The Office of Academic Planning & Assessment (OAPA) collects feedback from SRTI users on a regular basis to inform changes and improvements to the SRTI form, administration process, and reporting of results. In 2016-2017, in conjunction with the Working Group on the Evaluation of Teaching (www.umass.edu/oapa/program-assessment/instructional-innovation-assessment/evaluation-teaching-new-approach) OAPA conducted a more formal review of the SRTI form and reporting processes, collecting feedback from a variety of SRTI users, members of the Faculty Senate Rules Committee, and members of the Working Group on the Evaluation of Teaching. Based on this feedback a number of improvements were made to SRTI and, this semester (fall 2018), we are introducing a redesigned SRTI Section Report. This document summarizes and explains the rationale behind these improvements, which include a change in the order of the SRTI Global items, a new question related to student effort, and a new way to help interpret course ratings in context.

Change in Order of SRTI Global Items

One recurring theme that emerged in our consultations with various SRTI users was concern about asking students to answer an instructor-related question, “What is your overall rating of this instructor’s teaching?”, after they just answered the course-related question, “Overall, how much do you feel you learned in this course?” To improve the flow and logic of the SRTI, the order of the global items has been changed so that students answer the instructor-related global item immediately following the SRTI diagnostic items (items 1-9, which are also instructor-related) and before the two course-related global items. The new SRTI Section Report reflects this change (Figure 1).

Figure 1: SRTI Section Report Excerpt – Global Items 10 and 11

New Item: Student Level of Effort

Our consultations with SRTI users also indicated there was an interest in incorporating student-centered questions on the SRTI form that reinforced students’ role in their learning. Based on these discussions, in 2017 we began piloting the following question: “What level of effort did you put in this course?” In fall 2018, the responses to this question will be reported along with questions on the proportion of class sessions students’ attended and the hours per week spent working on a course outside of class (Figure 2).
Interpreting Ratings in Context: The Credible Interval

To help provide context for interpreting SRTI ratings, page two of the SRTI Section Report has always contained item means for the course as well as comparison group means controlling for class size and course level (undergraduate or graduate) at the department, school/college, and campus levels. Another recurring theme in the feedback OAPA has received is a request for us to provide some kind of “confidence interval” to help individual faculty members and personnel committees understand what the true range of possible scores might be, and how to determine whether an observed difference in SRTI means was a difference worthy of attention. We made two changes to the SRTI Section Report to address this feedback:

(1) We removed the bar chart that provided a visual representation of the course, department, school/college, and campus means because of concerns that it was encouraging over-interpretation of small differences in means.

(2) We now include an interval measurement around each course mean rating called a “credible interval” (Figure 3). Conceptually similar to a confidence interval, the 90% credible interval is based on a different set of statistical assumptions that are more appropriate for SRTI data than traditional confidence interval construction.

Observed differences in SRTI means may be attributed to any number of factors in addition to those related to teaching practices or the quality and content of instruction. Other factors to consider include those intrinsic to the group of students taking a course in any given semester. For example, students may differ in their level of interest in course content, in their response to an instructor as a person, or in their general practices for using rating scales (e.g., some students may give a rating of 5 for an instructor who is better than average and other students might only give a rating of 5 if an instructor was one of the best they ever had). The credible interval provides a range of values in which the “true” mean rating for a SRTI item is likely to lie. In this case, the true mean is the one an instructor would get if the influence of this student-level variation could be removed. Further details on the development of the credible interval and how to interpret it can be found on the OAPA website.