UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY | Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI) Working Group

Recommendation Report

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Prepared by Members of the USRI Working Group

Dr. Andrew Estefan & Dr. Leslie Reid (co-chairs)
Dr. Wendy Benoit (Science)
Dr. Barb Brown (Werklund)
Dr. Jason Wiens (Arts)
Dr. Natasha Kenny (Taylor Institute)
Alex Paquette (GSA VPA)
Renzo Pereyra (SU VPA)
Jackie Lambert (OIA)
Robin Arseneault (Teaching and Learning)

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Some documents referred to in this report can be found on the USRI Working Group website: documents include the GFC USRI Reports (1998 and 2003); GFC TLC Working Group Terms of Reference; USRI Working Group Literature Review Summary; Current USRI instrument and sample report.

Background

The practice of obtaining student feedback on their course learning experiences is a widespread and important component to helping academic staff critically reflect upon, assess, and improve their teaching practices (Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Linse, 2017; Richardson, 2005). When used and interpreted in context, student feedback is also an important component in the formal evaluation of teaching in higher education (Linse, 2017). Many institutions across Canada have recently or are currently engaging in systematic institutional reviews of student evaluations of teaching to ensure that they reflect the components of teaching, course design and student experience that are linked to the research on student learning and engagement. Generally, this work has confirmed that: a) gathering, interpreting and using student feedback is complex and challenging; b) robust technology and administrative systems and processes need to be in place across multiple organizational levels to support student feedback and evaluation processes; and c) documenting, assessing and improving teaching and learning practices must be based on evidence from multiple sources (i.e., instructor self-reflection, peer review and observation, student feedback, and scholarship on teaching and learning) over multiple periods of time.

In 1998, the University of Calgary launched the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI), a 11-item Likert-scale questionnaire developed to serve as a mechanism to gather student feedback at the end of a course, and to serve as one facet in understanding teaching quality at the University of Calgary. The USRI is typically administered at the same time as faculty/department/unit course feedback surveys, herein referred to as "Faculty Forms." The Faculty Forms are developed and governed by the academic units and are intended to complement the information collected through the USRI questionnaire. Most Faculty Forms consist of open-ended questions and serve to collect qualitative feedback from students. After its launch in 1998, the USRI was reviewed in 2003 by a USRI Review Committee. Both reports can be found on the USRI Working Group website. This is the last time the USRI system was formally reviewed.

Over the last 20 years there have been significant advancements in several areas that drive the need for a comprehensive review of the USRI system. First, advances in the understanding of how people learn and the research in teaching, learning and student engagement in higher education inform what teaching practices enhance and optimize student learning (Ambrose, Lovett, Bridges, DiPietro & Norman, 2010; Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Schwartz & Gurung, 2012; Smith & Baik, 2019). Modern course evaluation questionnaires should reflect questions linked to scholarly teaching and learning practices, including placing value on multiple ways of knowing (Louie et al., 2017). Second, over the past two decades, there have been advances in collecting systematic feedback on student outcomes as well as student feedback on their learning and campus experiences. Universities have recognized the need to have multiple mechanisms to collect student feedback on their experience, including end-of-course feedback forms, but they also acknowledge that opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences need to go far beyond course feedback.

Finally, there have been advances in the technology available to set up student feedback systems in higher education. Available technology systems such as Explorance, Anthology-Campus Labs, and Creatrix Campus include options such as validated course feedback questionnaires, question banks that can be customized to align with different learning experiences (i.e., online or face-to-face, clinical and lab settings, experiential learning courses), midcourse feedback questionnaires and automated reminders for students and staff, and the capability for online integration with an institution's learning management systems. These technologies are vastly advanced from the University of Calgary's current system, which is the Scantron-based Class Climate. In addition to increased functionality and ease of use, new technology platforms support advanced survey data practices and data collection, management, and reporting.

USRI Working Group

In January 2019, a working group formed to conduct a review of the University's USRI system, including the current questions, the platform used to administer the USRI and the processes around communication, collection, and distribution of the USRI, and bring forward a summary report with recommendations for change. The USRI working group reports to the General Faculties Council (GFC) Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC). The terms of reference can be found at this link. The activities and timelines of the USRI working group since its inception are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. USRI Working Group Activities and Timeline

Nov 2018	Formation of a USRI working group was approved at GFC
Jan 2019	First meeting of the USRI working group
Apr 2019	Conducted literature summary of student ratings of instruction
Jun 2019	Developed comprehensive plan for campus consultations
Dec 2019	Confirmed faculty/unit leads and held pilot consultations with them
Jan 2020	In-person consultations began; 12 sessions completed with the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Arts, Haskayne School of Business, Nursing, Faculty of Science, Schulich School of Engineering, Student's Union, Graduate Students Association
Mar 2020	Campus closure due to COVID-19
Jun 2020	Consultations resume in an online environment; 11 sessions completed with School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Cumming School of Medicine, Faculty of Kinesiology, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Social Work, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary in Qatar, Teaching and Learning Subcommittee of the Campus Mental Health Strategy's Implementation Advisory Committee, Indigenous Scholars and the Office of Indigenous Engagement, DEI Network Committee and the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
Sep 2020	Data analysis begins, and consultation report completed
Oct 2020	Working group workshop; thematizing data
Oct 2021	Complete draft USRI recommendation report

The first action of the working group was to complete a literature review to guide their work. This report was used to inform a comprehensive consultation plan to be taken to the academic community for the widespread review of the current USRI. A copy of the report can be found here.

Consultations

Consultations began in January 2020 with in-person meetings. In March 2020 this process was revised to adapt to COVID-19 protocols and continued in an online environment between April and June 2020. Each academic unit was consulted, including the University of Calgary Qatar campus. Additional groups were also consulted, such as the Student's Union, the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and three groups that support UCalgary strategies: The Campus Mental Health Strategy Teaching and Learning Committee, the Diversity Network, and the Office of Indigenous Engagement's Indigenous Scholars network. Overall, there were 23 facilitated discussions – 12 face-to-face sessions and 11 online – with a total of 298 participants.

All consultations were booked in coordination with designated faculty or unit representatives, and at a time and day suitable for their needs. Representatives were responsible for sending out a pre-drafted email inviting academic staff from their area to attend or for students through the GSA and Student's Union. Consultations were facilitated by academic staff from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning and were usually 90 minutes long. Sessions included a slide presentation beginning with a research/environmental scan overview and led into several activities to gather feedback on the presented principles and to identify challenges and improvements to the USRI. Questions broadly explored included:

- What are the key challenges and issues associated with the current USRI?
- What are the most meaningful feedback students could provide on their learning experiences through an instrument like the USRI?
- What changes would you most like to see in the USRI process?

Consultations were conducted individually or in small groups. During the group sessions, participants were invited to record their comments on worksheets, and during online sessions, via the Zoom chat function and Google docs. At the end of each session, participants were offered an opportunity to sign up to receive an emailed link to provide further, anonymous input on the USRI. Feedback was captured through the handwritten worksheets; notes taken by a graduate research assistant and project coordinator; and themes recorded by the facilitators to capture participant comments throughout the session (e.g., on flip chart paper, white boards and via the zoom chat and/or google docs). This feedback was further aggregated for anonymity and thematic analysis, the results of which have informed the recommendations presented in this report.

Guiding Principles

Based upon the literature review and an environmental scan of course feedback processes across Canada, the working group developed seven guiding principles for an effective system for student feedback on their academic course learning experiences to frame the consultations. The principles are: *learning-focused; minimize bias; valid and reliable; modular; flexible and customizable; streamlined and secure; responsible use* and reporting*. These principles were

shared throughout the consultation process for feedback and to help frame and guide discussions [Appendix I].

*It is not the purview of the USRI working group to consult on use or make recommendations on the use of USRI in academic processes.

Interim Changes to the USRI and Reports

In the fall of 2019, the USRI working group recognized there were some immediate changes that could be made to the USRI questions and related reports that would: 1) help address concerns being raised in consultations and 2) better align the current USRI with the research on course evaluations. The working group recommended to General Faculties Council three immediate changes to the current USRI. These changes were: removal of the question that asks students to rate the quality of overall instruction; removal of the comparators on the USRI reports; and replacement of means with modes on the USRI reports. All three changes were informed by the research on the use of student ratings of instruction and are in line with changes to student rating forms in higher education across Canada.

The changes were brought forward as recommendations to the GFC Teaching and Learning Committee and the GFC Executive Committee, with final approval at General Faculties Council on December 12, 2019. All three changes were implemented with the USRI and subsequent reports starting in September 2020.

Recommendations

After a comprehensive review of the research, trends in student feedback in higher education, and consultations across campus, we recommend that significant change is needed to the current USRI and Faculty Form system of collecting student feedback. This change is necessary to align our student feedback system with the research on teaching, learning and student experience in higher education.

Numerous recommendations emerged from the data collected during campus consultations. The working group has organized these recommendations into thematic areas and have drafted actionable items for each. These actions will create a robust system for student feedback on their learning experiences, build credibility and trust around course feedback, and facilitate students and academic staff coming together and working together to enhance quality teaching and learning in a good way.

In the themed area descriptions below, feedback collected during the consultations are used to illustrate and substantiate the recommendations put forward.

It is important to note that the USRI working group set out to collect feedback on the USRI and not on the Faculty Forms. However, discussion and feedback focused on the Faculty Forms came up at every consultation session with the most frequent observation being that most academic

staff and students think the Faculty Form questions are part of the USRI. While these instruments are separate, they are often implemented and completed by students at the same time and most academic staff receive their USRI and Faculty Form results together. Academic staff and students alike see them as one in the same. Therefore, some of the recommendations below refer to the Faculty Forms as well as the USRI. The recommendations on the Faculty Forms are not meant to suggest or imply that the academic units should not be overseeing their own questions. Decisions about Faculty-level questions and the choosing of these questions should remain part of the feedback collected from students and overseen by the appropriate processes within each academic unit.

1 / A System Overhaul is Needed

Feedback collected at the consultations along with the research literature on student feedback and course evaluations show that an overhaul of the USRI system is needed. The current instrument and associated administration processes present significant challenges for students to provide meaningful feedback about their experiences, and for academic staff to use that feedback in ways that enhance teaching practices and the student experiences. As consultations progressed, it became clear that concerns from students and academic staff could not be addressed by making adjustments in the wording of the questions on the current instrument.

In addition to replacing the current USRI instrument, changes also need to be made to the administration processes. For example, timing was often cited as being an issue – feedback was being sought too late in a term while students were stressed and experiencing competing demands. It was also clear that academic staff and students were conflating the concerns they have about the USRI with their concerns about the Faculty Forms. As mentioned earlier, Faculty Forms are usually administered alongside the USRI; students fill them out at the same time, and results from each are released together. In the consultations, these two instruments were collectively considered by many to be "the USRI." Many academic staff did not know that the open-response questions were from their Faculty Forms, which are administered and overseen by their academic unit and that these are separate to the USRI, which is administered by the institution. Many participants commented that the way information is collected—through the physical distribution of the USRI and Faculty Forms—was tedious, time-consuming, and inefficient. One participant said, "*a streamlined approach is needed*," and this was echoed by many in relation to the process, timing, and collecting of quantitative and qualitative feedback.

It is important to note that campus consultations took place before and during the first four months of the switch to remote and online learning due to the COVID pandemic. Prior to changes brought about by COVID, approximately 85% of USRI and Faculty Forms were administered to students during class time through a variety of processes, dependent on the program. In some programs, academic staff are required to recruit a colleague or student to distribute, collect and return the forms to their program office; in others, office staff visit a class to collect USRI and Faculty Form feedback during a timed window determined by the course instructor.

What we have also learned in the shift to remote and online teaching and learning is that the Class Climate system used to administer the USRI and Faculty Forms cannot be easily integrated with Peoplesoft or other platforms used to support teaching. Many processes are manual, including getting emails out to students to remind them to complete these questionnaires. This has had an impact on completion rates and exposed the technical challenges associated with the current technology used to support USRI and Faculty Form distribution and collection.

In addition to a lack of understanding about the difference between the USRI and the Faculty Forms, students and academic staff often reported that they felt the purpose of the USRI was unclear and were unsure how the information collected was used or how they were supposed to use the information.

We repeatedly heard that one instrument (like the USRI) cannot be a measure of teaching effectiveness, and there is the perception amongst academic staff that the USRI is seen in this way: *"The purpose of [the] USRI is unclear and it cannot achieve all stated objectives…*" and questions repeatedly surfaced in consultations such as: "*Is it to aid students? Is it to assess instructors, or to improve instruction?"*

We also heard that the questions should focus on students' learning experiences and minimize the opportunity for bias for those academic staff who identify as members of equity-seeking groups or who are assigned to teach courses that are difficult and have a reputation with students. These factors can affect students' perceptions of course instructors' teaching and therefore impact USRI ratings.

The limitations and constraints of the USRI system mean that revising the present USRI questions using Class Climate, the current technology platform, would not sufficiently address the changes needed. Therefore, the first actions for an overhaul of the student feedback system include:

a. Action: Develop a new course feedback questionnaire that combines a series of institutionally set questions, Faculty and/or program-level chosen questions, options for question modules for specific course types and modalities and includes a bank of optional questions that can be chosen by a course instructor.
b. Action: Secure a new technology platform to support and administer a new course feedback questionnaire as described in Action (a) above.
c. Action: Use the working group's guiding principles and the following actions in this report to inform the set of new questions to make up a new course feedback questionnaire.
d. Action: Ensure the use of student feedback on their course learning experiences is clearly articulated and understood by all stakeholders (academic staff, students, administrators).
e. Action: Establish an implementation working group to oversee the development, implementation, and maintenance of a new technology system for student feedback, that would report to GFC TLC.
f. Action: Develop a new name for a course feedback questionnaire that is more reflective of the purpose – to collect student feedback on their learning experiences.

2 / Focus Students' Feedback on their Learning and Course Experiences

Throughout our consultations, we repeatedly heard academic staff say they care deeply about teaching and their desire to get meaningful feedback from students. They expressed a need and want for a student feedback system that they can use to help them grow in their teaching practices. Specifically, participants discussed wanting to try something new in their teaching and to be able to use student feedback to better understand how their students learned and what aspects of a course helped them learn.

Academic staff overwhelmingly supported development of a new course feedback system with questions that focus on students' learning experiences and are connected to the research on teaching and learning in higher education. Many consultation participants emphasized the importance of focusing *on learning experience and not on students' ratings of teaching*. They also recommended that students be provided with opportunities to reflect on their learning efforts and contributions to the course experiences through the course feedback system.

Consultations with students also indicated that they wanted a questionnaire that would allow them to identify what aspects of the course supported their learning and success, and the ability to provide written feedback that allowed them to share what supported their experiences and ability to achieve the intended learning goals in the course, and what could be improved. Students expressed the desire for a new system to collect feedback that would allow them to highlight great teaching and learning experiences, as well as indicate course experiences that could be improved, or that need addressing.

In our consultations, academic staff repeatedly noted that factors outside of their control can influence students' perceptions of learning experiences. These factors can affect their course ratings, especially when the questions are not well focused on learning and activities, but rather on course instructor behavior and characteristics. One academic staff member commented:

> *"It asks students if they think the course is useful for their education, which in many cases they really do not know, and rates the teaching abilities of the professor, which in turns reflects the popularity or 'likeness' of the instructor."*

A repeated concern among academic staff was that students are not trained to assess teaching, and so the current USRI can (unintendedly) serve, instead, as a *"popularity contest."* Several comments in the data suggest that ratings given by students on the current USRI can serve to modify instructor behaviour in ways that might disadvantage students. For example, the question 'are the assessment methods fair?', could be rated low by students because the assessment method was hard, or innovative, or did not test the intended learning objectives of the course. This rating does not provide the course instructor with information on what to change, or why the methods were perceived to be unfair. As shared by one participant, questions like this can create a situation where the USRI "*promotes grade inflation and lack of risk-taking in teaching*."

Some academic staff shared that with student feedback on their Faculty Forms they had received comments that expressed racism, sexism, homophobia, and personalized attacks towards them. These participants also shared that they felt they had nowhere to turn for support, and these comments had an impact on their mental health and wellbeing. This has led academic staff to feel that their personal identity impacts their rating, with equity seeking groups receiving lower ratings and harsher judgements from students. This finding is addressed in more detail in Theme Four.

Another sentiment present in the data is that a new course feedback questionnaire would benefit from shifting to questions that asked students about their learning and their experiences in a course, instead of course instructor characteristics. Changing the focus of the questions will help students offer more constructive information on what supported their learning and what could be improved. One participant said:

> *"We need to incorporate more self-reflection and awareness from students - for example, students need to express and articulate their learning and how it applies to their life or how it can transform their life."*

Focusing the questions on students' learning activities and experiences would address two important issues. First, academic staff need insights into what their students are doing in order to understand aspects of their teaching that are working for students and as well as the areas for growth in their teaching practice. Where questions solicit feedback about issues outside of their control (i.e., where the class is scheduled, location, date of the final exam) or focus on rating instructors' personal characteristics (such as enthusiasm), important feedback on student learning is missed. Focusing on students' experiences will also help course instructors identify ways to design accessible, equitable and inclusive learning experiences. Second, focusing questions on the learning experiences of students can help minimize feedback that focuses on personality and other factors that are not related to learning.

The recommendations addressed under this theme are:

a. Action: Questions should reflect current research on teaching and learning in higher education with a focus on feedback related to students' learning experiences and achievements in the course.
b. Action: The name of the new instrument should reflect the new focus on students' learning experiences and not the *rating* of the course instructor.
c. Action: Ensure all academic units have systems in place for students to provide more time-sensitive feedback to a course instructor and, when appropriate, to academic leaders (such as department heads, program directors, associate deans, deans) should serious issues arise, or a student is not comfortable directing feedback to the course instructor.

3 / Flexible and Customizable Questionnaire Design

Throughout consultations, academic staff noted that the USRI does not make room for the array of disciplines, contexts, and teaching practices that are characteristic of a modern university. In our consultations, academic staff noted that the USRI instrument cannot be adapted to specific course contexts such as clinical settings, laboratory settings, field experiences, group study, and for courses with multiple instructors and teaching assistants. Some academic staff also reported that those teaching difficult or challenging topics receive lower ratings and harsher comments. Finally, academic staff and students indicated that they would appreciate a course feedback system that could allow for customized feedback to be solicited throughout a course, rather than just at the end of the course.

One academic staff member highlighted the current USRI questions limitations by saying:

> *"Taking … the type of courses into account [some] courses are less favourable to students than [others]. The course instructor [is] fighting from the beginning for approval."*

Another participant gave voice to the way teaching challenging content can influence students' feedback:

> *"Intentionally disruptive activities and transformative pedagogies can create discomfort that would result in a (lower) evaluation that overlooks the intended goals."*

One consultation participant drew attention to the course modality as something that influences students' experiences, sharing their perception that, *"online courses are evaluated more harshly.*" Cumulatively, these insights illustrate how the USRI's 11 static questions do not account for how diverse the learning experiences are across academic programs in the subject matter, learning environment and modality, and pedagogical approaches. The questions on the current USRI were not developed to account for the array of course types and approaches, highlighting the need for question modules that are specific to the learning environment and learning experiences of the course (i.e., online and face-to-face, clinical, lab, field and place-based settings, capstone courses, and experiential learning courses, to name a few).

Some participants emphasized flexibility and customizability to make student feedback more meaningful and actionable. As one academic staff member said:

> *"I think the flexibility to include different questions or sets of questions to personalize according to the teaching methods might be useful … I'd, perhaps, like to see questions tailored more to me and my teaching, asking questions which give more insight into how students have learned…"*

In consultation with student groups, we learned that students would like to be able to give more specific feedback about their course experiences. Students indicated they would value the opportunity to give reasons for their rating or written feedback alongside the quantitative

questions. Some students suggested it would be helpful—alongside each quantitative question—to be able to suggest "*an actionable, specific change the instructor could make*" and explain why they chose their rating.

Academic staff also echoed those responses to the quantitative questions about lacking context. One consultation participant noted:

> *"USRI alludes to a rather narrow view of teaching; I particularly miss aspects of community engagement and informed practice and critical thinking reflected in the surveys."*

Another commented:

> *"I wish that when a student says a numerical answer they have to follow up with a rationale for their choice. Maybe not always but if you say something is "unacceptable" maybe there should be a follow-up question, "why is it unacceptable?".*

Finally, we heard from graduate students that when they are in teaching assistant roles, feedback is not collected through the USRI system. Some graduate students receive feedback on their teaching assistant roles if their department or program office offers Feedback Forms but not all programs collect this feedback. Other graduate students reported that feedback is collected on their teaching assistantship roles but not shared back with them, so they are not able to access the student feedback. Graduate students expressed a strong desire to have the opportunity to get feedback on their teaching assistantship work as part of a new course feedback system. Undergraduate students also expressed an interest in being able to provide feedback on their teaching assistants, as some shared there is no mechanism (in certain programs) to do so.

Consultation data points to a new student feedback technology system needing to be developed in ways that allow for feedback across diverse teaching and learning experiences and contexts. The recommendations related to this theme are thus:

a. Action: Adopt a new technology platform that can allow for customization and flexibility, through the integration of questions that can be selected from a question bank, depending on the academic unit, program and/or course context.
b. Action: Build in opportunities for course instructors to ask specific questions related to their course, including new and innovative methods to support teaching and student learning.
c. Action: Create a mechanism for feedback in classes that are currently either too small to receive a USRI (where the sample size is statistically too small), or for class sections/components that do not receive a USRI under the current system (i.e., a separate lab component).
d. Action: Within a new platform ensure academic staff can create opportunities to collect feedback from students at multiple times throughout the term.

e. Action: Include graduate teaching assistants in the new student feedback system, as feedback to this group on their teaching is not consistent across programs.

4 / Advance Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in a New Student Feedback System

Throughout the consultations, we heard concerns that the USRI instrument and Faculty Forms were not designed to minimize or mitigate bias, especially for those who were early-career, those who took risks and introduced new and innovative teaching approaches, those who taught controversial course topics, and those who identified as belonging to equity-seeking groups. Participants shared statements such as, "*much power is given to a very flawed instrument,*" and the USRI is "*not measuring what is important and is not useful in terms of how to improve student learning experiences*."

Consultations revealed that some academic staff routinely received inappropriate, disrespectful, harmful, racist and gendered comments from students through the Faculty Forms. One participant said, "*students feel free to be racist, sexist in them*," a concern echoed by many. Another statement reflected many participants' concerns that, "*there was no accountability and responsibility for [student] comments*" and that students often commented on non-instructional factors related to the personal characteristics of the instructor.

Student groups expressed other EDI-related concerns with the design of the current USRI instrument and the methods used to collect feedback with it and the Faculty Forms. Concerns included that the feedback process is poorly designed for accessibility both in the distribution of forms in class and the limited time provided to complete feedback. For some students with disabilities, the USRI instrument and Faculty Forms are not accessible as they are not available digitally where students can access assistive technologies such as e-readers and dictation.

EDI-related concerns can also be experienced by students. To help ensure equitable and inclusive teaching and learning, course instructors need awareness of how course design and course dynamics shape their learning environments and impact students. Student feedback can identify aspects of the course design, teaching strategies and learning environment that foster equitable pathways for their students and maintain a productive learning environment, that supports a sense of belonging and inclusion. Opportunities for students to provide feedback that can inform equity, inclusivity and accessibility should be included in a new course feedback system.

Recommendations for actions under this theme are:

a. Action: Ensure the questions within a new student feedback system are designed to mitigate opportunities for bias (i.e., questions that focus on learning experiences rather than course instructor traits).
b. Action: Ensure expertise from the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is on all committees and teams overseeing the development and implementation of all aspects of a new system.

c. Action: Provide training and professional learning opportunities for those responsible for administering and using student feedback (e.g., Deans, Department Heads, Tenure, Promotion and Merit committees), on how to address bias, racism and harassment, as well as how to support academic staff who are affected. Ensure expertise from the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is involved in the development and offering of educational opportunities.
d. Action: Develop communications, education and training materials that includes information on mitigating bias in feedback, and on addressing bias and harassment if identified in feedback and commit to revisiting these needs with community support on an ongoing basis.
e. Action: Ensure the new course feedback system is accessible and inclusive to staff and learners of all abilities following the principles of universal design for learning.
f. Action: Include questions in the new course feedback system that provide feedback on equitable, inclusive, and accessible teaching and learning practices and learning environments.
g. Action: Provide training for academic staff and academic leaders on how to recognize and address barriers to equity and inclusivity for students.
h. Action: Provide training for students on giving constructive feedback on their experiences and awareness on bias, harassment, and all forms of discrimination.
i. Action: Develop a process to flag and address harassing, threatening and discriminatory comments, including supports for academic staff and academic leaders when incidents occur.

5 / Embed Indigenous Ways of Knowing in a New System

Indigenous Scholars expressed concern that the USRI items did not acknowledge the multiple Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing that exist in approaches to teaching and learning at UCalgary. They felt that the questions had very little relevance to those who teach issues on social justice for Indigenous peoples, and from a critical anti-racist approach. They recommended that the URSI reflect the University's Indigenous Strategy and Indigenous pedagogies, such as the importance of relationality, learning with and in community, land-based learning, Ceremony, and Elders/Traditional Knowledge. They wondered how a process could be designed to reflect parallel processes such as oral systems and traditions and recommended that a future instrument align with the language around transformation that is communicated in the Indigenous Strategy.

Similar to other comments received in the consultations, they felt that the USRI had little value in providing them with meaningful feedback as an academic staff member, including how they could adjust their teaching practice to improve student learning experiences. They thought the system could be designed to intentionally incorporate more self-reflection and awareness from students on their learning experiences. They also acknowledged that the USRI system and Faculty Forms facilitated bias and racism. Many of the Indigenous Scholars consulted acknowledged that they had experienced gender bias and racism through the USRI questionnaire and Faculty Forms and reflected on how difficult and traumatic these experiences were. Many expressed concerns

regarding the anonymity of the USRI, as it removes responsibility and accountability and does not support relationship building.

a. Action: Ensure representation from the Office of Indigenous Engagement on the implementation working group overseeing the development and implementation of a new system.
b. Action: Ensure the new course feedback system aligns with the Indigenous Strategy and Indigenous ways of knowing and being.
c. Action: Ensure the new course feedback system reflects and demonstrates value for Indigenous pedagogies, such as the importance of relationality, learning with and in community, land-based learning, Ceremony, and Elders/Traditional Knowledge.
d. Action: Explore how parallel processes could be reflected in the new course feedback system, including oral systems and traditions.
e. Action: Provide training and professional learning opportunities for those responsible for administering and using student feedback (e.g., Deans, Department Heads, Tenure, Promotion and Merit committees) on how to support Indigenous Scholars and how to understand Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning.

6 / Improve Communication and Education

Throughout the consultations, we heard the importance and need to have a comprehensive institutional communications plan around student feedback and course evaluations. Both academic staff and students discussed the importance and value of feedback, however, many expressed they did not feel this was well communicated across the institution. Students expressed their uncertainty of what happened to their course feedback and how the feedback was being used, or if it was used at all. Academic staff expressed a desire to have feedback from students that was constructive and could help them improve their practice. One academic staff member shared:

> *"USRI should provide useful and ongoing feedback on students' learning and their experience with different elements / assignments in my course that enables me to continuously improve my course designs, selection of materials/resources and my approach to teaching."*

Several academic staff noted they often receive feedback unrelated to the course, or about issues outside of their control. Examples can include anything from comments about the physical classroom itself to availability of eatery options on campus. These comments suggested to them that students either don't know the purpose of the USRI and/or lack a clear avenue to communicate concerns and feedback on factors that fall outside of those that the course instructor can influence or change.

We also heard that teaching is complex, and a broader assessment of teaching needs to be viewed from multiple perspectives. Academic staff requested effective communication around

the "*need to address what else to do to assess teaching: peer assessment and others need the same level of rigor as is being done with the USRI*." They also acknowledged concerns regarding the interpretation and use of the URSI and student comments from Faculty Forms in teaching assessment practice. Others suggested that additional clarity, support, and training is needed on appropriate use and interpretation of USRIs in assessment.

a. Action: Develop a comprehensive communications plan for students, academic staff and administration that promotes the value and purpose of student course feedback. Include in the communications, reminders of how course feedback is used.
b. Action: Develop communications and learning opportunities for students on how to give constructive and professional feedback.
c. Action: Develop resources and professional learning opportunities for academic staff on how to use and consider student feedback.
d. Action: Develop resources and professional learning opportunities for Department Heads, Deans, and assessment committees on how to use and consider student feedback appropriately and alongside other sources and information on teaching.
e. Action: Develop resources for academic staff on how to use student feedback in tenure, merit and promotion processes, as well as how to use feedback to support award and grant applications; clearly link to the revised GFC Academic Staff Criteria & Processes Handbook.

7 / Collect and Disseminate at the Right Time, in the Right Way

It was highlighted in consultations that the administration of the USRI and Faculty Forms, both paper and online versions, is dated and not user-friendly. We repeatedly heard concerns about the waste generated through the paper-based survey and how this approach contradicts the University's Sustainability Strategy. It was also evident in the data *how* the USRI is accessed (paper or email/links to the survey) is a deterrent for students to complete. It was noted by academic staff and students how out-dated the USRI looks and that it does not match current design standards set by the University.

In the consultations, students and academic staff reflected that the timing and administration of the USRI can be problematic. Academic staff felt that with it being administered at the end of a semester, at a time when students are stressed and have many competing priorities, they are not getting thoughtful feedback. Students admitted that during times of stress and with lots of deadlines, they are less likely to take the time to complete the forms and they also shared that when administered in class, they rarely had enough time to think carefully about their ratings and comments on the Faculty Forms. Academic staff expressed the need for iterative or multiple points of feedback within a singular class to enable a full cycle of learning, feedback, listening and implementation. Students also felt that giving feedback at the end of the term did not benefit them, and they were not able to see the effect of change in the class.

a. Action: The new course feedback questionnaire should be available as an online tool for completion during a set period that allows students time to provide meaningful feedback.
b. Action: In order to ensure high response rates, administration of the course feedback should include in-class time to build awareness and encourage participation and completion and additional time outside of class for completion.
c. Action: Ensure a new technology platform to administer the course feedback questionnaires can be integrated with other systems allowing for automated processes such as email reminders to students to submit their feedback.
d. Action: Ensure the new system has a reporting feature that is easy to use and interpret, providing academic staff opportunities to view student feedback over time and easily visualize and aggregate feedback.
e. Action: Ensure a new system has the capability of comment/sentiment analysis so academic staff can have support interpreting written feedback.

Summary

A working group of the General Faculties Council (GFC) Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) was struck to review and advise on the University's course feedback system, the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI). Our review confirmed that the current questions are dated and in need of renewal as is the technology used to support the current system.

A comprehensive consultation plan was developed to capture USRI experiences of academic staff and student groups. Over several months, data were collected from robust and wide-spread consultations and the themed results informed the recommendations and actions provided in this report.

The working group recommends a complete system overhaul, based on the inability of the current system and Class Climate software to adequately meet our institutional needs. This will require relinquishing the USRI instrument and associated reports for a new student course feedback system that integrates with necessary university processes and enterprise systems. The scope of this change is transformative but also doable. It will require an ongoing Implementation Working Group to ensure the system and supports continue to address the needs of academic staff and students. It is recommended the new system **focus on learning** and not the individual instructor with a **survey design** that integrates modularity and flexibility and is customizable to the needs of the course, program or instructor. Questions should **minimize bias** and give space for **Indigenous ways of knowing and being** in the feedback model. There also needs to be dedicated **communications and training** for all stakeholders and allow for ease of **administering and reporting** so that students have more choices in completing the surveys and academic staff can make more sense of student feedback.

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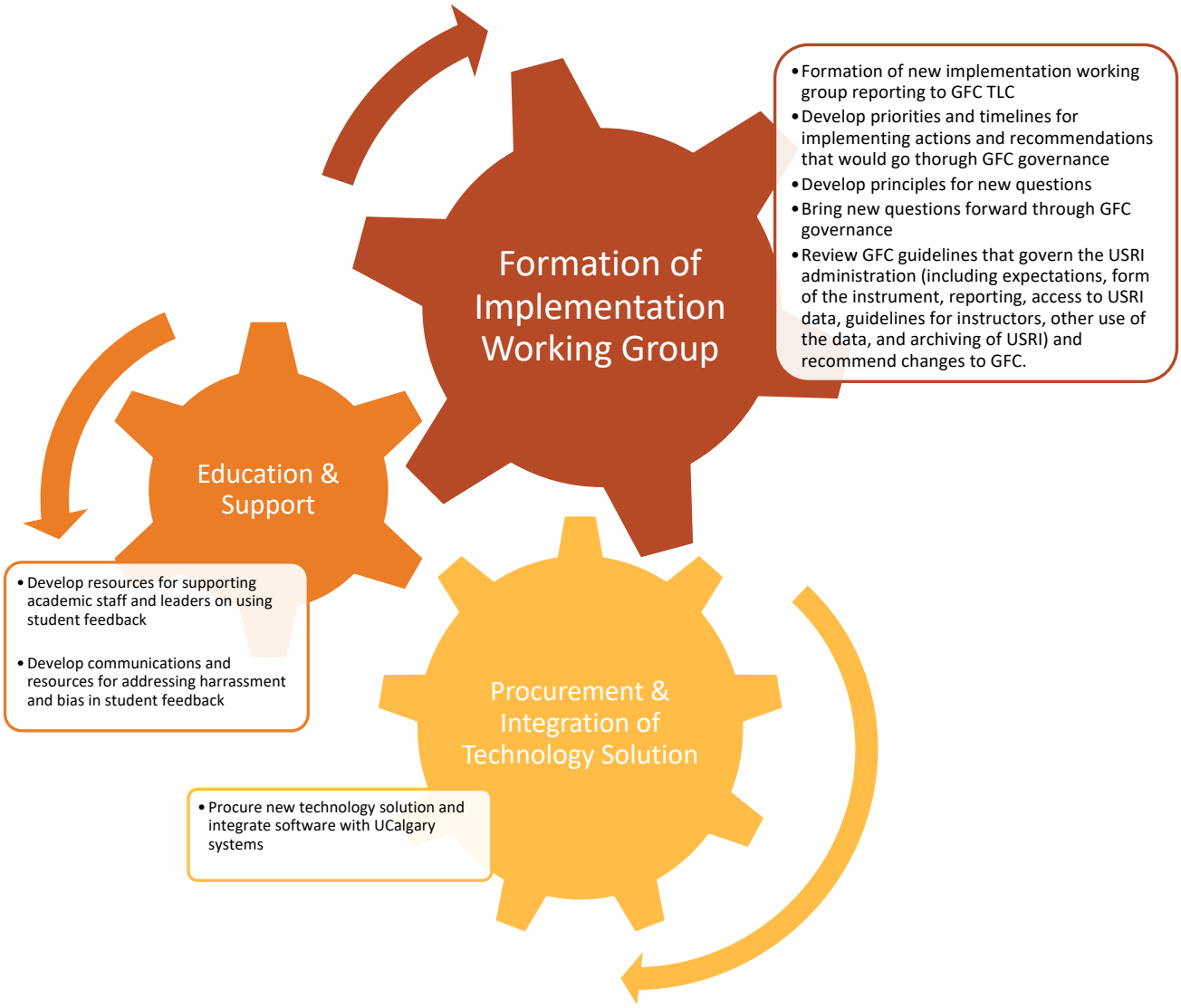
Appendix I: Guiding Principles for Student Feedback on Course Learning Experiences

The following seven guiding principles were developed by the working group and derived from the literature review and environmental scan. These principles were created to help inform decision-making processes moving towards a revised questionnaire. They were also shared throughout the consultation process for feedback and to help guide our discussions. The consultation process confirmed strong support for the principles, and their use in guiding future conversations and decisions related to student feedback processes.

1. Learning-focused: Questions are focused on students' learning experiences. Aggregate data provide academic staff valuable feedback for learning about their teaching practice.
2. Minimize bias: Questionnaire uses language that limits the likelihood of biased responses. Reporting processes are designed to minimize the effects of bias.
3. Valid and Reliable: Questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure, and responses demonstrate internal consistency.
4. Modular: Includes modules that can be selected for different learning modalities and experiences (e.g., clinical, experiential, or online learning).
5. Flexible & Customizable: Allows for standard set of questions and Faculty/Program questions. Allows individual instructors the opportunity to add additional questions.
6. Streamlined & Secure: Easy to access and use for staff and students. Data reports are secure and meaningful.
7. Responsible Use & Reporting: Used as intended, as a report on students' learning experiences. Used to help identify areas for strength and growth and as a reflective tool for teaching. Connected to qualitative feedback, allowing for meaningful interpretation of ratings. Transparent reporting on statistical validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Appendix II: Next Steps

The approval of the USRI Report through General Faculties Council (GFC) will initiate several pieces into action, including the formation of a new Implementation Working Group and the start of what can essentially be seen as phase 2. The graphic below provides a high-level summary of the three areas of work that will be initiated in the first 12 months after approval of the recommendation report.