

## American University

### Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Institutional Practices and Procedures

#### I. Scope

This document provides guidelines for Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) survey implementation and reporting. It applies to university schools, teaching departments, faculty teaching course sections, and students enrolled in surveys course sections, and academic administration.

As of the writing of these institutional practices (April 2025) the Washington College of Law (WCL) is excluded from this policy and practice document and administers their own SETs. WCL may be included later. In the event of such a merger, these guidelines will be revised and recirculated.

#### II. What is the purpose of SETs?

The key purpose of SET surveys is collecting and analyzing feedback regarding instruction and course design that allows faculty the opportunity to reflect on their work as an indicator of faculty thriving and improvement in teaching.

The implementation of SETs has been confirmed by the Faculty Senate of American University. Student Evaluation of Teaching provides a voice for students' academic experiences and provides them with the agency to affect the pedagogy and design of courses during their academic career at AU.

SET results are required components of faculty Teaching Portfolios. The portfolios are submitted for reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions. Specialized Longitudinal Individual Instructor and Department reports are available for faculty to view and download at [set.american.edu](http://set.american.edu).

#### III. Definitions

*Common questions:* All default SET questions on surveys. SET questions have been and will continue to be approved by the Faculty Senate.

*Course:* A course is an academic class offered to students. A course is identified by the subject code and course number in the official course catalog.

*Course section:* A course section is the specific section of an offered course. A course section is identified by the subject code, course number, and section number.

*Full-term course sections:* Course sections that follow the entire length of the term. These sections start on the “courses begin” date and end on the “courses end” date published in the official AU academic calendar.

*Less than full-term course sections:* Course sections that do not conform to the published term course start and end dates. These sections are longer than six days in length.

*Longitudinal reports:* These reports, both for individual faculty and departments, include SET results over 3 or 6 years in aggregate by term to easily identify trends over time. These reports are used for reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions.

*Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA):* University department that manages all SET administration, reporting and technical support as part of their portfolio.

*Private reports:* All SET reports housed in faculty SET accounts that are only visible to the instructor, found at [set.american.edu](http://set.american.edu).

*Public reports:* All SET reports are available to the AU community within the MyAU portal.

*Report:* A report is a summary of SET results by course section, faculty member, department, or term. Reports may include quantitative and qualitative data.

*Short courses:* Course sections six or fewer days long.

*Standard semester reports:* Public and private single course section and department reports.

*Specialty semester reports:* Reporting beyond regular course section reports for use in files for action and merit reviews.

*Survey exemption:* Course section will not receive a SET survey. These course sections meet the criteria for exemptions or have been exempted in response to an individual request.

*Survey exclusion:* These course sections will receive a SET survey. These are courses who meet the exemption criteria, but the faculty or administrator wishes to receive a SET.

*Term:* Synonymous with semester. This refers to the university defined calendar period when course sections are active. For example, Fall, Spring, or Summer.

#### **IV. SET Practices**

1. The SET survey questions are approved by the Faculty Senate and may only be revised through a formal Faculty Senate SET question review.
2. Grades are not contingent upon students completing the SET survey.
3. SET exceptions will not be granted to any course section with fewer than four enrolled students.
4. Median is the reported primary measure of central tendency.
5. Students are never individually identified in reports or data requests.

#### **V. SET Standard Procedures**

- A. Student Evaluation of Teaching survey questions
  1. SET questions are designed for courses that enroll a group of students that meet and cover a common curriculum or subject matter. All courses with a primary faculty member, where students meet in a classroom or online more than once, for credit, are expected to administer SETs.
  2. The current SET survey contains 14 common questions, developed by a Faculty Senate committee, and approved by the Faculty Senate and Dean of Faculty for adoption March 4, 2020, for implementation in Summer and Term 2 2020. Only the Faculty Senate may change common SET questions.
  3. SET survey common questions form the basis for every SET survey. The question structure includes 12 closed-ended questions with a 5-point scale, and two open-ended questions. By design, surveys have a minimum of 14 and maximum of 23 questions.
  4. Faculty may add one custom question to their SET surveys.
  5. Departments and programs may add up to four custom questions for each course section.
    - a. Custom questions are submitted to OIRA.
    - b. Custom questions are re-confirmed with department chairs and program directors every three years through OIRA.
    - c. Additions and updates to custom questions will be made the term following the submission date.
  6. Faculty are not provided with information about individual student SET submissions.

7. Faculty with course sections that do not receive surveys are encouraged to collect student feedback in an alternate format, for example, through an anonymous survey.

B. Exemptions and exceptions

1. Exemptions for SET surveys apply to course sections with enrollment of six or fewer students or they are independently supervised. The common SET survey questions generally do not apply to these course types.
2. All course sections conduct surveys, with the following exemptions based on course section conditions or types:
  - a. Global enrollment fewer than six.
  - b. Course section with multiple students but no direct classroom instruction.
  - c. One-to-one instruction. i.e. music instruction.
  - d. Not taught by American University faculty member.

3. Exempt course types

Exempt course types
AU Abroad
Doctoral Continuing Ed
Independent Study
Internship
NSLC (High school leadership course sections)
Music instruction 1:1
PUAD-0XX non-credit
Research
SIS-795 course sections
Student teaching
Thesis seminars

- a. Any requests for exemptions beyond those listed above must be approved by the dean of the respective school.
- b. Long-term exemptions, beyond one term, must be approved by the respective dean. Long term exemptions are re-confirmed every two years by OIRA, the originator and the dean, if the exemption window extends beyond the review cycle date.

### C. Survey Exceptions

1. SET exceptions will not be granted under any circumstances for course sections with fewer than four students.
2. Requests for an exception for a course section survey must be approved by the dean of the respective school.
3. Long-term exceptions, beyond one term, must be approved by the dean of the respective school. Long-term exceptions are re-confirmed every three years by OIRA, the originator and the dean, if the exception window extends beyond the review cycle date.

### D. Survey windows and timing

1. OIRA shall determine the default survey windows based on the current official academic calendar.
2. The length of surveys for short course sections is 3-8 days long. Full and less than full term course section survey windows are 9 days long. When holidays and other major events occur in a term that disallows the regular survey window structure, OIRA reserves the right to modify the default windows. In such a case, the survey window will be open as close to nine days as possible, but no less than seven days.
3. Faculty have the option of adjusting the timing of their SET surveys to conform to their SET survey administration plan.
4. It is encouraged to close SET surveys before finals week.
5. No SETs should be open past the "Final grades deadline," published in the official academic calendar.
6. OIRA does not share student SET survey status.

### E. Survey Administration

1. OIRA manages the Student Evaluation of Teaching platform, and interfaces with platform support to manage communications, surveys, data, upgrades, reports, and troubleshooting.
2. OIRA manages SET survey administration, interfaces with faculty, students, and staff to communicate and manage the survey process.
3. Closed surveys may only be reopened by the faculty member or at a faculty member's request. OIRA does not reopen surveys at students' request. Students must contact their faculty member who then alerts OIRA of the approved change.
4. OIRA is responsible for all communications to the AU community regarding SETs as necessary.

## F. SET reporting

1. SET report structure and contents must be approved by the Dean of Faculty.
2. No SET reports will be provided to faculty after separation for American University. Faculty are recommended to download and save all SET reports prior to leaving American University.
3. Timing
  - a. At the close of each term, the SET Senior Coordinator will publish a projected draft report distribution schedule.
  - b. The SET Senior Coordinator in OIRA creates and distributes SET term-specific PDF reports available to AU faculty within four weeks of the final grade submission date published in the official AU academic calendar.
4. Contents
  - a. All reports include summary responses to closed-ended common questions.
  - b. Instructor-Course reports with student comments include all common SET questions, and if applicable, custom questions added by faculty and departments or programs.
5. Thresholds
  - a. All SET reports, except the Instructor-Course report with student comments, have a threshold of six responses to be generated.
  - b. The Instructor-Course report with student comments has a threshold of one.
6. Metrics
  - a. All reports reflect the same general metrics. Comparison data or invited counts are not reported on all SET reports.
  - b. Means will not be provided with any SET data.
  - c. All statistical data will be calculated and reported to one decimal place.
7. Early SET report release
  - a. Requests for early issue standard semester SET reports are taken on a case-by-case basis.
    - i. Requests must be from the faculty member or a faculty member's teaching department, teaching school, teaching program, or an administrator for planning and assessment purposes.
    - ii. Faculty will be notified when a request is made for their SET reports, prior to their dissemination.
8. Ad hoc reports
  - a. Schools, programs and departments may request SET data in a custom format. These reports may be requested through the OIRA SET Senior Coordinator and fulfilled by OIRA.

- b. Ad hoc report request approvals are based on the following criteria:
    - i. Is the data already available from public sources?
    - ii. Is the data protected by SET policy?
    - iii. The purpose and end use of the data requested.
  - c. Ad hoc report requests are subject to approval by either OIRA or the Dean of Faculty.
  - d. Reports do not display data at any level with fewer than six responses.
  - e. If multiple course sections are reported in aggregate, course sections with fewer than six responses may be included. This applies to cross-listed course sections, including cross-listed lecture/laboratory science sections.
  - f. Sufficient lead time for report requests is strongly encouraged. A minimum of one month is recommended.
9. Confidentiality
- a. Student open-ended comments are private. Student names are not associated with or attributed to a specific comment in any report.
  - b. Faculty have access to de-identified student comments in their Instructor-Course report with student comments. Faculty may share these reports.
  - c. For a legitimate educational interest, de-identified student comments may be made available to university administration.
10. Website
- a. OIRA will maintain a website presence with general SET information and updates, in addition to information and resources specific to faculty and student users.

For further information about SETs, including details about SET administration, directions, and FAQs, visit <https://www.american.edu/provost/oira/set/>.