

Evaluating Student Impact Capacity:

A Guidebook for Teachers

This guidebook is designed to assist course coordinators in evaluating students' impact capacity in their courses. It contains the definition of students' impact capacity and a non-exhaustive list of example questions for evaluating societal impact capacity, which can be tailored to specific course's intended learning objectives.

Who can primarily benefit from this tool?

Course coordinators and higher education professionals.

In which context is this tool useful?

Ideally, this guidebook would be used prior to the start of a course, however, it can be beneficial at any stage. Before using this tool, it is important to have the course's intended learning objectives defined.

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Tip: This is an interactive document. Open it in Adobe Acrobat.

What is impact capacity?

Impact capacity refers to students' capacity to have a positive societal impact during and after their academic studies. The EUR strategic project Impact at the Core conceptualises five key elements of impact capacity.

The five elements of impact capacity:



Empathetic Engagement

Student's ability to genuinely engage with complex societal challenges, fostering responsibility and empathy through the dimensions of labor, affect, and ethics.



Adaptive Resilience

Student's ability to embrace uncertainty, fostering resilience and adaptability by staying open to emergence and accepting multiple paths to solutions.



Collaborative Intelligence

Student's ability to work collaboratively with others, engaging diverse perspectives to understand situations, take joint action, and move toward innovative solutions.



Integrated Values and Knowledge

Student's ability to integrate personal and collective values with academic and situated knowledge to shape interventions from multiple perspectives.



Critical Reflexivity

Student's ability to reflect on experiences, deepening self-awareness and fostering societal change through continuous personal development.

Why should you evaluate impact capacity?

Evaluating students' impact capacity helps you understand if your course succeeds in being 'impact-driven', meaning that it encourages a rich learning environment built around authentic problems that will equip students with the skills, competencies, knowledge and attitudes to create positive societal impact within and beyond their academic studies. Such an evaluation will help you draw more detailed conclusions about **what has (or has not) worked and what should (or should not) change for future courses**.

When should you evaluate impact capacity?

Impact evaluation can be done at any stage of a course or done at multiple points to allow for comparison. See below for elaboration on the role of impact evaluation at various course stages.

Check methods per evaluation stage

Compare methods for evaluation



Stages of impact evaluation



Pre-course evaluation

This is an important moment **to assess attitudes, awareness, and knowledge prior to the course**, which will serve as a baseline for future evaluations and can inform you of any priors you should take into account during the course delivery.



Mid-course evaluation

This is a check-in moment **to reflect on first potential changes occurring among students**. This evaluation should focus on how students are developing, what activities are creating the most benefit, and what else is needed to foster impact capacity.



End-course evaluation

This end evaluation allows for information to be gathered on **the changes in impact capacity and understand how/why these changes occurred**. Through this, it can be determined whether the desired (short-term) impact capacity development was achieved.



Alumni evaluation

In evaluating alumni for societal impact, the objective is **to understand if the impact capacity development has led to alumni's readiness to tackle real world issues and create an impact**. There is recognition of the importance of university education in giving former students the skills, knowledge and experiences to create a positive societal impact in the future.

Which methods should you use to evaluate impact capacity?

Different tools for an impact evaluation are surveys, participant diaries, interviews and focus groups. Choosing between different methods and tools will help determine the data quality and feasibility of the evaluation.

Take a survey as an example: while open-ended questions provide rich details that can offer descriptive context within alumni's responses, its time-consuming nature may impact the likelihood that alumni complete the survey. Likewise, data analysis is more time-intensive than with closed questions.

If possible, we advise a mixed approach with open and closed survey questions to allow for easily gatherable data and room for context and input from students and alumni.



Suggested method per impact evaluation stage



Pre-course evaluation



Surveys



Mid-course evaluation



Interviews



Focus groups



Student diaries



End-course evaluation



Surveys



Focus groups



Alumni evaluation



Surveys

Evaluation methods



Surveys

- + Suitable for before/after comparison
- + Minor time commitment for students
- + Time-effective for alumni and evaluators
- Lower response rates^{1, 2}
- Past research has shown university graduates score their skills significantly higher than their employers³

We recommend surveys to save time. It is important to make your survey compatible with smartphones and a short time commitment. It may also require using their personal email addresses (and ensuring that this is GDPR compliant). When distributing a survey, we advise offering a (small) reward by participating. For example, by creating an impact award for alumni.



Student diaries

- + Allow insight into students' experiences and changes throughout the course
- Time-consuming for students and evaluators
- High commitment for students



Focus groups

- + Can gather detailed insights
- + Acts as a final reflection moment for students in realising their impact capacity



Interviews

- + Allow for detailed insight into students' experiences and changes throughout the course
- Highly dependent on individual student

Start evaluating the **impact capacity** of students



Start evaluating the impact capacity of students

Planning the evaluation of your students' impact capacity involves five steps.



1.

Reflect on what you
want to know

2.

Map ILOs to impact
capacity dimensions

3.

Select your
evaluation approach

4.

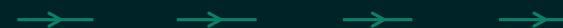
Tailor the questions
to your course

5.

Conduct your
evaluation



1. Reflect on what you want to know



What do you want to know about your students' impact capacity? Is it the actual impact they have had on society? Or is it their capacity to engage in impact in the future? This leads to two types of questions: results and capacity.

It is important to reflect on your evaluation ambitions to decide on an evaluation approach. From our Impact at the Core and Evaluating Societal Impact teams' perspectives, we focus on potential-focussed questions and would encourage the use of potential-focussed questions that privilege evaluating the impact capacity of students.

Results-focussed questions

Assesses what students have done with the impact capacities they have gained – i.e., if they have acted upon those skills (and what were the results). While such questions can supply information regarding the usefulness of the ILOs, they do require students/alumni to estimate their past actions, which may lead to inaccurate data due to recall bias, overestimation or unawareness.

// How often do you collaborate with others from different disciplines on complex issues? //

// How often do you incorporate model thinking when addressing complex, ambiguous issues? //

Potential-focussed questions

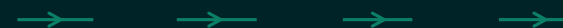
Seeks to understand students' readiness to act impactfully in the future. Such questions do not ask if one has engaged in an activity but asks if they feel capable to do so in the future, as there could be situational factors involved such as lack of time or opportunity that explains the "lack of" results.

// When confronted with an issue related to the course content, do you feel able to look at it from a multidisciplinary perspective? //

// Do you feel comfortable collaborating with others from different disciplines on complex issues? //



2. Map ILOs to impact capacity dimensions



It is beneficial to ensure alignment between the course's ILOs and the EUR definition of impact-driven education. Add in your ILOs to the aligned impact capacity dimension. This ensures that your course covers all aspects of impact capacity. On the right is an example of a course's ILOs mapped onto Impact at the Core's concept of impact capacity, i.e., students' 'capacity to have a positive societal impact during and after their study at EUR' 4:

We view the intended skills of the course as key components that are essential in developing the student impact capacity, and do not align with only one impact capacity dimension but act as amalgamations within the different dimensions. One way to look at this is to consider the intended skills as the 'how' - the necessary building blocks for impact - and the dimensions of impact capacity as the 'so what' - moving toward what alumni can or should be able to do to create positive societal impact.

What is impact capacity?



An example of mapping impact capacity to ILOs

1

Empathetic Engagement

Analyse societal challenges critically. Demonstrate active listening. Reflect on stakeholder perspectives

2

Adaptive Resilience

Navigate through ambiguous scenarios. Embrace solutions through emergence. Reframe setbacks as opportunities.

3

Collaborative Intelligence

Manage team dynamics with constructive communication. Collaborate ethically with partners to address challenges. Leverage diversity to enhance problem-solving.

4

Integrated Values and Knowledge

Synthesise academic and situated knowledge to design interventions. Articulate the role of values in decision-making. Integrate perspectives from multiple fields.

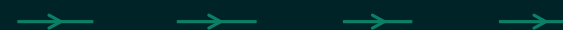
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Critical Reflexivity

Question dominant narratives. Connect learning to societal impact and identity. Reflect on experiences to deepen self-awareness.



3. Select your evaluation approach



Depending on the stage of your evaluation, select which research method you will use. Remember that open-ended questions can be used for surveys, interviews or focus groups, while close-ended questions can (likely) only be used for surveys.

1. Define Your Evaluation Goals

Start by clarifying your main objectives. What do you hope to understand or measure? This will help you select an approach aligned with your goals:

- Behavior Understanding → Observational Techniques
- Outcome Measurement → Surveys/Quantitative Tools
- Experience Exploration → Interviews/Focus Groups

2. Consider the Type of Data You Need

- **Quantitative Data:**
Choose surveys or structured assessments with closed-ended questions.
- **Qualitative Data:**
Consider interviews, focus groups, or open-ended surveys to gather deeper insights.

3. Assess Participant & Resource Constraints

- Time Limitations: Use short surveys or structured interviews for limited availability.
- Resource Limitations: Online surveys are cost-effective for broad reach, while focus groups offer depth but may need more resources.

Focus on Feasibility



Choose approaches that align with your goals, resources, and participants' time to ensure an effective and practical evaluation process!

4. Match the Approach to Your Evaluation Stage

- Exploratory Stage: Use open-ended methods like Focus Groups or Interviews to identify themes.
- Implementation Stage: Employ Observations or Case Studies to assess real-world applications.
- Summative Stage: Use Surveys or Pre/Post-Tests to evaluate outcomes and effectiveness.

5. Combine Methods for Comprehensive Insights

- Mixed approaches, like combining surveys with follow-up interviews, provide well-rounded insights by balancing quantitative trends with qualitative depth.

6. Leverage Digital Tools for Efficiency

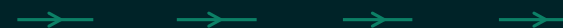
- Use online surveys, virtual interview platforms, and data analysis software to streamline data collection, especially for remote participants.

7. Pilot Test Your Evaluation Approach

- Run a pilot test to refine your approach, improving reliability and ensuring it meets your objectives before a full rollout.



4. Tailor the questions to your course



Below, we suggest closed and open-ended questions that fit within the mapping of intended skills to the impact capacity dimensions of reflexive capacity, academic attitude, impact competencies and responsible, engaged and entrepreneurial mindset. We have written these questions in a general way, including both results- and potential-focussed questions.

Now that you have reflected on what you want to know, adjust the questions to align with your answers to the following prompts:

- What are the main topics of your course?
- Which (academic and non-academic) skills are being developed in this course?
- What societal issues are integrated into this course?
- Which fields are relevant to this course?

For convenience, we have bracketed where you should insert the relevant information for your course. Keep in mind that some questions may not be applicable to your course or the current stage of your course. In the bank of questions you can find the questions listed out in a more actionable way (i.e., with answer options for close-ended questions).

Go to the question bank



Good luck on conducting your evaluation!



Bank of questions

Closed questions

Stratifying question

Which (groups, projects, internships, etc.) were you involved in?

Personal impact questions

- Do you work or study in a field related to [course topic]?
- Do you work or study in a field related to one of the course-related fields?
- If studying, following a doctoral programme or working at a university, are you affiliated with the university in which you took the course?
- Did the course allow you to develop your professional network?
- How influential was your participation in the course on your study/ career choices?

Impact capacity questions

Reflexive capacity

- When confronted with an (course-related) issue in the news, at work, in studies, or socially, etc., do you feel able to analyse its ethical, legal, social, economic and cultural contexts?
- When confronted with an (course-related) issue, how often do you analyse it within its ethical, legal, social, economic and cultural contexts?

- When confronted with an (course-related) issue, do you feel able to reflect on your perspective and the perspectives of others?
- When confronted with an (course-related) issue, how often do you reflect on your perspective and the perspectives of others?

Academic attitude

- Do you feel able to incorporate model thinking when addressing complex, ambiguous issues?
- How often do you incorporate model thinking when addressing complex, ambiguous issues?
- When confronted with an (course-related) issue, do you feel able to look at it from a multidisciplinary perspective?
- When confronted with an (course-related) issue, how often do you look at it from a multidisciplinary perspective?

Bank of questions

Impact competencies

- Do you feel comfortable collaborating with others from different disciplines on complex issues?
- How often do you collaborate with others from different disciplines on complex issues?
- Do you feel able to understand the basic techniques and concepts behind (course subject)?
- Do you feel able to apply your (course subject) knowledge to your work or studies?
- How often do you apply your (course subject) knowledge to your work or studies?
- Do you feel able to critically think about issues such as fairness, transparency, accountability, safety and ethics when discussing (course subject)?
- How often do you critically think about issues such as fairness, transparency, accountability, safety and ethics when discussing (course subject)?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing how you would approach a (course-related) problem with a peer?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing how you would approach a (course-related) problem with a supervisor teacher?

Responsible, engaged and entrepreneurial mindset

- Do you feel comfortable using the knowledge, skills and experiences gained from your participation in the (course) to engage in your community?
- In the last year, how often have you used the knowledge, skills and experiences gained from your participation in the (course) to engage in your community?
- Do you feel comfortable going out of your way to communicate with others about (course subject)?
- How often do you go out of your way to communicate with others about (course subject)?

Bank of questions

Open questions

Stratifying question

- Which (groups, projects, internships etc.) were you involved in?

Personal impact questions

- What is your current work/academic situation? Are you working or studying in a field related to (course topics) or a combination?
- How has your experience within the course had an influence on your subsequent academic and/or professional decisions?
- Has the course helped with understanding dynamics you're facing at your current position?

Impact Capacity questions

Reflexive capacity

- When confronted with an (course-related) issue, do you feel the course has prepared you? How so or how not? Can you provide an example?

Academic attitude

- How has your experience in the course influenced how you approach complex, ambiguous issues today?

Impact competencies

- How would you describe your (course ILO skills) today?
- How do you demonstrate your (course ILO skills) to others? Do you feel comfortable doing so?

Responsible, engaged and entrepreneurial mindset

- How have you used the knowledge, skills and experiences gained from the course to engage in your (local/international/online) community?
- Do you feel that the course has prepared you to take the lead in complex issues (related to [course subject])?

Bank of questions

General questions by course stage

Pre-course evaluation

- Why is it important for you to participate in this course?
- In terms of your life and career goals, what kind of impact do you expect this course to have?
- Considering your expectations, what specific areas do you anticipate learning the most about in this course?
- What are your anticipated achievements or abilities that you are striving for?
- What is your current attitude towards [course subject]?
- What do you hope to add to the discussion on [course subject]?

Mid-course coach evaluation

- What has been most challenging for you during the course so far?
- How do you experience working in an interdisciplinary context?
- Have you encountered new perspectives on [course subject] that you were not aware of/as familiar with before the course? If so, please elaborate.

End-course evaluation

- In what way has your perspective and attitude on [course subject] changed? If not, why not?
- How did the opportunity to hear from societal stakeholders contribute to your learning experience?
- Did the participation of with societal stakeholders influence your motivation and engagement with the course?
- Did the course allow you to expand/develop your professional and/or personal network?
- What was a situation that you found challenging within this course?
- Did you use skills or abilities that you wouldn't normally use during a course?

- How did the course challenge you to step outside of your comfort zone and try new things?
- What do you think of the quality and usefulness of the solutions or prototypes you worked on?
- Throughout the course, did you experience situations where you reflected on your own values/knowledge and those of others? If yes, in what way?
- In what way did the academic literature/knowledge help you to relate to the societal urgency that the course was concerned with?
- Do you consider the spaces where the course took place to have been stimulating for your learning experience?
- How did you experience the input from the societal stakeholders?

Alumni evaluation

- In what ways has your perspective on [course subject] changed since taking this course?
- Do you continue to use the skills or abilities that you learned from this course?
- What role has this course played in your life/academic/career trajectory?

Reference

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Colophon

This guidebook for evaluating students' societal impact capacity was put together for course coordinators and educational professionals at Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) who want to assess how their courses are benefitting their students. The guidebook provides a non-exhaustive list of questions intended to help educators understand changes to student impact capacity.

This tool benefited from interactions with many colleagues at EUR. We initially thank Michele Murgia, Education Coordinator in Artificial Intelligence for the Convergence, which inspired us to develop this guidebook. We also thank Dr. Marieke A. Hartman, Senior Lecturer Public and Global Health, at Erasmus University College, and Dr. Esra Sertel, Learning Innovation Consultant at the Rotterdam School of Management, for sharing their approaches to evaluation. Finally, this tool was developed in partnership with the EUR strategic project Impact at the Core. We especially thank Dr Joe Binnetti and Linda de Vreede for their continued leadership and partnership in impact-driven education at EUR.

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To cite this tool

Evaluating Societal Impact (2024). Evaluating Student Impact Capacity Guidebook. Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR). <https://doi.org/10.25397/eur.27646677>.

Version 1.0

December 2024

Rotterdam, the Netherlands

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