

# **Inclusion and respect when evaluating teaching**

## **SALC support materials**

August 2019

The School of Arts, Language and Cultures is committed to high-quality teaching and to ensuring this teaching takes place in an inclusive and respectful environment. Indeed, we believe that a supportive and constructive environment is essential to making teaching and learning a meaningful, enjoyable, and expansive experience.

Gathering information about student satisfaction is important for various reasons and purposes, but must be treated with recognition of flaws in this data. For some time now, SALC colleagues have been raising concerns about bias in teaching evaluations through the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Teaching and Learning (T&L) channels. In 2018-19, the use of unit surveys was no longer deemed compulsory in the criteria for academic promotion in the Faculty of Humanities, however the required CV format still mandated submission of survey data. We hope that this will be addressed for the promotion round of 2019-20.

The aim of this small set of resources is to raise awareness of issues related to student evaluations of teaching. In particular, it offers staff members some texts that they can use when speaking to students about these evaluations and suggests some materials that course conveners or programme directors may want to incorporate into courses or induction materials. There is no obligation to make use of these resources, but we recognise that as long as we continue to use teaching evaluations we need to do more to support staff in managing them.

Please talk to your mentor, (senior) colleagues, or Programme Director if you would like support when reviewing evaluations. Sometimes having someone with you when you open them can help with the potential emotional impact that can come with receiving feedback. If you have any concerns about the substance or wording of specific comments please seek advice from your Head of Department; the SALC Director of Teaching, Learning and Students; or the SALC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead, as you feel most comfortable.

We hope you find this useful and would welcome ideas about what else we might include, discuss, or do.

### **List of resources**

1. Introduction on bias in teaching evaluations
2. Paragraph for inclusion in programme and course handbooks
3. Prompts and resources related to diversity in the classroom
4. Suggested teaching activities on evaluations
5. Bibliography

SALC Equality & Diversity website: <https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/salc/meetings-committees/equality-and-diversity-committee/>

## On bias in teaching evaluations

Research on the problems with student evaluations of teaching, often referred to at the University of Manchester as unit surveys or unit evaluation questionnaires, is manifold. While results can be equivocal, a recent meta-study found no correlation between student evaluations of teaching and student performance – that is, students do not learn more from teachers who receive higher scores in evaluations (Uttle, White and Gonzalez, 2017). One controlled study found that, to quote, ‘The provision of chocolate cookies had a significant effect on course evaluation’ (Hessler et al, 2018).

However, there has been a correlation between evaluations and gender of teaching staff: instructors perceived as female were given lower scores on evaluations than those perceived as male (Macnell, Driscoll and Hunt, 2014; Boring, Ottoboni and Stark, 2016). The word ‘brilliant’ appears more often in evaluations of male teachers and the word ‘strict’ in evaluations of female teachers (Lilienfeld, 2016). Sociological research suggests that women and minority professors have to work harder to meet student expectations by overcoming unconscious bias and ‘presumption of incompetence’ in first impressions (Lazos, 2012). Researchers have therefore concluded that using evaluations in recruitment and promotions decision may put female staff members at a disadvantage (Wagner, Rieger and Voorvelt, 2016). Low response rates, seen in non-compulsory surveys as at Manchester, further increase difficulties of interpretation, however most universities are not in a position to systematically address this selection bias when interpreting results (Goons and Salomons, 2017).

## Paragraph for inclusion in course and programme handbooks

Below is some text that you may choose to adopt or adapt for course and programme materials. Here are the principles behind it:

- Expecting respectful communications;
- Emphasising reflection not reaction;
- Focusing feedback on being substantive, constructive and not personalised;
- Introducing students to why this matters.

*The data on student satisfaction with teaching are important, but they are also flawed. A significant body of research has demonstrated that student evaluations are biased against certain groups, most prominently (but not exclusively) women and ethnic and racial minorities. Like the feedback you receive on your work, the comments will be most effective if they reflect on the substance of your experience of the course – what helped you to learn and what obstacles there were – and avoid personalising or generalising. As with all communications at the University, we expect feedback in Unit Surveys to be provided in a respectful, professional, and constructive manner.*

By way of context: it has been written with the UG Programme Handbook in mind, added to the section on Course Unit/Programme Evaluation (5.1). You may wish to place it elsewhere. We have also added a note in the section on communication within the School (7.3).

## Diversity and inclusivity in the classroom

While UoM has plenty of resources and training to support professional development in teaching, few of them are at present focused on how to discuss diversity in the classroom, particularly from the point of view of students' perceptions of their teachers.

In March 2018 SALC hosted a workshop for teachers (academic staff and teaching assistants) to explore experiences of unconscious bias in the classroom. Below are some of the questions that participants reflected on:

- What are the reasons you teach?
- What expectations do you think students have of university teachers?
- What do you think students see in you when you teach?
- How consciously do you position yourself in the classroom?
- What kind of cultural knowledge can we each contribute in the classroom?
- Do you speak to students about how to be inclusive in discussions?
- How can we be inclusive without spotlighting identity?

Discussions returned frequently to the idea that there is no set way of doing things, but that taking time to reflect on these issues is important if we are to create more inclusive environments for teachers of different profiles as well as students with a range of backgrounds. The resources below include some practical ideas on questions to think about, habits to avoid, and how to hold challenging conversations in the classroom.

### Online resources

- University of Michigan, Centre for Research on Teaching and Learning (CRLT) pages on Inclusive Teaching Resources and Strategies: <http://crlt.umich.edu/multicultural-teaching/inclusive-teaching-strategies>
- Harvard University, Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning pages on Inclusive Teaching: <https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/inclusive-teaching>
- University College London Inclusive Teaching Toolkit: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/inclusive-teaching-toolkit>
- Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit: <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/learning-teaching/>
- University of Manchester page on Inclusive Teaching and Learning Materials: <https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/policy-guidance/teaching-and-learning/learning/inclusive-materials/>
- University of Manchester, Faculty of Humanities Teaching Assistant Hub: <https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/humanities/teaching-support/ta-hub/>

## Suggested teaching activities on evaluations

In the context of the student evaluations of teaching, you may wish to include some of these resources and activities in seminars, in course handbooks, and/or on Blackboard. The most appropriate times may be in welcome week or in week 11, when the course surveys go live. Discussion of biases in teaching evaluations could sit amongst the main methods course of the programme.

### Discussion activities

- Taking an Implicit Association Test, through Harvard's Project Implicit (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>). This will require your students to have access to a computer with a keyboard.
- Explore the vocabulary used to describe instructors at US universities at <http://benschmidt.org/profGender/>.
- Discuss one of the articles or blog posts linked in the resources section of Blackboard. The two most-digestible are Eva Liliénfeld, 'How Student Evaluations Are Skewed against Women and Minority Professors' (<https://tcf.org/content/commentary/student-evaluations-skewed-women-minority-professors>) and William Huntsberry, 'How We Talk About Our Teachers' (<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/02/23/386001328/how-we-talk-about-our-teachers>)
- Watch a selection of the (very brief) 'What, Me? Biased?' videos produced by the New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/video/who-me-biased>)
- Ask students to write down their feedback and reflect on what they will say, rather than quickly filling in the form.

### Blogs, podcasts, websites and videos

Boring, Anne, Kellie Ottoboni and Philip B. Stark (2016). 'Student evaluations of teaching are not only unreliable, they are significantly biased against female instructors.' LSE Impact Blog, available at:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/02/04/student-evaluations-of-teaching-gender-bias/>

Huntsberry, William, 'How We Talk About Our Teachers'

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/02/23/386001328/how-we-talk-about-our-teachers?auto=format?auto=format&t=1542128349450>

Liliénfeld, Eva, 'How Student Evaluations Are Skewed against Women and Minority Professors.' The Century Foundation, available at:

<https://tcf.org/content/commentary/student-evaluations-skewed-women-minority-professors/?session=1>

Project Implicit, <http://www.projectimplicit.net/>

Project Implicit, Implicit Awareness Tests, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Savonick, Danica and Cathy N. Davidson (2017). Gender Bias in Academe: An Annotated Bibliography of Important Recent Studies. LSE Impact Blog, available at:

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/03/08/gender-bias-in-academe-an-annotated-bibliography/>

Schmid, B., 'Gendered Language in Teacher Reviews', <http://benschmidt.org/profGender/>

Who, Me? Biased? <https://www.nytimes.com/video/who-me-biased>

See also academic research in the bibliography.

Thank you to the History Department for sharing these materials.

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