

TRACE Ad Hoc Committee

Presentation to the Faculty Senate

Wednesday, 4/22/2026

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

2024-2025

Resolutions

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
- We have an estate of Senate-approved resolutions awaiting Provost approval action

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	○	Eliminate the single overall effectiveness question
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/	○	TRACE revision based on observable instructors' actions
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	✓	TRACE not only measure of teaching
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 the fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee	○	2-year limit historical TRACE data to students online
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	○	Online faculty responses
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 the fall of 2025.	TRACE Ad Hoc Committee	○	Automate incentives

Update since 25 March 2026:

- I. April 6th meeting and email discussions with Provost Beth Winkelstein
- II. Discussions with SAC RE: scientifically-valid survey construction
- III. New resolution for TRACE survey revision reflects:
 - TRACE survey in 2024/2025 Senate Resolution 24 (passed 44-0-0)
 - Feedback from global faculty survey (see committee report)
577 faculty (16%), all ranks, all colleges, all campuses, six gender identities
 - Feedback from Student Government Association (see committee report)
34 responses (81% of 42 elected senate-voting representatives)
 - TRACE Committee's report recommendations (see committee report)
 - Provost requirements

I. Meeting and email discussions with Provost Beth Winkelstein

- Office of the Provost
 - requires a summative question in which students assess “teaching effectiveness”
 - agrees faculty should be evaluated fairly
 - is understanding the faculty perspective on their teaching
- Today’s new resolution is the result of Provost’s and Committee’s commitment to collaborate and compromise

II. Discussions with SAC and survey specialists

- There are multiple dimensions of effective teaching practice
- A question that asks a student to evaluate multiple teaching dimensions in a single response
 - violates established psychometric principles
 - does not measure what it intends to measure*
 - is subject to bias and arbitrary interpretation
 - just as the current TRACE survey*
- Committee has converged on a summative question that focuses on the single most critical dimension of effective teaching: whether the instruction was effective at helping students learn

12. The instruction was effective at helping students learn in this course.

- Almost always effective (more than 80% of the time)
- Usually effective (about 60-80% of the time)
- Sometimes effective (about 40-59% of the time)
- Rarely effective (about 20-39% of the time)
- Almost never effective (less than 20% of the time)

- ✓ focuses on the instruction not the instructor
- ✓ is single-construct and psychometrically valid
- ✓ is answerable by a student's observation
- ✓ decouples from student's engagement and capability
- ✓ contains an internal Rubric for each response choice
- ✓ is considered fair across all teaching styles
- ✓ is considered fair across all course formats
- ✓ is free of pedagogical jargon

III. New resolution based on all feedback

Resolution 25 from 2024/25	New Resolution
Preamble	
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.	Please evaluate this class based on its content, your engagement with the material, your learning of intended course materials, 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. Your answers are anonymous and confidential.
Student reflection	
1. How often did you attend this course?	1. no change
2. The number of hours per week I devoted to this course outside scheduled class meeting times	2. no change
3. What could I have done to make this course better for myself?	3. no change
Course-related questions	
4. The syllabus was accurate and helpful in delineating expectations and course outcomes	4. The syllabus clearly described what I was expected to learn and how the course would be conducted
5. Required and additional course materials were helpful in achieving course outcomes.	5. The required and additional course materials were helpful for my learning in this course.
Learning-related questions	
6. Course sessions (in person, online, recorded, or any other type of presentation) were helpful for learning.	6. no change
	7. I understood what I should learn from the course.
7. Indicate whether you met all/most/some/few/none of the learning outcomes for the course.	omit
8. My grades in this course reflect my mastery of the course learning outcomes.	omit
9. This course had the expected amount of rigor in relation to the learning outcomes	omit

Classroom Questions	omit
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	omit
Instructor-related questions	
11. The instructor explained how I would be graded in this course.	8. The instructor consistently explained how students would be assessed in the course.
12. The instructor helped the students identify ways to master the learning outcomes.	9. The instructor helped students identify ways to learn the course material.
13. The instructor created opportunities for me to be engaged in the course.	10. The instructor created opportunities for students to be engaged in the course.
14. The instructor promoted a course environment that enables learning.	omit
15. The instructor clearly communicated ideas and information	11. no change
	12. The instruction was effective at helping students learn in this course.
16. What did the instructor do well?	13. no change
17. What could be improved about the course?	14. no change

Resolution for Senate Vote

TRACE Ad Hoc Committee — Faculty Senate, 4/22/2026

The proposed TRACE revision replaces a survey that does not conform to peer-reviewed best practices with one that does — while satisfying Provost requirements and serving students and faculty.

FACULTY INTERESTS

- ✓ Observational questions replace subjective personality judgments
- ✓ Summative question focuses on *instruction*, not the instructor
- ✓ Resolution reaffirms TRACE is not the sole measure of teaching

PROVOST REQUIREMENTS

- ✓ Summative instrument is retained as requested
- ✓ Single-construct question is psychometrically defensible
- ✓ Frequency-based rubric provides interpretable, comparable data across colleges

STUDENT INTERESTS

- ✓ Plain language free of pedagogical jargon
- ✓ Internal rubric reduces arbitrary interpretation
- ✓ Preamble reminds students to evaluate course and instructor's actions, not unrelated attributes

The TRACE Ad Hoc Committee requests that the Faculty Senate vote to approve this resolution and forward it to the Provost for implementation in Fall 2026.

WHEREAS: Resolution 24 (passed 25-0-0, 4/1/2020; Provost approved 4/10/2020) states: BE IT RESOLVED that usage of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) surveys such as TRACE in merit, tenure, and/or promotion considerations must involve (a) analysis of multiple SET queries and (b) utilization of multiple measures of the distribution of the responses (such as median or mode) rather than only the average of responses, and

WHEREAS: Resolution 25 (passed 44-0-0, 3/26/2025; Provost approved 5/5/2025) states: 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, and

WHEREAS: the Provost's office requires on TRACE survey a summative instrument for assessing "teaching effectiveness", and the query "The instruction was effective at helping students learn in this course" being answered as either "Almost always effective (more than 80% of the time), or Usually effective (about 60–80% of the time), or Sometimes effective (about 40–59% of the time), or Rarely effective (about 20–39% of the time), or Almost never effective (less than 20% of the time)" is single-construct and psychometrically valid, is answerable by students' observation, focuses on the instructor's actions, contains an internal Rubric for each response choice, and is considered fair across all teaching styles and course formats, and

WHEREAS: the global Northeastern University faculty and the Student Government have provided valuable and legitimate feedback for revising the TRACE survey instrument, and

WHEREAS: the attached TRACE survey revision reminds students to focus on course material, student learning, instructor actions, instruction instead of instructors' personal qualities, and emphasizes precise questions with actionable feedback for faculty, as recommended by the TRACE Committee,

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: the TRACE survey be revised to the structure and content presented below.

Please evaluate this class based on *its content, your engagement with the material, your learning of intended course materials*, 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. Your answers are anonymous and confidential.

Student reflection

1. How often did you attend this class?

- 80-100% of class meetings
- 60-80% of class meetings
- 40-60% of class meetings
- 20-40% of class meetings
- 1-20% of class meetings
- There were no class meetings to attend

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

- 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 clearly described what I was expected to learn and how the course would be conducted

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- I am not familiar with the contents of the syllabus

5. The required and additional course materials were helpful for my learning in this course.

- 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
- There were no class sessions

7. I understood what I should learn from the course.

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

Instructor-related questions

8. The instructor consistently explained how students would be assessed in the course.

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

9. The instructor helped students identify ways to learn the course material.

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

10. The instructor created opportunities for students to be engaged in the course.

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

11. The instructor clearly communicated ideas and information.

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

12. The instruction was effective at helping students learn in this course.

- Almost always effective (more than 80% of the time)
- Usually effective (about 60-80% of the time)
- Sometimes effective (about 40-59% of the time)
- Rarely effective (about 20-39% of the time)
- Almost never effective (less than 20% of the time)

13. What did the instructor do well?

14. What could be improved about the course?

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

Susan Wang – Mills – Mathematics & Computer Science

Joanna Weaver, COS – Psychology



The psychometric paradox for a single “teaching effectiveness” question

- Effective teaching practice is multi-dimensional.
- A question that bundles multiple constructs into one item produces a response that cannot be interpreted unambiguously
 - a student who finds the instructor effective in one dimension but not another has no coherent way to answer.
- The response does not reliably measure what we intend it to measure.
- This is not a matter of preference or wording
- It is a measurement limitation that the field of educational measurement has extensively documented.

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

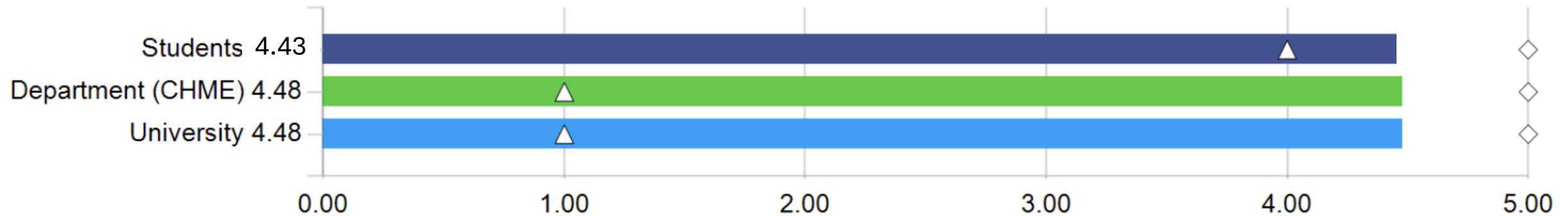
Selected Findings From Faculty Senate Survey 577 responses (16%)

- 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

Findings From Student Government Association 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), reflecting 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%) colleague 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!

Recommendations:

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.