

Student Opinion Survey messages for Students, Faculty, and Administrators

Joint Academic Affairs / Faculty Senate Task-Force

Item A – Endorsed by Faculty Senate, March 23, 2026

To students (header of opinion surveys)

Your feedback is essential to help us refine curriculum and strengthen the learning experience for future students. To make your input as meaningful as possible, please provide specific feedback regarding the course structure and teaching methods. By sharing your experiences, you contribute to creating a more rigorous, effective, and more supportive learning environment for our academic community.

Items B, C, and D (next pages) – Endorsed by Faculty Senate April 27, 2026

Student opinion survey suggestions for faculty, students, and administrators.

The following three documents (Items B, C, & D) reflect two years of discussions between the NAU Faculty Senate and Academic Affairs regarding student opinion surveys. We recognize that the messages, suggestions, and sample language contained in Items B & C do not, on their own, eliminate some of the thorny fundamental problems with the survey system, but believe that faculty will find some utility and ideas for mitigating some of these issues. In Item D, we seek to communicate our shared understanding of what we believe to be best practices to review committees, chairs, directors and deans, in particular, the preference that student opinion surveys are de-weighted in favor of other evidence when faculty performance is assessed.

Item B

Providing Course Feedback - (for use as an email, slide or canvas post for students)

The following is example text, please feel free to modify to your individual needs, professional judgement, and style preferences.

Your feedback is a vital part of our academic community. At the end of each term, you are invited to share your experience through Student Opinion Surveys. These surveys are not just "ratings"; they are used by professors to inform their teaching and by the university to maintain the integrity of the curriculum. To ensure your voice is heard and your feedback is effective, please keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Be Specific and Actionable

General comments like, "The lectures were awesome." or "I didn't like the lectures." are difficult to act upon. Instead, identify the *why* so the instructor knows exactly what to keep and what to change. **Instead of:** "The homework was confusing." **Try:** "The homework instructions were sometimes unclear, so I wasn't always sure what was expected for the assignment."

2. Focus on Learning

The most actionable feedback focuses on the teaching environment, course structure, and design. Consider commenting on topics such as the clarity of explanations, organization of the course, impact of assignments on learning, pace of the course, and clarity of feedback you received on assignments and exams.

3. Professionalism Matters

Professionalism in your written communication about the course ensures your feedback is taken seriously.

Item C

MEMORANDUM

TO: NAU Faculty - **FROM:** Office of the Provost / Faculty Senate

SUBJECT: Encouraging Constructive Student Feedback

Student opinion surveys are mandated by ABOR, but their use and interpretation is a matter of shared governance. While these evaluations are a standard part of our academic cycle, we recognize that the quality of feedback varies. To ensure these surveys remain a tool for professional growth rather than a source of frustration, we suggest taking an active role in framing the purpose of these evaluations for your students. We have purposefully avoided direct discussion of bias and abusive comments that are known problems with the surveys in an effort to avoid prompting students to do these things. We recommend that faculty set aside ten minutes of class near the end of the term for students to submit their survey responses in class, and to give examples of times that you have used student feedback to improve your course(s).

The goal is to move the conversation away from "rating" an instructor and toward collaborating on the future of the course. Research suggests that when instructors take a few minutes of class time to explain *how* feedback is used, the quality and professionalism of student responses improve. We encourage you to share the following points with your students:

Purpose of surveys: Remind students that the primary goal is to improve the course for future peers. Their insights help shape syllabi, reading lists, and teaching methods.

Power of being specific: Encourage students to provide actionable advice (e.g., "I appreciated when we discussed our reactions to the films in small group" and "The exams covered some material that we didn't spend much time on in lecture, so a review of key topics would be helpful.") rather than broad unspecific comments or comments on faculty personality or disposition.

If you are looking for a way to broach this subject, we have attached a sample message to share with students (as an email, handout, or canvas message). You might also consider adopting the following language:

"Your feedback on the course survey is very important to me. I read every comment to see what worked for you and what didn't so I can improve this class for the next group of students. Please keep your feedback constructive and focused on the learning experience. The most helpful comments are those that are specific and actionable."



Item D

MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty Review Committees, Chairs, Directors, & Deans - **FROM:** Office of the Provost / Faculty Senate - **SUBJECT:** Best Practices for Interpreting Student Opinion Surveys

While student opinion surveys are ABOR-mandated and can offer a valuable window into the student experience, they must be interpreted with deliberation, context, and a clear awareness of their inherent limitations. The primary goal of surveys is insights to improve courses for future students. To ensure these tools are used as effectively as possible, please keep the following in mind during your evaluations of faculty performance.

Extensive pedagogical research indicates that student evaluations are frequently influenced by implicit biases. Studies consistently show that faculty who are women or people of color often receive lower scores than their white male counterparts, even when teaching identical materials. Courses that cover more difficult subjects also often receive more criticism. Please do not rely on numerical scores in isolation. Moreover, the anonymity of surveys can sometimes be misused to submit comments that are unprofessional, abusive, or personally derogatory. Such comments should be disregarded when evaluating faculty performance.

To promote a fairer evaluation process, we encourage you to de-weight student surveys in your assessments of faculty performance. Student Opinion Surveys capture only one perspective on what happens in the classroom and should be interpreted within a broader set of teaching evidence. Please be aware that syllabus organization is not always the purview of a faculty due to accreditation requirements and courses with multiple sections. When evaluating faculty performance, please consider other evidence of teaching effectiveness, such as teaching portfolios as outlined in the *Inclusive Excellence in Teaching* documents, including, but not limited to:

- (1) Course design, structure, and environment.
- (2) Innovative pedagogical methods and approaches; and
- (3) Evidence and artifacts of student learning and mentorship.

We ask that you share these perspectives with your faculty.

When instructors feel the limitations and biases of the evaluation process are known by leadership, they are more likely to engage deeply with feedback and implement the meaningful changes that benefit NAU students.

