

Physics 217 Instruction Evaluation #1: Results

Here is a summary of the responses gathered to the instruction evaluation that I handed out after the first midterm. Not very many glaring problems were revealed, but there are a few items in which there's room for improvement, and we'll be trying to gain those potential improvements soon. Stay tuned.

Professor (Dan Watson)

___ Clarity of lectures (0 = totally obscure, 10 = crystal clear)

Score = 8.5±1.4, target = 10

___ Accessibility outside of class (0 = impossible to find, 10 = always around, NA = haven't looked)

Score = 8.9±0.4, target = 10

Because the target score is at the end of the range -- and because people don't normally give grades of 11 or 12 on a 10-point scale -- a score within a standard deviation or so of the maximum is hard to improve upon, and thus I don't have much to gain here. A few people remarked that they like the reliance upon PowerPoint and the computer for display, by which I infer that I'm not frequently falling prey to the temptation of moving through the lectures too fast to be followed. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Recitation

___ Utility (0 = completely useless, 10 = extremely helpful, NA = haven't been there)

Score = 5.5±1.6, target = 10

On the other hand, a score far from the maximum indicates something we can improve. In this case, thought, the written comments that came with these numerical scores are somewhat contradictory -- some complaining that all that's done is to work on homework, some complaining that not enough time in recitation is spent on the homework -- so I'm not sure yet what to change. **Send me more suggestions, and I'll implement all of the best ones.** Meanwhile, let me remind you what I think the recitation should be about: it's supposed to be your orientation toward that week's homework, consisting of brief review and some short practice problem to be solved while you're there. The specific recitation problems are chosen because we think they will raise the same questions that the real homework problems will. They are offered in recitation so that you can get many of the common questions answered in advance of doing the homework. Other, more detailed, questions about homework, present or past, tends to be specific to individuals, and our plan for such questions is to address them during office hours. Is it possible that some of the misgivings expressed about recitation could be alleviated by a few trips to office hours?

I hope, by the way, that none of the misgivings you may have about recitations are reflected on Drew. He's doing what I asked him to do, and I think he's an excellent TA. Blame me for the design of recitation.

Textbooks

___ Griffiths ___ Purcell (0 = just awful, 10 = really very good, NA = I'm way behind in my reading)

Scores = 8.6±1.0 and 7.0±0.8, target = 10 for both

I suppose the relatively low score for Purcell's book is a result of the small number of people reading it. That's too bad; it's a great book. Everybody seems to like Griffiths a lot, though. I don't feel compelled to search around aggressively for alternatives for the next time I teach this class.

Homework

___ Length (0 = takes all week, 10 = I could do a lot more than that, NA = haven't worked one)

Score = 4.0±1.4, target = 3

___ Difficulty (0 = way too hard, 10 = way too easy, NA = haven't worked one)

Score = 4.0±0.9, target = 3

___ Grading (0 = vicious and/or arbitrary, 10 = fair and just, NA = haven't worked one)

Score = 8.8±1.1, target = 10

___ Solutions (0 = I don't get a thing out of them, 10 = very helpful, NA = haven't seen one)

Score = 8.9±1.8, target = 10

Junior-level E&M homework is supposed to be long and difficult; you won't learn much if it isn't. As you've undoubtedly noticed, it's getting longer and more difficult as the semester goes on. I don't think I need to make a change here; no doubt the averages for length and difficulty will hit their targets by the next evaluation. (Actually I bet they would even if I made the homework shorter and easier, now that you know what the targets are...)

I'm glad to see that the solutions are considered effective; they're among my favorite teaching tools, and they take a lot of effort to prepare.

Exam

___ Length (0 = too long, 10 = I could do a lot more than that, NA = haven't worked one)

Score = 4.7±0.6, target = 5

___ Difficulty (0 = way too hard, 10 = way too easy, NA = haven't worked one)

Score = 4.5±0.7, target = 5

___ Grading (0 = vicious and/or arbitrary, 10 = fair and just, NA = haven't worked one)

Score = 9.5±0.7, target = 10

___ Solutions (0 = I don't get a thing out of them, 10 = very helpful, NA = haven't seen one)

Score = 8.8±1.7, target = 10

Junior-level E&M exams are supposed to be hard but fair, and not impossible to complete in the allotted time. It looks as if the midterm exam was designed just about right.

Thank you for helping us improve the quality of teaching at the University of Rochester!