Cheat sheet—choosing objectives for student evaluations of teaching at Stockton

* **Narrow your selection of “important” and “essential” objectives to the top 1-5 learning objectives that are most important in a given class.** The only “rule” is that you select at least one objective as either “important” or “essential.” However, selecting too many objectives is usually problematic: it is harder for students to make progress if the class has many objectives and research indicates that student ratings tend to decrease when larger numbers of objectives are selected. That said, some classes have only one objective and in some with more than 5 objectives students perceive that they make good progress on all selected objectives. You are invited to make an appointment with The Director of the Institute for Faculty Development to see how choosing different objectives would affect your student ratings.
* **The nature of your course dictates your selections** (for example, if you teach a W1 class, logically the objective about progress developing communication skills should be “essential,” or if you teach a first-year seminar class you belong to a group of people who’ve agreed to some core common objectives).
* **For you to select something as “important” or “essential” it should be a significant part of the class and, as IDEA states, “specific and substantive techniques and assignments [should be] employed to help the student achieve the objective.”** Your class should also include meaningful measurement of how well students have achieved that objective that is reflected in a significant portion of their grades.
* **Students should be learning, not just practicing skills related to the objectives you select**—students working in groups or writing or giving oral presentations who are not receiving active instruction in how to do these things better are unlikely to report progress on objectives related to these. Are you *teaching* students or having them complete work in these formats to meet other learning objectives in the course? Remember that teaching may occur through lecture but can also occur through peer or teacher feedback given formally or informally.
* If you are asking students to “apply” course materials in a test so that they can show they understand concepts or to “apply” course materials to develop professional skills, these are not the same thing as asking them to “apply course materials to improve rational thinking, problem solving, and decisions.”
* “Developing creative capacities” can be done in the sciences and other classes that are not fine arts, writing, or literature.
* **IDEA gives you students’ *perceptions* of their learning, which is not the same as student learning.**
* **Students will be more likely to perceive progress if you relate to them, early and often, what goals they are working on and use vocabulary similar to that on the IDEA form.** This means that your syllabus, assignments, and in-class discussion/lecture should refer to the goals and help students see how activities are intended to help them make progress on the goals.
* **Use page four on your IDEA forms to track student feedback over time—**the items in bold should match the items on which you’re receiving the highest scores if your students perceive that they have made progress on the learning objectives you selected for the class. High scores in items you didn’t select may point to things you might add later. Low scores in items you did select point to a need to make a change in your selections and/or your pedagogy.

**Myths about objectives**

*I have to choose 3.* No. If you choose none as important or essential, then by default all will be important, which is not good. But you could select as few as one or as many as all of them. Best practice would be to select 3-5.

*I have to have at least one essential or I have to have at least one important.*  No. You can have any combination of important and essential objectives. You could have none selected as essential, and only some as important. You could have none selected as important, and only some as essential.