TRACE Ad Hoc Committee

Presentation to the Faculty Senate

Wednesday, 3/25/2026

LVX
VERITAS
VIRTVS

Members

Amy Bryzgel, CAMD - Art + Design

Michael Gonyeau, BCHS - Pharmacy and Health Systems Sciences

Steve Lustig, Chair, COE - Chemical Engineering

Talia Vestri – CSSH - English

Susan Wang – Mills – Mathematics & Computer Science

Joanna Weaver, COS – Psychology

Status Quo

Our current TRACE survey does not conform to standard best practices for Student Evaluation of Teaching compared to current, peer-reviewed pedagogical literature

2024-2025
Resolutions

Date	#	Text	Vote			Status	Committee
03/26/2025	23	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,	43-0-0			ON HOLD: Provost Madigan requests that these are reviewed in fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee
03/26/2025	24	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.	44-0-0			ON HOLD: Provost Madigan requests that these are reviewed in the fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee Appendix C: https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/wp-content/
03/26/2025	25	WHEREAS student evaluations of teaching have been established to be subject to bias, BE IT RESOLVED that TRACE survey results be	44-0-0	Approved 05/05/2025	Not Required		TRACE Ad Hoc Committee
03/26/2025	26	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,	42-1-1			ON HOLD: Provost Madigan requests that these are reviewed in fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee
03/26/2025	27	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,	43-1-0			ON HOLD: Provost Madigan requests that these are reviewed in the fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee
03/26/2025	28	WHEREAS high participation rates in TRACE surveys increase statistical validity of results, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate work with the TRACE vendor such that university, colleges, departments, and instructors can automate incentives to students to submit complete and	42-2-0			ON HOLD: Provost Madigan requests that these are reviewed in fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee

- Eliminate the single overall effectiveness question
- TRACE revision based on observable instructors' actions
- ✓ TRACE not only measure of teaching
- 2-year limit historical TRACE data to students online
- Online faculty responses
- Automate incentives

2025-2026 TRACE Ad Hoc Committee Activities

For all charges

- 12 committee meetings

- Discussions with Deb Franko, David Madigan, Beth Winkelstein

- Reviewed past Faculty Senate reports

- Surveyed global NU faculty in Fall 2025 Faculty Senate survey on TRACE

- Surveyed Student Government Association on TRACE

- Surveyed all college deans faculty affairs and all department heads

- Interviewed Jeff Anderson, Sr Acct Manager, Explorance, TRACE vendor

- Produced 18-page report of all activities, findings, recommendations, +84 pages of survey data (102 pages total)

Charge 1

Review the approved Senate Resolutions of TRACE Committee (from 2024-25) including TRACE survey and revise it based on feedback from the broader faculty community (using surveys and other means), with the aim of producing a version that effectively evaluates instructional quality. Prepare additional senate resolutions as needed.

Methodology

Faculty and SGA gave feedback on revised TRACE for the preamble, instructions, each of the queries; gave open ended responses on strengths, weaknesses, and desired changes

Selected Findings From Faculty Senate Survey 577 responses (16%)

- Strong support for replacing the single teaching effectiveness rating with multiple specific questions

- Appreciation for the shift toward specific, behaviorally anchored questions on observable instructor actions and learning outcomes over generalized effectiveness ratings

- Students lack expertise to evaluate their own learning outcomes and mastery — the most frequent criticism

- Persistent concern about demographic and grading biases – preamble primes to focus on specific instructor behaviors & course experiences rather than global impressions, which are more susceptible to demographic bias.

- Faculty valued the opportunity to respond to student comments & limit longevity of on-line reviews

<u>Findings From Student Government Association</u> 34 responses (81% of 42 elected senate-voting representatives)

- Strong overall approval of the revised instrument, with 16 of 18 items scoring above 4.0 and 29% of respondents giving uniformly positive ratings.

- "Learning outcomes" is poorly understood — **the most frequent student criticism, noting the term is vague, that professors often don't explicitly lay out or quantify learning outcomes, and that related questions become highly subjective as a result.**

- Students praised the shorter, plainer-language design — multiple respondents valued the survey's conciseness, simpler wording, and removal of Canvas/online environment questions compared to the prior TRACE.

- Two items were clear outliers dragging down satisfaction — Question 8 (grades reflecting mastery, mean 3.44) and Question 4 (self-reflection, mean 3.76) accounted for the bulk of dissatisfaction

- Students want a parallel question about instructor weaknesses — several respondents noted the survey asks what the professor did well but lacks a corresponding question inviting constructive criticism of the instructor specifically, as distinct from the course improvement question. (We recommend focus on course improvement)

- Students also use TRACE and want it designed for them to choose classes

Findings From Students
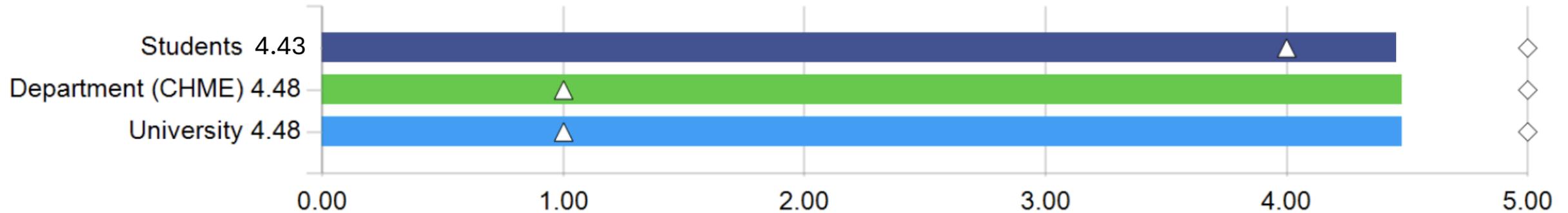
➢ Reducing the richness of student feedback to a single numerical score discards the very diagnostic, behaviorally specific insights that both faculty and students have shown they can provide, and using the same flattened metric for "teaching effectiveness" for high-stakes decisions about merit, tenure, and promotion is not merely reductive — *it is an institutionally sanctioned distortion of the evidence.*

➢ This further underscores how our current TRACE survey does not conform to standard best practices for Student Evaluation of Teaching compared to current, peer-reviewed pedagogical literature

Convergence: Both faculty and students independently endorsed the shift from a single teaching effectiveness rating to specific, experience-based questions, and both groups flagged "learning outcomes" as vague or poorly understood, objected to the classroom conditions item as outside instructor control, and rated the open-ended questions among the strongest items on the survey.

Divergence: Students were substantially more positive overall (mean 4.34 vs. faculty mean 3.76), reflecsting their perspective as users reporting on course experience, while faculty were far more concerned with how the instrument would be used against them — raising issues of gender, race, and grading biases (~18 comments) and the high-stakes role of TRACE in merit, tenure, and promotion decisions that did not appear in the student data at all.

Recommendations:
- Shorten the survey by removing three items that do not measure instructor behavior: grades reflecting mastery, expected rigor, and classroom conditions.

- Retain the learning outcomes construct but reword items in plain language so students report on observable instructor actions rather than self-assess their own competence.

- Issue institutional guidance through the Provost's office and CATLR directing all instructors to communicate and reinforce course learning outcomes throughout the semester, making the teaching expectation explicit rather than embedded implicitly in the survey.

- Specific changes are itemized in our report!

Charge 2

Work with SVP for AA, Registrar's office and the new University TRACE vendor to explore feasibility of committee's resolutions and implement new version of TRACE survey.

Status:

- Implementation delayed throughout 2025–2026 by SVP for AA
  - Spring 2026 TRACE deployment takes priority
  - SVP for AA indicated that changes best implemented over the summer between academic years
- Five Senate resolutions remain on hold — now under review by Provost Winkelstein.
- Four meetings held with Provost Winkelstein since November 2025, which the committee considers productive and ongoing.

Recommendations:

- Return to Faculty Senate before adjournment if new resolutions are needed

- The current TRACE Committee persist through the 2026 summer to
  - Continue discussions on the 2024-2025 resolutions on behalf of the Faculty Senate with Provost Winkelstein
  - Work with the SVP for AA, Registrar's office and vendor to explore feasibility of committee's resolutions and implement the new version of TRACE survey

- Another *ad hoc* TRACE committee be established for academic year 2026–27 to collaborate with university leadership, Registrar, and Explorance to assist implementing recommended changes to the TRACE survey.

Charge 3

Faculty handbook states that "Implementation of multiple, mutually independent mechanisms of evaluation, at least one of which is based on input from students". Review processes at all colleges/departments/units and confirm that they use TRACE as only one component in a more comprehensive assessment of teaching effectiveness in faculty merit, promotion, and tenure processes. Propose a resolution with handbook updates if needed.

Charge 4

Similar to previous charge, review tenure and promotion criteria for all colleges to ensure that all units are following the appropriate criteria. Prepare a list of units that are not in compliance so that faculty senate can follow up. If TRACE is used as sole student-provided data, propose additional assessment options to be adopted.

Methodology:

- University-wide survey of all department leaders & deans for faculty affairs across all colleges

- Respondents reported which data sources their units use to assess teaching effectiveness for annual merit, promotion, and tenure decisions.

- Compliance assessed against the Faculty Handbook standard requiring three elements: multiple mechanisms, mutual independence among mechanisms, and at least one mechanism based on student input.

Findings from 58 (100%) colleage deans for faculty affairs and department/unit heads:

Number of departments/units/colleges in each compliance category compared to NU Faculty Handbook requirements for assessing teaching effectiveness

Compliance Category	Merit	Promotion	Tenure
Compliant 2+ independent mechanisms, student input present	33	42	41
Partially Compliant TRACE + self-reflection only	5	3	3
Non-Compliant TRACE as sole mechanism	11	4	4
Not Applicable / Exempt NTT-only, no P&T, or N/A	5	6	7
Ambiguous / Insufficient Response	4	3	3

Specific details are itemized in our report!

<u>Recommendations:</u>

1. Request formal compliance plans from all non-compliant units (4 for tenure/promotion, 11 for annual merit) within one academic year

2. Seek clarification from ambiguous units before determining whether formal referral is warranted

3. Encourage partially compliant units to adopt peer observation or teaching portfolio review

4. Acknowledge structural exemptions for NTT-only and accreditation-governed units while requesting documentation of alternative approaches

5. Propose handbook addendum explicitly defining qualifying independent mechanisms, clarifying that the multi-mechanism standard applies equally to annual merit and tenure/promotion

6. Specify that self-reflection statements qualify as independent only when subject to structured external review

7. Establish triennial compliance review by the Faculty Senate

Conclusions – What should TRACE do?

- Remind students to focus on course material, instructor actions, and learning outcomes instead of instructors' personal qualities.

- Eliminate ambiguous concepts and jargons that are susceptible to bias (e.g., "teaching effectiveness")

- Emphasize precise questions with actionable feedback for faculty, and eliminate subjective and summative queries.

- Encourage faculty to experiment and innovate by limiting the online availability of past evaluation data to students.

TRACE Ad Hoc Committee (2025/26)

Respectfully submitted:

    Amy Bryzgel, CAMD - Art + Design

    Michael Gonyeau, BCHS - Pharmacy and Health Systems Sciences

    Steve Lustig, Chair, COE - Chemical Engineering

    Talia Vestri – CSSH - English

    Susan Wang – Mills – Mathematics & Computer Science

    Joanna Weaver, COS – Psychology

LVX VERITAS VIRTVS