Proposal to Switch from the SET to the SEI

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Summary

The SEI (Student Evaluation of Instruction) is the instrument most widely used at OSU for student evaluation of teaching. We have been using the alternate instrument SET (Student Evaluation of Teaching), for many, many years. For P&T purposes (at the college and university levels), it would help if we were to switch to the SEI. This note describes the SEI, compares it with the SET, and considers the pros and cons of switching.

1 General Information

First, some general information about the SEI and university policies:

1. The SEI is a standardized survey instrument that many departments use (I am not sure of the exact number of departments that use them; one number I got was that 173 departments used the SEI during Winter and Spring 2003 but I have no idea out of how many).

2. Summary results of SEI are made available to the instructor. They can also be made available to the department chair if the department has officially decided that the SEI will be used in P&T decisions and that the results can be provided directly to the chair. (All instructors must be notified of this decision. The Registrar must be informed. The reports can be sent to the chair in hardcopy or electronically.)

3. SEI results should be used in conjunction with other assessments such as peer evaluation and self-assessment.

4. A department may use its own instrument for collecting student feedback if done in a consistent manner. (I.e., we can continue to use the SET if we so choose.)

2 SEI Questions

There are 10 items on the SEI. For each, there are five possible ratings from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". In converting these to numerical ratings, "strongly agree" translates to 5; "agree" to 4; "neutral" to 3; "disagree" to 2; and "strongly disagree" to 1. The student can also mark "not applicable" for any of the items.

The ten items on the SEI are:

1. Subject matter was well organized.

2. Course was intellectually stimulating.

3. Instructor was genuinely interested in teaching.

4. Instructor encouraged students to think for themselves.

5. Instructor was well prepared.

6. Instructor was genuinely interested in helping students.

7. I learned a great deal from this instructor.

8. The instructor created an atmosphere conducive to learning.

9. The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly.

10. Overall, I would rate this instructor as . . .
    The possible ratings for this last item are "excellent" through "poor", not "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The conversion to numbers is again from 5 through 1.

The student is also asked to provide three additional pieces of information:

1. Rank (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate, graduate professional, or other).

2. Cumulative GPA range (< 2.0, 2.0-2.29, 2.3-2.69, 2.7-2.99, 3.0-3.29, 3.3-3.69, 3.7-4.0).

3. Reason for enrolling in the course (specifically required in my major/minor, one of several choices to meet a requirement in my major, fulfills a GEC requirement, free elective choice [apparently, "looked interesting" is not one of the options!]).

Comparison groups are determined according to class size (small: 5 to 20; medium: 21 to 60; large: over 60); and course electivity (required either for the major or GEC; a possible choice to meet a major requirement; free elective choice). Neither the rank of the student nor the student's GPA is used. So a section of CIS 560 with 40 students in it would have, as its comparison group, all "medium sized courses required for the major".

3 Results

Summary reports of the SEI are sent out in the fourth week of the following quarter. The report has three sections:

- Section I: For each of the ten items, the percentage of students that responded at each rating level (1–5). (Rather useful for low enrollment courses in which one student's response may greatly influence the mean.)

- Section II (this is the main results section):

  1. The instructor's means and standard deviations for each item.
  2. The means and standard deviations for each item for the *comparison group* of courses in the same *college.*
  3. The means and standard deviations for each item for the comparison group of courses in the university.
  4. The means and standard deviations for *all* the courses in the same department (*not* by comparison group – comparison groups within some departments are too small).

- Section III: Histogram of the distribution of mean scores, for the past four quarters, on the *overall rating* (last item on the SEI) for the comparison group of courses in the university.

4 Procedures

SEI forms are automatically produced by the Office of Registrar for every course and sent to the departments. The course/call number, instructor name, and quarter are pre-printed on the forms. The forms are delivered to the department by the end of the eighth week of classes.

Students must use #2 pencils to fill in the bubble sheets. A responsible proctor (student volunteer or staff member) should administer the survey. The proctor should collect completed response sheets, place them in the return envelope *so that they all face in one direction*, seal the envelope, *sign it*, and return it to the department office. The department office should place the sealed envelope in a Campus Mail envelope and send it to 202 Lincoln Tower.

5 Related

There is something called *FYI* that allows an instructor to create a form tailored to obtain specific feedback about his/her course. This is for use of the instructor and not part of SEI.

6 Other

A couple of years ago, the Univ. Senate appointed an ad-hoc committee to evaluate the SEI. The report from that committee contained a number of suggestions, a few of which seem to have been implemented, and others ignored. The ones that seem to have been implemented include:

- The summary report should be based on data from comparable courses rather than all courses in the university. But only part of this suggestion has been implemented. [The full suggestion was to define "comparable course" based on both the course number (below 500, between 500 and 699, above 699) and the reason for taking the course; the former has not been included. Further, there was a suggestion to include only courses taught by regular faculty; this too has been ignored.]

- The average for each comparison group should be reported for the university as a whole, *and* for the college and the department.

- The FYI (see Section 5) results should be reported separately from the SEI results (with the former going only to the instructor).

The ignored suggestions include:

- Rename the instrument to Student Feedback Survey since it primarily measures student satisfaction rather than quality of instruction.

- The last item in the survey, asking for an "overall score" (in which the instructor is ranked on a scale of "excellent" to "poor") be deleted since it promotes a simplistic comparison of the individual instructor with the university/college/department mean, ignoring the rest of the information. [Indeed, this is precisely what is happening.]

- Histograms should not be used as they call undue attention to a single question (the one related to "overall score").

- The average student grade for the course, and for the comparison group (for the university, the college, and the department) should be included in the summary results.

7 Commparison and Recommendations

a. Content: The SEI is shorter than the SET and should take less time for a student to complete. But it provides less information (nothing about the texts, assignments, exams; no free-form comments). We could add an extra sheet to the SEI asking for free-form comment. In that case, the proctor would have to make sure that these sheets are separated from the SEI questionnaire. Apart from this, the SEI questions are reasonably similar to the SET questions[1].

b. Results: In coverting the student responses to numerical values, the SEI translates "strongly agree" through "strongly disagree" to *5 through 1*, whereas the SET translates them into *1 through 5*. This scale inversion is obviously important to remember when comparing the results.

On the critical question, "given the opportunity, I would choose this instructor again for another course", the SET average for the comparison group of CIS courses with numbers above 600 is 2.1 (slightly worse than "agree"). On the corresponding question, "overall, I would rate this instructor as", the SEI average for the comparison group "medium-sized course required in the major" is 4.09 within the College of Engineering and 4.26 across the university; if the comparison group is "course is one of several choices to meet a requirement in the major", the corresponding figures are 4.40 and 4.35. Note that 4.00 corresponds to "agree", so these numbers are definitely better than "agree".

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[1] I personally think the SEI could be substantially improved without increasing the number of questions. Many of the questions seem rather repetitive to me. In particular, questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 seem to be addressing very related issues. For example, questions 3, 6, 8, and one of 1 or 5, could, it seems to me, be omitted; or rather replaced by questions about assignments, exams, notes, etc. But anyway, that is a separate topic.

c. Procedures: The SEI is clearly a bit more demanding than the SET with respect to what the proctor is expected to do; this will be even more so if we add a supplementary sheet (for free-form comments). On the other hand, the amount of work for the CIS main office would go down somewhat (since the Registrar's office will take care of processing the SEI forms). Note also that while the SET results are usually available the week after final exams; the SEI results will be available four or five weeks later.

d. Recommendation: Although there seem to be problems with the SEI, in summary, I think the advantages (especially the easier acceptance of the SEI by the college and the university in P&T matters) outweigh the disadvantages. Hence I recommend that we switch to the SEI.

8 Links

Here are some useful links:

- http://www.ureg.ohio-state.edu/ourweb/Tests/TestsContent/SEI_handbook.pdf
  "Handbook" of the SEI; contains instructions, sample SEI form, and sample result report.

- http://www.ureg.ohio-state.edu/ourweb/tests/index.html
  Registrar's site for SEI and related items (including the FYI instrument).

- http://oaa.ohio-state.edu/eval_teaching/
  OAA's "evaluation of teaching" page; includes "Pedagogical Analysis of SEI Items" and "Rationale for SEI Items".

- http://senate.ohio-state.edu/SEI.html
  Report of the University Senate's ad-hoc committee.