

DEPARTMENT HEADS AND CHAIRS: READING STUDENT COMMENTS

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Why faculty discount written comments

- Biggest concern- the students are not the experts. They sometimes do not value the learning done in class until much later.
- Students (especially) undergraduate students are not trained to write meaningful comments.
- The brain is not fully formed until you are 29 years old. Students don't always understand fully the benefit of what they are being taught in the classroom until they are in the world of work.
- At this age, most students don't know what they're talking about and fail to offer constructive feedback.
- My courses are rigorous therefore some will complain because they don't receive the grade they wanted.



[illegible]

- ... evaluations are biased against women, faculty of color, and other unrepresented groups.
- This represents my popularity not how much they learned.
- ...women usually score lower and comments are directed to personal dress, or superficial characteristics- same for people of color.
- Class size matters ... look up data on that ... smaller = easier to please folks, larger = harder.
- Consider whether the class is required and/or predominantly majors or non-majors



Other concerns frequently noted

- A major advisor in area prompts students to complain and write negative comments about specific faculty members.
- If a student is reported for plagiarism, they may fill out an eval with negative comments.
- Some students will complain because they don't like the class content at all.
- It's really hard to make every 54 students happy who're required to receive at least a B to pass this class.
- Single biggest concern- that all students aren't represented.



SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES RECOMMENDING HOLISTIC EVALUATIONS OF TEACHING

- American Anthropological Association
- American Dialect Society
- American Folklore Society
- American Historical Association
- American Political Science Association
- Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
- Dance Studies Association
- International Center of Medieval Art
- Latin American Studies Association
- Middle East Studies Association
- National Communication Association
- National Council on Public History
- Rhetoric Society of America
- Society for Cinema and Media Studies
- Society for Personality and Social Psychology
- Society of Architectural Historians
- Sociologists for Women in Society

OVERALL CRITICISMS

1. Questions on SETs should focus on student experiences, and the instruments should be framed as an opportunity for student feedback, rather than an opportunity for formal ratings of teaching effectiveness

2. SETs should not be used as the only evidence of teaching effectiveness. Rather, when they are used, they should be part of a holistic assessment that includes peer observations, reviews of teaching materials, and instructor self-reflections.

3. SETs should not be used to compare individual faculty members to each other or to a department average. As part of a holistic assessment, they can appropriately be used to document patterns in an instructor's feedback over time.

4. If quantitative scores are reported, they should include distributions, sample sizes, and response rates for each question on the instrument (Stark and Freishtat 2014). This provides an interpretative context for the scores (e.g., items with low response rates should be given little weight).

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- 5. Evaluators (e.g., chairs, deans, hiring committees, tenure and promotion committees) should be trained in how to interpret and use SETs as part of a holistic assessment of teaching effectiveness.
- And Student Comments

AAUW 2016 STUDY

In 2016 the American Association of University Professors released a comprehensive survey of faculty members about teaching evaluations. which found that:

The rate at which students were filling out evaluations has gone down precipitously in the electronic age.

The tone of their comments has started to resemble that of internet message boards, with more abuse and bullying.

AAUW 2016 STUDY

Students who were **aware of** some or all of their **grades** tended to be harder on faculty members in both written comments and numerical assessment. Mid Semester is more effective

That decrease in reliability and consistency contributes to the ineffectiveness of student evaluations as a primary metric for faculty assessment.

SETs measure student bias more than teacher effectiveness

AAUW 2016 STUDY

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Because faculty course evaluations are often used in making decisions for promotion and tenure, they are a relatively hidden source of bias against under-represented groups, one that administrators, department chairs, and hiring or promotion committees are not likely to consider.

FACTORS BIASING COURSE / INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS



- Large classes (>40 students)
- Courses outside major
- Time of day (“non-prime time”)
- Freshmen-level courses
- Theory-oriented courses
- Taught by:
 - Persons of color / Females / Non-Native Speakers



- Small classes (<40 students)
- Courses in major
- Time of day (“prime time”)
- Senior-level and Graduate courses
- Practice-oriented courses
- Taught by:
 - White / Males

You greatly enhance your odds of low evaluations if you can manage to be a female, person of color, teaching a large freshman general education theory course to non-majors at 7:30 a.m. (It won't hurt if the classroom is a dump too!)

SETS AND COMMENTS – PROCEED WITH CAUTION



- **Relying on often-biased student evaluations to assess faculty could lead to lawsuits**
- “Relying on biased instruments to evaluate faculty members is institutional discrimination. Indeed, it is simply a matter of time before a class-action lawsuit is filed against an institution for knowingly using biased instruments in evaluating its faculty.”
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/> June 24, 2019
- Farr, Moira. 2018. “Arbitration Decision on Student Evaluations of Teaching Applauded by Faculty.” University Affairs August 28. Retrieved from <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/arbitration-decision-on-student-evaluations-of-teaching-applauded-by-faculty/>.

The good, Bad, and
sometimes Ugly

IF YOU PLAN TO
READ THEM

BEST PRACTICES IN USING STUDENT COMMENTS IN EVALUATING TEACHING

- Consider the **context**
- Compare **within** not across **faculty**
- Don't fixate on the **outliers**
- Look for **themes**
- Listen to the **faculty perspective**
- **Triangulate**

Consider the Context



Students: Who Are They?

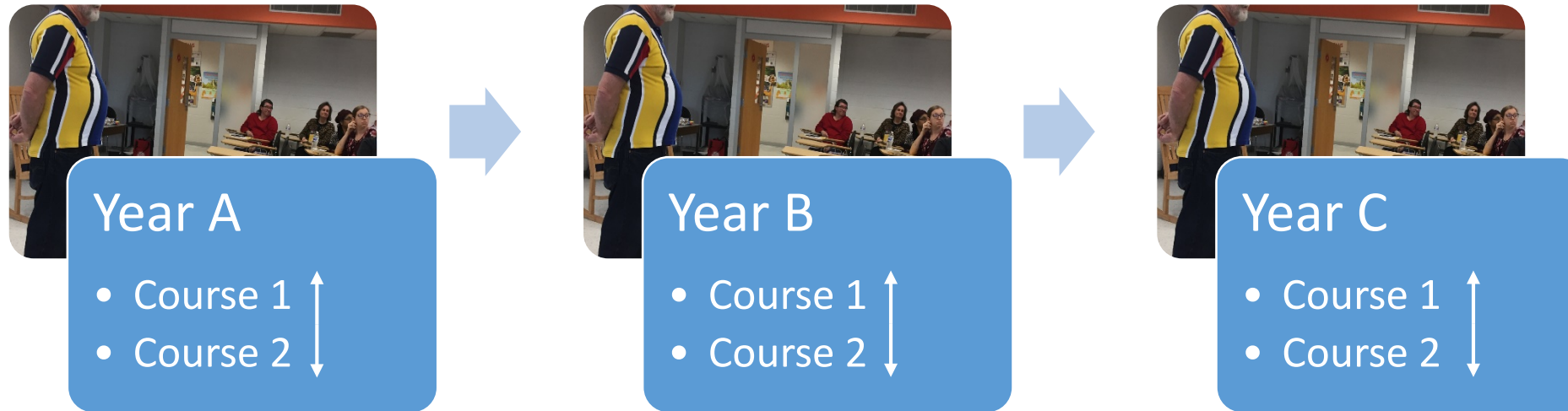
Faculty: Who Are They?

Context: What is the class? Size? Topic? Level?

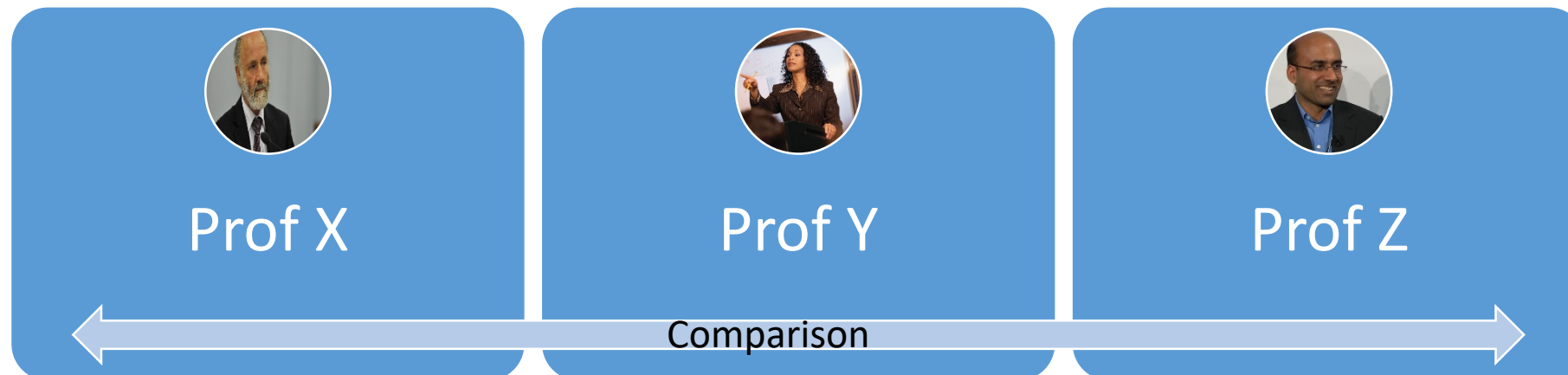
Required? Gateway? Major? High DFW? Time offered? Undergraduate? Graduate? Introductory?



Compare Within not Between Faculty



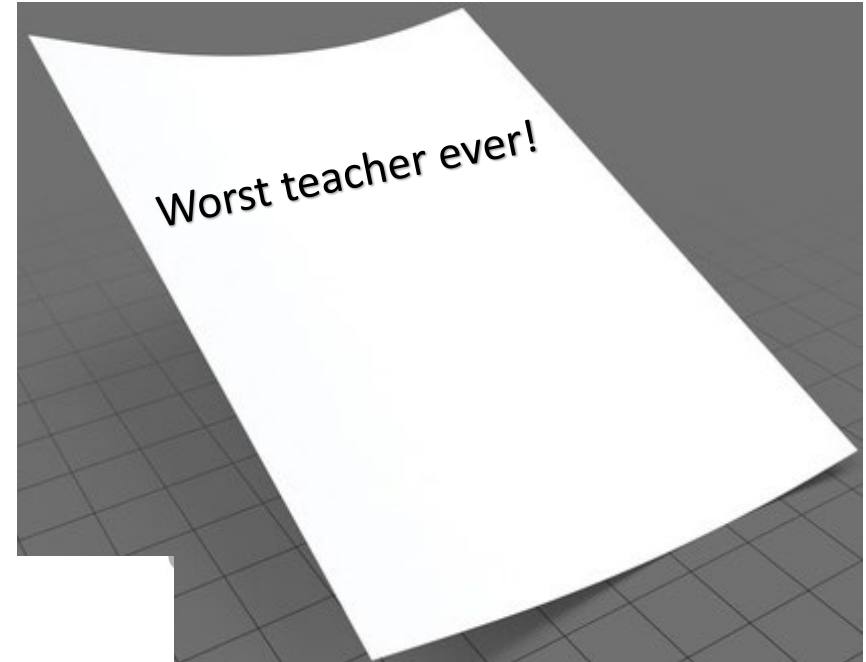
This!!!



Not
This!!!

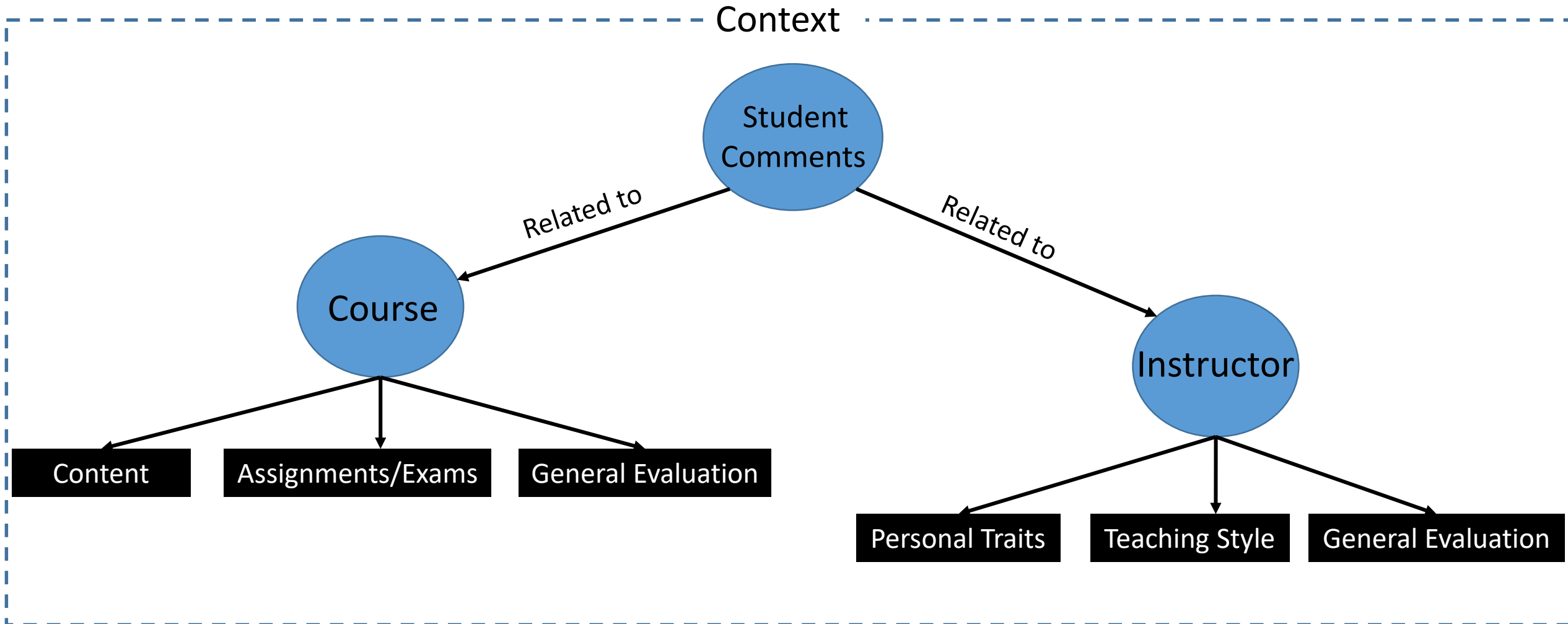
Don't Fixate on the Outliers

Percent of students commenting --
What does 15% of 40% tell us?



Use the 10% rule!

Look for themes related to:



Course-Related Comments			Instructor-Related Comments		
Content	Assignments/Exams	General Comments	Personal Traits	Teaching Style	General Comments
	This course was super-easy – he told you exactly what would be on the exams!	LAST science course!!! PARTY ON!	He seemed happy to teach this course – always enthusiastic and well-prepared!	Professor Donaldson is boring – always in a monotone	This professor was great! Give him a raise!
	His exams were basically trivia contests to see who had read the book – all the questions were from the book, only a few questions came from the lectures.	Too early – 8:00 classes Su*k!	Very friendly – always willing to answer questions!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't read the slides to us! • Just give us the slides, we can read them for ourselves! • I like that he was super-organized and the slides were detailed. 	He's the bomb!
	Pretty good course, but the exams were way too hard!	I learned a lot in this course!	Seemed to play favorites – some students could do no wrong – others couldn't do anything right!	Be a big help if he spelled out all that genus and species crap	I am interested in botany and Dr. D is great!
	If you read the book, the exams were a piece of cake! Really didn't need to go to class to do well.		He didn't treat everybody the same – played favorites!	Most. Boring. Professor. EVER!	One of the best professors I have had at the U of A! He cared that we learned the material.
	Didn't grade and return homework in a timely manner. This was frustrating.			Dr. Monotone!	Seemed pretty proud of the way he could rip off those Latin names.
	I saw several students cheat on the three exams, but he didn't seem to notice or care!				OKAY class, fair-to-middling professor – pretty typical for a big university

Listen to the Faculty Perspective



Looking for something better?

FORMATIVE



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SUMMATIVE



- Provides excellent **Formative** and **Summative** Feedback
- Peer reviews provide faculty members an opportunity to receive and discuss feedback on their teaching.
- With proper training and experience, peer reviews based on classroom observations are sufficiently reliable. Each step requires preparation if it is to be fair, transparent, and professional.
- Enables teaching to be a community endeavor
– Improves Organization

- Focuses more on **student learning and engagement**
- Improves Teaching - provides opportunities to experiment with new techniques
- Provides an in-depth Snapshot to compliment other assessments of teaching



Teaching Portfolios

Helps faculty member clarify and refine teaching practices.

Facilitates a proactive approach to student-centered learning

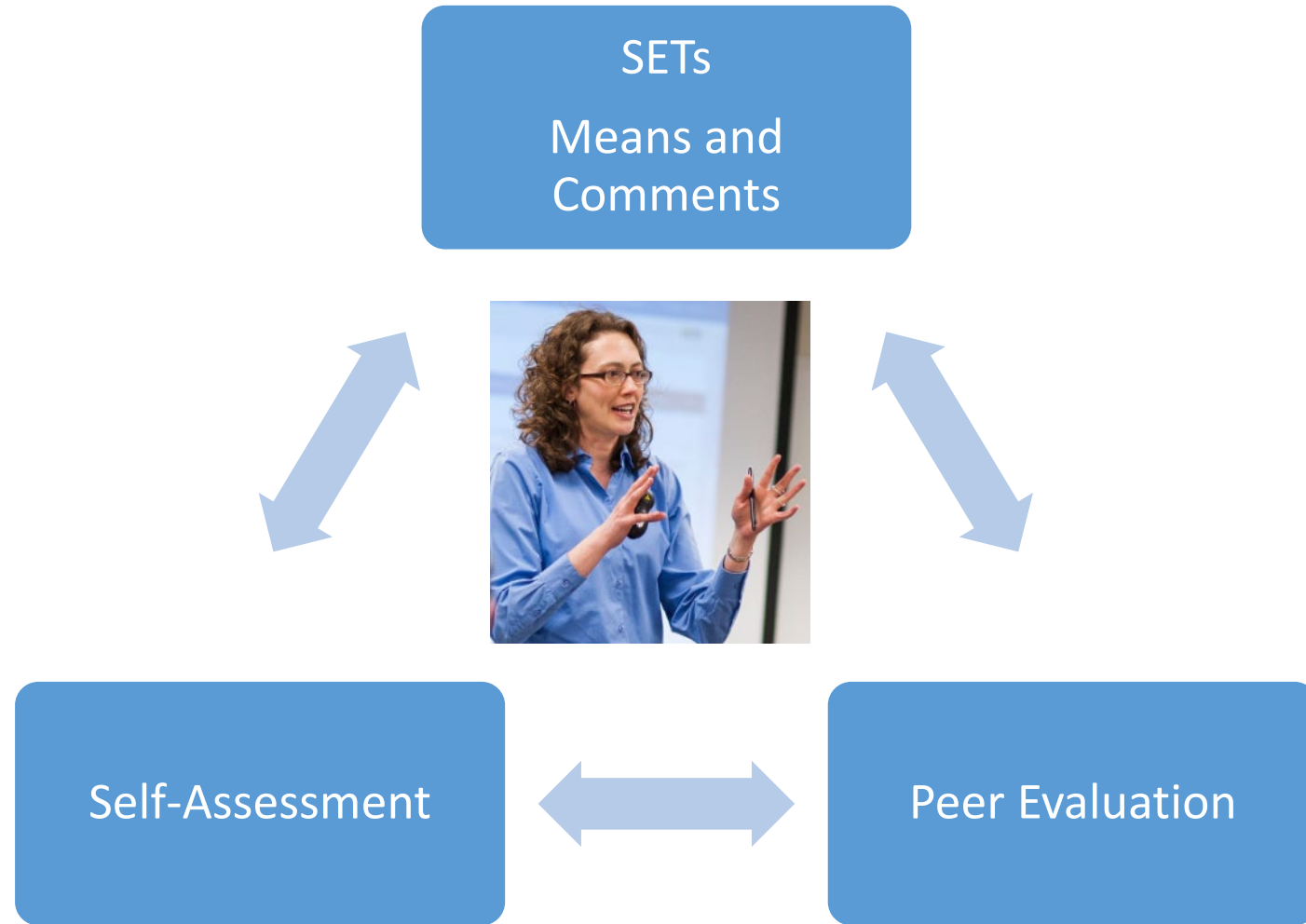
Assists faculty in reflecting on personal style in the classroom

Reflection on pedagogy/learning outcomes

Clarifies commitment to teaching and learning.

Provides more focus on the learning process and course goals.

Triangulate





Looking for more alternatives

There are others listed in 1405.11 pp.11-12

Thank you!