Policy for
STUDENT RATINGS OF INSTRUCTION

1.0 Policy Statement

Student ratings of instruction are part of a broad strategy for continuous improvement in learning and teaching at Dalhousie University. Student Ratings of Instruction (SRI) are undertaken through a systematic process for all courses where appropriate. A subset of questions will be common to all instructors. Provision will be made for secure student access to the summary results of those questions.

2.0 Guiding Principles

2.1 Student Ratings of Instruction are part of an overall system to support the improvement of learning and teaching at Dalhousie University.

2.2 Student feedback on instruction is an essential part of the system.

2.3 The effectiveness of the SRI process requires ongoing education of its goals, procedures and on the interpretation and application of results.

2.4 The rights and dignity of students and instructors shall be protected during the rating process, including the processes and practices to collect data and disseminate results.

2.5 The identities of students shall be protected.

2.6 All instructors have the opportunity to choose to participate in making their summary results available to students;

2.7 The process and results shall be accessible to both students and instructors, subject to item 4.0 below.

3.0 Policy Goals

3.1 Engage students in the process of continuous improvement of students’ educational experience.

3.2 Demonstrate accountability through the provision of student access to summary data on student ratings of instruction.

3.3 Provide instructors with student feedback data on their teaching performance.
3.4 Provide students with data about student perceptions of the quality of teaching.

3.5 Provide departments, faculty and the university with data to support instructor evaluation, awards and recognition.

3.6 Provide departments, faculties and the university with data to support evaluation of programs, departments and institutions.

4.0 Dissemination of SRI Results

Student ratings of instruction results shall be disseminated as follows:

4.1 Student Ratings of Instruction results for all questions shall be made available to instructors for each course taught in which there are five or more students enrolled and for which five or more responses are received.

4.2 Results shall be made available to instructors only after they have submitted final marks for the course in which they are being rated.

4.3 Unsigned qualitative comments and signed comments with the students’ signatures removed are provided to the instructor.

4.4 Department chairs, program heads or their equivalents in academic units will have access to the results from the common questions and the signed qualitative comments on the student ratings of instruction form.

4.5 Deans will receive a summary of the results of the commons questions on the SRI for each instructor in their Faculty.

4.6 Only the results from the common questions and signed comments from the qualitative responses will be used for tenure and promotion purposes.

4.7 The results of the common questions asked in the student ratings of instruction process shall be made available to students through a secure on-line portal in accordance with privacy regulations stipulated by the Office of the University Counsel and related collective agreements. No results will be released without the consent of the instructor.

4.8 The results of the common questions accessible to students for each course taught by a specific instructor will be based on the cumulative SRI results for up to the three most recent terms in which an instructor has given consent to provide results to students.
For confidentiality and reliability purposes the results referenced in item 4.5 above will be released to students where the results are from classes with ten (10) or more responses and from classes with response rates of forty (40) percent or greater.

Faculties and Departments shall make the student ratings of instruction available to the Vice-President Academic and Provost upon request.

5.0 Responsibilities

5.1 Students:
Dalhousie students are expected to provide constructive and honest feedback to an instructor which is intended to improve the quality of instruction of an instructor in future years. Students are also expected to be aware of the complexities of teaching and learning. The summary results from the common SRI questions, although valuable, provides only a partial picture of teaching and learning effectiveness.

5.2 Instructors:
Individuals teaching at Dalhousie are responsible to familiarize themselves with the SRI process and to ensure that student feedback mechanisms, of which the SRI is one, are built into their courses. Instructors have a responsibility to convey to students the importance of their participation in the SRI process. Instructors are encouraged to advise students at least one week in advance as to when the SRI process will occur.

5.3 Faculties and Departments:
Deans, academic directors, and department heads are to ensure the SRI process is administered consistently in all courses where it is appropriate. They are also expected to counsel and mentor instructors about their participation in the SRI process especially those in their early years of teaching or those without tenure. Identifying support and access to teaching development resources is part of mentoring. Deans, Chairs and Heads shall also encourage Faculty members’ use of the customizable sections of the SRI.

5.4 Senate:
The Dalhousie University Senate will ensure that the SRI instrument and processes are regularly reviewed. The Senate will periodically assess the intended outcome of the policy which is to contribute to continual improvement of learning and teaching at the University.
5.5 University Administration:
The Unit responsible for administering the SRI instrument shall report to the Vice-President Academic and Provost on the following metrics:

- Number of courses where the SRI instrument is used;
- Uptake levels on each component of the instrument;
- Number of students responding;
- Number of courses that have SRI results accessible to students;
- Number of times the student SRI website has been accessed.

The Unit shall also advise the University on any emerging issues and/or on refinements of the instrument to improve content or process. The Vice-President Academic and Provost shall report annually to Senate on teaching quality, effectiveness, and evaluation, and on the extent to which the University is meeting its learning and teaching goals. The Vice-President Academic and Provost will support education and communications to the Dalhousie community on the policy and procedures.
The Centre for Learning and Teaching administers the Student Ratings of Instruction program, including the collection, results compilation, distribution and archiving of data.

The Student Ratings of Instruction (SRI) form is comprised of four sections:

**Section A** contains a set of common questions that are asked across all courses for which SRI data are collected. The questions provide information on student perceptions of the effectiveness of the instructor’s teaching;

**Section B** contains optional customized questions developed by an academic unit for purposes of program improvement;

**Section C** contains optional questions selected by the instructor for purposes of receiving formative feedback, with results provided only to the instructor; and,

**Section D** collects data in the form of student written comments. This section provides students the opportunity to respond in writing to several open-ended questions. Only data from signed responses may be used for promotion and tenure purposes. Unsigned comments are received by the instructor only.

(A copy of the SRI form may be downloaded from: [http://learningandteaching.dal.ca/sri_forms.html](http://learningandteaching.dal.ca/sri_forms.html))

### 1.0 Data Collection Procedure for Student Ratings of Instruction

The Centre for Learning and Teaching receives a preliminary list of all courses and instructors compiled from Banner data.

Academic units will designate a liaison person who will facilitate the SRI process in his/her unit. This person will be asked by the Centre for Learning and Teaching to verify a preliminary list of all courses/instructors teaching in the term. This verification process occurs shortly after the last add/drop date in the term.

**Paper Version:**

Distribution and collection of the SRI forms will be administered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching. For each instructor/course combination, the Centre for Learning and Teaching prepares an envelope that contains a
questionnaire for each registered student in the course. These envelopes are delivered to each academic unit. There will be one envelope for each instructor teaching in a course (i.e., a course taught by two instructors will have two envelopes). When multiple instructors are involved, the decision to administer the SRI will be made in collaboration with the academic unit head.

Although instructors are encouraged to indicate early in the term the value of SRI process, SRI feedback is sought during the latter part of term, normally after three quarters of the course has been competed. In most cases, the instructor will determine in which class the SRI process will occur. It is highly recommended that this feedback process occur prior to the last week of classes and that instructors announce, at least one week in advance, the date that the SRI will be administered.

On the day the questionnaires are administered, the Instructor, a designated student or someone otherwise designated by the academic unit will pick up the course envelope containing the SRI forms from the assigned Academic Unit office and bring it to the class.

The instructor (or designate) will convey to students the importance of their participation in the SRI process. The instructor will leave the room for the full duration of the SRI process including the collection of the student forms. Prior to leaving the room the instructor will ensure a student is appointed from the course (or someone may designated by the academic unit) to oversee the process. The designated person will read the standard SRI instructions to the class and administer the SRI process following a standard protocol that is printed on each envelope.

The person assigned to oversee the process will:

  i) Ensure all forms are placed in the envelope;
  ii) Seal the envelope; and sign across the seal
  iii) Deliver the envelope to the assigned liaison person for the academic unit.

The liaison person in the academic unit is responsible for collecting and returning all envelopes to the Centre for Learning and Teaching, after removing the written comments forms, if applicable.

**On-Line Version:**

Currently, an on-line version of the SRI is available to instructors teaching on-line courses. In these courses, the procedure is as follows:

Department liaisons are asked to provide lists of courses which require online evaluations. A request is made to the Data Requests Office of Banner for the
student emails for each of these courses. The CLT does not receive names or Banner numbers for the students, thus, protecting anonymity. Distribution of the online surveys is administered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching. For each instructor/course combination, The Centre for Learning and Teaching sets up an online survey in Opinio, using a template modelled on the paper version. The questions are identical to the paper surveys. There is a survey for each instructor teaching in a course (i.e., a course taught by two instructors will have two surveys.)

The surveys are delivered in the same time frame as the paper versions, except when alternate dates are requested by the department (some online courses follow a different timeline). Start and stop dates are defined in the survey.

On the day the survey opens, an email invitation is sent to registered students, containing a dedicated link to their personal survey. Once the survey has been started, it may not be re-opened. Should a student fail to start and/or complete the survey, up to five reminders are delivered by email, until the survey is completed by the student or closed by date.

The students in the course are given the opportunity to provide written comments on the course, using the same model as the paper versions. The instructor receives all comments that are typed into the survey. The comments portion of these reports does not contain any information about the identity of the students. Presently, in order to have the comments provided to the department or school for inclusion in the personal file of the instructor, the students must print their completed comment forms (Section D), sign them, and mail them to the Centre for Learning and Teaching. The signed forms are collated by CLT and delivered as confidential documents to the Department liaison persons.

Once the surveys are closed, the data is exported to the Student Ratings of Instruction database, and the standard reports are generated for the instructors, Departments, and Deans.

(A note regarding electronic versions of the SRI: Although the Opinio strategy works well for a relatively small number of on-line courses participating in the SRI process, it is not a scalable solution for the electronic capture of SRI data. In the near future, it is anticipated that Dalhousie University will implement an in-class system for the electronic capture of SRI results. This system will be designed to maintain the robust response rates of paper-based collection strategies with the considerable advantages of directly inputting data in an electronic format.)
2.0 Dissemination of Student Ratings of Instruction Data to Instructors and Academic Administrators

The summary results from the SRI process are distributed to Instructors and their academic administrators as follows:

INSTRUCTORS: For each course taught in which there are five or more students enrolled and for which five or more responses are received, instructors receive SRI results from the following sections of the SRI questionnaire:

Section A: Common questions;
Section B: Academic Unit customized questions;
Section C: Instructor-customized questions;
Section D: Open-ended question section. A copy of all student comments removing student attribution (i.e. student name and student number) is provided to the Instructor. (Note: The Instructor will receive either a typed version of the comments or photocopies of originals with all student signatures and student numbers deleted.)

Following submission of Instructors’ student grades to the Registrar’s Office, the Centre for Learning and Teaching shall distribute a report on the student ratings of instruction to instructors for Sections A, B, C, and D.

The Instructor shall receive:

1. A “Student Ratings of Instruction Report” on the results obtained from Section A of the SRI questionnaire. This summative report will provide the following data for each question asked:
   - Mean for the course
   - Department mean
   - Standard deviation for the class
   - Lowest mean for a course in the department
   - Highest mean for a course in the department
   - Number of respondents selecting each of the available categories: Very Poor, Poor, Satisfactory, Good, Excellent, or No Response

The report also contains a bar graph that depicts the distribution of response for the instructor’s course (as a percentage of all responses in this course) and for the department (as a percentage of all responses in all participating courses).

The report form clearly indicates the course number and the academic year, term, Faculty, and department/school in which the course was
taught. The instructor report also provides information on total enrolments for the course, the number of respondents, and response rates.

2. **Copies of all written comments without student attribution** which were obtained from the Student Ratings of Instruction - Section D - response to open-ended questions. At no time will student names, student signatures, or student Banner numbers be made available to an instructor. Instructors will receive (depending on the option chosen by their academic unit) either a typed version of the comments or photocopies of originals with all student signatures and student numbers deleted.)

**Dissemination to Instructors and Academic Administrators:** The results of each section of the SRI questionnaire will be made available to academic staff as follows (also see Appendix A- Summary of the Dissemination of results of the SRI Process to Stakeholders):

Section A: The results for the common questions will be made available to instructors, department heads/chairs, program unit heads, directors of schools, and deans.

Other senior academic administrators (as defined in the terms of the collective agreement between the University and the Dalhousie Faculty Association) may make a request in writing to the Centre for Learning and Teaching to receive the results of section A for any participating instructor.

Section B: The results for Faculty/department/school developed questions will be made available to instructors and to the relevant department heads/chairs, program unit heads or directors of schools. Results from Section B will not be used for tenure and promotion purposes.

Section C: Results from Section C are confidential and provided **exclusively** to the instructor of the course. Results from Section C will **not** be made available to Deans, Academic Directors, Department Chairs/Heads, or Program/Units Heads.

Section D: Signed copies of student written comments are available to Deans, Academic Directors, Department Chairs/Heads, and Program/Unit Heads. Unsigned student comments are available **only** to the instructor. Unsigned student comments are **not** available to Deans, Academic Directors, Department Chairs/Heads, or Program/Unit Heads.

All original signed copies of student written comments will be maintained in a secure and confidential file within the office of the chair/head and are not available to the instructor as per Article 18.11 of the Collective Agreement between the Board of Governors of Dalhousie University and the Dalhousie Faculty Association 2007-2011.)
3.0 Dissemination of Student Ratings of Instruction Data to Students

Under the conditions outlined in section 3 below, students will have access, via a secure website, to the results for the common questions 1-8 for those Instructors who have given their permission to make their results available to students. Only instructors who give their permission to have their data included will appear on the student access page. Only registered students at Dalhousie University with an assigned student “Banner” number may access the password protected SRI results site.

Conditions to make SRI results accessible to students:

SRI summary data for items 1-8 for individual instructors and courses will be made available to students via a secure website when:

- The instructor has given permission for these results to be made available to students;
- When course student response rates are forty (40) per cent or higher; and,
- Where course size is ten (10) students or more.

Exclusions from the student accessible SRI summary reporting site may also occur under the following conditions:

- Where an instructor is in his/her first three years of teaching;
- In contexts where the evaluation of teaching using the SRI instrument may not be appropriate such as clinical teaching or where courses are team taught or taught by multiple instructors;
- On the recommendation of an instructor’s department head or chair.

Conditions for the use of SRI results by students:

- SRI student reports are provided for the use of Dalhousie University students only.
- The distribution of this information in any form is strictly prohibited.

4.0 Procedure for Instructors to Enable their SRI Results from Section A to be viewed by Dalhousie University Students

Instructors will give permission to make their SRI results for items 1-8 accessible to students by completing a signed Permission Form for each course they teach. This form will indicate approval to make their summary SRI data from items 1-8 of Section A, (Common Questions) accessible to Dalhousie University students through the secure on-line student access
system, subject to the conditions in Section 3 above. The form requires the signature of the Instructor.

The SRI student access page will report the cumulative SRI results up to the three most recent offerings of a course (but not exceeding a five year period) in which an instructor has given consent to provide results to students for a particular class. The SRI Student Access page will be searchable by either class number or instructor.

As part of the Instructor permission process, instructors will be invited to provide up to 400 characters of text that will appear on the SRI student access page as a message to prospective students. The message can take many forms and might include a description of the course content, the kinds of learning experiences students can expect, or feedback about the course from former students.

The permission form shall be returned to the identified liaison person for the instructor’s academic unit in both print and electronic formats. The departmental liaison person, who is responsible for the compilation and administration of the permission process, will be given access to the department’s courses in the online database and would be given system rights to release the data for the instructors who give permission to make their results available to students, along with the contents of any text box submitted. This person will also maintain a file of the original signed forms.

This agreement process is repeated each term for each course.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning will administer the process whereby the SRI data will be made available to students through a secure portal for all instructors who have given permission for their specified SRI results to be accessible to students. The Centre for Learning and Teaching will have access to all files associated with the SRI data base.

As part of the move to electronic capture, it is anticipated that this Permission Form component of the system will be completed directly by each instructor.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this policy the following definitions shall be utilized:

**Instructor**: includes all faculty members, including part time and sessional faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants who take on substantial responsibility for teaching a course. This information about who is to be evaluated using the SRI process is provided by each academic unit.
Student Ratings of Instruction (SRI): refers to the systematic collection of student feedback on the quality of learning and teaching in credit courses including a set of common questions used across all teaching units.

Student: an individual registered at Dalhousie University in credit course(s).

Course: shall be defined at the Faculty level and may include any unit of instruction for which academic credit is assigned.

Note: Dalhousie acknowledges the value of the University of British Columbia’s A Policy on Student Evaluation of Teaching (May 16, 2007) in providing a useful example and framework template
### Appendix A

**Summary of the Dissemination of Results of the SRI Process to Different Stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Part A (Common)</th>
<th>Part B (Program Customized)</th>
<th>Part C (Instructor Customized)</th>
<th>Part D (Qualitative Questions)</th>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Signed (with identifying information removed) and unsigned comments</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Deans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>X (Items 1-8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Under the terms of the collective agreement between the University and the Dalhousie Faculty Association, senior administrators may request, in writing, to the Centre for Learning and Teaching the results for Part A*