

# CATS: A Guide for Faculty Members

Course and Teacher Surveys process, please contact the Vice Pro

### What questions are asked?

CATS is intended to be a minimum survey, and it is assumed that faculty, departments, and colleges may want to add additional questions. A copy of the digital instrument is appended to this Guide.

### May I add questions of my own?

You are free to add your own additional questions to CATS. You may, if you wish, send your additional questions to the Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness by emailing [CATS-QUESTIONS@villanova.edu](mailto:CATS-QUESTIONS@villanova.edu) no later than 4 weeks prior to the end date of a full semester-length course and no later than 3 weeks prior to the end date of a shorter course. Your college or department may also have supplemental questions, so please check with your chair before adding your own questions. Additional questions will appear at the end of the survey.

### What is the relationship between the grades I give students and the ratings they give me on the CATS forms?

The relationship between student ratings and grades has been extensively studied by social scientists, and there is little evidence for the common view that students trade high student ratings for high grades or punish instructors with high standards. Indeed, the results of Villanova's study completed in 2011 are reported below and indicate grading has an inconsequential impact on CATS scores. At Villanova, some of the most lenient graders get low scores and some of the most demanding teachers get high scores. On the other hand, students do not respond well to grading practices that they perceive as arbitrary and unfair, and they will express their resentment about what they perceive as unfair grading practices when it comes time to fill out the CATS forms. Rather than trying to give high grades, new faculty members should focus on giving students greater clarity about expectations. One experienced faculty member put it this way: a0. (t)6.bout

The provost, the vice provost for academics, and the associate vice provost for teaching and learning;  
Selected administrators in the Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness and in UNIT; and  
Employees of eXplorance Inc., proprietor of the software used for CATS.

Deans may designate all or portions of access under their purview to relevant administrators and faculty members.

For the faculty in the College of Engineering, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and School of Business, results for the D&I questions are only accessible to the chair/program director of your home department. For College of Nursing faculty, D&I results are only accessible to the college's  
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public workshops.

Generally speaking, teaching effectiveness does improve over the first few semesters, as faculty members get a clearer sense of student learning styles.

Faculty members may also want to ask advice of recognized good teachers in the department and may ask permission to observe classes.

Having said that, we have analyzed the CATS results from a large sample of students, and we can make a few generalizations about how to improve ratings. This is based on a pretest consisting of about 800 students.

**Improving scores on overall teaching effectiveness.** There are six factors that are, in the perception of a large number of Villanova students, most closely associated with the overall rating on teaching. The results suggest that improvements in the students' perception of these factors will have the greatest impact on how they assess your overall performance as a teacher. For those who are interested in the statistics, we list them with numbers in the tables below, but the general idea is that the factors are listed in order of relevance. Remember that we are discussing student perceptions here, so that it is not enough, for example, for you to organize and plan the course effectively from your own perspective. Students must also perceive that the course is well organized and planned. Sometimes it is helpful to spend a little bit of time helping students perceive things that you yourself may be aware of.

### **Explanation of variance of responses of overall evaluation of quality of instruction (Question 28: Quality of Instruction)**

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**Explanation of variance of responses of overall evaluation of value of the course  
(Question 29: Overall Value)**

**Question**

**Percentage of total cumulative variation**

students. In the fall semester of 2022, the single opened CATS question changed to two open-ended questions. The APC also oversaw the administration of the CATS change from a paper to a digital format. The APC continues to monitor the administration and the reporting of CATS and is always looking to improve both.

### General Principles for the use of student ratings for faculty evaluation and development: (Issued November 25, 1996)

In using and interpreting student ratings, committees, department chairs and other administrators should be guided by these principles:

1. Student ratings are a valuable source of data about effective teaching. (Research shows that they are highly reliable and stable and are relatively valid against a variety of indicators).
2. Student ratings must be supplemented with other sources of information about teaching, such as: syllabi; tests; grade distributions; faculty self-evaluations; and reports of class observations by colleagues.
3. Student ratings are only one tool for helping to improve teaching. Ratings can be a valuable source of information that aids in instructional improvement. They may help to identify particular aspects of a course that merit attention (e.g., test and exams, organization, student i4e only ontouoncol4.3 (ou



1. Faculty and administrators should always view **CATS scores as only one indicator in the evaluation of faculty teaching and, recognize that these data are based on student perceptions.** Remember Villanova's rationale for surveying students about teaching effectiveness:
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3. In view of the substantive differences across academic departments, faculty members' scores should be compared **primarily to departmental benchmarks** (e.g., average scores).
4. **Small differences**, such as two tenths of a point, from departmental and college means on Questions 28 and 29 should be interpreted as **inconsequential** differences in order to appropriately mitigate the small differences attributed to some of the demographic and situational variables, especially the differences described in items 4 and 5 presented below in the "Detailed Results of the Statistical Analysis."
5. The class size, the rigor of grading, the time of day, the type of course, the class rank of the student and the student's GPA **do not have a consequential** impact and therefore should not be emphasized when interpreting CATS scores on Questions 28 and 29.
6. Faculty should not be concerned about asking students to spend 3 or more hours per week on course work outside of class, because **higher workload is not associated with lower CATS** scores on Questions 28 and 29.
7. The age of the instructor, the number of years of teaching experience, and the type of full-time faculty member (tenure-track, tenured, or non-tenure track) do not have a consequential impact on CATS scores on Questions 28 and 29. Department Chairs should **work with all faculty members to develop effective teaching**, especially part-time faculty m

### Detailed Results of the Statistical Analysis (October 2012)

The following eight variables had an **inconsequential** effect of 0.06 or less in either direction (higher or lower than the average score) on Q28:

1. Class Size (under 30 or over 30 students)
2. The student's self-reported GPA
3. The Student's class rank (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior or senior)
4. The age of the faculty member
5. Time of day class is taught (e.g., before 9:00 or before 10:00)
6. The type of course (required or elective)
7. The ratio of self-reported GPA to the class GPA
8. The faculty member's number of years of teaching experience (e.g., less than 15 years and more than 25 years)

The following five variables had **small effects** around 0.1 to 0.21 in either direction (higher or lower than the average score) on Q28:



1. As students report