Interpreting SELT data: Broad guidelines

SELT data is one of the most common methods used by the University of Adelaide to obtain some insight into our students’ learning experiences. Teacher SELTs are also used for promotion and Planning, Development and Review (PDR) purposes.

When used for PDR, there are a number of issues that may be useful to consider.

SELTs are a collection of students’ reflections on their learning experience. Independent evaluation of SELTs (report from National Centre for Vocational Education Research) has shown that the Teacher and Course SELTs to be highly reliable survey instruments. The SELTs have only a small percentage of students completing it with aberrant responses (such as filling in all 1s where the class median may be 5).

SELT aggregated results for both course and teacher are available on the Planning and Performance Reporting website (http://www.adelaide.edu.au/planning/selt/) for every Discipline, School and Faculty for the last 10 years.

Mathematically, it is not possible for every staff member to have results above the mean. It is for this reason we recommend that our staff use the Broad Agreement figure, which shows the percentage of students who were in agreement (marked a 5, 6 or 7 on the SELT) with any given question. It is possible for every staff member to improve their broad agreement figures past a threshold, or expectation standard set by themselves, their School or the University.

The University has established the expectation standard (http://www.adelaide.edu.au/planning/selt/) that staff should achieve in SELTs.

When looking at a SELT report consider the following:

- Don’t just look at the numbers, read the student comments. They will provide you with greater insight as to what the students are thinking.
- Look for bimodal distributions (where part of the class appears to have a very different opinion to another part). This can manifest itself in the numbers by a large standard deviation and/or a median and mean significantly different from each other.
- A difference of a few decimal points between results from one year or semester to the next (eg 5.1 compared to 5.3) is unlikely to be statistically significant. There is an inherent error in all statistical measurements and SELTs are no exception. The size of this error will grow when the response rate to the survey is low. So check to make sure enough students responded to the survey. An error of 0.2–0.3 in means is typical in the following classes:
  - Class size of 260 with a 50% response rate
  - Class size of 18 with a 67% response rate
  - Class size of 600 with a 32% response rate