



Center for Teaching Excellence  
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## **The Course and Instructor Evaluation: Continuing the Process**

**By Spencer Baker, Ph.D.**  
CTE Faculty Associate for Assessment

During the 2011 spring semester, Hampton University transitioned from a “pencil and paper” evaluation, using Scantron forms, to an electronic Course and Instructor evaluation process. Our goal was to save time and resources, as well as to provide faculty with “quick” and meaningful feedback from our students. We accomplished our goal by restoring valuable instruction time, through eliminating in-class evaluations, and providing you with the students’ feedback immediately after you have submitted your final grades each semester. Faculty are now receiving this feedback electronically with all evaluations in one email, along with an Instructor’s Profile Report that is based upon the number of areas/courses taught during the semester.

In the Evaluation Report, you are provided with *a global index rating* for each area followed by the *demographics of the respondents*, i.e., the number of males and females, their current GPA, and expected final grade. In the current evaluation, we have identified three areas for rating. The first area focuses on the instructor, with *Teacher Presence* rated with 11 items (reduced from the original 17). The second area focuses on the student’s *Social and Emotional Connection* with others in the class (students and instructor) with four (4) items rated (reduced from the original 6). The third area focuses on *Cognitive Presence*, with another 10 items rated (reduced from the original 17). There are also three questions that focus on *the student’s general satisfaction with the course*.

Currently, you receive one chart for the items (reduced from the original 3). The chart provides you with a graph for each question, identifying the percentage of students rating the item. The right side of the graph provides information on how many students responded to the item (n=) with an average score, the median score, and the standard deviation identified. Finally, you are provided with all of the open-ended *Comments* made by the students. Often, these personal comments are more valuable than the ratings.

Initially, we were faced with the challenge of evaluating courses and instructors with multiple instructors, i.e., team-taught courses. We have met this challenge and

can now provide evaluations for multiple professors teaching the same course, which allows students the opportunity to rate the *Teaching Presence* of each instructor.

Although we have experienced success over the course of the last six years, we are still faced with a few challenges. First and foremost, we are still challenged with the low response rate of our students. Yes, the online survey includes a number of items, but the requested information is essential for improving the instructional process at Hampton University. In response to students' concerns, we have reduced the number of items to make it easier for them to reply to the survey. Although students are provided ease of access to the online evaluation and they receive reminders to respond, we still need the faculty to encourage them to participate in the process by submitting the evaluation.

Additionally, faculty are required to place these evaluations in their dossiers for the three-year, mini-dossier review and for tenure and promotion. *The Instructor Profile* is ideal for inclusion in these dossiers because it contains the ratings for all of the courses taught in the area, along with all of the comments from students. To ensure that you receive the evaluations, the instructor must verify the email address in the Banner System. If you do not receive an evaluation for a specific course, it may be that none of the students enrolled in that course completed an evaluation.

It is important to note that *we ensure confidentiality for all who participate in the electronically-conducted process*. All procedures are established prior to the course/instructor evaluation period, and the system is never accessed to determine who responded. We need your help in encouraging students to participate in the evaluation process during the specified period.

In closing, we have made great strides in transitioning from a "paper and pencil" to an online course/instructor evaluation process. However, we are always looking for other ways to exploit technology to improve the teaching/learning environment at Hampton University.

## **Do Quizzes Improve Student Learning? A Look at the Evidence**

**By Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D.  
From FacultyFocus.Com**

There's a lot of talk these days about evidence-based instructional practices, so much that I've gotten worried we aren't thinking enough about what that means. Let me see if I can explain with an example.

Recently I've been trying to locate the evidence that supports quizzing, wondering if it merits the evidence-based label. Tracking down this evidence in our discipline-based research is challenging because although quizzing has been studied across our disciplines, it's not easily searchable. My collection of studies is good, but I know it's not complete. As you might suspect, the results are mixed; they are more positive than negative, but still, a significant number of researchers don't find that quizzes affect learning outcomes.

I've been looking closely at a set of seven studies, which you will find listed at the end of the article. (These studies were randomly selected—no empirical objective here.) Not all of the studies report the same positive results, but if they are viewed collectively, the use of quizzes seems to yield some impressive benefits. Students reported they spent more time reading and more time studying between tests, and that they were more motivated to come to class prepared when the course included quizzes. These quizzes also increased student participation, lowered failure rates, improved exam scores, resulted in better overall course grades, and did not lower course evaluations. That all sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

But the devil is in the details, as in the specific combination of factors and conditions that produced the results. When I looked closely at this subset, I was amazed at the array of details that could potentially affect whether quizzes improve learning.

- Are they pop quizzes or scheduled on the syllabus?
- What types of questions are used (multiple choice, short answer, etc.)?
- What's the relationship between quiz questions and questions on the exam (same questions, similar questions, or completely different)?
- How many quizzes are given throughout the semester?
- When are the quizzes given—before content coverage or after? How soon after?
- Do students take the quizzes in class or online?
- Are the quizzes graded or ungraded? If graded, how much do they count?
- Is the lowest score dropped?
- What kind of feedback are students provided?

In addition to these design details, there are content variables derived from what's being taught, the level at which it's taught, the type of course, and the instructional method used to deliver it. And then there are student variables, such as their year in college and academic performance to date. In all likelihood, the classroom climate exerts some influence on the outcomes as well.

What this evidence tells us is that given a particular set of conditions, quizzes produce positive results, in most cases a range of them. And that gives us three things to consider. First, based on studies done in our disciplines, quizzes are an evidence-based instructional strategy only in a general sense. If your course design details and teaching context aren't the same as those in the study, you aren't assured the same results.

Second, to be sure that your quizzes produce the desired results, you need evidence. You can conduct your own empirical analysis. One of the benefits of all these different studies is that they provide a range of different ways quiz performance can be analyzed. That will give you the best evidence, but you can also do something quasi-empirical. You can look at exam scores in sections with and without quiz scores. You can ask students how a course with quizzes affects their attendance, preparation, and study habits. Or, you can carefully, thoughtfully, and objectively observe how quizzes are affecting learning. What we need to stop doing is assuming that just because an instructional strategy has been studied and judged effective, we can use that same strategy and accrue the same benefits.

Finally, looking at a set of studies (whether on quizzing or a range of other instructional strategies) illustrates the profound importance of instructional design. So often, when we decide on an instructional approach, we just do it. Without much thought or purposeful decision-making, we come up with a way to use quizzes. And yet it's those easy, seemingly minor decisions about the details that determine the outcome.

Remember, though, that you haven't gotten the whole story here. You've gotten the sum of a sample of studies done in our disciplines. Regular repeated testing has been studied elsewhere. In the next post, we'll continue this consideration of what it means to be an evidence-based instructional strategy.

**Resources:**

Azorlosa, J. W. (2011). The effect of announced quizzes on exam performance: II. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 38, 3-7.

Batsell, Jr., W. R., Perry, J. L., Hanley, E., and Hostetter, A. B., (2017). Ecological validity of the testing effect: The use of daily quizzes in introductory psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 44 (1), 18-23.

Braun, K. W., and Sellers, R. D. (2012). Using a “daily motivational quiz” to increase student preparation, attendance and participation. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 27 (1), 267-279.

Hardsell, L. (2009). The effect of quiz timing on exam performance. *Journal of Education for Business*, 84 (3), 135-141.

Hatteberg, S. J. and Steffy, K., (2013). Increasing reading compliance of undergraduates: An evaluation of compliance methods. *Teaching Sociology*, 41(4), 346-352.

Johnson, B. C., and Kiviniemi, M. T. (2009). The effect of online chapter quizzes on exam performance in an undergraduate social psychology course. *Teaching of Psychology*, 36 (1), 33-37.

Kouyoumdjian, H. (2004). Influence of unannounced quizzes and cumulative final on attendance and study behavior. *Teaching of Psychology*, 31 (2), 110-111.

## **Announcements**

### **AAC&U Meetings and Events**

AAC&U sponsors a variety of continuing programs—meetings, workshops, and summer institutes for campus teams—that bring together college educators from across institutional types, disciplines, and departments. AAC&U activities nurture the talents and creativity of higher education's current and future leaders. Attendees of recent meetings have described them as powerful and transformative—providing participants with innovative ideas and practices, and shaping the direction of their educational reform efforts.

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