

# Student Perceptions of Learning Survey Michigan State University

## PROVISIONAL QUESTION CATALOG & GUIDANCE

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of the Provisional Question Catalog is to provide a starting point for selecting, modifying, or creating questions that address the interests of a particular college or teaching unit. The questions have been vetted for best practices in item design, but they should be considered provisional until they have been assessed for equity, reliability, and validity. Questions will be featured in the SPLS Question Bank once they have been assessed for equity, reliability, and validity.

### ***Structure***

The Provisional Question Catalog is organized according to nine areas that research suggests students have in mind when they are asked about their perceptions of the quality of teaching and courses:

- Overall
- Clarity
- Organization/structure
- Interaction/rapport/concern/helpfulness
- Learning atmosphere
- Stimulation of interest/enthusiasm/engagement
- Instructional assessment
- Perceived learning
- Opportunities to demonstrate understanding

Questions for all nine areas can be viewed together in the first worksheet, “ALL,” or by individual area in the subsequent worksheets.

Each question is numbered in Column A for easy reference.

The highlighted questions represent general questions for each area, followed by samples of questions that are more granular or context specific.

The eight institution-level questions that are posed to every student for every course are marked as “MSU Question” in Column B.

The response scales that correspond to each question are listed in Column E. There are only two 5-point response scales: agreement and quality.

### ***Guidance: Instructor versus Course Questions***

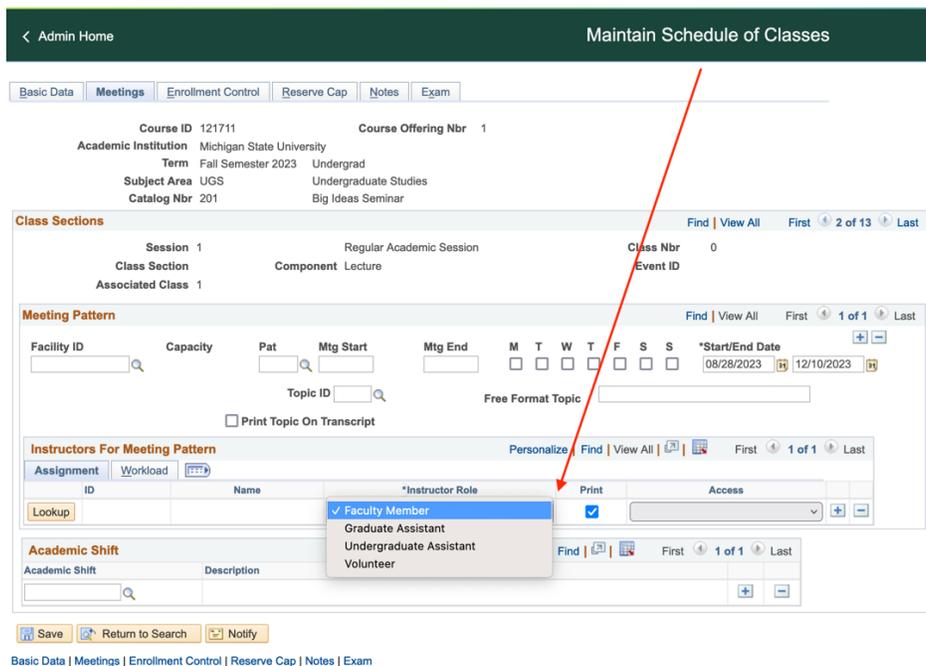
Research suggests that students rarely distinguish between the *course* and the *instructor* when reporting perceptions of their learning experiences. For example, there is very rarely a statistically significant difference in reported responses about the quality of a *course* and the *instructor* of that course. Still, it can be helpful to get feedback that is specific to an instructor, especially when there is more than one instructor of record, and the question is more granular or context specific.

The SPLS instrument replicates every *instructor* question according to the number of instructors of record entered in Campus Solutions and includes the first and last name listed within the Human Resources

database (not “legal name”). For example, the institution-level question related to learning atmosphere will be presented to students as follows when two instructors and one graduate teaching assistant are entered in Campus Solutions.

- *The instructor, Sasha Spartan, created an atmosphere that supported my learning:*
- *The instructor, Gary Green, created an atmosphere that supported my learning:*
- *The graduate teaching assistant, Pat White, created an atmosphere that supported my learning:*

The term “instructor” will be applied when Faculty Member is selected as the instructor role within Campus Solutions, and “graduate teaching assistant” will be applied when Graduate Assistant is selected. Questions will not be generated, and reports will not be distributed to individuals who are designated as Undergraduate Assistant or Volunteer.



### ***Guidance: Response Scales***

Colleges and/or teaching units that create or have their own questions should use a 5-point Likert-type response scale in which the first option is most favorable. Whenever possible, the agreement or quality scale should be used to limit response scale variability.

### ***Guidance: Question Development***

The Student Perceptions of Learning Survey collects students’ perceptions of their learning experiences. There are natural limitations to what can be gained from such a survey. Be mindful of these common issues when selecting, modifying, or creating survey questions.

*Expertise.* Consider whether students have adequate expertise to answer the question properly and reliably. For example, students would need expertise in the subject matter being taught for a question like, “The course covered all of the major concepts for the subject matter.” And students would need pedagogical expertise for a question like, “The instructor used the most effective teaching methods for the course content.”

*Multi-part.* A best practice in item design is to avoid questions that have multiple components. It may be difficult for students to respond to a single survey question that is effectively two questions. For example, “The instructor related course concepts to current research and practical applications.”

Still, there are some instances in which a question could have multiple parts that are interconnected. For example, “The course highlighted the connections between theory, research, and practice” assumes that the three concepts are linked, and the linkage is evident to students. This will not always be the case, so multi-part questions should be considered on a case-by-case basis and used cautiously.

*Broad.* Research suggests that questions that ask students about their learning experiences more broadly may be more subject to biases and less reliable. These include questions using the word “overall,” such as, “Overall, the quality of instruction provided by the instructor in this course was excellent.” What students have in mind when answering an “overall” question can vary dramatically from person to person and could be out of the control of the instructor or unrelated to the course. How students respond to broad questions should be considered in relation to more specific and reliable questions.

*Definition.* Consider whether all students define terms used in the question in the intended ways. For example, terms such as “critical reflection” and “integrated reasoning” and other specialized terminology should only be used when it is clear that they have been well-defined and featured prominently in a course.

*Further guidance about interpreting and using SPLS results is available from the Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development.*

***Revised April 11, 2023***