rate and overall effectiveness. TRACE is one of the factors considered as part of the Teaching review, I don't think there is a specific %; sometimes the return rate is very low. Faculty can respond to student comments if they choose to.</p>	<p>Model dossier requires for all TRACE surveys for each course taught to be included in the appendix. Summary TRACE table is included with scores for overall teaching effectiveness and comparators (dept/ university) to be included. Based on my review of letters at each level, letters include the range of scores and some comments on qualitative feedback that faculty receive from students.</p> <p>Because the university does focus on teaching effectiveness of faculty when they go up for promotion (and tenure), and because TRACE data are readily available and has benchmark comparison data, we do rely on the scores available from these surveys quite a bit. While many units do have peer evals of teaching; there is less consistency in what instrument is used to document the process and it is not clear if faculty receive appropriate training as peer observers, so these data are more challenging to interpret and rely on. We have tried to raise awareness of how bias towards faculty from historically marginalized groups, including women, impact student evaluations of teaching among our faculty.</p> <p>For co-op and nursing faculty in Bouve College, the same data are used in Merit evaluations.</p>

College of Arts, Media and Design

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
<p>Departments evaluate merit according their own processes and procedures; there is not additional use of TRACE data in merit at the college level.</p>	<p>Quantitative and Qualitative TRACE data are used in college promotion review; the average overall instructor effectiveness rating across all sections is calculated and used together with individual course data (including comments) to identify and contextualize themes, outliers, and trends. The themes, outliers and trends of TRACE</p>

	data constitute one component of the teaching area, together with the scope and evidence for teaching activities not measured by TRACE.
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College of Engineering

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
TRACE is administered for every Engineering. The results are taken very seriously in merit salary decisions. We concentrate specifically on two TRACE questions: (1) I learned a lot in this course, and (2) What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?	TRACE is administered for every Engineering class. The results are taken very seriously in promotion to Assoc. and Full Professor. We concentrate specifically on two TRACE questions: (1) I learned a lot in this course, and (2) What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?

College of Professional Studies

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
We use a tool called EvalKit, which functions similarly to TRACE. This tool is used for both the annual merit evaluation and promotion decisions. Teaching effectiveness is assessed using Question #8: "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?" along with evaluative comments. The mean score a faculty member receives on this question is compared to the college's overall mean score. This metric is applied in both the annual merit review and the promotion process.	We use a tool called EvalKit, which functions similarly to TRACE. This tool is used for both the annual merit evaluation and promotion decisions. Teaching effectiveness is assessed using Question #8: "What is your overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness?" along with evaluative comments. The mean score a faculty member receives on this question is compared to the college's overall mean score. This metric is applied in both the annual merit review and the promotion process.

College of Science

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
In the College of Science, merit reviews take place at the Department level, not the College level. The use of TRACE in merit reviews varies somewhat among the six departments. All departments make some use of TRACE. The TRACE data are typically used to provide overall teaching effectiveness scores, student comments, and enrollment numbers. The enrollment numbers could be obtained elsewhere, but they are	In promotion cases, all candidates in the University are required to include a table of TRACE overall effectiveness scores for the courses taught in the period that is relevant for the promotion consideration. In the College of Science, both the College Tenure and Promotion Committee and the Dean of the College of Science consistently quote the average of these scores in their reports, and sometimes the enrollment

<p>conveniently provided with the TRACE reports.</p> <p>All departments make use of additional non-TRACE information to evaluate the teaching portion of merit. These can include evaluations from peer visits, reviews of instructional material, documentation of course development and pedagogical innovation. It is difficult to quantify the weight assigned to the TRACE scores in the merit evaluation, except to say that it is not 0% and not 100%.</p>	<p>numbers. The comments from students obtained via TRACE are also used to provide qualitative information about teaching style and student impact. To try to quantify the weight of these scores, we can examine the space in the reports that is devoted to TRACE scores. This typically consists of one sentence in the Committee report (which is typically devotes a page or more to teaching aspects) and one sentence in the Dean's report (which typically devotes about three paragraphs to teaching aspects). The student comments from TRACE are used in both reports to help to describe the teaching style of the candidates. These comments are presented with more weight than the numerical scores. The data obtained from TRACE are complemented by reports from peer visits, history of course development and pedagogical innovation, and content of the courses taught..</p>
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College of Social Sciences and Humanities

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
<p>All CSSH units include TRACE evaluations as part of merit reviews as one factor in assessing teaching, but units vary in which data they emphasize and how the data are weighted.</p>	<p>All CSSH units include TRACE evaluations as part of promotion reviews as one factor in assessing teaching, but units vary in which data they emphasize and how the data are weighted. College-level consideration of promotion relies on the TRACE data analyzed at the unit level. For TT faculty, TRACE scores contribute to evaluating 40% of their effort but are not used exclusively as faculty also have their teaching observed/evaluated in person by a colleague. Teaching is the primary criterion for evaluating TTF promotion cases. TRACE scores contribute to evaluating their performance as part of the teaching dossier, along with in-person observation of classroom teaching.</p>

D'Amore-McKim School of Business

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
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The proposed use of TRACE in our merit evaluation has been controversial and this proposed use has yet to pass. The Merit Evaluation Committee, at its discretion, can also supplement the merit score based on TRACE evaluations with secondary evidence of teaching effectiveness.	No response received
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Khoury College of Computer Sciences

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
TRACE survey data are used in the college's annual merit review process, specifically, only the Overall effectiveness, as a single number. For example, values ≥ 3.5 are satisfactory.	Same as used for Merit

Mills College at Northeastern

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
We use TRACE data in merit reviews. We ask faculty under review to submit all TRACE data. The data complements the faculty member's narrative about teaching. There is no set weighting during committee discussions.	Course titles, Term and year, No. of respondents, No. of enrolled, overall mean instructor effectiveness score are used, without set weighting in committee discussion.

School of Law

TRACE results in Merit	TRACE results in Promotion
My understanding is that all TRACE data is used for both types of review, but in a qualitative/interpretive way with no formal metrics for weighting.	My understanding is that all TRACE data is used for both types of review, but in a qualitative/interpretive way with no formal metrics for weighting.

APPENDIX E: Fall 2024 Faculty Senate Survey Results

Faculty Senate Survey Results

[Section 1](#) presents responder counts by demographic categories. [Section 2](#) summarizes answers to categorical questions by demographic categories. Finally, [Section 3](#) presents ChatGPT summaries of answers to narrative questions.

1. Demographics

[Figure 1](#) presents the distribution of survey respondents by demographic categories such as faculty status, rank, primary college, gender, and campus. We replace missing responses with “No answer” to differentiate them from “Other” or “Prefer not to answer” responses.

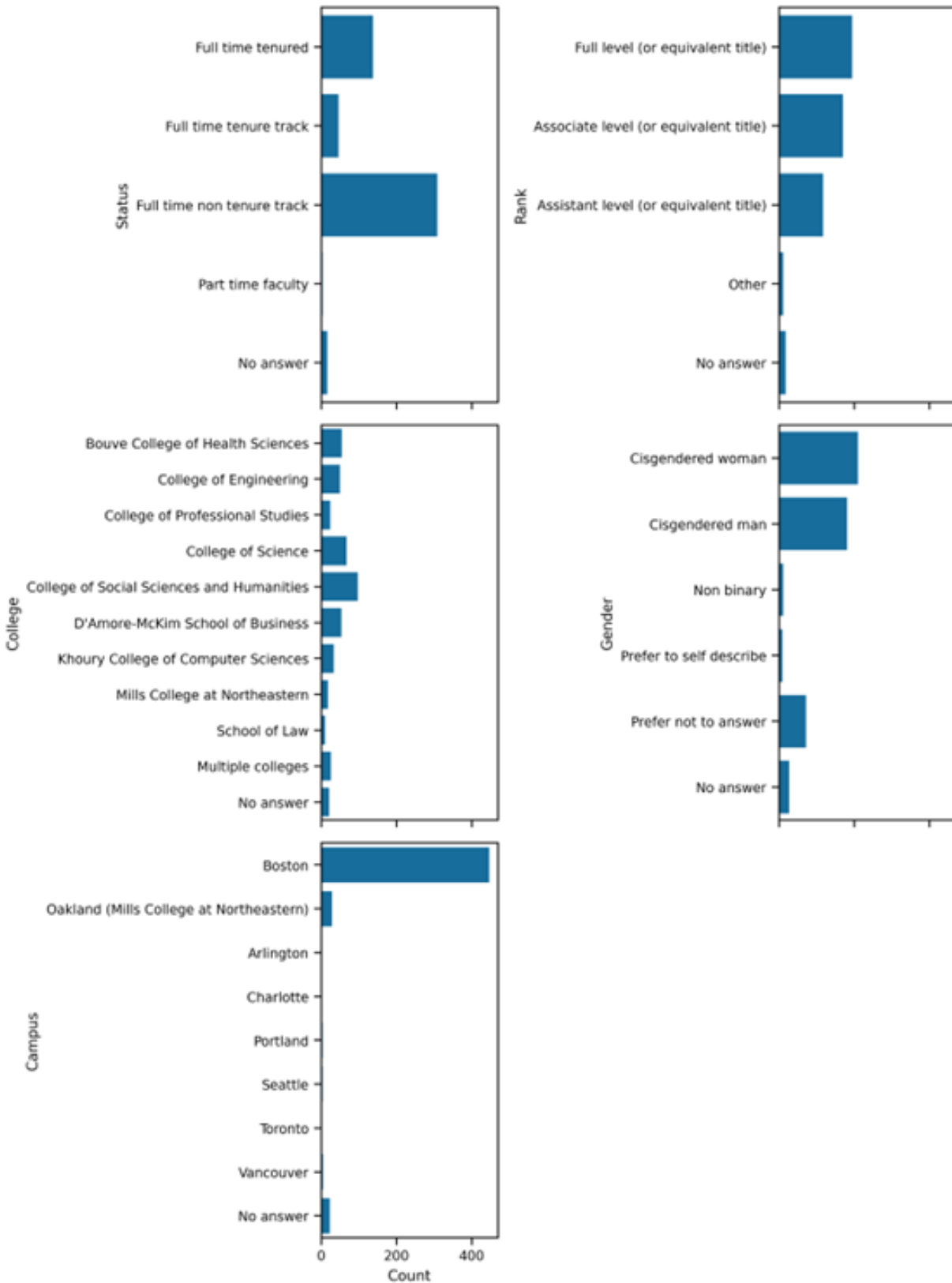


Figure 1: Responder counts by demographic categories.

2. Categorical Questions

This section summarizes responses to six categorical questions, grouped by demographic categories. Each figure highlights the key trends and notable differences across groups.

[Figure 2](#) presents category responses by faculty status to the six categorical questions.

[Figure 3](#) presents category responses by faculty rank. [Figure 4](#) presents category responses by college. [Figure 5](#) presents category responses by gender. [Figure 6](#) presents category responses by campus.

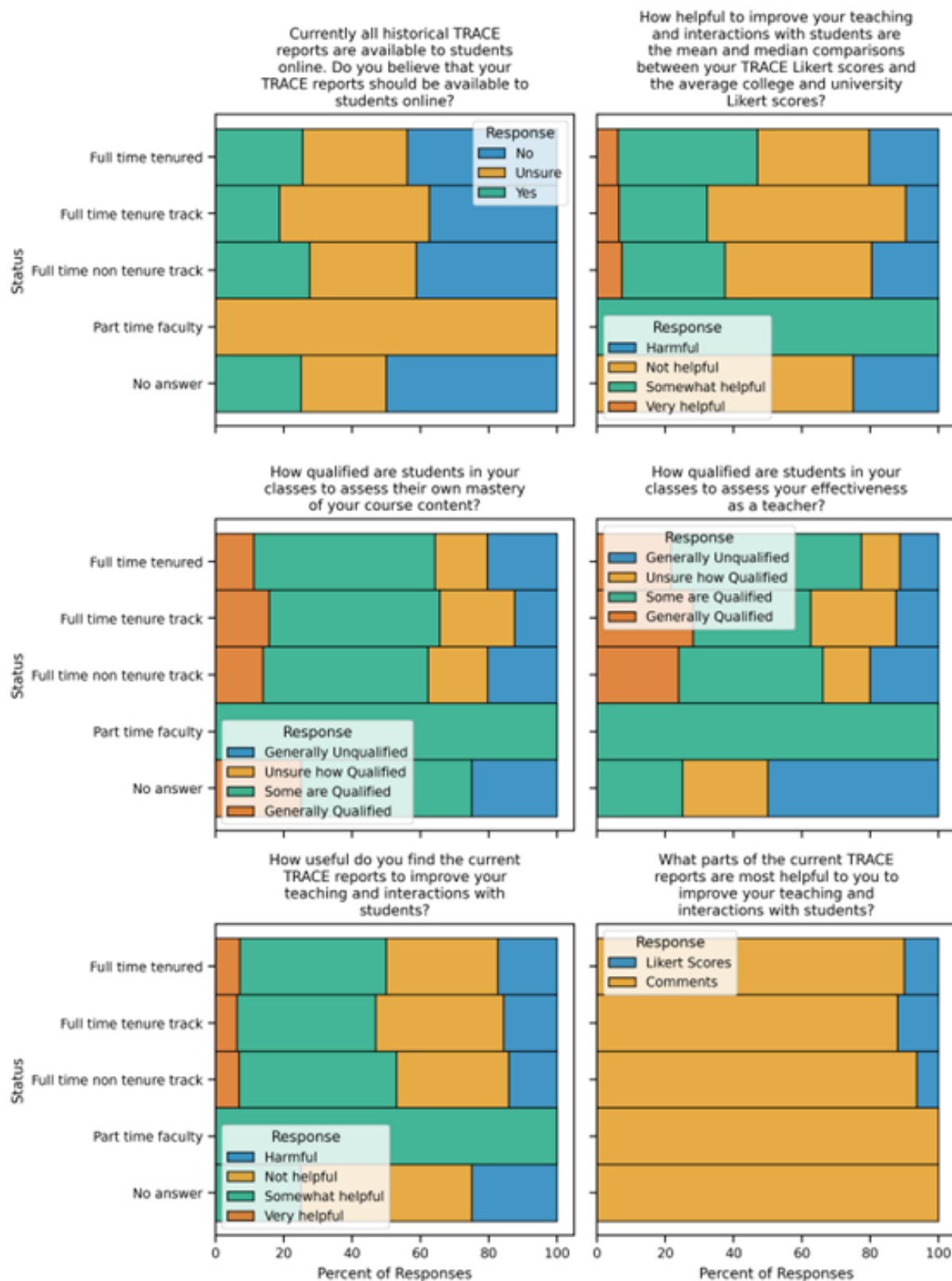


Figure 2: Categorical question responses by faculty status.

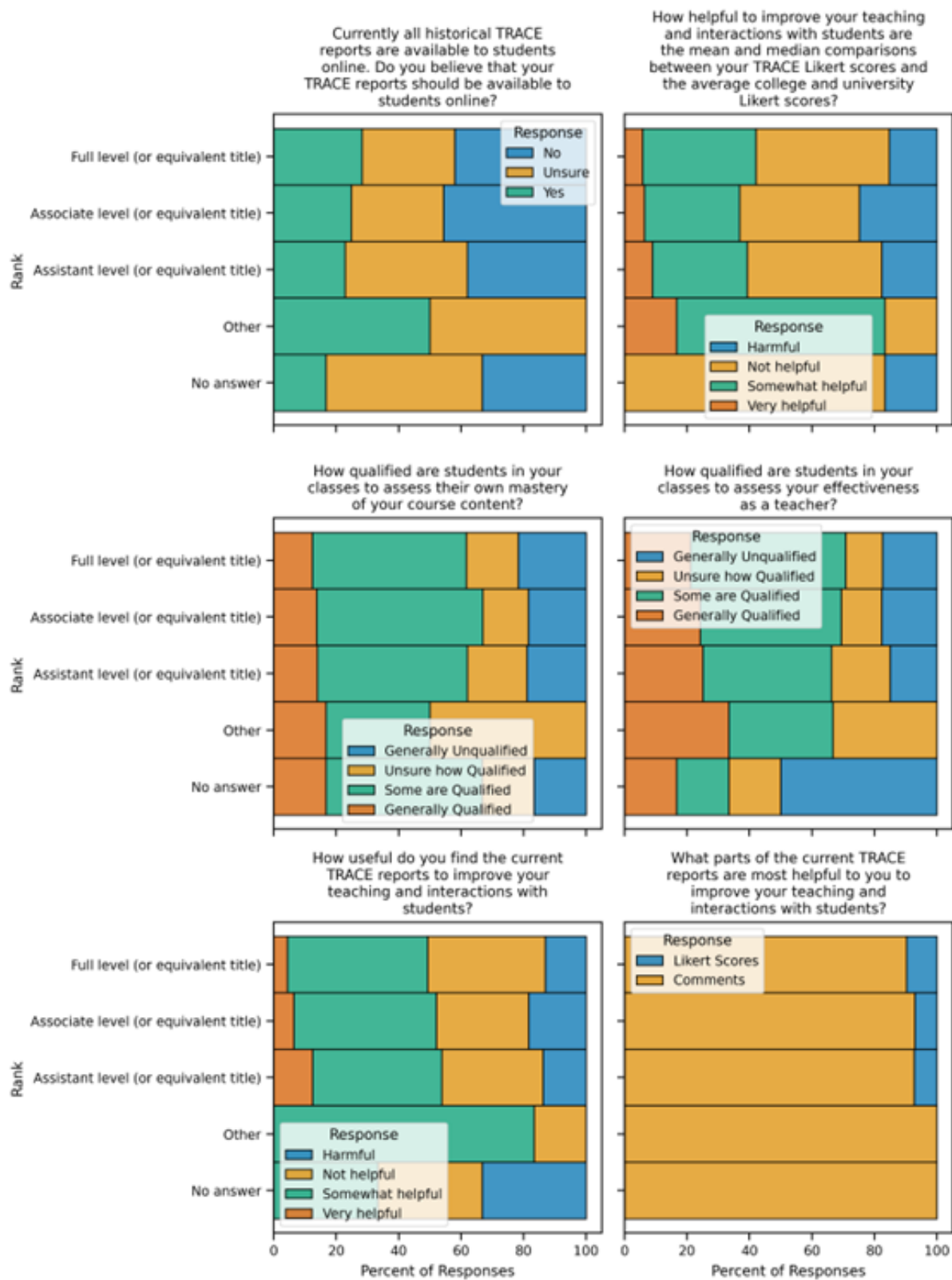


Figure 3: Categorical question responses by faculty rank.

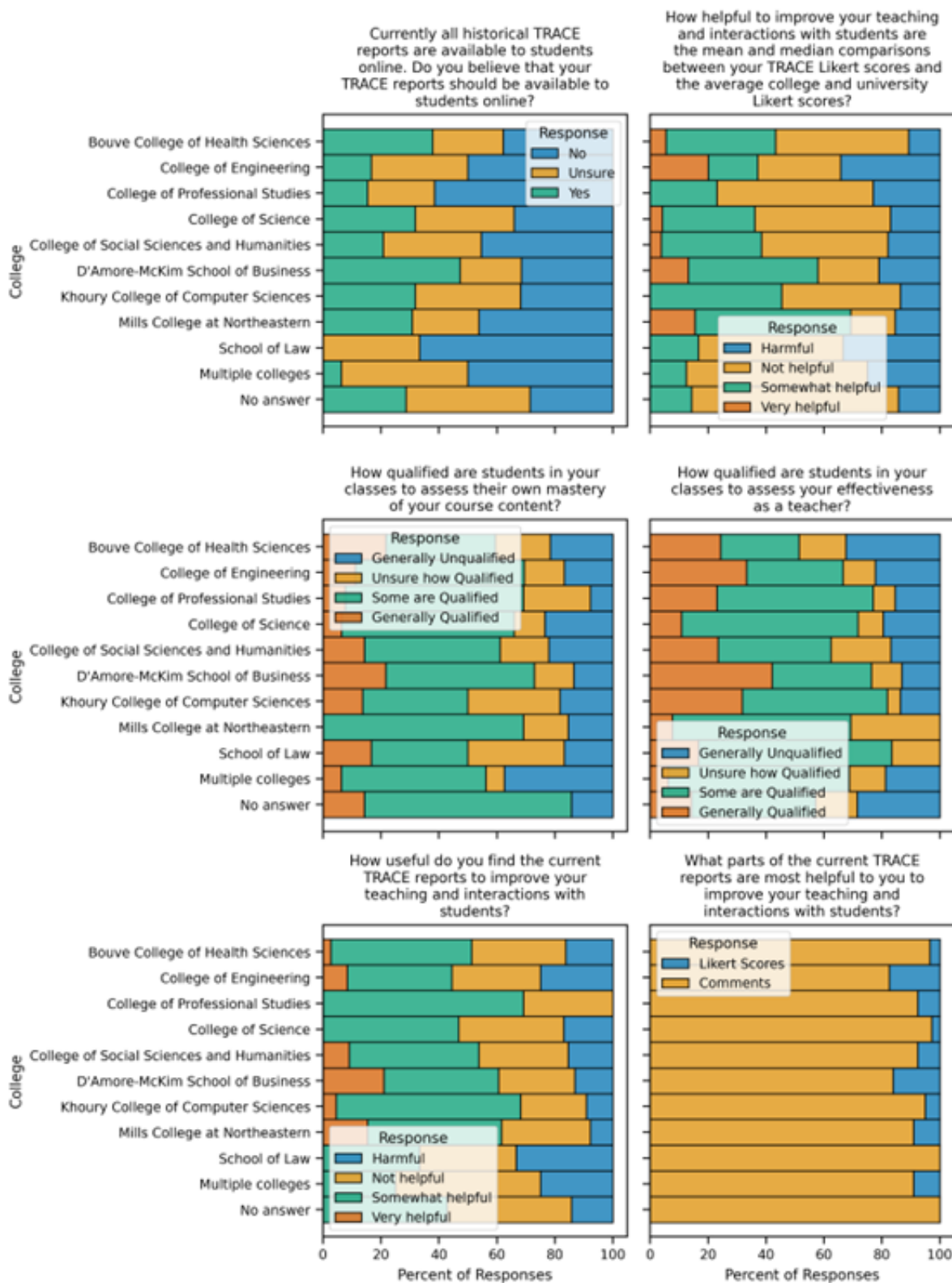


Figure 4: Categorical question responses by college.

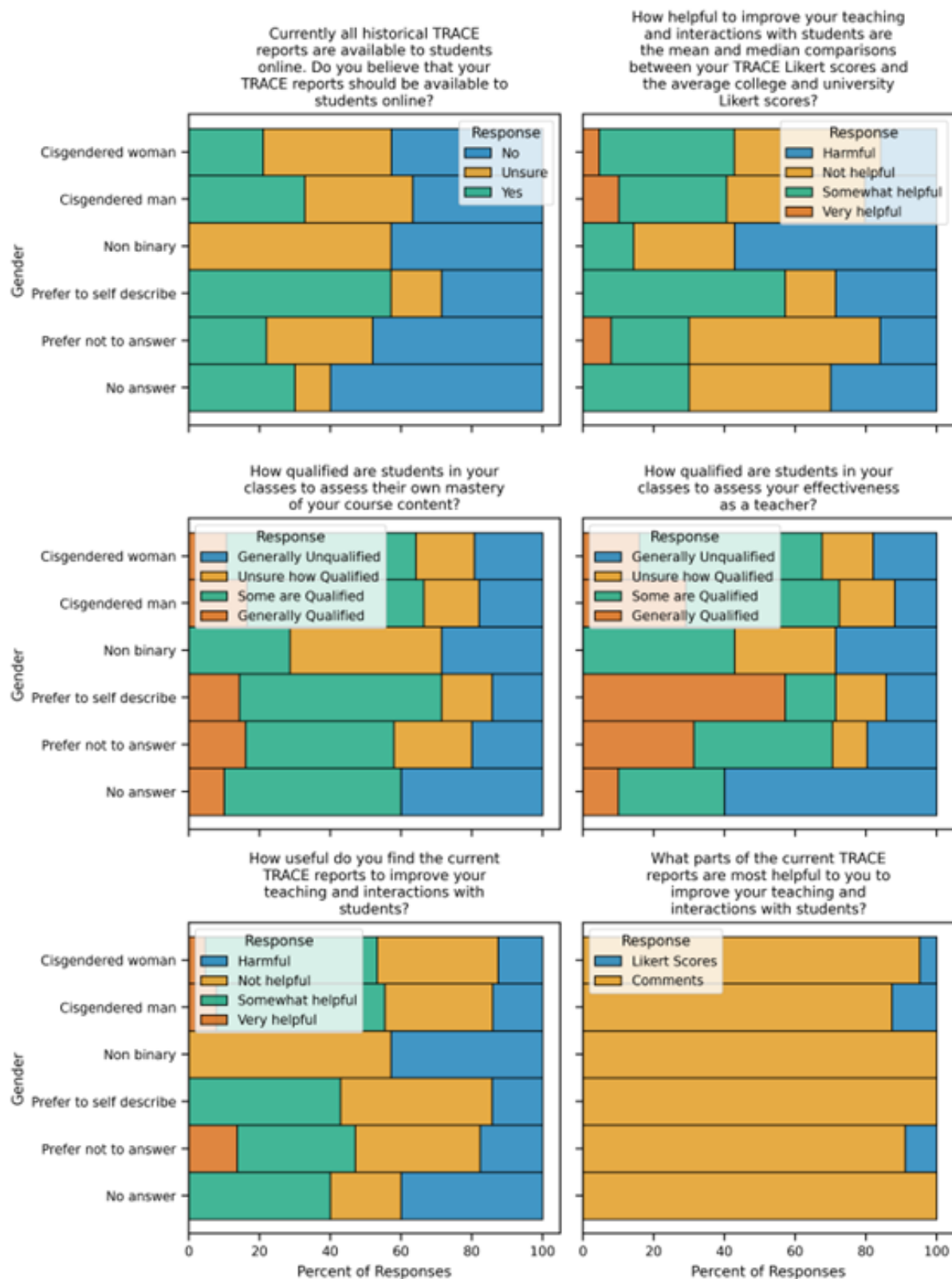


Figure 5: Categorical question responses by gender.

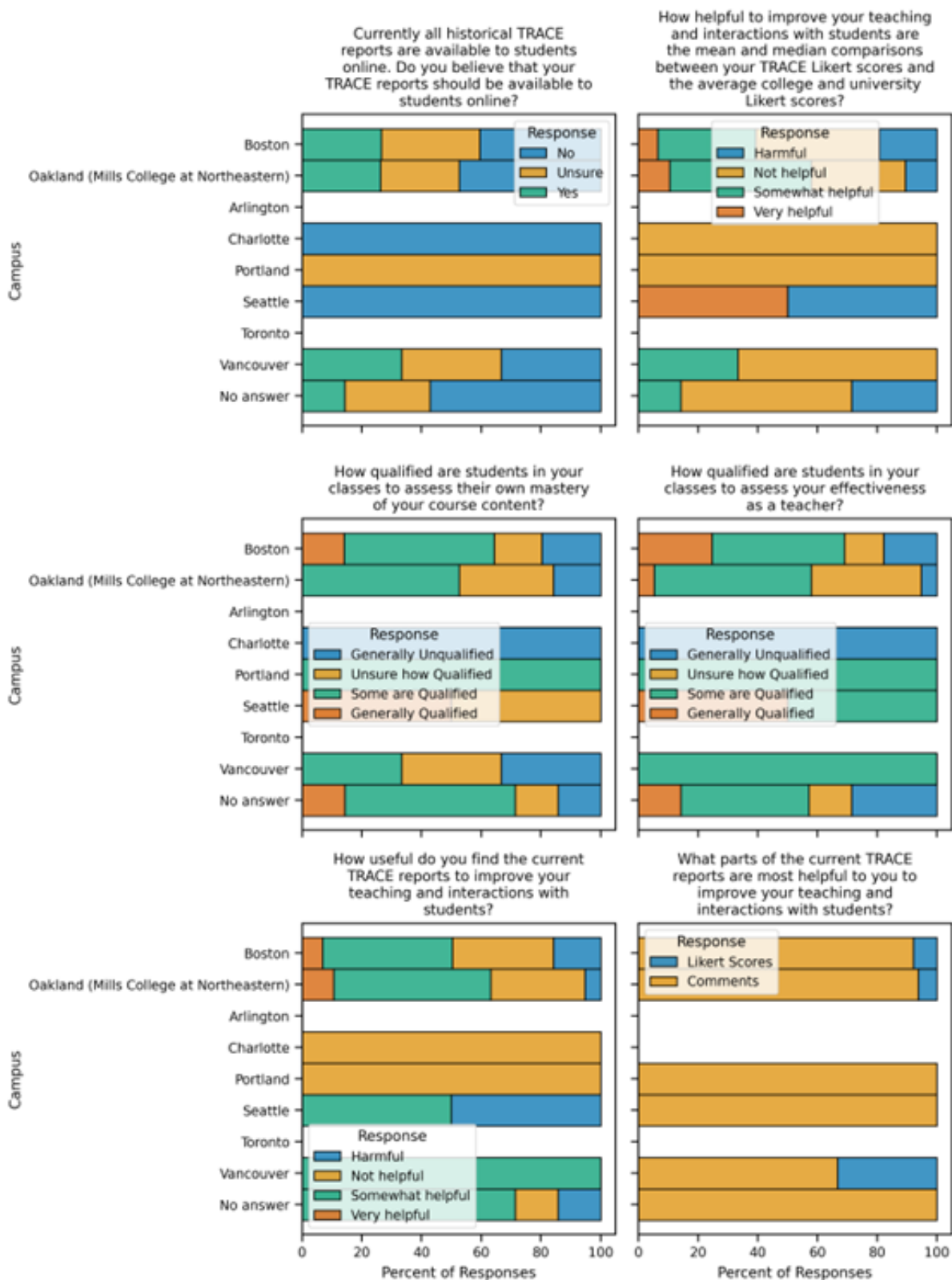


Figure 6: Categorical question responses by campus.

3 Narrative Questions

This section presents ChatGPT-generated summaries of the open-ended survey questions. To create each summary, we combined faculty responses (omitting missing, NaN, or N/A answers) and prompted ChatGPT 4.0 with the following:

Please summarize faculty answers to the following survey question. The faculty answers are separated by ###. Please ignore missing, NaN, or N/A answers. Please limit your summary to 250 words.

3.1 Question: If you detected bias in your teaching evaluations, please indicate how you detected bias and what kind of bias you detected. If you have not detected bias please put N/A.

Summary of Answers: Faculty responses to the survey question reveal widespread perceptions of bias in teaching evaluations, particularly highlighting gender, race, age, and disability-related biases. Many faculty members noted gender bias, with recurring themes including derogatory comments about appearance, differences in ratings compared to male colleagues, and assumptions about nurturing roles for women. Comments often cited that female faculty receive lower scores regardless of teaching effectiveness.

Additionally, several respondents reported implicit and explicit biases against non-native speakers, alleging that linguistic and cultural differences led to negative evaluations. There were instances of age bias, suggesting that older instructors generally received poorer evaluations than younger peers. Faculty also recognized a trend where students with lower grades disproportionately left negative feedback, indicating a correlation between student performance and evaluation scores.

Some respondents pointed to the issues stemming from the nature of student evaluations themselves—particularly that they often reflect students' dissatisfaction with their grades or course difficulty, rather than teaching quality. Evaluations were characterized as unfairly biased towards professors who grade leniently, while those who maintain high standards received harsher feedback.

Overall, faculty expressed concern about the potential detrimental impact of biased evaluations on career progression and the broader implications for educational equity, advocating for a more balanced approach to assessing teaching effectiveness.

3.2 Question: If you detected bias in your teaching evaluations, please indicate how has the bias affected you. If you have not detected bias please put N/A.

Summary of Answers: Faculty responses to the survey regarding detected bias in teaching evaluations reveal a range of emotional and professional impacts. Many expressed feelings of discouragement, depression, anger, and hopelessness, suggesting that bias has significantly affected their emotional well-being and motivation to teach effectively. A

common sentiment is the perception that biased evaluations undermine their teaching efforts and self-worth, prompting faculty to question their career choices and teaching styles.

Several faculty members noted that they feel pressured to cater to student expectations to avoid negative evaluations, leading to grade inflation and compromised teaching rigor. Some indicated that they have adjusted their teaching strategies or softened their approaches due to concerns regarding biased evaluations impacting their promotion and merit reviews.

Others highlighted the inequity they face compared to colleagues, particularly with respect to gender and racial biases, which they believe lead to harsher evaluations. A few individuals mentioned that they have resigned themselves to the bias, choosing to focus on peer feedback or subjective measures of teaching effectiveness instead.

Overall, the feedback indicates that the legacy of bias in evaluations impacts not only individual faculty morale but also broader issues of equity and fairness in teaching assessments, promotion, and merit-based evaluations within the academic environment. Faculty are increasingly frustrated by the institutional reliance on biased evaluations and the lack of meaningful response from administration regarding these issues.

3.3 Question: Which TRACE data are used in the annual merit processes in your career path?

Summary of Answers: The faculty responses to the survey question about the TRACE data used in annual merit processes show a strong emphasis on overall effectiveness scores. Many faculty members indicated that “Overall Instructor Effectiveness” and “Effectiveness” scores are the primary metrics utilized (e.g., “Overall effectiveness scores,” “overall effectiveness,” “teaching effectiveness”). Several respondents mentioned the importance of both qualitative and quantitative data, noting that student comments and feedback play a role in evaluations, although opinions varied on their weight in the merit process.

Some faculty expressed uncertainty about the specific data used, with comments like “I assume all of them but I am not sure” or “not sure.” There were also comments highlighting the problematic nature of using TRACE data for evaluative rather than formative purposes, with some arguing that certain metrics are insufficient for a holistic view of teaching effectiveness.

A few responses indicated that not all TRACE data is consistently used, with some reporting that only specific scores are considered, such as results from the questions “I learned a lot in this course” and “Overall rating of the instructor’s effectiveness.” There were mentions of changes over time in the criteria utilized and differing practices across departments. Overall, while most agreed that the effectiveness scores strongly influence the annual merit review, the exact application and fairness of these evaluations were questioned.

2.3.4 Question: Which TRACE data are used in the promotion processes in your career path?

Summary of Answers: The survey responses indicate that faculty members generally believe that a wide range of TRACE data—including numerical scores and qualitative comments—plays a significant role in their promotion processes. Many respondents explicitly state that “overall effectiveness” scores are particularly emphasized, along with both quantitative data and qualitative feedback. While some faculty are uncertain about the specifics, many suggest that all TRACE data is used, though there is a notable concern about the potential misuse of this data for evaluative purposes.

There is a divide in the clarity of how TRACE results are incorporated into promotions; some respondents feel a lack of transparency about which metrics are truly weighted most heavily. For instance, comments often support or challenge the impressions formed by numerical scores, yet some faculty argue that only the overall effectiveness score is given serious consideration.

Overall, it is clear from the feedback that while there is a consensus that TRACE data is integral to promotion evaluations, there are mixed feelings surrounding its application and fairness, reflecting a desire for clearer guidelines from management.

3.5 Question: What methods and evaluations are used by your department and college to assess your teaching?

Summary of Answers: The assessment of teaching effectiveness among faculty primarily relies on TRACE (Teaching, Research, and Assessment for Continuous Improvement) evaluations, which are mentioned by nearly all respondents as a significant measure of teaching performance. Some faculty members note that TRACE scores are often the only evaluations they receive, with several expressing dissatisfaction regarding the lack of other comprehensive methods.

Peer evaluations and observations are the next most commonly cited methods. While many departments do incorporate peer reviews and classroom observations, several faculty indicate that these practices are not consistently enforced or are underutilized in their departments. Additionally, some faculty members report the use of qualitative evaluations and self-reflections, and a few mentioned innovative feedback methods such as mid-semester student surveys or student ambassadors to gauge satisfaction.

Overall, there is a broad consensus that while TRACE is the primary tool used for teaching assessment, there is a desire for more systematic and meaningful peer evaluation processes. Faculty emphasize an interest in having more diverse methods of assessment beyond quantitative scores to provide a holistic view of teaching effectiveness.

3.6 Question: How do you use the current TRACE reports beyond merit and promotion?

Summary of Answers: Faculty responses to the question of how they use TRACE reports beyond merit and promotion reveal a spectrum of engagement and opinions on their effectiveness. Many faculty members indicate they actively utilize TRACE reports to adjust their teaching practices, incorporating student feedback to refine course content, teaching styles, and overall pedagogical approaches. Specific uses include modifying syllabi, changing course materials, adapting assignments, and making adjustments based on student suggestions to enhance learning outcomes.

However, a significant number express skepticism regarding the usefulness of TRACE reports. Many faculty members feel that the quantitative ratings are unreliable or biased, often reflecting student satisfaction rather than actual teaching effectiveness. Some faculty report relying more on their own assessments, like mid-semester evaluations or separate student surveys, which they find more informative and constructive.

Additionally, some responses highlight emotional reactions to TRACE comments, with faculty mentioning they can feel discouraged or stressed by overwhelmingly negative feedback or poorly constructed criticisms. They emphasize that while some comments provide actionable insights, much of the feedback is anecdotal or not representative of the entire student experience.

In conclusion, while many faculty value TRACE reports for self-reflection and course improvement, a notable portion remains critical, seeking alternative methods for gathering meaningful feedback that better supports their teaching practices and professional development.

Raw Numerical Response Data:

RESPONDENT BACKGROUND AND IDENTITY QUESTIONS

Select your faculty status: (select one)

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
Full time non tenure track	307	60.31%
Full time tenured	137	26.92%
Full time tenure track	46	9.04%
Part time faculty	3	0.59%

Select your faculty rank: (select one)

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
Full level (or equivalent title)	193	37.92%
Associate level (or equivalent title)	170	33.40%
Assistant level (or equivalent title)	117	22.99%
Senior Co-op Faculty	1	0.20%
Clinical Instructor	1	0.20%
University Distinguished Professor	1	0.20%
Co-op Faculty	1	0.20%

prefer not to say to avoid retribution for responses	1	0.20%
Senior co-op coordinator	1	0.20%
Senior Lecturer	1	0.20%

Identify the colleges in which you teach (select multiple)

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
College of Social Sciences and Humanities	108	17.85%
College of Science	71	11.74%
College of Arts	69	11.40%
Media and Design	69	11.40%
Bouve College of Health Sciences	61	10.08%
College of Engineering	55	9.09%
D'Amore-McKim School of Business	53	8.76%
Khoury College of Computer Sciences	44	7.27%
College of Professional Studies	23	3.80%
Mills College at Northeastern	19	3.14%
School of Law	12	1.98%

Where is your campus?

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
Boston	446	87.62%
Oakland (Mills College at Northeastern)	28	5.50%
Vancouver	4	0.79%
Seattle	3	0.59%
Portland	3	0.59%
Charlotte	1	0.20%
Toronto	1	0.20%
Arlington	1	0.20%

What is your gender identity?

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
Cisgendered woman	210	41.257367
Cisgendered man	180	5.363458
Prefer not to answer	72	14.145383
Nonbinary	11	2.161100
Female	9	1.768173

SPECIFIC TRACE QUESTIONS

What parts of the current TRACE reports are most helpful to you to improve your teaching and interactions with students? (select one)

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
Comments	257	73.22%
None	72	20.51%
Likert Scores	22	6.27%

How useful do you find the current TRACE reports to improve your teaching and interactions with students? (select one)

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
Not helpful	147	41.64%
Somewhat helpful	115	32.58%
Harmful	67	18.98%
Very helpful	24	6.80%

Currently all historical TRACE reports are available to students online. Do you believe that your TRACE reports should be available to students online? (select one)

Unique Response	Count	Percentage
No	147	41.64%
Unsure	115	32.58%
Yes	91	25.78%

Reasons for “No”:

1. Online courses are being evaluated with in-person criteria
2. Some students have used reviews to extract revenge for bad grades
3. They often disproportionately punish people based on race, age and gender
4. They are heavily biased and students reward easy As over doing hard and difficult work
5. These are biases evaluation tools
6. Privacy concerns when few classes have been taught
7. TRACE inherently contains bias
8. Students with a grudge tend to respond more frequently, comments are rarely constructive or surprising
9. Underperforming students use this as a platform to vent with very disrespectful language - without offering constructive suggestions.
10. We have a member of our dept who started badly at teaching but has improved considerably; early TRACE scores were poor, and more recent scores were more modest, even good. But students see the historical TRACE scores and seem to be actively avoiding sections taught by this instructor. Maybe TRACE scores should be seen for the last 3 years only, to allow for growth or change in an instructor's teaching.
11. Having students be able to access previous TRACE reports can influence their thinking when submitting a TRACE for the same professor. Many students use TRACE to air grievances or take frustrations out on faculty. Students are not qualified experts in teaching and in their disciplines, and they do not need to provide feedback on teaching. They can mostly evaluate their experience in the course.

12. Students should have some insight into how a teacher teaches, but there is plenty of documentation and research that indicates student evaluations are racist and misogynist, and using them as a yardstick for a teacher's future performance encourages those same biases in our students. Furthermore, students know that TRACE scores are visible and will use them vindictively, as a form of public shaming. When are we actually going to interrogate why we place so much value on what 18-21 year olds think are best practices for teaching?
13. TRACE creates an incentive system where keeping students happy is more important than teaching effectively. Hard professors earn lower scores, so classes get easier and more straightforward. It forces us to coddle students too much until we earn a high enough rank that bad TRACE scores cannot tank our promotions.
14. These evaluations are unfair to women and people of color
15. Many students do not complete the TRACE reports. Those who do are mostly students who are upset. I do not feel this should be a part of an instructor's merit as it is not an actual reflection of their performance. Much of the feedback is not an accurate portrayal.

Reasons for "Unsure"

1. "The lack of participation makes the sample returning TRACE evaluations highly suspect."
2. "Students should have some insight into how a teacher teaches, but there is plenty of documentation and research that indicates student evaluations are racist and misogynist, and using them as a yardstick for a teacher's future performance encourages those same biases in our students. Furthermore, students know that TRACE scores are visible and will use them vindictively, as a form of public shaming. When are we actually going to interrogate why we place so much value on what 18-21 year olds think are best practices for teaching?"
3. "Students may expect the same when course/teaching has changed/improved."
4. "Access to some information is helpful for the students (as opposed to just relying on word-of-mouth). Some of the questions asked on the TRACE could be meaningful to students IF the answers represented things accurately and without bias. However, this is not always the case. Still, the secret to good TRACE evaluations are that students more or less feel the experience was worthwhile and provided space to achieve their goals, which is not a bad thing. The comments were much more helpful generally (aside from allowing students to be lazier in review). Perhaps soliciting more specific comments and requiring comments be entered could improve the survey."
5. "Very few students fill out the TRACE evaluations. Typically you get the ones who really liked the class and the ones who are pissed off. So the reports don't give a real score with any meaning because of the low sample size. Students being able to view them will give a skewed perspective on the class."
6. "Student evaluations have been shown over and over again to suffer from racial and gender bias. They should not be used at all."
7. "I need more information on the pros & cons on the topic."
8. "Nothing in the TRACE questions is specific or concrete enough to implement constructive changes."
9. "Student evaluations of instructors are provably sexist and racist - they put instructors at a disadvantage and only reinforce existing biases."
10. "I like that they can see what I have done well, but if I am the only teacher for a class and then they have a bad idea of me before taking it I think it may bias them."

11. "I don't mind it personally, but I have not fully thought through the potential ramifications for others."
12. "I think it is reasonable to have perhaps 3-5 years of evaluations available. I think older evaluations should be removed from student access. I also think access to evaluations for full-time faculty should be removed when they depart the faculty. There is always a risk that TRACE evaluations are used inappropriately, and the volume of the evaluations available magnify the risk. Older information is also often nonrepresentative, since faculty change and so do the courses they teach."
13. "I was not aware."
14. "The practice perpetuates bias from prior years. One bad year sets up negative bias for many following years, and this is unjust. These reports are popularity contests and perpetuate the same popularity."
15. "Transparency is good, it's valuable for students."
16. "Each cohort is different and the context in which learning happens could vary, some of this can be externally related such as the case with the recent pandemic, others could be subtle and it would not be fair to faculty that have those experiences."
17. "Students often use TRACE to help them plan their courses. The fact that TRACE is highly encouraged by faculty allows for a greater wealth of data to inform their decisions. RateMyProfessor also exists, and student indeed use it, but RateMyProfessor is an external tool that only the most disgruntled/satisfied student will seek out to elaborate on a professor's personality/pedagogy/etc. The students WILL use a tool, may as well give them a tool with less skewed data."
18. "Public record seems to make sense. Helps with seeing if the teachers type is a match."
19. "The TRACE reports are often biased against women and faculty of color. Moreover, on the Oakland campus, many faculty are being asked to teach outside their areas of expertise, which puts them at a disadvantage. I think faculty colleagues know that and can weight the data accordingly, but students do not."
20. "TRACE results are often limited in number. Students do not get an accurate picture of an instructor from the results. I believe they have limited value unless they are robust for a particular course. Good TRACE scores are often associated with 'easy' courses. Students put too much weight on what other students say about particular courses and instructors."
21. "Students typically don't know what makes for a good professor."
22. "The TRACE reports without context are useless and students have no context. For example, I taught a class with 17 people. I'm *sure* most of them loved it and learned—many said as much. But I forgot to *force* them to do their TRACE evaluations and only 2 students filled them out. It was the angry students who thought I was a tough grader. If students see those TRACE evals they'll get distorted, out of context information."

Reasons for “Yes”

1. "It is fine, better than 'Rate my Professor' or whatever other garbage they are going to look at"
2. "Even though I find TRACE deeply flawed, I opt for transparency"
3. "transparency"
4. "The students have the right to know how I have been assessed in the past"
5. "I need to be accountable. I was the only person to teach my course for more than a decade - students have a right to know what sort of teacher I am."

6. "Transparency should be encouraged"
7. Students are consumers and if there is a choice in faculty, they should be able to read comments from previous student
8. "transparency"
9. "Transparency"
10. "Students can use that information to select classes."
11. "It is important for students to see other student experiences. They will get this data from some less reliable source if we do not make TRACE available."
12. "Transparency"
13. "They mean so little it doesn't matter who sees them"
14. "transparency"
15. "During promotion it was reported that the only question that matters is 'how effective is the teacher'...if this is true, why have all the other questions?"
16. "past, present and future students are collaborators in the continued improvement of the course. If they have the time and interest to review data related to the course or perceptions of my teaching and its evolution, they are welcome or I will provide."

How qualified are students in your classes to assess their own mastery of your course content?

Unique Response	Count	Percentage (%)
Generally Qualified	47	13.35
Some are Qualified	176	50.00
Unsure how Qualified	60	17.05
Generally Unqualified	69	19.60

How qualified are students in your classes to assess your effectiveness as a teacher?

Unique Response	Count	Percentage (%)
Generally Qualified	82	23.30
Some are Qualified	159	45.17
Unsure how Qualified	50	14.20
Generally Unqualified	61	17.33

If you detected bias in your teaching evaluations, please indicate how you detected bias and what kind of bias you detected.

1. age and disability affected my scores
2. gender bias - comments on clothing, looks
3. there is a bias against more difficult courses or those that adhere to required time commitments
4. Gender bias.
5. Only via sampling. Disaffected students are more likely to bother to complete the evaluation.
6. Comments about my appearance instead of comments on the content indicate a bias
7. I usually have 98% great comments, but there are 1-2 every semester where a student says something ad hominem and personal; they didn't like my teaching style. Usually this is a student with an axe to grind; a student who didn't get an extension or got a bad grade. Students tend to use TRACE in such cases as hostile territory where they actively show their

biases not against the teaching per se, but against the outcome. It is always counter-productive.

8. It's almost impossible to detect.
9. TRACE gives little information about the course content and format. This would be a valuable focus and perhaps more useful for evaluation purposes.
10. People specifically call out my appearance, attire, etc. They commented on my children when we were remote teaching during the pandemic.
11. All teaching evaluations are biased towards whether the class was easy and whether the students got the grade they wanted.
13. Some students confuse high standards with harmful behavior.
14. Comments making clear the student was one who received a bad grade based on specifics about a project or assignment they noted.

If you detected bias in your teaching evaluations, please indicate how you detected bias and what kind of bias you detected, where the cell contains "Generally Unqualified":

- Gender bias
- gender bias; bias against non-native speakers bias
- not mine but have been on committees and seen bias against women and persons of color
- I'm a white, straight, cis-male. I don't detect negative bias, but I am aware that I benefit from positive bias because of my identity markers.
- By providing false statements
- students have given me lower scores for the same exact course taught in a very similar way as a male colleague
- There is all sorts of bias in teaching SURVEYS (they are NOT evaluations, stop calling them that) and this bias is well documented in the research literature.
- Spotting bias in teaching evaluations is tricky (and this has traditionally been used as a defense to just ignore it). Students' opinions can be influenced by things like the instructor's personality or even the course difficulty. Plus, implicit biases related to gender, age, sexuality, etc can skew results. The people who fill out these evaluations might not represent the whole class, and the timing at the end of the term can affect feedback too. Anonymity can lead to more extreme comments since students feel less accountable. Because of these issues, using teaching evaluations for promotions and merit decisions isn't ideal. They can be inaccurate and unfair, demotivating instructors and perpetuating inequalities. Instead, a mix of peer reviews, self-assessments, and evidence of student learning outcomes would give a fairer picture of teaching effectiveness.
- If a student is commenting about 'their preferences' and liking them - not connected to learning.
- I hold multiple identities that have a high correlation in the literature to lower SET scores. Last semester I taught one section of a course, and another faculty member taught the second section. This faculty member has multiple "majority" identities that are associated with higher SET scores. Compared to this instructor, I spent more hours working to improve course assignments, meeting with and organizing the TAs, offering office hours, and revising lectures. I even had several students from the other section approach me for help because the other instructor was not able to resolve their problems or questions.

If you detected bias in your teaching evaluations, please indicate how you detected bias and what kind of bias you detected, where the cell contains "Unsure how Qualified":

- There's a strong bias towards easy grading - the easier your grading the higher you get
- Perhaps not bias but just non-constructive comments that don't show much personal perspective.
- Often polarizing - well performed and engaging students typically offer good suggestions, and the others who don't even show up offer hate comments.
- Flat out lies, unfounded accusations of bias
- Gender bias. Disability bias. Unconscious and conscious bias stemming from pre-conceived notions of the course and instructor based on inaccurate past reviews.
- I'm not sure how I would know.
- I have detected bias in the comments made by students in my TRACE evaluations. In the past, I have been accused of racism by a student in my teaching evaluation for a specific situation that I held multiple students from multiple different cultural backgrounds to account for the issue. However, it appeared to be that because I am a white female and the student was an Asian female they assumed I was singling them out because of race.
- Gender bias. The use of "Mrs" instead of professor or Dr. is a good start. But also the assumption that a woman professor will be "soft" on plagiarism. Also the general assumption of whether a professor is knowledgeable based on race and gender manifests in challenges to authority based on identity rather than content.
- I'm fine with my own evaluations. But research has shown that the biases are real.
- Not protected class bias but a general willingness to blame the professor for everything from the room being unpleasant to a guest speaker not being prepared to assigning challenging readings. Generally I am shocked at how certain students are that they know what a professor should be teaching and how.
- Not sure that this is bias, but some students dislike assignments that have intentional ambiguity.

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- Only via sampling. Disaffected students are more likely to bother to complete the evaluation.
- I'm a white, straight, cis-male. I don't detect negative bias, but I am aware that I benefit from positive bias because of my identity markers.
- By providing false statements
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If you detected bias in your teaching evaluations, please indicate how has the bias affected you.

- At this point in my career, I discount teaching evaluations due to bias. Previously, I questioned my choices regarding career path and self-worth.
- I just ignore evals until it comes time for merit review. Don't get me wrong, I'm always looking for ways to improve my teaching, I just don't base those decisions on TRACE evals.
- Lowers moral
- It has consistently lowered my TRACE scores with respect to my male colleagues and, in the past, undermined my confidence in teaching effectively
- Appealed and response was removed prior to publishing.
- Adapted to the expectation of NU students
- It's like other rejections in life: if it's actionable, I should try to take action on it. If it's not, I should just let it go.
- Higher TRACE maybe
- Made me address these issues straight on in course introduction
- It happens every day - why would my course evaluations be any different?
- It is very discouraging and makes me not want to read the TRACE evaluations.
- Honestly, made me consider quitting and going back to industry since this system of inexpert reviews is used in assessing my financial worth by the institution.
- Not sure about Bias here, but I am very affected by student's negative comments.
- Bias affects me because I am a woman. There are numerous studies to show that as such I will be graded harsher than a male colleague teaching the same thing

- It has made me worried about my responsibility to respond to such comments in my merit evaluation.
- It doesn't affect me, it affects the mental well-being and stability of my colleagues who aren't white, straight, cis-male
- It makes me feel like I want to teach less and just give everyone an A to avoid the pressure
- Thick skin, no hard done!
- Very upset and hopeless. Upper management just seems to brush it off.
- If you have a small section ~10-12 students, one or two bad evaluations can drag what would have been a score of 5.0 on "Teacher Effectiveness" to 4.5, or 4.2... these scores do not reflect the mean experience of students. I would be happy to see the top 5% of scores and the bottom 5% of scores cut in every TRACE cycle.
- The bias has not affected me. I discussed it with my director and dean and moved continued course.
- My overall ranking.
- I use suggestions to assist in developing for future semesters.
- I have devised strategies to increase student participation in TRACE to hopefully get more accurate feedback from students.
- I have not detected much bias in my evaluations - some questioning of my inclusion of creative activities being "arts and crafts" which I think demonstrates a lack of understanding of the driving purpose of the assignment but I think these critiques are more frequent because of my gender (female). I also know of numerous instances of colleagues finding bias in their evaluations
- They are hurtful and discouraging - especially knowing that they impact your promotion.
- I am beholden to keeping students happy at the expense of their learning.
- I see students repeat claims from prior semesters even though they've been fixed in this one. Students are primed to think a class will be one way and that sets their expectations even though they changed.

How do you use the current TRACE reports beyond merit and promotion?, specifically pertaining to how TRACE reports are not useful to instructors, along with examples for each concept:

1. **Not:**

- "Scores are not helpful I don't To assess courses for the future I wouldn't I don't."
- "But overall, TRACE does not help with pedagogical innovation."
- "self-assessment and curriculum planning; community partnership planning and assessment NOT Improving my courses I use feedback to change / improve courses year on year."

2. **Useless:**

- "I don't: the reports are useless."
- "There's enough literature to indicate this is useless comments are helpful I read the comments to attempt understanding the student feedback na Assess my own effectiveness."

3. **Irrelevant:**

- "It's irrelevant post-remote teaching and contributes to survey fatigue."

4. **Unhelpful:**

- "The feedback from TRACE reports is often unhelpful and does not provide actionable insights."
- "I find the comments unhelpful as they are often vague and not constructive."

5. **Ineffective:**
 - "TRACE reports are ineffective in providing meaningful feedback for improving teaching practices."
 - "The evaluations are ineffective and do not accurately reflect my teaching abilities."
6. **Worthless:**
 - "The reports are worthless and do not add any value to my teaching evaluations."
 - "I consider TRACE reports to be worthless as they do not provide useful information."
7. **Pointless:**
 - "Filling out TRACE reports feels pointless as they do not lead to any constructive changes."
 - "The feedback is often so generic that it makes the whole process seem pointless."
8. **Unproductive:**
 - "The feedback from TRACE reports is unproductive and does not lead to any improvements."
 - "I find the evaluations to be unproductive as they do not provide specific suggestions for improvement."
9. **Insignificant:**
 - "The data from TRACE reports is insignificant and does not make a noticeable difference in my teaching."
 - "I consider the feedback to be insignificant as it does not address the key issues in my courses."
10. **Inadequate:**
 - "The reports are inadequate and do not provide sufficient information for making improvements."
 - "I find the feedback to be inadequate as it lacks depth and specificity."

How do you use the current TRACE reports beyond merit and promotion?, specifically pertaining to how TRACE reports are useful to instructors. For each concept give examples using the concept

1. **Helpful:**
 - "My TRACE scores are typically above average for my department, which is helpful to know, but generally I think this is a harmful practice."
 - "Comments are helpful for course and instructor improvement."
 - "I find the comments helpful for understanding how students perceive the course and making adjustments."
2. **Useful:**
 - "I have never learned or gained any useful insight from TRACE."
 - "Some adjustments to syllabus I review the comments to collect any key themes, but I get more useful information for improving courses from separate feedback surveys I provide to students."
 - "The feedback from TRACE reports is useful for identifying areas where students are struggling."
3. **Effective:**
 - "TRACE reports are effective in providing feedback that helps improve teaching practices."
 - "The evaluations are effective in highlighting areas where I can make improvements."

- "I find the feedback effective in understanding student needs and adjusting my teaching accordingly."
4. **Constructive:**
 - "I try to adjust my own teaching to account for the constructive comments and suggestions that students provide."
 - "The feedback is often constructive and helps me make meaningful changes to my courses."
 - "I appreciate the constructive criticism as it allows me to improve my teaching methods."
 5. **Beneficial:**
 - "I read comments and look for potential modifications that would be beneficial to include in future course iterations."
 - "The feedback from TRACE reports is beneficial for understanding student perspectives."
 - "I find the evaluations beneficial in identifying areas for improvement."
 6. **Informative:**
 - "Only the comments are informative, but they are only received at the end of the semester, so these reports are not very useful."
 - "The feedback is informative and provides valuable insights into student experiences."
 - "I find the comments informative for understanding how students perceive the course."
 7. **Valuable:**
 - "Usually these are redundant to my requests for in-class feedback, but there have occasionally been valuable comments."
 - "The feedback from TRACE reports is valuable for making course adjustments."
 - "I find the evaluations valuable in understanding student needs."
 8. **Worthwhile:**
 - "The feedback is worthwhile and helps me make meaningful changes to my teaching."
 - "I find the evaluations worthwhile for understanding student perspectives."
 - "The comments are worthwhile and provide valuable insights into student experiences."
 9. **Advantageous:**
 - "The feedback from TRACE reports is advantageous for improving teaching practices."
 - "I find the evaluations advantageous in identifying areas for improvement."
 - "The comments are advantageous for understanding student needs."
 10. **Productive:**
 - "The feedback from TRACE reports is productive and helps me make meaningful changes to my courses."
 - "I find the evaluations productive for understanding student perspectives."
 - "The comments are productive and provide valuable insights into student experiences."