Interpreting ESCI Data

ESCI stands for the Evaluation System for Courses and Instruction, the computer-based system that summarizes student end-of-course ratings. In advising faculty clients about how best to interpret ESCI results, Instructional Consultation frequently makes the following points. These are intended as general suggestions, and should not be taken as rigid or universal guidelines. For assistance in interpreting particular data, please contact a consultant 893-2972.

1. ESCI results represent what your students say about your teaching and your course. This is an **important and valuable source of information** (but it should not be the only source – see 3 below).

2. Questions A and B are overall "summary" questions. There are two ways to look at the data:

   How well students think you are doing in "**absolute**" terms, as defined by the "anchor points" of the scale: "Excellent", "Very Good", "Good", "Fair", "Poor".

   How well students in your course think you are doing **relative** to what students say about other courses in the department and campuswide.

3. Results of Questions A and B should be corroborated (or questioned) via other evidence about the course before reaching important conclusions. For ideas and discussion of other sources, see a consultant (x2972).

4. Results of Questions A and B should **not be overinterpreted**. In general, we suggest that by themselves these results are accurate enough only to place instructors and courses into three broad categories: the truly outstanding, those with problems, and the vast majority in the middle.

5. To get the most useful information from the results, we suggest you look at the entire distributions, not just the means or medians. Results are always reported in terms of percentage distributions, so it is easy to look at the results and see that, for example, "46% of my students rated my teaching as Excellent or Very Good." Looking at the entire distribution lets you see whether the responses are clustered in a couple of categories ("They loved it!"), or spread across the categories ("Some loved it, some thought it was OK, and some hated it"), or perhaps even bimodal ("Some loved it and some hated it, but nobody was indifferent").

6. In using the comparison norms, your results will differ to some extent from those of your department during the current quarter, the department over time, and the campus over time. It is important to understand when those differences are educationally meaningful and when they are not. It is possible to use statistical procedures to compare two distributions, but it is not uncommon for the number of student respondents to be so large that any difference is statistically significant, even though it may not be educationally meaningful. As a rough rule of thumb to decide when the differences between your course and the "norms" may be meaningful, we suggest the following:

   If the percentage of students who rate your course in any particular category differs by about **10%** from the percentage in a norm group, then **there MAY be something educationally meaningful going on**, and it's worth examining.

   For example, suppose your department this quarter has 54% of students rating "the overall quality of the instructor's teaching" as "Excellent," and 64% of your students rate your teaching as "Excellent." Then you may be doing a better job in this course than the departmental average, and you could look at responses to other questions on the survey and to other sources to understand the differences, and to decide for yourself whether they are meaningful.

   If for any response category the percentage differs by about **20%**, then **there's PROBABLY something meaningful going on**, and it's definitely worth seeking further understanding.

   If the percentage differs by about **30%**, then **there IS something meaningful going on.**

   These are not meant as hard and fast cutoff points; the overall message is that the larger the differences between two distributions, the bigger the chance that the differences are meaningful, and therefore the more important it is to understand what's going on. We definitely would caution against reaching conclusions based on differences as small as 5%.

7. Overall, **teaching at UCSB is rated highly by our students**: from Fall 2001 through Spring 2007, in 81% of courses students have rated the overall quality of the instructor's teaching as "Excellent" or "Very Good", and the figure increases to 94% if one includes the "Good" category. This suggests, among other things, that with such a capable group of instructors it will only be the truly exceptional who stand out, and that those who receive average or typical ratings are competent and effective instructors who are doing well for students and for the University.