



## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

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DEPARTMENT OF  
LITERATURE AND  
LANGUAGES

September 22, 2015

Dr. Trey Miller  
Full Economist  
RAND Corporation  
1776 Main Street  
Santa Monica, CA 90407

Dear Dr. Miller,

Thank you for your letter explaining your proposed Student End-of-Course Survey questions for students in the UT Tyler PATSS program. I shared your letter and the proposed questions with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, several of whom are PATSS instructors themselves. We do, in fact, have questions and a few concerns, in part because the course evaluation surveys to which you wish to append these questions are given to *all* students, not just PATSS students. We do not wish to seem as if we are picking at nits, but faculty are rather sensitive about course survey instruments, both because they need to be brief and also because we worry about the possible uses of their results.

As far as your proposed survey questions go, we think the first two questions are fine. We would like you to be aware, however, of our concerns about the other three.

First, could you explain the difference between question three (“did this class meet the instructor in a classroom”) and question four (“did this class meet the instructor face-to-face”)? The questions seem to be asking the same thing. We suspect the students will think this as well. It is hard enough getting students to complete online evaluations as it is, if we add seemingly redundant questions, we make the job harder.

The last question, which asks how many hours per week of instruction were provided online, seems problematic to us in several ways. First, if the class being evaluated is fully face to face, it is irrelevant. This problem can be corrected by the insertion of a simple clause such as, “if this course was advertised as an online or hybrid course, . . .” But more importantly, if the course is online or hybrid, we do not believe the question will yield useful information. It is difficult to define the term “instruction” in the online or hybrid formats. In our experience, the number of hours of instruction we provide online and the number of hours of instruction students choose to use are often quite different.

For example, in my online graduate course in British Literature last semester, in place of what I might have said or done with students in a three-hour face to face class, I provided the following: an assortment of video lectures ranging from seven to twenty minutes in length, several readiness assessments (quizzes that could be taken several times until the material was mastered), many pages of instructional documents or study questions that students were expected to download and refer to while they were doing their assigned reading, and a discussion board that had a number of possible prompts to which students were required to respond (and to which I replied). A very dedicated student could gain many hours of “instruction” or at least learning-experience from such an array of materials. Some students report that they listen to video lectures several times, re-take the readiness assessments, and work with their study team members on my reading guides. Additionally, I have seen some students comment many times on different discussion board threads; they respond to each other and to my comments on their comments. The amount of time spent on discussions such as these would be hard to calculate, especially because they may take several days to complete.

On the other hand, a less motivated online student (and faculty have all known some of these) might skip through most of these materials very superficially. The answer such a student might give to a query about how much instruction was provided would differ so radically from that of the first student that we do not believe the data you collect from this question would be of any real value. Moreover, data from the lazy student could reflect very poorly on a professor who has, in fact, provided a great deal of instruction.

I hope these questions and concerns may be of use to you. We are quite willing to work with RAND to make sure UT Tyler offers the very best instruction available—whether it be online, hybrid, or face to face.

Sincerely,

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