

Low Course Ratings: What Can You Learn From Them?

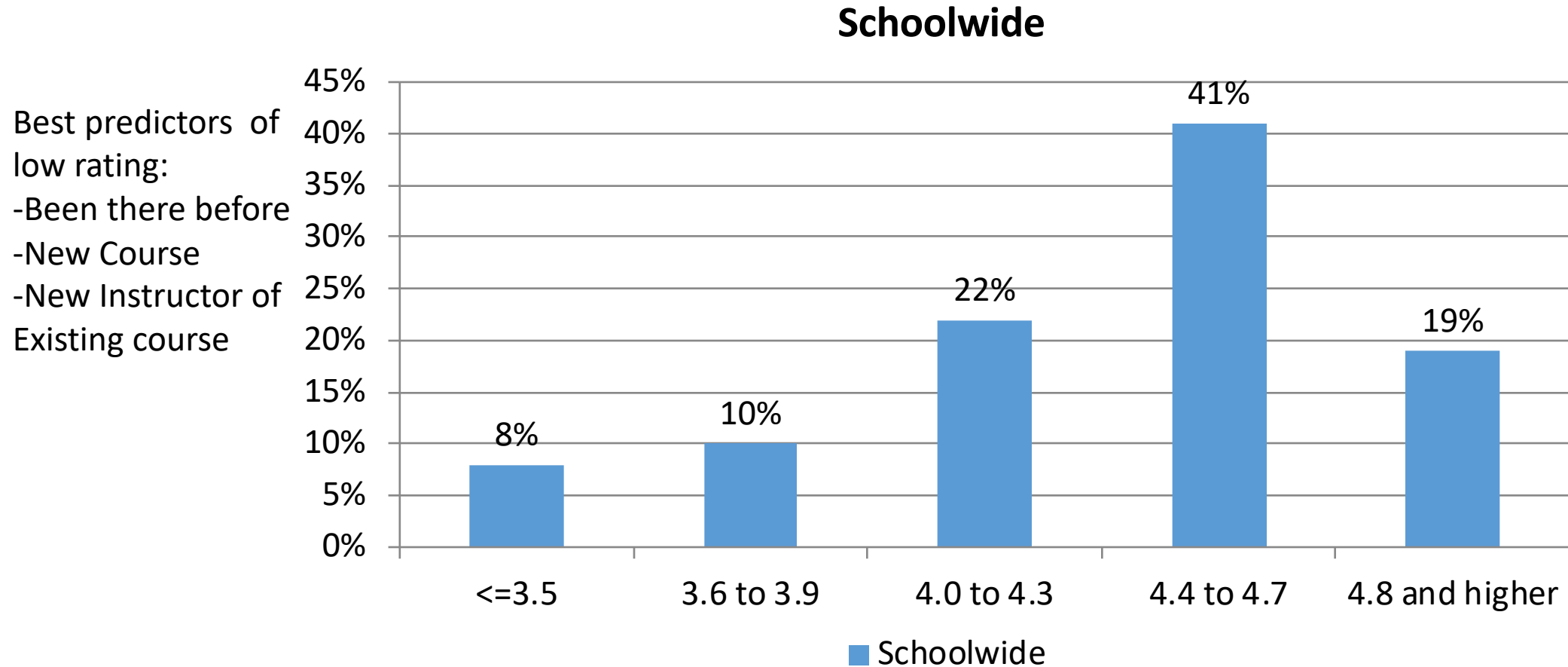
Nancy M. Kane
Professor of Management
Faculty Director, Case-Based Teaching and Learning Initiative

April 11, 2019

CEP Policy: Oversight of Course Evaluations

- **High Rating** is an overall rating of 4.8 or higher (on a five-point scale.) Instructors of courses that receive a high rating are sent a letter of congratulations from the chair of the CEP, and department chairs are notified of the course's high rating.
- **Very Large Course Rating** at or above 4.4 gets letter of congratulations
- **Low Rating** is an overall rating of 3.9 or lower (on a five-point scale.) Consistent poor course performance (as evidenced by student evaluations, peer review, and/or other means of course review) is subject to CEP oversight.
- The results of the previous year's online course evaluations and the exit survey are compiled into department education reports that are distributed by the Office of Education to department chairs in the fall.

AY 2018: Distribution of Courses by Overall Student Course Rating



Source: Course Evaluation Data

Scale: 1= very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = fair, 4 = good, 5 = excellent

When are Student Course Evaluations Most Likely to Lead to Course Improvement?

- Provide information to the instructor that s/he didn't already know
- Instructor is motivated to improve
- Instructor knows how to improve:
 - Self-help
 - Trusted colleague
 - Education specialist

The Source of Most Problems Apparent from Course Evaluations

- Degree program design
- Course design
- Course implementation

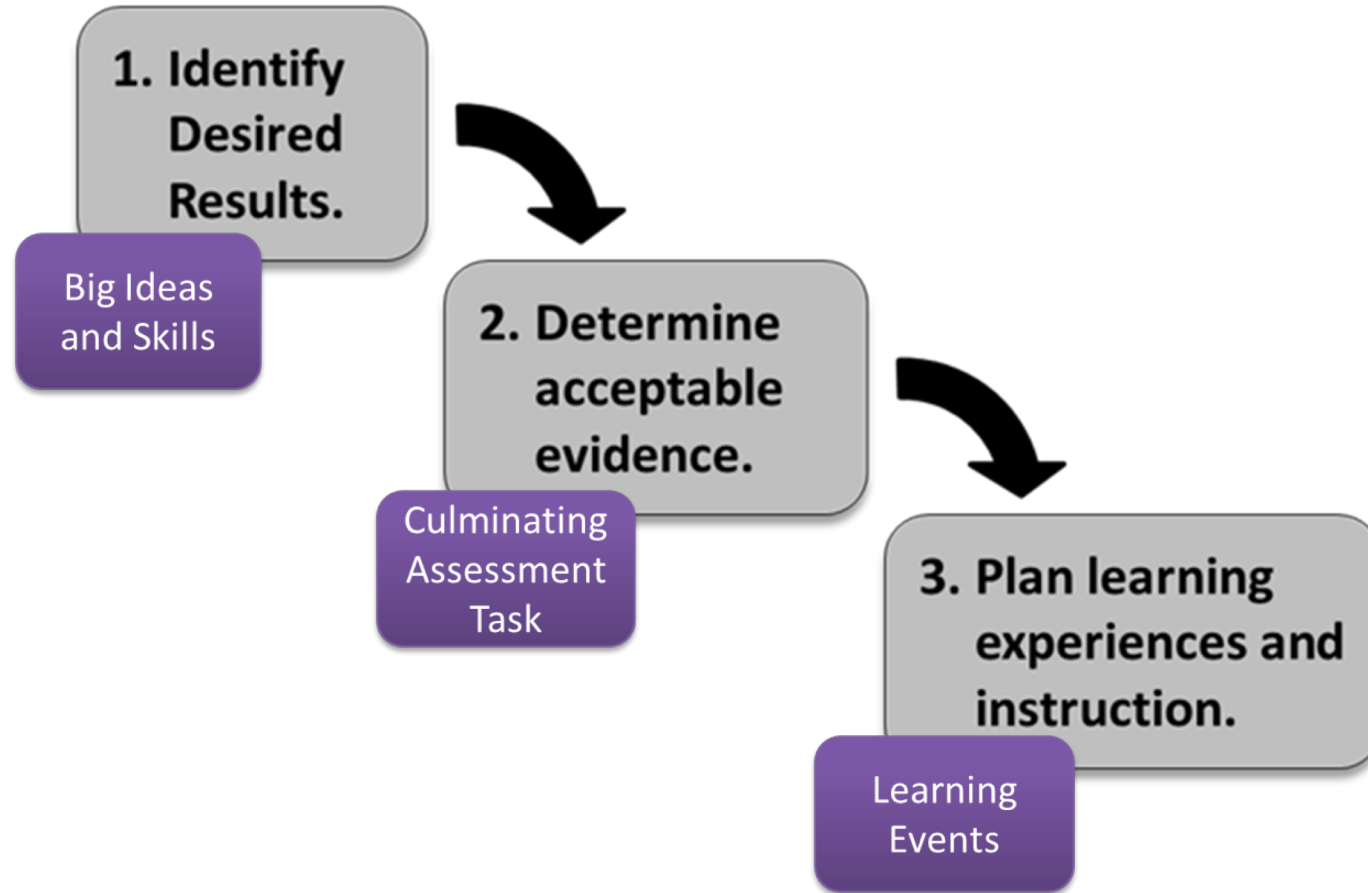
Degree Program Design

| Student Complaint: | Possible Steps to Take |
|---|--|
| <p>Number and/or mix of students (work experience, degree program, prior coursework):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-course is too introductory-course is too theoretical-course assumes knowledge I don't have-course requires technical skills (often, statistical software) I don't have-course is too big | <p>Review purpose of course offering with program director(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Target audience/admission requirements-Required vs elective- Term that course is offered (sequencing/prerequisites)-Additional resources to help less prepared students catch up (online, labs, TA sessions)-May need to redesign course with lower/higher level learning objectives and content |
| <p>Overlaps with other courses taken</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Syllabus Explorer course mapping software about to be launched-Review related course syllabi, meet with course instructors-Talk with Program Director about unique learning objectives |
| | |

Course Design

| Student Complaint: | Possible Steps to Take |
|--|--|
| Lacks adequate syllabus | Create full syllabus with readings, assignments, due dates, class activities <i>before</i> course begins |
| Learning objectives (LO) not clear or relevant | Review LO with program director, ensure that they are relevant and that all assignments and in-class activities are related to them |
| Course lacks an integrating framework | Look to key disciplinary frameworks, theories relevant to course learning objectives to build linkages across class sessions |
| Too much reading or assignments | Select only the one or two readings that best address the learning objectives of each session; emphasize well-designed assignment that demonstrates learning rather than quantity of work |
| Assignments not related to class content and/or learning objectives | Use “backward design” principles: start with learning objective, then figure out readings, assignments, in-class activities |
| Guest speakers not integrated into course framework or learning objectives | Be selective with speakers – good teachers as well as content masters; Describe learning objectives of the session and how you want them to be addressed; leave time for interaction, reflection |
| Lack opportunity for active engagement | Plan in-class activities that actively engage students; break lectures up with group activities, use discussions; “flip” classroom |
| Content is overly clinical | Unless you are teaching only clinicians, develop nonclinical examples of your disciplinary principles and theories; include glossary of clinical terms when used |

Backward Design



Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Course Implementation/Teaching

| Student Complaint | Possible Steps to Take |
|---|--|
| Class culture inhospitable to active engagement | Ask trusted colleague to observe class or review a videotape of the class with education specialist |
| Poor time management | Design a teaching plan for every class that includes LO, topics of class activity, activities themselves, allotted time for each activity |
| Poor discussion management | See above; most discussions require a plan; key skills: Question, Listen, Respond. Must be geared to LO |
| Inconsistent grading/unclear expectations | Design grading rubrics, share with students along with assignment. Practice grading with TAs. For participation grading, try Teachly! |
| Unresponsive to students | Provide email/office hours. Monitor email and respond to students during course within 24 hours. Pay especial attention during days before assignments, exams due (TA should also do this) |
| Insensitive language | Respond with open mind |
| Late, inadequate, or no feedback on assignments | Design assignments with timing for feedback in mind – ideally, provide feedback before next assignment is due. Good feedback gives the reasons why, not just the final assessment/grade. |

Sample Grading Rubric

| | Very Poor (1) | Poor (2) | Satisfactory (3) | Very Good (4) |
|--|---------------|---|--|---|
| Adherence to Instructions | No Submission | Falls outside prescribed word limit OR Did not answer all questions OR Did not rely on case facts and assigned reading | Within prescribed word limit, AND Made effort to answer all questions AND relied on case facts and assigned reading | Meets Satisfactory and fully addressed all questions |
| Clarity of Writing | No response | Unclear meaning to sentences and paragraphs; and/or many grammatical and/or spelling errors | Clear meaning to sentences, paragraphs, but could use editing for grammar, spelling | Clear and concise response, little to no errors of grammar or spelling |
| Quality of Response | | | | |
| (a) Identified major customer groups (b) Accurately described payer generosity (c) Thoughtful analysis of ACA impact on payer mix and generosity | No Response | Good response (reflects case facts, readings) to descriptive element (a) but does not address (b) or present justifiable analysis of ACA impact (c) | Good response to (a) and (b) but does not present justifiable analysis of ACA impact (c) | Well justified response to all three elements of the question, relates response to case facts and readings. |

Maximum points possible: 12

School-wide Sources of Assistance

Office of Education

- Erin Driver-Linn, Dean for Education
- Nancy Turnbull, Senior Associate Dean for Professional Education
- Nancy Kane, faculty director, Case-Based Teaching and Learning

Department of Information Technology

- Sejal Vashi, Director of Digital Learning

Case Resources Website:

- caseresources.hsph.harvard.edu/resources