

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS POLICY & PROCEDURES

The revised instructional rating system policy which follows was approved by the University Committee on Undergraduate Education, the University Committee on Graduate Studies, and the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.

1. OVERVIEW

The Student Perceptions of Learning Environments Policy's (SPLEP) goal is to support high-quality instruction by providing:

- (1) instructors and academic programs with data about student perceptions related to instructional practices to support course improvement in MSU's teaching and learning environments;
- (2) instructional supervisors with one source of information for consideration in personnel decisions such as retention, promotion, salary, and tenure in recognition that effective teaching constitutes an important criterion in evaluating personnel; and
- (3) students with information to guide decision-making related to course selection.

SPLEP data support the [Michigan State University Code of Teaching Responsibility](#), which outlines certain obligations and standards for instructional staff such as—but not limited to:

- designing course content consistent with approved descriptions, outcomes, and goals;
- providing a syllabus with all required and relevant information – including course outcomes, contact information, grading criteria, assignments, readings, attendance policy, etc.;
- regularly attending the learning environment and published office hours; and
- returning examinations, papers, and projects in a timely way in support of student learning.

2. SPLEP & SPLS FRAMEWORK

2.1. Nomenclature

The name for the policy and procedures currently known as the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) shall be renamed to the *Student Perceptions of Learning Environments Policy (SPLEP)*, and the centrally administered survey instrument that supports SPLEP shall be known as the *Student Perceptions of Learning Survey (SPLS)*.

These name changes distinguish between the policy and the instrument, signal the shift in protocols, and make it clear that students are **not** being asked to **evaluate** their instructors' teaching. Rather, students can provide valuable feedback about their learning experiences for their instructors.

2.2. Purpose and Scope

The SPLEP ensures that all students, in all learning environments, can provide feedback to their instructors. This feedback should enrich the instructor's professional development and provide ideas to improve the course's teaching and learning environment. All instructional personnel, regardless of

rank—including graduate teaching assistants, are covered under this policy in all credit-bearing classes (i.e., every course, every section, every modality, and every term).

The SPLS provides academic units with a standardized method to meet the SPLEP requirement. The SPLS is not intended to serve as a direct indicator of student learning nor any other purpose than those outlined in this policy.

2.3. SPLEP Data Use & Reporting

Supervisors shall make regular and systematic use of SPLS data—or its equivalent— as *part* of the unit's evaluation of instructional performance. Each teaching unit (i.e., a College, Department, or School) shall create and communicate a comprehensive policy related to collecting instructional data and is responsible for implementing that policy as outlined in this document.

- A. SPLS data—or its equivalent—should report information about the course section and the instructional staff assigned to a course section. Data are reported at multiple organizational and instructional levels, and the amount and type of information provided is based on one's role and positionality.
- B. Units should manage data and results in accordance with their purpose, while maintaining strict confidentiality for the student respondents and instructional staff. Each teaching unit shall create comprehensive procedures related to implementing the SPLEP within their unit following the use, access, and survey design provisions contained in this policy document.
- C. Units, in collaboration with instructional technology, should administer the SPLS—or equivalent—during the established University time frame, with responses due before the availability of course grade sheets.
- D. MSU will return valid data promptly to the instructional staff and their supervisor(s) after the instructor-of-record posts course grades. Note that some data options might not be available if reporting does not hit a threshold to allow for student confidentiality.
- E. Instructional staff and supervisor(s) should systematically consult their results in conjunction with other instructional review data according to the procedures established within each academic unit. Other means for instructional review can include classroom visits, peer review, teaching portfolios, reflections, and course material review (e.g., course syllabi, assignments, and exams).
- F. Instructional staff can comment, orally and in writing, on the feedback. Supervisors should consider these comments when making promotion, tenure, and annual reviews. If any instructional staff members feels that their supervisor(s) is using data inappropriately, they should follow the grievance policies relevant to their unit and position.
- G. MSU administering units will provide professional development, guidance, and instructional aides related to the use, interpretation, and application of the data and results.

2.4 Provision of Access

Access to instructional data is determined by one's professional responsibilities. The following framework should govern access to student instructional rating results from the SPLS and any alternative systems used at MSU.

2.4.1 Central Access and General Principles

- A. The Office of the Provost and its designees shall have access to all institutional data and SPLS reports for the purposes of:
 - a. administering, implementing, and reviewing the procedures outlined in this policy;
 - b. assessing questions' equity, reliability, and validity;
 - c. managing the addition, deletion, and revision of survey questions and the MSU question bank; and
 - d. detecting campus-wide trends related to instructional needs and assessment.
- B. Information directly related to questions' reliability, validity, and bias can be publicly reported in aggregate with the Provost's approval.
- C. Requests to review SPLS data and report on it for reasons beyond those listed in this policy require the Provost's approval.
- D. MSU will not report results that threaten a respondent's confidentiality by revealing their identity; therefore, MSU will not publish, nor make public, results when responses are below a respondent number that maintains students' confidentiality.
- E. MSU will not report nor use results that identify the instructional staff in ways discordant with this policy. Instructional data should be used according to the guidance provided by the institution, and they should not be used to compare instructional staff or publicized without an individual's permission.

2.4.2 Operational Access

- A. MSU IT professionals and designated systems administrators will have access to the system and its data based on their professional role in managing the survey and data systems.
- B. The SPLS data will interface with MSU's centralized database and other systems to gather and report accurate data.
- C. MSU owns data collected by the SPLS, which is warehoused in a centralized data repository.
- D. IT will report to the campus community and other relevant stakeholders—as appropriate for the situation—system maintenance, updates, or data breaches as related to the SPLS.

2.4.3 Academic Program Access

- A. Each College's Dean's Office and its designees shall have access to the SPLS and related-systems' results for teaching programs they administer, courses taught in their unit(s)—including cross-listed courses, and for courses taught by instructional staff with a full- or joint-appointment in their unit(s).
- B. College sub-unit leaders (e.g., department chairpersons and school directors) and their designees shall have access to the SPLS and related-systems' results for teaching programs they administer, courses taught in their sub-unit—including cross-listed courses, and for courses taught by instructional staff with a full- or joint-appointment in their sub-unit.
- C. Academic leaders within each sub-unit may request that their administrative assistants have access to data to support their work.
- D. College and sub-unit leaders may request additional data for their academic programs for uses aligned with this policy with approval from the designed SPLEP security administrators.

2.4.4 Instructional Access

- A. Instructional staff—including faculty, academic staff, and graduate students—shall have access to the SPLS and related-systems’ results for their courses.
- B. Instructional staff shall have access to the SPLS and related systems’ results for graduate teaching assistants and other instructional personnel whom they supervise.
- C. Instructional staff not typically assigned as an instructor-of-record in the MSU system, who have a valid *instructional* purpose for receiving feedback (e.g., clinical, lab, section, and recitation leaders), should receive relevant results. These positions should contact their unit’s security administrator and follow the appropriate IT procedures to obtain access.

2.5. Survey Design & Question Selection

The following framework should govern the instrument design from the centrally administered survey (i.e., the SPLS) and all other instruments used to implement this policy.

2.5.1 Survey Design and Questions

- A. The SPLS—and any instrument designed to implement the SPLEP—will consist of questions from a centralized MSU Question Bank that MSU or peer institutions have vetted for validity, reliability, and equity (see Section 2.6 for procedures to add questions to the bank).
- B. Instruments used to implement the SPLEP are limited to 20 questions.
- C. As part of the administration of the SPLEP instrument, an opening statement will inform students about the process’ timeline, who will have access to the results, and how the results will be used.
- D. Students shall not be required or requested by faculty members to identify themselves on rating forms.
- E. Survey design and questions shall be reviewed through University Governance procedure in accordance with MSU By-Laws at least every five years.

2.5.2 Institutional Questions

- A. The institution will select no more than eight questions—approved through governance—that represent the University’s priorities for teaching and learning, as well as that serve the function outlined in this policy.
- B. MSU shall allocate a sub-set of the institutional questions—three or four questions—as public-facing, whose data will be available to the MSU students. Public-facing survey data shall be augmented with institutional data to provide students with the best information possible to meet the needs of academic decision making (e.g., courses’ academic profile—major and year of study and average GPA).
- C. University-level questions, including those selected to be public-facing, shall not include open-ended, qualitative questions.
- D. Unused questions at the institutional level shall be allocated to a College’s academic programs.

2.5.3 Academic Program Questions

- A. At least 12 questions are allocated to MSU’s degree-granting colleges, and the College may in turn allocate questions to academic programs (i.e., Departments, Schools, majors, minors, or certificates) within their administration.
- B. In allocating questions, Colleges should consider the unique nature of academic programs, as well as the staffing associated with each (e.g., use of clinical instructors or laboratory

assistants, online sections, or off-campus sections) that may warrant specific questions for these individuals/contexts.

2.5.4 Question Approval and Review

- A. For institutional questions, decisions about questions and survey format rest with the relevant academic governance committees: UCUE and UCGS. Appeals to these decisions made by UCUE and UCGS go to the Provost, who has final authority on these matters.
- B. These committees will authorize a working group every five years to review the centrally administered survey questions.
- C. Each College will determine how they will manage question selection, approval, review, and allocation(s) to sub-units following these guidelines:
 - a. Each College shall designate a College-level committee (e.g., a curriculum committee) to establish the College's common questions and hear any requests for changes to the College-level questions.
 - b. If the College decides to allocate questions to a department, school, or other academic program, then the department or sub-unit must designate a committee to establish the unit's common questions and hear any requests for changes to department or sub-unit level questions.
 - c. Appeals to decisions made at the department or sub-unit level will go to the College-level committee and appeals at the College-level will go to UCUE and UCGS.
- C. Requests to revise, add, or remove questions at the institutional, College, or academic program level can come from MSU administrators, faculty and academic staff, or students.
- D. Committees and administrators assigned for review and oversight must be inclusive of diverse faculty and academic staff and have a knowledge and/or experience related to curriculum, teaching, and learning; undergraduate and graduate student policies; and personnel, promotion, and tenure policies.

2.6. Use of Alternative Surveys & Questions

Each teaching unit (i.e., College, Department, or School, whichever supervises the academic program), may approve one or more instruments to fulfill the SPLEP in accordance with unit bylaws.

Even if an academic program uses its own instrument, all MSU students will receive the SPLS with the institutional questions, and if required by the College, all College-level questions shall also be administered to all its students.

Regardless of which instruments are used, all units must follow the guidance in this policy.

2.6.1 Alternative Survey Parameters

- A. All instruments must include questions from the approved MSU Question Bank or participate in a vetting process to get their questions added to the Bank.
- B. Units should provide survey instruments to students during the standard time frame established by the University.
- C. All alternative instruments must conform to the purpose and intent of the SPLEP, submit results to the same individuals who would obtain the SPLS results, and conform to the same data management, reporting, confidentiality, and use policies as the SPLS and outlined in the SPLEP.

- D. It is the responsibility of the academic program using its own instrument to provide equivalent data in a timely way to non-unit academic supervisors for use in personnel discussions (e.g., if Department X's course is taught by an instructor from Department Y, then Department X needs to provide the data to the Department Y Chairperson).

2.6.2 Alternative Question Parameters

- A. If a unit wants to add questions to the MSU question bank, they ask their designated administrative and governance structures to allow the question to be trialed on a provisional basis until sufficient validity, reliability, and equity is established.
- B. During the trial phase, the College is responsible for monitoring and managing repercussions (i.e., should students or instructors challenge the question or its results) of using questions added by their unit(s).
- C. Until officially added to the question bank, any trial questions should be designated as such in the question's wording on the instrument (e.g., [1] *Trial Question – To what degree did the instructor stress the value of alternative disciplinary perspectives?*).
- D. Individual instructional staff are not allowed to add questions to the official SPLS and should work through their unit's process to modify instrument design.

Recommended Implementation SPLEP Data Reporting

SPLEP policy suggests that surveys collect data that provide feedback about the (1) course and (2) the instructional staff.

Based on this distinction, data and results can be reported at the following organizational/course levels:

- *Course* – all sections of an MSU course offered in a single semester, regardless of modality or instructor (e.g., CEM 141).
- *Meta-Section* – sections of an MSU course offered in a single semester that have the same instructional staff (e.g., CEM 141, sections 1 – 7).
- *Section* – single offering of an MSU course offered by specific instructor and/or graduate student (e.g., CEM 141, section 4).

Table A.1: What data are reported at each course level?

	Course	Meta-Section	Section
Descriptive demographics:			
• Sex/Gender	X	X	X
• Year of Study	X	X	X
• Major/Major Preference	X	X	X
• Race/Ethnicity	X	X	X
Average GPA	X	X	X
Aggregate response distribution, averages, and deviations for course questions	X	X	X
Qualitative responses to course questions (if used)	X	X	X
Disaggregated response distribution for course ratings by demographic factors	X*	X*	X*
Access to inferential or comparative results across sections**	X**		

* Only if sufficient responses exist by demographic to ensure confidentiality.

** Colleges may decide to provide these data to departments and instructors.

In addition, the data can be reported at different instructional staff levels. Note that units can design the survey so that students will answer *each* instructional question for *each* instructional staff member associated with the course.

- *Instructor-of-Record* – MSU employee or graduate student assigned to a course section(s) as the instructional lead in the MSU database.
- *Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)* – MSU graduate student assigned as course assistant (i.e., lab, clinical, section, recitation leaders) in the MSU database.
- *Other assistants* – individuals, whether employees or students—who serve in an active, instructional role within the learning environment.

Table A.2: What data are reported at each instructional level?

	Instructor	GTA	Other
Aggregate response distribution, averages, and deviations for instructional questions	X	X	X
Qualitative responses to instruction-level questions (if used)	X	X	X
Disaggregated response distribution for instructional ratings by demographic factors	X*	X*	
Access to inferential or comparative results across instructors			

* Only if sufficient responses exist by demographic to ensure confidentiality.

When reporting these data, the results can be organized at the following levels:

- Institution-level (i.e., MSU central administration)
- College-level
- Sub-unit (e.g., department, school, or program)
- Supervisor (e.g., department chair, school director, etc.)
- Instructor-of-record (i.e., official instructional lead for the section)
- Graduate teaching assistant
- Other instructional staff

The recommendation is that at higher levels, more details and inferential data can be shared, as well as more disaggregated results. As data become more specific to a section or instructor, the level of detail should be constrained as a means of maintaining confidentiality and the appropriate interpretation of the results.

In all instances, the superordinate designation should receive the data from the levels below; however, individuals at equivalent or subordinate levels should not get data from those at equal or higher levels. In other words, Department Chairs should always receive data for instructional staff whom they supervise; however, graduate teaching assistants should not receive data about their instructor-of-record.

Table A.3: Who has access to data and at what level of detail?

	Example(s)	Institution	College	Sub-Unit	Supervisor	Instructor-of-Record	GTA	Other Assistants
Access to inferential or comparative results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of GPAs across sections • Comparison of student ratings by respondent's gender • Comparison of instructional ratings by demographic 	X	X	X				
Access to course-level data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive demographics and ratings at the course level 	X	X	X	X			
Access to meta-section data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive demographics and ratings at the meta-section level 	X	X	X	X	X		
Access to section data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive demographics and ratings at the section level 	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Access to data about the instructor-of-record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive ratings specific to the instructor-of-record 	X	X	X	X	X		
Access to data about the graduate teaching assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive ratings specific to the graduate teaching assistant 	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Access to instructional staff data (individualized to the staff member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive ratings specific to an instructional staff supporting the course but is not the GTA or instructor-of-record 	X	X	X	X			X