

2013

# SRI Report Executive Summary Revised

Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/faculty-senate-index>



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "SRI Report Executive Summary Revised" (2013). *Faculty Senate Index*. 238.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/faculty-senate-index/238>

This other is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Senate Documents at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Senate Index by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

## SRI Report: Executive Summary

**Introduction:** In the fall of 2013, the Senate Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate at Georgia Southern University created an Ad Hoc Committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the Georgia Southern University Student Ratings of Instruction [SRI] instrument and its use. The Committee comprised representatives from the various units on campus. During the fall 2013 semester, the Committee created two surveys, one for faculty and one for department chairs, to assess faculty and administrator opinions. A total of 234 faculty members (out of an estimated 950) and 21 department chairs (out of 37) responded to the surveys. This reflects response rates of 25% and 57%, respectively, both greatly in excess of what is typical for online surveys and is likely an indicator of high levels of motivation to comment on the SRI form and its use. The Committee coded and interpreted the data; the results are included in the complete report.

**Background:** Research on Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) is extensive and reveals that SETs are typically used for two purposes: a) **formatively**, to improve teaching effectiveness, and b) **summatively**, to evaluate faculty performance as teachers. However, these two purposes cannot always be effectively assessed with a single measure (Hoyt & Pallett, 1999). The University System of Georgia [USG] Board of Regents [BOR] [Policy Manual Section 8.3.5.1](#), paragraph 1, states, “Each institution, as part of its evaluative procedures, will utilize a written system of faculty evaluations by students, *with the improvement of teaching effectiveness as the main focus of these student evaluations*” [emphasis added]. Unfortunately and ironically, most SETs do not actually assess teaching effectiveness. As Titus (2008) notes, “Although the term *student evaluation of teaching* (SET) is commonly used, most researchers agree that the rating scales solicit *student opinions* (e.g., Powell 1978) and provide indications of *student satisfaction* (e.g., Abrami, d’Apollonia, and Cohen 1990).” (p. 416). Other typical problems with SETs include

- Students’ inexperience and inability to evaluate effective teaching practices;
- The introduction of bias through variables such as class size, subject matter, course level, meeting time, instructor race/gender, etc.;
- The tendency of most students to spend considerably less time on academic work than what is recommended by the U.S. Department of Education and other educational organizations; and
- The complex and problematic relationship between SETs and student grades.

Taken together, these findings reveal that most SETs do not assess what they purport to assess, do not provide reliable summative data on teaching effectiveness, and are known to be vulnerable to racism, sexism, and other forms of discriminatory bias against protected classes. To use SETs in summative ways to evaluate faculty performance would introduce such biases into the evaluation processes themselves, which would violate both Georgia Southern University policy and state and federal law. Additionally, using SETs may prove ineffective or even harmful in promoting teaching effectiveness if the SETs themselves are not designed with formative goals as their primary purpose.

However, there is much research to suggest that SETs specifically designed to focus on student learning and to provide formative feedback as their primary goal represent “best practices” in their use and can be highly effective. Such SETs would also more closely align with the USG [Policy Manual Section 8.3.5.1](#) and its explicit focus on the use of SETs for the improvement of teaching effectiveness. They would also better reflect the Georgia Southern University Faculty Handbook definition of superior teaching as “focused on student learning outcomes” (205.01).

## **General Summary**

Georgia Southern faculty survey responses indicated a high level of frustration and anger with the current SRI form and its use. Many faculty expressed multiple concerns about lack of validity of the current measure, its vulnerability to factors that are irrelevant to teaching, its insufficient focus on student learning, and overuse and misuse by administrators in evaluating faculty teaching. Many faculty comments echoed findings from the literature reviewed in the Background section.

As for the chairs, many indicated dissatisfaction with the current SRI and its use in evaluating teaching, often echoing the concerns raised by faculty and the literature presented in the Background section. One clear pattern that emerged from the data was that chairs appeared to be just as frustrated with the current forms and their use as faculty and were very supportive of finding better and more appropriate ways to evaluate faculty teaching effectiveness. Also note that because the sample size for this survey was less than one tenth of that of the faculty survey, there were significantly fewer total responses. This resulted in the identification of fewer themes for responses each question, but many of those themes reflected sentiments expressed by a significant number of the respondents (e.g., 20-75%). These themes appear in the complete report.

## **Recommendations**

Because of the myriad problems with the current SRI measure used by Georgia Southern University and its use, both as identified in the Background section and as identified by faculty and department chairs, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Faculty Welfare Committee be charged with composing, pilot-testing, and presenting to the Senate for adoption a new SRI that incorporates best practices from the research literature and focuses on student learning, learning behaviors, and formative feedback (e.g., the Skowronek et al., 2011 measure: see Appendix in the complete report). The new SRI should provide multiple opportunities for students to specify in writing how the instructor promoted student learning. The FWC should also find ways to make the evaluation of teaching effectiveness more equitable and consistently defined, assessed, and used across the university. This would include developing guidelines for how SRIs should be used and objectively valued in annual reviews and in promotion and tenure (and pre/post tenure) decisions for all faculty.
2. That the comparison of individual faculty SRI data to other faculty members (e.g., department means) or to a specific “cut point” (e.g., 4.0) be discontinued and that the faculty handbook be amended to prohibit such practices. Such comparisons are contrary to “best practices” in the use of SRIs. Further, in a university that emphasizes commitment to excellence in teaching and learning as a hiring criterion, it should be expected that the large majority of faculty are already good teachers.
3. That the use of SRI data as either the sole or majority criterion for evaluating teaching effectiveness be discontinued and that the faculty handbook be amended to prohibit such practices until such time as the Faculty Welfare Committee can develop more specific guidelines for the use of SRI data, which should be implemented, according the BOR policy, "with the improvement of teaching effectiveness as the main focus." The Georgia Southern University Faculty Handbook (205.01) already lists multiple other methods for assessing teaching effectiveness, and the Committee recommends that these bear much more weight.
4. That faculty members should be given an opportunity to respond to SRI results. These responses should be permanently appended to any future reports of that SRI data.
5. That Georgia Southern University discontinue the practice of forwarding a one-page summary of the SRIs to the Provost’s Office along with major reviews (e.g., promotion and tenure, post-tenure) and amend the faculty handbook to reflect this change.
6. That SRI administration match the method of delivery for the course: online courses should use online course evaluations; face-to-face courses should use face-to-face evaluations. The existing literature documents extremely low participation rates for

online course evaluations in face-to-face courses which can only be ameliorated by the implementation of costly, logistically complicated, and draconian measures to coerce student compliance (the use of which would entirely negate any value of such evaluations on improving teaching effectiveness).