FAQs

Houghton’s Online Course Evaluation Project:
The IDEA Center’s Student Ratings of Instruction

What is the IDEA Center?
The IDEA (Individual Development and Educational Assessment) Center is a not-for-profit arm of Kansas State University established in 1975. While they offer a broad range of services, their commitment is to continuous individual and institutional improvement through achievement-based and extensive nationwide research. We are using their "Student Ratings of Instruction" portion of services, which is delivered online. ([www.theideacenter.org](http://www.theideacenter.org))

Did we look at any other systems or vendors?
Yes. Daryl Stevenson worked with the Faculty Development Committee to review several other vendors like <courseevaluations.com>, <courseeval.com>, and Lance Technologies of Buffalo (regarding the possibility of using a homegrown version through Synapse). All other versions require creating our own instrument and having it outsourced through these organizations. The for-profit costs for startup were two to four times greater than the costs for the IDEA Center program, and although there is more on-campus involvement in delivering this program, the benefit of an established, benchmarked instrument used by hundreds of other institutions is much more robust in its deliverables and in line with our intended faculty development emphasis.

What services does the IDEA Center offer?
The Center has developed two instruments for instructional evaluation: the Short Form has 18 items and is useful for summative evaluation. The Diagnostic Form has 47 items and is useful for formative analysis of instructional strengths and weaknesses as well as summative evaluation. Both forms contain items which primarily focus on what and how much a student has learned in the course rather than on teacher behaviors or organizational style. Twelve specific objectives encompass virtually all emphases that could describe a particular course, and students rate the degree of progress they have made on the objectives. Since any given course would not include all 12, instructors are asked to pre-select [three to five](#) that are considered either [Essential](#) or [Important](#) in that particular course. Student ratings on those designated objectives are emphasized in the feedback report.

How does this system work? What do instructors do?
About mid-semester, instructors inform their departmental assistants which courses will be evaluated that semester (tenure-track folks will do all courses; tenured will evaluate one lower level and one upper level course each year). About a week later, IDEA sends the Faculty Information Form (FIF) for each course, and you select the several Essential or Important objectives (3 – 5 total) that describe your course and some other information (i.e., your discipline code for national benchmarking; prefix, number, date and time of course; adding any additional questions? etc.). Your course rosters are loaded onto the IDEA Center servers (by others, not you). The course evaluation link is sent to students via email, with follow up email reminders to students until completed. At the close of the semester, the IDEA Center will ground mail feedback reports to the campus (to Daryl Stevenson) and these will be distributed two to three weeks following the last day of classes. One copy goes to the departmental office, a second goes to the instructor, and an electronic record is kept in the Academic Dean’s Office (but not the free responses). All data and reports are burned on a CD and sent to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment as a backup, for security, and for an historical record. These are confidential reports.
Specifically, what do we get in the feedback report?
The Short Form report is three pages and includes a summative evaluation of teaching effectiveness, which is assessed in two ways: a) student ratings of their progress on the pre-selected 3-5 relevant objectives, and b) overall ratings, which is the average student agreement with statements that the teacher and the course were excellent. A summary evaluation is the average of the two measures. Raw and standardized scores are reported that take into account the fact that not all classrooms are equal in number of students, style of instruction, and depth of content. There are statistical corrections built in. Benchmarking occurs with all IDEA Center data from all users, with your discipline colleagues across the country, and with all Houghton results. Further faculty orientation and personal assistance in interpreting the report is available and encouraged.

The Diagnostic Form Report is four pages and includes a report of all the items on the Short Form plus others which help to diagnose instructional abilities, behaviors, and tendencies. The fourth page of the Diagnostic Report provides suggestions for improving teaching effectiveness by analyzing teaching methods and styles as revealed by the pattern of responses. Finally, both reports reveal the frequency count detail of how everyone in your class responded to every item.

How long does it take students?
The longer Diagnostic Form can be completed in about twenty minutes on average, but it depends on how much free response students write. The Short Form is much briefer.

Exactly when and where do students complete the online evaluation of my course?
Some instructors have students do it in class while most ask students to do it at their convenience. (In-class completion produces the highest rates of participation.) You can determine how and where you want to have students complete the form. You could do it in class or lab with everyone bringing their laptops on a particular class day. You can make it a requirement of a course, or you might incentivize them by promising several extra points toward their final grade if they complete it. (By your request, Daryl can send you the report of who did it, but he has no access to actual responses). Or, you might spend time appealing to reason and responsibility, and simply expect them to do it.

Does everyone do it for every class every semester?
No. Until further policies or discussion, all tenure-track faculty assess every course using the Diagnostic Form for maximum assistance in faculty development. Tenured faculty evaluate one upper level and one lower level course each semester and may choose which form to use. Refer to the newest Faculty Handbook for the specific policy language.