

Student Guide | End-of-Term Course Feedback Surveys

[Alternative versions of this guide are available in [a brief view \(PDF\)](#), a [web view](#), and [a slide view \(PDF\)](#).]

At the end of each term, SLU invites students to complete **End-of-Term Course Feedback Surveys** for each of their courses.¹ These surveys are administered via a tool called Blue (by Explorance), which students may access from their email or from Canvas, once the survey period begins.

This Guide provides information to support your effective engagement in this important course feedback process. It is grounded in the assumption that students want to learn in equitable, inclusive learning environments; value effective, evidence-informed instruction; and want to create even better courses for future SLU students. The Guide is organized by the elements of the [Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm](#), which is a signature approach to teaching at Jesuit colleges and universities.

Note: Many instructors create other opportunities for student course feedback, whether at mid-term or other points during a course. This Guide focuses on the End-of-Term Course Feedback Surveys administered at the University level, but the information provided also may be helpful when providing other kinds of course feedback contexts.

Context

End-of-Term Course Feedback Surveys (ETFCS) allow students to provide anonymous² feedback on their formal educational experiences. **The primary purpose of the surveys is to help instructors better understand how students experience courses and how courses may be enhanced in the future.** Most instructors review survey results regularly and use them to inform changes (sometimes small, sometimes more substantive) to their courses over time. Thus, feedback is most helpful when students provide specific, concrete feedback.

ETFCS results also may be used in other ways. University administrators (department chairs, program directors, and academic deans) may use them to better understand how students experience particular instructors and courses over time and/or how students experience their curriculum across courses in their academic units. In addition to supporting an instructor's development as a teacher, ETFCS results also may be used as one small part of an instructor's annual performance evaluation, their tenure and/or promotion evaluation, and/or nominations for teaching awards.

¹ These surveys may be referred to casually as "course evaluations" or "student evaluations." In general, students are invited to complete end-of-term surveys for all credit-bearing courses, with the exception of some non-traditional courses, such as an Independent Study, Thesis Research, and Dissertation Research.

² While the Blue system contains information about students – their identities, the courses they take, whether or not they have completed a survey for a given course – individual student survey responses are combined with those of all other students in a given course/term. After grades have been submitted, instructors receive a report that aggregates all student responses; the report does not identify how individual students responded to the survey, nor is there a way for the instructor to know which students provided which scores/comments.

One final note about context: when you begin a Blue survey, you'll see a few questions about yourself – questions about things like what motivated you to take a course, whether you had the background you needed prior to the course, how you prepared for and engaged in the course, and so on. You might be wondering why we ask these questions, since they're about you, not about the course or the instructor. The answer is twofold: such questions can foster more reflective feedback on instruction, and your responses help readers better understand the context of specific survey results.

Tip #1: As you prepare to respond to questions about the course and the instructor, spend a little time reflecting on the relationship between why you took the course, what you put into the course, and how you experienced the course. In other words, how did your context shape your experience of the course?

Experience

The majority of the questions in the ETFCS are about your experience in/of the course. You'll see questions about specific aspects of a course's design and specific instructor behaviors. These questions are derived from the research on effective teaching, course design, and learning environments.

You'll notice the survey does not ask you how you feel about a course.

Why not? Because this is not a satisfaction survey. Instead, it's a survey meant to capture information about the specific aspects of the course and instruction that, from your perspective, supported your learning/achievement of the course outcomes.

Tip #2: Speaking of experience, we hope your experience of completing an End-of-Term Course Feedback Survey will be one of thoughtful reflection, with attention to the particular context in which the course took place and your experience of the whole term, including awareness of your own learning and growth since the start of the term.

In addition to closed-ended items that provide scaled response options, you'll also see open-text items that give you an opportunity to provide concrete suggestions for ways the course might be improved. These items can provide instructors with some of the most useful feedback in the survey, assuming students take the time to reflect thoughtfully on particular aspects of their experience in a course.

Reflection

Reflection is a hallmark of Jesuit education. It's also a fundamental commitment to responsible participation in course feedback surveys. Just as you want your instructors to be reflective when

providing feedback on your course assignments, we ask you to approach this feedback opportunity as an act of Ignatian reflection.

So, what does this mean? Ignatian reflection is a meaning-making exercise – an opportunity to review experiences, notice the details and texture of those experiences, and identify the learning and growth that has come from those experiences.

Before you go into Blue to complete a course feedback survey, then, you are encouraged to review/remind yourself of the following:

Tip #3: Before you log in to complete the ETFCS for a specific course, take a little time to **reflect** on your full experience in/of that course, using some of the prompts listed above. Be sure to consider: what **actions** you took to support your learning in the course and what **actions** your instructor took.

- The syllabus and/or course calendar, especially the units or topics covered and the activities and assignments completed along the way
- The “light bulb” moments you experienced, where you learned something new or something finally “clicked” for you
- Any struggles you may have had, including moments when the learning was more difficult, and the activities/content that helped you move past them
- What you knew (or thought or believed) about the course and its content at the beginning of the term, and how you understand the course/content now
- The specific actions taken by the instructor that supported your learning and/or engagement in the course

Reflection need not be labor-intensive. Even spending just a few minutes reflecting on your experience in a course can better prepare you to provide useful feedback.

Action

Action is at the heart of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm – and, indeed, the whole point of any learning process. Action also is a key element of the course feedback process because the primary purpose of ETFCS is to inform possible actions an instructor might take in future versions of a course.

As you reflect on your experience in a given course, try to pinpoint concrete actions you took in your own learning process, actions the instructor took during the course, and actions the instructor could take in the future to support student learning in the course. Feedback that is grounded in examples of concrete actions will be of greatest benefit to your instructors and to future SLU students.

Once you’re ready to complete a course feedback survey, consider carefully the specific actions each question is asking about. When responding to open-text questions, try to offer as specific feedback as

possible, rather than vague comments. (These [tips from the University of Michigan](#) provide examples of less helpful and more helpful comments.)

One final note about focusing on action: when you do this, you're much less likely to bring implicit biases into your responses. As you'll read at the start of the Blue ETFCS, research has shown that student feedback on courses is often influenced by unconscious and unintentional biases about instructors. For example, women and instructors of color systemically receive less positive student feedback than white men – even when there are no actual differences in the instruction or in what students have learned.

Tip #4: Try to focus on the specific actions each survey question is asking about and respond with those in mind. This will help reduce the likelihood that unconscious bias will shape your responses. Focus, too, on specific actions an instructor could take to enhance the course. Doing so will help the instructor evaluate how well things went this time around and what they might do differently in the future.

Therefore, when you focus on the specific actions your instructor has taken in the course – reading each survey item carefully and responding to exactly what is being asked – you reduce the likelihood that those unconscious biases will shape your responses. This is a concrete way you can help to make teaching at SLU more just and equitable for all instructors, regardless of their perceived identity(ies), age, appearance, personality, or national origin.

Evaluation

When you engage in Ignatian reflection, evaluation is built in – an essential step in reflecting on your experiences, the actions you've taken, and the actions your instructor has taken, all with an eye toward possible enhancements for the future. When the ETFCS asks you to provide suggestions for improving the course, it's asking you to reflect on how well things have gone and on specific actions that could enhance learning for future students.

Through an Ignatian lens, evaluation should be offered in a constructive way, grounded in a focus on the instructor's actions. When students criticize an instructor in personal terms, or voice complaints without connecting those complaints to specific actions, instructors can't really act on the feedback.

Tip #5: Ground your evaluation of a course in concrete details and descriptions of past or future actions so the instructor will see how your feedback can better inform future changes to the course.

Ultimately, we hope you will approach the End-of-Term Course Feedback Surveys as an opportunity to practice Ignatian reflection. Just as you want instructors to provide thoughtful, respectful, constructive comments on your coursework, you also should provide thoughtful, respectful, constructive comments about your experience in a course.