



# Classroom Survey of Student Engagement

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## Working with CLASSE data

This guide provides suggestions for understanding, interpreting and using CLASSE data to facilitate conversations on improving the quality of teaching and learning in a specific module.<sup>1</sup>

## Purpose of CLASSE

CLASSE is a pair of survey instruments that provides information on engagement practices in a single module. The two surveys are administered among students (CLASSE<sub>Student</sub>) and the lecturer (CLASSE<sub>Lecturer</sub>) of a specific module. CLASSE<sub>Student</sub> data offers quantitative information on the time and effort students spend on educationally purposeful activities. CLASSE<sub>Lecturer</sub> data allows lecturers the opportunity to reflect on how important they consider effective educational practices to be in their module. Therefore CLASSE data can be used to improve teaching and learning practices, with the ultimate goal of improving student success rates.

## How the CLASSE data can be used

One of the most important ways in which the data can be used is to identify student behaviours that occur with below average frequency, but that the lecturer considers to be important for academic success.

## The importance of student engagement

Research that shows that engagement, the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities, is the best single predictor of their learning and personal development. Certain institutional practices lead to higher levels of student engagement. The best known set of engagement indicators is the “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,”<sup>2</sup> These indicators include

1. student-faculty contact
2. cooperation among students
3. active learning
4. prompt feedback
5. time on task

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<sup>1</sup> Module can refer to a subject or a specific course depending on the terms that are used in a specific institution.

<sup>2</sup> Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3-7.

6. high expectations
7. respect for diverse talents and ways of learning

Emphasising good educational practice helps focus faculty, staff, students, and others on the tasks and activities that are associated with higher yields in terms of desired student learning outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

## Data-reporting opportunities

CLASSE data can be used in various ways, such as:<sup>4</sup>

- Module evaluations
- Improvement of teaching and learning
- Monitoring learning outcomes at module level
- Informing improvement efforts
- Supporting student learning and development
- Facilitating student retention and engagement
- Monitoring academic standards
- Guiding staff development efforts
- Improving internal communication
- Accountability and transparency
- Managing resources, programs, and services

## Using CLASSE data to facilitate conversation

### Respondent characteristics

The Respondent Characteristics Report provides details of the demographic profile of the CLASSE<sub>Student</sub> sample. Reflecting on the demographics of students can help lecturers to think about whether different groups in their courses have different experiences and different needs and how these needs can be addressed.

### Frequency distribution

The Frequency Distribution for the CLASSE report is based on the responses of students in the specific module. The frequency (count and percentage) on each item is given for the overall sample of students. The frequency of student response options can be compared to lecturer ratings to determine whether students participate to the extent required important by the lecturer.

### Quadrant analysis

The CLASSE data is displayed by means of a quadrant analysis.

The CLASSE<sub>Lecturer</sub> importance results are represented on the vertical axis. The two upper quadrants represent items that lecturers valued as either important or very important. The

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Page 2 of *Working with NSSE Data: A Facilitator's Guide*. (2010). Available at [nsse.iub.edu/links/facilitators\\_guide](https://nsse.iub.edu/links/facilitators_guide)

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from *Working with NSSE Data: A Facilitator's Guide*. (2010). Available at [nsse.iub.edu/links/facilitators\\_guide](https://nsse.iub.edu/links/facilitators_guide)

two lower quadrants represent items that lecturers valued as either somewhat important or not important.

The CLASSE<sub>Student</sub> average frequency results are displayed on the horizontal axis. The two left-hand quadrants represent items that students participated in at below average frequency. The two right-hand quadrants represent items that students participated in at above average frequency.

If the practices that staff value as important and those that students perform often are aligned, all of the CLASSE items would fall into the upper right and lower left quadrants (see Figure 1).

### Quadrant Analysis

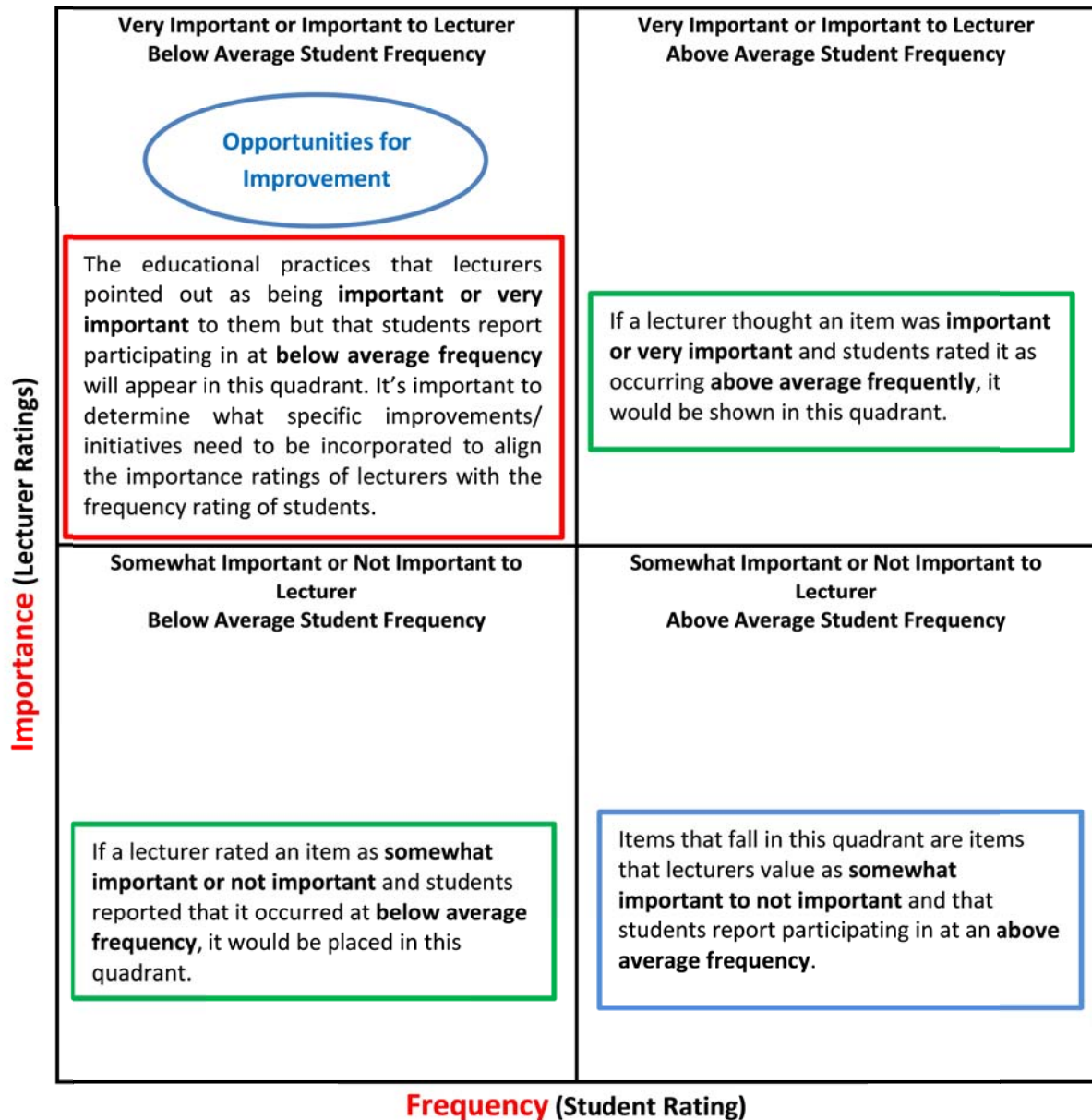


Figure 1: Quadrant analysis

## Important to remember

Student engagement data collected by the CLASSE is intended to be a diagnostic tool. The CLASSE data should not be interpreted on its own, but should be combined with other institutional data, as well as literature on improving effective educational activities.

### Guidelines for a staff development conversation<sup>5</sup>

**1. Make sure lecturers and staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement**

Staff who are less familiar with assessment in general and the concept of student engagement in particular should be convinced of the value of CLASSE results for improving teaching and learning. The section on the importance of student engagement can help in this regard.

**2. Understand what CLASSE data represents and use the results wisely**

Understand that CLASSE measures student engagement in a specific class and at a specific time. These results cannot be generalised to all the staff members' teaching responsibilities, but should rather be viewed as an opportunity to encourage reflection within a specific context.

**3. Report CLASSE data in a responsible way and make sure staff see the numbers in context**

Use CLASSE data to encourage staff to make improvements. Techniques can be found in *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*.<sup>6</sup> Use Appendix 1 to prepare and frame a positive conversation around teaching and learning improvement.

**4. Link CLASSE results to other institutional and evaluation data relating to the student learning experience**

Student engagement data is most valuable when combined with other evaluation data. This can take the form of module evaluation data or qualitative evaluation data of the student learning experience in the module.

**5. Don't go it alone**

Encourage staff to share CLASSE results with each other and to form or join conversations of faculty groups or communities focusing on improving teaching and learning. The positive impact of CLASSE results will be multiplied if the data can be used by groups of staff that are working on improvement efforts around campus.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Using NSSE Data. Available at [http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/Using\\_NSSE\\_Data.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/Using_NSSE_Data.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Barkley, E.F. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## APPENDIX 1

### Becoming a Better Teacher: Principles That Make Improvement a Positive Process

By: Maryellen Weimer, PhD in Faculty Development

*Editor's note: These principles don't propose breathtakingly new insights, but they offer a context for improvement that should make efforts to teach better more successful.*

- **IMPROVEMENT IS NOT A DIRTY WORD**—All teachers can improve; most should. Don't base efforts on premises of remediation and deficiency. Positive premises work just as well. You can improve your teaching just as effectively doing more of what works well as you can by seeking to eliminate weaknesses.
- **FOCUS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ON ENCOURAGING MORE AND BETTER LEARNING FOR STUDENTS**—Asking if a teacher wants to improve often engenders a defensive response (more evidence of premises of remediation and a motivation to improve driven by the need to fix problems). Asking if a teacher cares how much and how well students learn engenders positive responses, even from curmudgeons. Take what is known about learning (much is) and work to figure out the instructional implications of that theory and research. Ask yourself this question: If a teacher aspired to teach in ways that promoted learning, what would that teacher do about instructional nuts and bolts such as assignments, classroom policies, and presentational approaches?
- **DON'T TRIVIALIZE WHAT'S INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS**—Stop thinking quick fixes, techniques, and training. The "just-do-it" approach toward instructional change doesn't cut it. Discovering a good technique and attaching it to whatever's happening in class tomorrow trivializes the complex interplay of variables that contribute to success in the classroom. Effective, sustainable change rests on careful planning and a systematic, thoughtful approach to change.
- **RECOGNIZE THE ROLE OF LEARNING IN THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS**—Most faculty aren't trained to teach, and norms expecting ongoing growth and development are not strong. As a result, most of what we know about teaching we have learned by doing—not by study, analysis, and careful reflection. Most faculty are surprised when they discover how much can be learned by reading, by encountering research and theory, and by thoughtful analysis. Part of what makes this learning motivating and satisfying is that class time tomorrow (or sometime soon) offers an opportunity to apply that new knowledge. Most of us love to learn, and seeing teaching and learning as new material to master can make teaching a source of intellectual intrigue.
- **PERSONHOOD IS EXPRESSED THROUGH TEACHING**—We do teach content and we do teach students, but just as surely we teach who we are. Conduct in and out of the classroom conveys important messages about values, beliefs, and attitudes. Because students respond to us as people, because teaching reveals something about us as human beings, it leaves us vulnerable, open, exposed, and thereby able to be hurt. It's an occupational hazard for which we don't get extra pay or protection. But it also

affords opportunity—the chance to be valued and confirmed as a person, to be honored and respected. This means that better teaching isn't always about learning the content better. It isn't always about the acquisition of new techniques. Sometimes it's about being a better person.

- **IMPROVEMENT BEGINS AND ENDS WITH THE FACULTY MEMBER**—You play the central role in the improvement process. Others may try to motivate. They may threaten (no merit raise if you don't improve). They may cajole (your students deserve it). They may try to persuade (your students will learn more if you do it this way). But they cannot implement one change in your classroom . . . you alone can do that. In the same way that you can't learn anything for your students, nobody can improve your teaching for you. It's something done by you, for you (and for your students).
- **FORMATIVE FEEDBACK GUARANTEES THE INTEGRITY OF THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS**—Teachers need diagnostic, descriptive details that help them understand the impact of their policies, practices, and behaviors on student learning. The systems used by most institutions to evaluate instruction fail to provide this kind of feedback. This failure is a good news/bad news scenario. The bad news is that most institutions could (and should) be doing better. This is an area in which much useful research has been conducted. The good news is that you can step in and make the process work for you. You can ask students about the impact of a particular assignment, activity, practice, exam, or reading on their learning. You can ask questions about the impact of any aspect of instruction on learning. You should be asking about many of these aspects if you want to make wise and well-informed decisions about improvement.
- **SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS**—Too often we expect perfection. In order to be “good,” a classroom activity has to thoroughly engage and involve every single student. It has to work every time we use it, regardless of class level and content. Anything less than complete success means the activity is flawed or we have failed. Realistically, however, anything we do or try in the class is going to have mixed results. Although aspirations to perfection are lofty, they aren't very realistic, at least for most of us.
- **SEE TEACHING EXCELLENCE AS A CAREER-LONG QUEST**—Don't expect to finally get it right or to permanently achieve an exemplary level of teaching excellence. Once you think you've arrived, the journey is over. It's the quest for teaching excellence that motivates, inspires, and satisfies. Find pleasure in your travels. Once you reach one destination, leave shortly for yet another interesting place.

Reprinted from Principles That Make Improvement a Positive Process. (2005). *The Teaching Professor*, 19.10, 5. <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/faculty-development/principles-that-make-improvement-a-positive-process/>