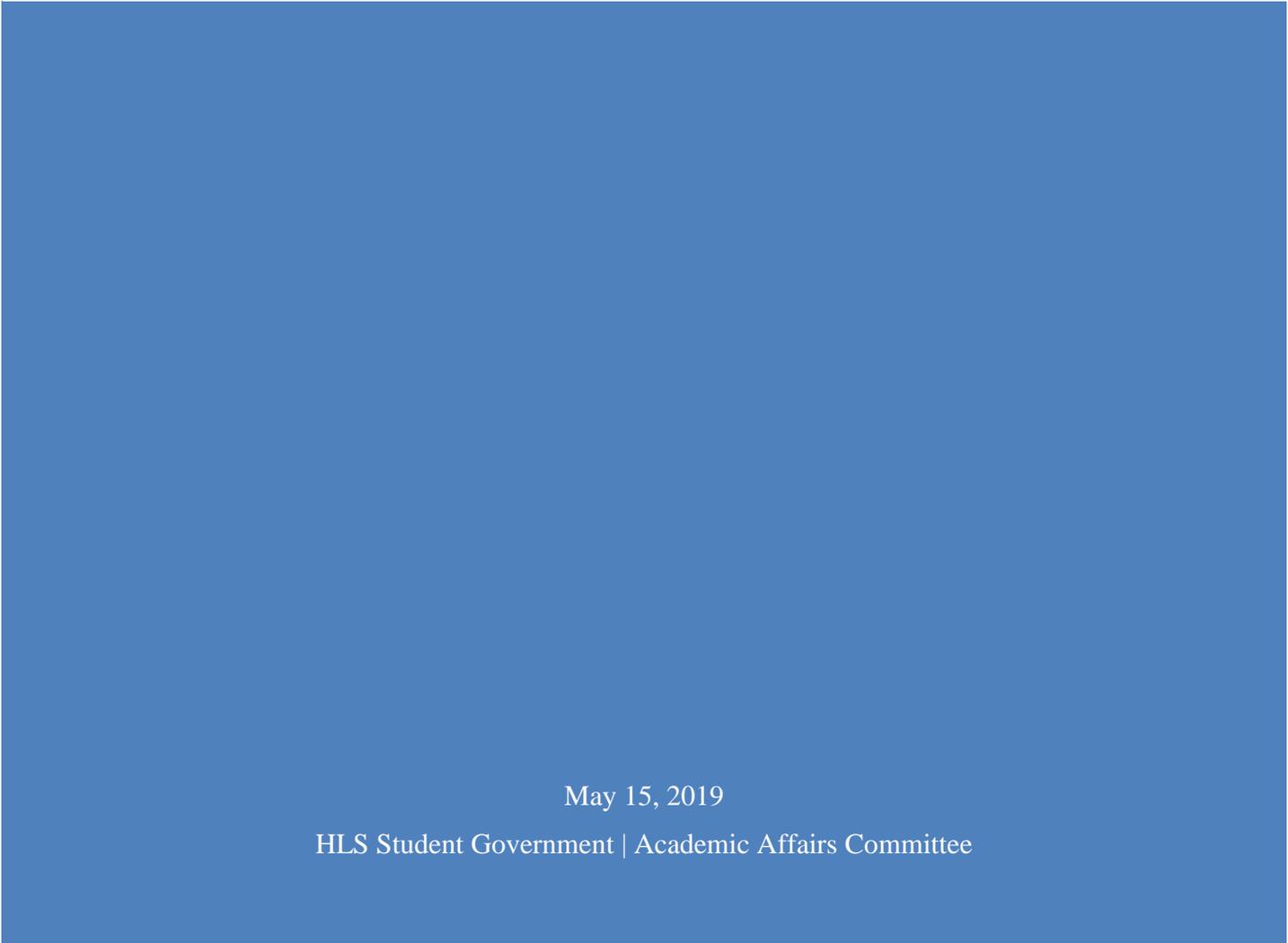




HLS COURSE EVALUATIONS SPRING 2019 STUDENT SURVEY REPORT ON RESULTS

May 15, 2019

HLS Student Government | Academic Affairs Committee



Executive Summary

HLS Student Government distributed a survey via email in May 2019 to collect students' thoughts on the current HLS course evaluations and how they might be improved. This report analyzes the results of that survey.

332 students completed the survey. Their responses indicate that the most useful portions of the current HLS Course Evaluations are the sections on "appropriateness of workload" and on hours spent preparing for class. The other sections provide little information to students because they are difficult to interpret and there is little variance in the scores students tend to assign. Respondents indicated that Too Dope is their preferred source of information on courses and professors because it provides critical narrative student comments, which HLS course evaluations lack.

Most respondents indicated their support for each of three hypothetical changes to how HLS Course Evaluations are structured now. Almost all respondents supported having written student comments visible on Helios. Respondents would most want to see student responses to the question, "what would you like to tell future students about this class?" Approximately two-thirds of respondents supported both keeping evaluations open until after the close of exams and rewarding completion of course evaluations with early grade release.

These results indicate that students do not find the current HLS Course Evaluations as useful to them in their course selection processes as they could be. Much of the information currently provided is abstruse—students do not know how to interpret small variations in numerical averages allegedly characterizing how well a course met a vague and abstract criterion. Students would find narrative comments much more readily understandable, and an open-ended question would provide evaluators with an opportunity to pass on to students information they find most relevant. Keeping the evaluations open beyond the close of exams would allow students to include in their assessments a crucial part of their experience of a course: the exam. Finally, extending the window for completion of the evaluations and incentivizing completion with some sort of reward—potentially early grade release—would likely raise completion rates.

Each of these reforms would need to be carefully implemented. Students raised thoughtful concerns about each of these changes, which are outlined in the results section. Despite the challenges of implementation, improving HLS Course Evaluations has the potential to greatly improve every student's access to the information they need to make informed course selections. With more readily decipherable, relevant information on HLS courses and professors, students could better craft meaningful schedules to meet their academic needs.

About the Survey

As part of their successful campaign for the 2019-2020 HLS Student Government Co-Presidency, Princess Daisy Akita and Daniel Egel-Weiss promised to address student concerns regarding the current HLS course evaluations. To begin making good on that promise, the Academic Affairs Committee of Student Government created a Google Form survey to gather student opinions on HLS course evaluations.

The survey (attached) had two parts. The first part asked students to evaluate the information from HLS course evaluations which is accessible to them on Helios based on how useful that information is to them as they select courses. Students were presented with an image of a portion of these course evaluations and asked to rank the usefulness of that portion using a 1-5 Likert scale. Each Likert scale question was followed by an optional question where students could write comments pertaining to that portion of the HLS course evaluations visible on Helios. The first part of the survey closed with a question asking students to choose which tool was most useful for them in their course selection processes: HLS Course Evaluations, HLS Intel, or Too Dope, and a final question asking students who had ever not completed an HLS course evaluation to provide the reason(s) for which they did not complete the evaluation.

The second part of the survey asked students to consider several hypothetical changes to HLS course evaluations. The formatting of the questions was similar to that in Part 1: a Likert scale question on the usefulness of certain hypothetical changes followed by an optional open-response question where students could include comments on that hypothetical change. The Likert scale questions were formatted: “How would your assessment of course evaluations change if ____?” The hypothetical changes students were asked to consider were: (1) course evaluations staying open beyond the exam period, (2) completion of course evaluations being rewarded by early grade release, and (3) course evaluations visible on Helios including written student comments. This series of questions was followed by one question asking students to pick which among several questions they would most want to view student responses to as they select courses. The survey closed with a final open-ended question asking students for any additional comments.

Prior to distributing the survey to the student body, the Student Government informed Lisa Burns, Assistant Dean and Registrar, of its intent to conduct the survey and requested her input on the survey questions. Ms. Burns expressed her approval of the survey as written.

On April 22, 2019, Student Government sent a link to the survey via email to all HLS students. Participation was encouraged by giving students the opportunity to enter a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card in return for completing the survey. The survey remained open until April 30, 2019.

Results

332 students completed the survey. Their responses indicate that 3 out of the 5 sections of the current HLS course evaluations visible to them on Helios are minimally useful for selecting courses. Respondents indicated that the “appropriateness of workload” section is the most useful, followed by the section on hours spent preparing for class. Generally, respondents indicated that the numerical averages provided on Helios are hard to interpret, and they expressed a strong preference for qualitative student comments over the quantitative data currently available to them.

Regarding the hypothetical changes to HLS course evaluations, respondents generally supported them. The vast majority of respondents were in support of having written student comments visible on Helios, again pointing to the importance of qualitative data. About two-thirds of respondents indicated that keeping evaluations open after the close of exams would be a positive change because of the importance of evaluating exams and because the post-exam period would be a less stressful time to complete the evaluations. Two-thirds of respondents also indicated that rewarding completion of course evaluations with early grade release would increase the likelihood that they would complete course evaluations. These results are discussed in greater detail below.

Part 1: Usefulness of Current HLS Course Evaluations

Overview

Respondents’ Likert Scale ratings and qualitative comments on the current HLS course evaluations indicate that the most useful portion of the evaluations visible to students on Helios is the “appropriateness” of workload section. The majority of respondents characterized this portion as either a 4 or 5 out of 5 in terms of its usefulness in students’ course selection processes. The second most useful portion of the evaluations visible to students on Helios is the portion on hours spent preparing for class, though respondents voiced concerns about the accuracy of the data provided and how to properly interpret it.

The least useful portion of the current evaluations is the amorphous “Student Learning” section, which 65% of respondents characterized as a 1 or 2 out of 5 in terms of usefulness. Respondents noted that the skills addressed in this section are too vague and subjective to provide meaningful information as students try to select courses. A majority of students also characterized the section on preparation and engagement as a 1 or 2 out of 5 in terms of its usefulness. Respondents commented that they did not know how to interpret the values students assigned in this section, and pointed out that “preparation” and “engagement” are distinct concepts which shouldn’t be assessed in the same question.

Respondents expressed mixed but more often negative evaluations of the usefulness of the section “Evaluation of Course/Clinic and Teacher/Supervisor.” Respondents noted that the numbers had little variance and they doubted that the variance which existed mapped onto meaningful differences among professors or courses. Respondents noted their preference for written comments over numerical assessments for conveying this kind of information.

Relatedly, nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that Too Dope was the most useful source of information on courses available to them, citing the fact that Too Dope includes qualitative comments from students.

Finally, 60% of respondents indicated that they had not completed at least one of their course evaluations. The reasons for doing so varied. The most popular, by a small margin, was students’ beliefs that their answers wouldn’t matter to professors or to the administration.

The following sections give a more detailed picture of the results for each of these topics.

Evaluation of Course/Clinic and Teacher/Supervisor

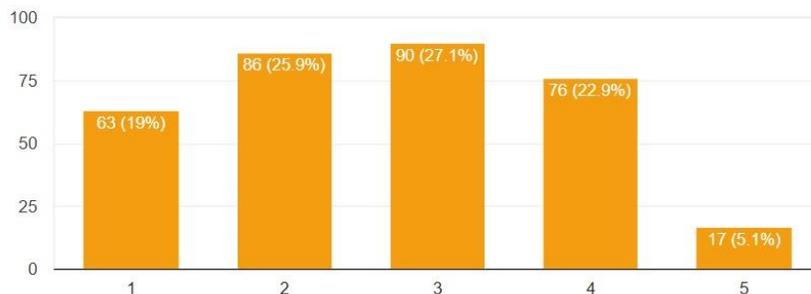
Students were asked to evaluate how useful to their course selection processes is the table of information (viewable from Helios) from HLS course evaluations entitled “Evaluation of Course/Clinic and Teacher/Supervisor” (see example below).

Evaluation of Course/Clinic and Teacher/Supervisor								
How would you rate the performance of your teacher or primary supervisor?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Total	Avg.
Knowledge of Subject Matter	-	1	-	2	70	-	73	4.93
Clarity and organization of class or clinic case/project	-	-	-	1	72	-	73	4.99
Quality/editing of course or project materials	-	-	-	7	65	1	73	4.90
Responsiveness to student concerns & questions	-	-	1	2	70	-	73	4.95
Presentation and encouragement of competing viewpoints/perspectives	-	1	1	1	70	-	73	4.92
Creates an environment broadly conducive to learning	-	-	1	4	68	-	73	4.92
Accessibility of teacher/supervisor outside of class/supervision	-	-	1	3	66	3	73	4.93
Overall effectiveness of teacher/supervisor	-	1	1	2	69	-	73	4.90
Overall effectiveness of the course/clinic	-	1	2	1	69	-	73	4.89

The most common value assigned to this portion was 3, indicating that most respondents find this portion of course evaluations to have some, though not much value. Only 5% of respondents found this portion “very useful.” 45% of respondents ranked this question as only 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that they do not find this portion very useful. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 1? (see example above)

332 responses



77 respondents provided written comments. 17 respondents noted that they would much prefer to view written student comments. 11 respondents noted that they can't interpret what the numerical averages mean on this portion of the course evaluations. Students doubt that what a "4" means is consistent for all students, particularly because no description is given as to what the "1" or the "5" means on the scale. One respondent stated concisely, "[t]he categories are not clear enough and I don't necessarily know what is a typical range of scores."

These respondents noted that a 5-point scale does not provide enough differentiation to meaningfully distinguish among professors. Nearly every professor or course ends up in the 4-5 range, and the decimal differences do not seem to convey anything significant.

Relatedly, 14 respondents noted that, given the caliber of faculty which HLS hires (or should be hiring), it seems odd to ask students to evaluate how knowledgeable professors are on their subject matter. One respondent, who reflected numerous concerns voiced by others, wrote:

First, I don't think students are in a good position to judge the professor's knowledge of a subject matter, so that question shouldn't be a part of the evaluation (besides, shame on Harvard if they hire a professor who doesn't know their subject matter well). Second, there's usually not much variation in the ratings, which almost always hover between a 4 and 5. I think it would be more helpful to be able to read other students' written comments.

Another responded commented:

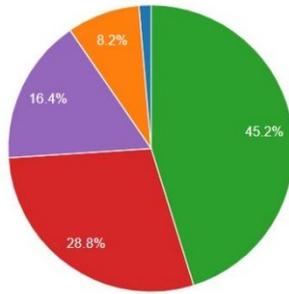
How on earth is a 4.62 vs. a 4.26 supposed to tell us whether a professor is doing a good job of teaching? If you compare multiple, say, Tax professors across this, it will tell you absolutely nothing.

Among miscellaneous other comments, respondents noted that the most useful question in this portion was regarding "clarity and organization," followed by "overall effectiveness." Respondents noted that the other questions were too vague to be meaningfully interpreted.

Preparation and Engagement

Students were next asked to evaluate how useful to their course selection processes is the table and pie chart (viewable from Helios) from HLS course evaluations detailing averages of student responses to the question "How did your overall preparation and engagement in the course or clinic compare to your experience of the other courses or clinics you have taken at HLS (see example below).

How did your overall preparation and engagement in the course or clinic compare to your experience of the other courses or clinics you have taken at HLS?



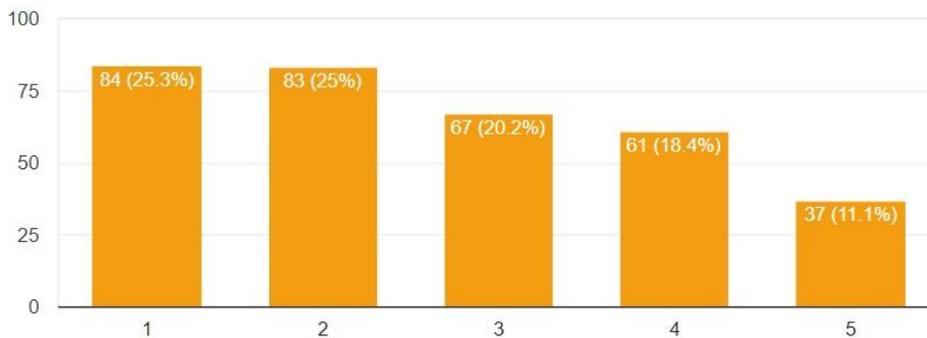
Answer	Number	Percentage of Class
Much lower	1	1.37%
Somewhat lower	6	8.22%
About the same	33	45.21%
Somewhat higher	21	28.77%
Much higher	12	16.44%
Total	73	100.00%

■ Much lower ■ Somewhat lower ■ About the same ■ Somewhat higher ■ Much higher

The most common value assigned to this portion was 1, indicating that many respondents find this portion of course evaluations to be useless as they try to select courses. Just over half of respondents ranked this question as a 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that the majority of students find this question to have little value. However, approximately 30% of respondents ranked this question as a 4 or 5 in utility, indicating that roughly a third of respondents do derive some value from this question. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 2? (see example above)

332 responses



66 respondents provided written comments regarding this portion of the course evaluations. About half of these respondents indicated that they cannot interpret what responses to this question mean or that they did not understand the meaning of the question when they filled out the evaluations themselves. These respondents noted that each student—particularly 1Ls and LLMs—has only a very small and particular subset of HLS courses to compare to: since everyone is comparing to different courses, the responses cannot be interpreted by other students.

At least 12 students noted that “engagement” is not the same as “preparation,” and so it was unclear what a particular student had in mind when they filled out the evaluation. Respondents noted that a student could find a course boring and unengaging but still do more hours of reading to prepare for that course than other courses. One respondent commented that:

It is difficult to actually understand what this question is asking and what students are thinking about when they respond to it, as the term “overall preparation and engagement” [is] vague - is it talking about workload, enjoyment, or something else?

Since this question asks students to evaluate two different things at once, it’s unclear what any individual student was responding to.

Appropriateness of Workload

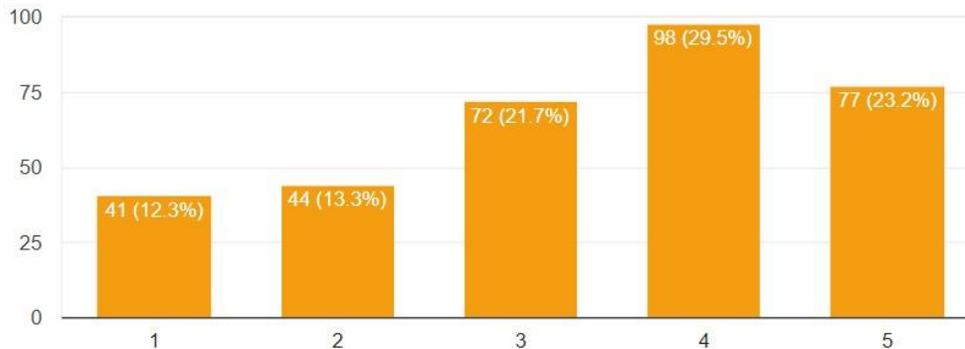
Students were next asked to evaluate how useful to their course selection processes is the table and pie chart (viewable from Helios) from HLS course evaluations entitled “Appropriateness of Workload” (see example below).



The most common value assigned to this portion was 4, indicating that many respondents find this portion of course evaluations to be quite useful as they try to select courses. Over half of respondents ranked this question as a 4 or 5 on the Likert scale, indicating that the majority of students find this question to be valuable. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 3? (see example above)

332 responses



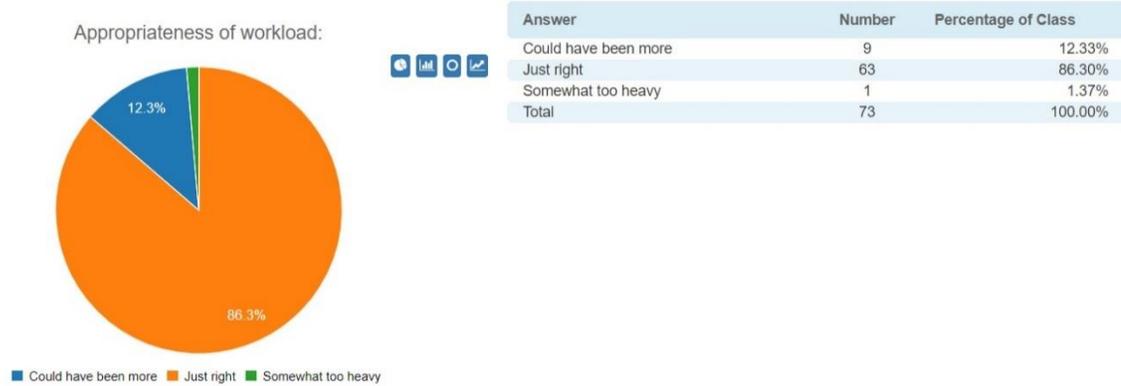
40 students provided written comments to this question. 11 respondents noted that “appropriateness” of workload is highly subjective, and so the responses are difficult to interpret. 5 respondents noted that it would be more helpful if the question were phrased in terms of whether the workload was proportional to the number of credits awarded for the class. Several respondents noted that students will be unlikely to say that a class was too little work “lest next year’s class get more work.” One respondent commented:

“Appropriateness” is so subjective that asking students to rate it is not helpful. Because different courses attract different subsets of students, with varying work ethic, “just right” could mean radically different things across classes. What’s more, different students find different work more strenuous—some are slow readers, some find writing more of a challenge, etc. The information is opaque, and could be improved by adding a comment box for students to describe the workload.

10 respondents noted that this question was helpful for them or at least the most helpful of the information they can access on Helios.

Hours Spent Preparing for Class

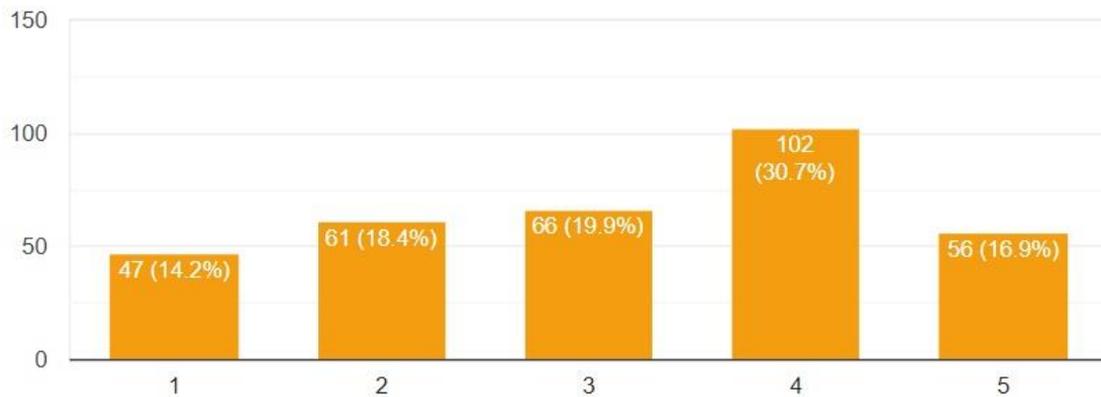
Students were next asked to evaluate how useful to their course selection processes is the table and bar graph (viewable from Helios) from HLS course evaluations detailing averages of student responses to the question “On average, how many hours did you spend preparing for your class or clinic each week?” (see example below).



The most common value assigned to this portion was 4, indicating that many respondents find this portion of course evaluations to be useful as they try to select courses. Respondents were almost evenly split among the other Likert scale values. The second most common value assigned to this portion was 3. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 4? (see example above)

332 responses



48 respondents provided written comments to this question. 6 respondents noted that this question was more helpful than others because it provided more objective information. However, all the other comments spoke to problems with interpreting this question because of the variety of classes, workstyles, and assignment types that students have. Several students were uncertain whether this question was meant to include hours spent in class. 7 students commented that the number of hours a student would work on a given assignment was very subjective. 6 students would prefer to be asked how many pages of reading they had per week. 2 students noted that they would prefer to

know how much time one *would* spend on the class per week *if* one were to do all the work assigned.

10 respondents noted that it is very hard to retroactively guess how many hours one spent per week on a class. Respondents speculated that other students (or reported that they themselves) inaccurately estimated or lied. Others noted that the workload in many classes varies widely throughout the semester, and reporting an average of hours per week doesn't capture this important variation in flow. Finally, students noted it was unclear whether time spent preparing for exams or final projects was supposed to be included in this weekly average.

Student Learning

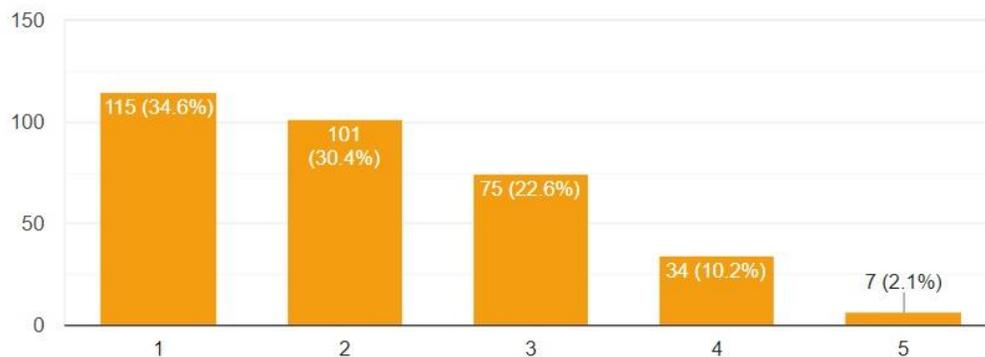
Students were finally asked to evaluate how useful to their course selection processes is the table of information (viewable from Helios) from HLS course evaluations entitled "Student Learning" (see example below).

Student Learning	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Total	Avg.
Explaining complex legal issues in simple terms to clients and other audiences	-	-	2	7	60	4	73	4.84
Formal presentation and oral advocacy skills	-	1	7	11	39	15	73	4.52
Doctrinal content of particular subject	-	1	-	3	69	-	73	4.92
Historical and / or political context of particular subject	-	2	-	11	60	-	73	4.77
Ability to articulate both/all sides of contested issue	-	-	1	6	66	-	73	4.89
Relationship of particular subject to understanding of law in general	-	1	1	6	65	-	73	4.85

The most common value assigned to this portion was 1, indicating that many respondents find this portion of course evaluations to be useless as they try to select courses. 65% of respondents ranked this question as a 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that the majority of students find this question to have little value. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 5? (see example above)

332 responses



49 respondents provided written comments to this question. 11 respondents noted that this portion of Helios is useless to them. 10 respondents indicated that they don't know what these questions mean or can't interpret what student answers mean. These respondents commented that the questions are so vague and broad that they are hard to distinguish or interpret concretely.

9 respondents indicated that these questions often do not seem relevant to the class they are evaluating or the classes they are selecting among. Students do not understand how these questions are selected for each course. One student commented:

I can't emphasize enough how utterly pointless this section is. No one fills it out really (or if so, not accurately) and it tells me absolutely nothing. Sounds like it tracks to some internal "learning goals" type metric borne out of a values and core competencies planning meeting and does not track at all to student needs.

3 students emphasized that written student comments would be much more useful.

HLS Course Evaluations, HLS Intel, or Too Dope?

Students were asked to choose which tool was most useful for them in their course selection processes: HLS Course Evaluations, HLS Intel, or Too Dope. Approximately 72% of respondents indicated that Too Dope was the most useful; approximately 20% indicated that HLS Course Evaluations were most useful, and about 8% indicated that HLS Intel was the most useful.

Reasons for non-completion

Students were asked to provide the reason(s) for which they did not complete a course evaluation. Students were given a list of 4 reasons that they could select from ("I didn't have enough time," "I didn't think my answers mattered to professors or the administration," "I didn't think my answers would be useful to students," "I forgot") as well as the option to write their own reason in. Students could select multiple answers (so percentages do not sum to 100).

About 40% of respondents indicated that they had completed all of their course evaluations and so the question was not applicable to them. From a fifth to a quarter of respondents selected each of the provided reasons, with the most commonly selected reason, by a small margin, being "I didn't think my answers mattered to professors or the administration."

In the space where students could write in their own reason for non-completion, five students wrote that they wanted to be able to view narrative comments—because they couldn't, they considered filling out the evaluations pointless. Five students commented that they were too busy during the reading or exam period to fill out the evaluations. Three students commented that the quantity of email reminders that they received about the course evaluations annoyed them to the point that they didn't fill out the evaluations. Two students commented that they weren't sure how the evaluations impacted professors, that they were wary of giving a negative review that could negatively impact the professor's career, and so didn't fill out the review.

Part 2: Evaluation of Hypothetical Changes

Overview

Generally, respondents expressed support for all three hypothetical changes to the HLS current evaluations. The most popular change was making visible written student comments on Helios, which about 90% of students characterized as a 4 or 5 out of 5 in terms of how much it would improve the usefulness of course evaluations. Students pointed out the importance of qualitative data and the inability of numerical averages to convey the same information as richly or precisely. 83% of students would want to see student responses to the question “what would you like to tell future students about this class?”

65% of respondents indicated that keeping HLS course evaluations open after the close of exams would be a positive change. Another 27% felt neutrally about this proposition. In comments, students noted that keeping evaluations open after the close of exams would allow students to evaluate the exams and how well the class prepared them to take the exams, which respondents considered crucial elements of a course to evaluate.

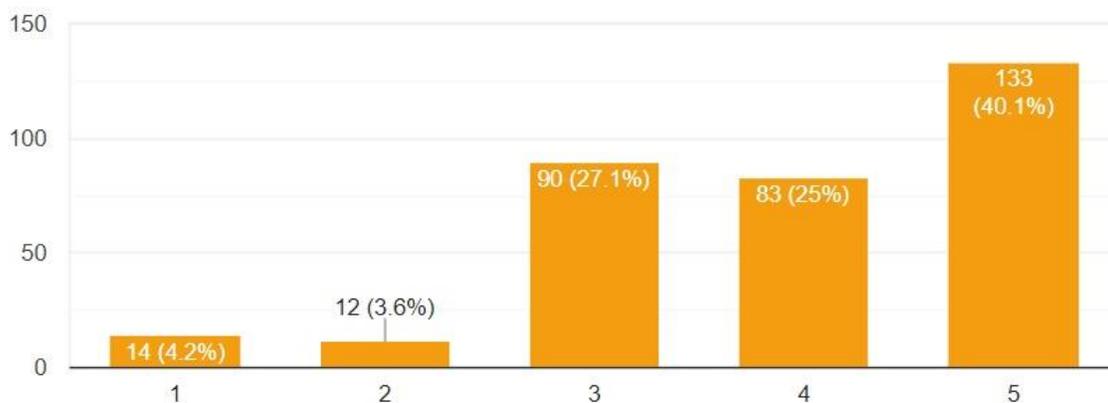
About two-thirds of respondents indicated that rewarding completion of course evaluations with early grade release would increase the likelihood that they would complete course evaluations. Those respondents who were against this change voiced concerns about coercing students into completing the exams by withholding their grades—which might put them at a disadvantage in job applications. Students who were for the change cited the example of numerous institutions which follow this model.

Keeping Evaluations Open After the Close of Exams

Students were asked how their assessment of course evaluations would change if the course evaluations stayed open beyond the exam period. The most common value assigned to this question was 5: about 40% of respondents indicated that course evaluations would be much more useful if they stayed open beyond the exam period. Only about 8% ranked this question as a 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that very few respondents would find this to be a negative change. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

1. Currently, course evaluations close before the exam period. How would your assessment of course evaluations change if they stayed open beyond the exam period?

332 responses



122 respondents provided written comments on this hypothetical change. 88 respondents indicated that keeping evaluations open beyond the exam period would allow students to pass on critical information about the professor's accessibility during reading week and how well the information taught was reflected in the assessment. Respondents indicated that it didn't make sense that exams are frequently 100% of students' grades and yet students are allowed no opportunity to pass on to other students their evaluations of the fairness and difficulty of the exam. Respondents noted that the ability to craft a challenging exam appropriately tailored to the material taught is a critical skill that professors should be evaluated on.

15 respondents noted that they would be more likely to complete course evaluations and to do so thoroughly if they were open beyond the end of the exam period.

7 respondents voiced concern that student evaluations would be biased by their experience with the exam or by their grades. 11 other respondents noted that either such bias could be dealt with by (1) keeping evaluations open past the end of exams but prior to grade release, or (2) having a separate evaluation for the exam, or that the importance of the information provided by the opportunity to evaluate exams outweighed any skew in evaluations that might come from students' negative exam experiences.

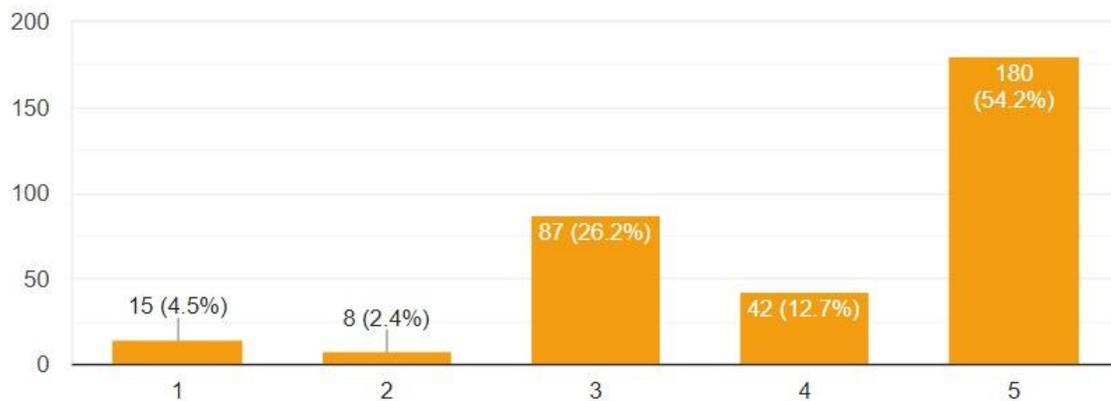
Rewarding Evaluation Completion with Early Grade Release

Students were asked how their assessment of course evaluations would change if completion of course evaluations was rewarded by early grade release. The most common value assigned to this question was 5: about 54% of respondents indicated that they would be much more likely to complete their course evaluations if doing so resulted in early grade release. Only about 7% ranked

this question as a 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that very few respondents would find this to be a negative change. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

2. Currently, there is no tangible incentive to complete course evaluations. How would the likelihood that you complete your course evaluations change if completing your course evaluations resulted in your grades being released early?

332 responses



71 respondents provided written comments on this hypothetical change. The few students who were against this change were quite vocal: 25 respondents (~8%) wrote comments indicating that tying completion of course evaluations to early grade release would be a bad idea. These respondents noted that this would feel more like a penalty than a reward, and that students should not be coerced into completing evaluations. Doing so might induce students who don't care about evaluations to complete them, which could decrease the quality of the evaluations. These respondents noted that such a scheme could create stress for students and unequal opportunities for jobs, clerkships, and RA positions.

12 respondents noted that this change would be an appropriate and effective means to increase rates of course evaluation completion. Several of these respondents noted that they had similar schemes in their undergraduate institutions or were aware of other schools that had had such schemes (those mentioned by name were Yale College, Harvard College, Stanford, and other Harvard Graduate Schools). These respondents noted that students at these schools always completed their evaluations and did not feel negatively about the incentive scheme.

11 respondents noted that some sort of material reward (such as a gift card) would be a good incentive to complete course evaluations. Alternative incentive schemes suggested by respondents included: conditioning registration on completion of course evaluations, or rewarding completion of course evaluations with exam feedback, HLS gear, "muffins," tuition reduction, or "securities."

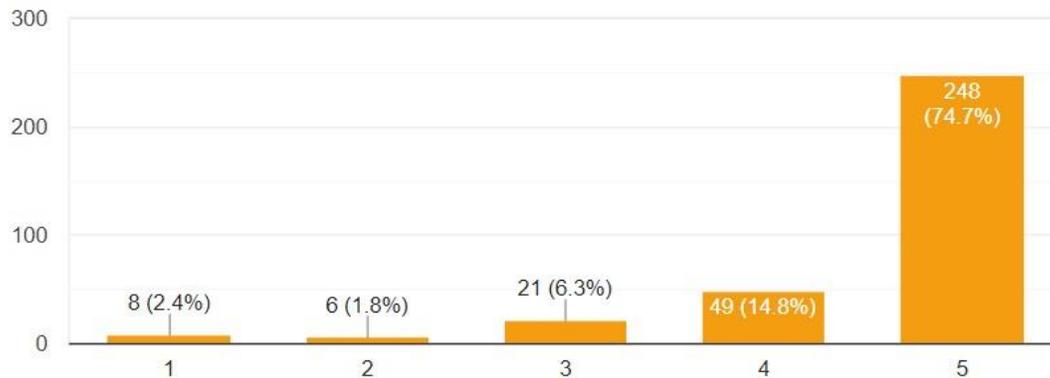
5 students noted that they wouldn't need an intrinsic reward to complete evaluations if the evaluations were just kept open longer so they had more time to fill them out, particularly outside the stress of the exam and reading period. Several other students noted that they would feel sufficiently incentivized if they felt that the exams were truly used by the administration or were actually useful to students. These students noted that if their written comments were visible to other students it would make them much more incentivized to fill out the evaluations.

Having Written Student Comments Visible on Helios

Students were asked how their assessment of course evaluations would change if the course evaluations visible on Helios including written student comments. The most common value assigned to this question was 5: about 75% of respondents indicated that course evaluations would be much more useful to them if they could view written student comments. Only about 4% ranked this question as a 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that very few respondents would find this to be a negative change. The following bar graph depicts the distribution of values respondents assigned to this portion of the course evaluations.

3. Currently, no written student comments are visible on course evaluations. How would your assessment of course evaluations change if you could view written student comments?

332 responses



99 respondents provided written comments on this hypothetical change. About 80 of these comments were strongly in support of including qualitative student comments on the Helios course evaluations. One respondent wrote:

DO THIS, PLEASE. This would be the only thing I look at, and really the only way I judge courses now. Give us a chance to tell our fellow students about teaching style, cold calls, classroom environment, exam difficulty, and the like; let us share our passion for great

classes and provide a space for thoughtful criticism. Number rankings are prone to wild distortion, and words give us a better chance to give a balanced review of the class. I think it would also cut down somewhat on the chaotic first week of mass drop/adds, since people have more information and can feel more confident in their schedule choices.

22 respondents indicated that the reason that they preferred Too Dope or HLS Intel to HLS Course Evaluations on Helios was because the former two sources included narrative comments. 5 respondents noted that only well-connected students had access to quality information about courses and professors because they accessed this critical qualitative information through their social networks. These respondents noted that this wasn't fair—all students should have access to quality information on their academic choices at HLS. One respondent commented:

Qualitative reviews are the most useful component in making class decisions. Right now we have to run around, trying to contact anyone and everyone we know to find out what they know about classes or what they've heard through rumors. It would be much easier to have a central bank of these comments, especially for students who don't have a lot of upperclassmen friends to get information from.

Another respondent noted:

Students offer a valuable perspective that's crucial in selecting courses. The current system forces you to know people in other class years, which isn't fair—well-connected people get better information. I'm shy! Why am I punished?

A couple of students emphasized that they would want to be assured that the comments would be anonymous, and that they would want to know before writing the comments if they were going to be made visible to the general HLS student body.

5 students commented that this was a bad idea. Concerns ranged from picturing an overflow of disorganized information on Helios to worries that student biases would result in disproportionately harmful comments on professors from marginalized identities, such as people of color and women. Regarding the concern about information overflow and disorganization, several other respondents suggested that the comments be organized with searchable hashtags, or that they include a feature where students can mark a comment as “useful” so that those comments appear first on Helios, similar to how Amazon comments work.

Question to which Viewing Student Comments would be Most Desired

Students were asked to pick which among several questions they would most want to view student responses to on Helios as they select courses. Students could only select one question.

About 83% of respondents chose the question “what would you like to tell future students about this class?” The next most popular question, chosen by 9% of respondents, was “What has been the most valuable aspect of this course for you? Possibilities might include acquisition of skills or knowledge, or change of perspective.” 3% of respondents selected “How comfortable did you feel sharing a controversial point of view in class?”

Students were also permitted to write in their own response. Fifteen students chose to do this, and there were no clear patterns among their responses.

General Student Comments

The survey closed with a final open-ended response question asking students for final comments on HLS course evaluations. 50 respondents added comments here. 10 respondents used this space to re-emphasize the importance of making written student comments accessible on Helios. 6 students noted that the current course evaluations are too long and too complex—this both disincentivizes students from completing them and makes interpreting the results confusing. These students would prefer shorter, simpler evaluations with an open-ended qualitative comment section which respondents could include narrative commentary on the course.

4 respondents wish that they had more information about how course evaluations are used—who reads them? In what ways are they anonymous? Are they required to be used in any way? Having greater clarity and transparency regarding how course evaluations are used by the administration would improve how students view the course evaluation system, which is currently very opaque.

A couple of students expressed dissatisfaction with the character limits on the open-response style questions currently used on the course evaluations. They indicated that they had been unable to fully report concerns they had with professors or classes, and would like more space to do so.

One respondent encapsulated many students' views shared on this survey with this comment, expressing the respondent's desire that course evaluations include student comments visible to all students on Helios:

Even my professors have joked about how terrible the system is, and I've had a few of them put out their own feedback surveys. The way evaluations are set up now makes it seem like the administration doesn't care about student voice whatsoever. Yes, some professors might get critical public reviews, but law school is so short and so intense that we deserve that transparency and honesty from our fellow students. Choosing courses feels like shooting blindly in the dark, and I don't want to waste any of my time here - please give us the tools to make more informed decisions.

Conclusion

Based on these results, it's clear that the current HLS Course Evaluations need to be improved in order to provide reliable, understandable, and valuable information on courses and professors to students who are trying to design a schedule that will meet their needs. While respondents indicated that the current portions of the evaluations on Helios which speak to appropriateness of workload and hours spent preparing for class provide useful information, they indicated that the other three portions were so difficult to interpret that they were not very useful sources of information. Respondents generally relied on Too Dope for information on courses, notwithstanding the smaller response rates, because they understood what the narrative student comments on Too Dope meant.

Respondent indicated support most strongly for making written student comments visible on Helios. They would most like to see student responses to the question "What would you like to tell future students about this class?" Two-thirds of respondents also supported keeping evaluations open beyond the end of exams and rewarding completion of evaluations with early grade release.

Respondents also noted that they would appreciate greater clarity as to how HLS Course Evaluations are used and to what extent they are anonymous. Respondents repeatedly expressed frustration that course evaluations do not serve as a better source of information for them, which means that only well-connected students have access to good information about courses, such as that distributed among affinity group members. HLS Course Evaluations could better serve student needs by increasing transparency about how they are used, by making narrative student comments visible on Helios, by keeping them open past the close of exams, and by better incentivizing students to complete them. All of these changes would require careful implementation, but could greatly improve students' abilities to select courses which are right for them.

HLS Course Evaluations Survey

Student Government wants all students at HLS to have access to meaningful information about courses when they are ranking preferences and crafting their schedules. This survey is designed to assess how useful the current HLS course evaluations are to students, and to explore some ways that the evaluations might be improved.

Student Government is committed to advocating for the needs of the student body, but can't do it without your input. Your feedback is essential! Thank you in advance for participating. The survey should only take about 5 minutes to complete.

Results will be anonymous. However, if you'd like to be entered into a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card, you can provide your email at the end.

* Required

Part 1: How useful are the Current HLS Course Evaluations?

Below is a series of screenshots of the current course evaluation questions which are visible to students as they browse the course catalog in Helios. Following each screenshot are two questions asking how useful these questions are to you as you select future courses to take at HLS.

Example of Current Course Evaluations Question 1

Evaluation of Course/Clinic and Teacher/Supervisor

How would you rate the performance of your teacher or primary supervisor?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Total	Avg.
Knowledge of Subject Matter	-	1	-	2	70	-	73	4.93
Clarity and organization of class or clinic case/project	-	-	-	1	72	-	73	4.99
Quality/editing of course or project materials	-	-	-	7	65	1	73	4.90
Responsiveness to student concerns & questions	-	-	1	2	70	-	73	4.95
Presentation and encouragement of competing viewpoints/perspectives	-	1	1	1	70	-	73	4.92
Creates an environment broadly conducive to learning	-	-	1	4	68	-	73	4.92
Accessibility of teacher/supervisor outside of class/supervision	-	-	1	3	66	3	73	4.93
Overall effectiveness of teacher/supervisor	-	1	1	2	69	-	73	4.90
Overall effectiveness of the course/clinic	-	1	2	1	69	-	73	4.89

1. In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 1? (see example above) *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

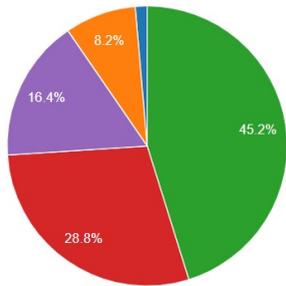
Useless: the information is unclear, irrelevant, or I don't feel I can rely on it when I am selecting courses

Very useful: it provides clear, relevant information that I feel I can rely on when I select courses

2. [Optional] If you have any comments regarding Current Course Evaluations Question 1, please note them here.

Example of Current Course Evaluations Question 2

How did your overall preparation and engagement in the course or clinic compare to your experience of the other courses or clinics you have taken at HLS?



Answer	Number	Percentage of Class
Much lower	1	1.37%
Somewhat lower	6	8.22%
About the same	33	45.21%
Somewhat higher	21	28.77%
Much higher	12	16.44%
Total	73	100.00%

■ Much lower ■ Somewhat lower ■ About the same ■ Somewhat higher ■ Much higher

3. In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 2? (see example above) *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

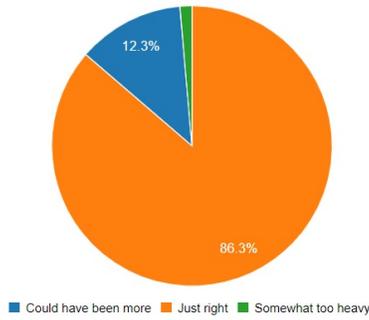
Useless: the information is unclear, irrelevant, or I don't feel I can rely on it when I am selecting courses

Very useful: it provides clear, relevant information that I feel I can rely on when I select courses

4. [Optional] If you have any comments regarding Current Course Evaluations Question 2, please note them here.

Example of Current Course Evaluations Question 3

Appropriateness of workload:



Answer	Number	Percentage of Class
Could have been more	9	12.33%
Just right	63	86.30%
Somewhat too heavy	1	1.37%
Total	73	100.00%

5. In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 3? (see example above) *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

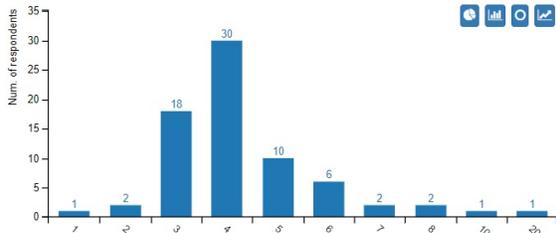
Useless: the information is unclear, irrelevant, or I don't feel I can rely on it when I am selecting courses

Very useful: it provides clear, relevant information that I feel I can rely on when I select courses

6. [Optional] If you have any comments regarding Current Course Evaluations Question 3, please note them here.

Example of Current Course Evaluations Question 4

On average, how many hours did you spend preparing for your class or clinic each week?



Answer	Number	Percentage of Class
1	1	1.37%
2	2	2.74%
3	18	24.66%
4	30	41.10%
5	10	13.70%
6	6	8.22%
7	2	2.74%
8	2	2.74%
10	1	1.37%
20	1	1.37%
Total	73	100.00%

7. In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 4? (see example above) *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Useless: the information is unclear, irrelevant, or I don't feel I can rely on it when I am selecting courses	<input type="radio"/>	Very useful: it provides clear, relevant information that I feel I can rely on when I select courses				

8. [Optional] If you have any comments regarding Current Course Evaluations Question 4, please note them here.

Example of Current Course Evaluations Question 5

Student Learning

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Total	Avg.
Explaining complex legal issues in simple terms to clients and other audiences	-	-	2	7	60	4	73	4.84
Formal presentation and oral advocacy skills	-	1	7	11	39	15	73	4.52
Doctrinal content of particular subject	-	1	-	3	69	-	73	4.92
Historical and / or political context of particular subject	-	2	-	11	60	-	73	4.77
Ability to articulate both/all sides of contested issue	-	-	1	6	66	-	73	4.89
Relationship of particular subject to understanding of law in general	-	1	1	6	65	-	73	4.85

9. In your course selection process, how useful to you is the Current Course Evaluations Question 5? (see example above) *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Useless: the information is unclear, irrelevant, or I don't feel I can rely on it when I am selecting courses	<input type="radio"/>	Very useful: it provides clear, relevant information that I feel I can rely on when I select courses				

10. [Optional] If you have any comments regarding Current Course Evaluations Question 5, please note them here.

11. Of the following sources, which is the most useful to you for evaluating courses? *

Mark only one oval.

- HLS Course Evaluations
- HLS Intel
- Too Dope

12. If you have ever not completed a course evaluation, what was the reason? Select all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- N/A: I have completed all my available course evaluations.
- I didn't have enough time.
- I didn't think my answers mattered to professors or the administration.
- I didn't think my answers would be useful to students.
- I forgot.
- Other: _____

Part 2: How could HLS course evaluations be better?

13. 1. Currently, course evaluations close before the exam period. How would your assessment of course evaluations change if they stayed open beyond the exam period? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Course Evaluations would become much less useful for me.	<input type="radio"/>	Course Evaluations would become much more useful for me.				

14. [Optional] If you'd like to explain your answer to question 1 above, please do so here.

15. **2. Currently, there is no tangible incentive to complete course evaluations. How would the likelihood that you complete your course evaluations change if completing your course evaluations resulted in your grades being released early? ***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I would be much less likely to complete my course evaluations.	<input type="radio"/>	I would be much more likely to complete my course evaluations.				

16. **[Optional] If you'd like to explain your answer to question 2 above, please do so here. In particular, if a different incentive (other than early grade release) would work better for you, please include that incentive here.**

17. **3. Currently, no written student comments are visible on course evaluations. How would your assessment of course evaluations change if you could view written student comments? ***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Course evaluations would become much less useful for me.	<input type="radio"/>	Course evaluations would become much more useful for me.				

18. **[Optional] If you'd like to explain your answer to question 3, please do so here.**

19. **4. If you could view written student comments to *one* of the following questions when viewing a course evaluation, which question would you most want to view student responses to? ***

Mark only one oval.

- How comfortable did you feel sharing a controversial point of view in class?
- What would you like to tell future students about this course?
- What has been the most valuable aspect of this course for you? Possibilities might include acquisition of skills or knowledge, or change of perspective.
- Other: _____

20. If there's anything else you want to share regarding your experience with HLS course evaluations or how they could be more useful for you, please note it here.

Optional Raffle Entry

21. If you'd like to be entered into a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card, please include your email here.

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