

## Scaling Student Assessment Podcast Series

### Episode 4 – Scaling Student Voice with Yvonne Chen

Intro

Yvonne Chen: Students can feel when instructors are being real, being authentic and being sincere, they can really tell whether or not they see it out loud is a different story. But I think people truly can tell where whether you are serious about this. And I think by experimenting and trying, we are also encouraging the next generations of our students. They have thoughts, encourage them to just speak out more, to express themselves.

Drew Vartia: Welcome to the next episode of Scaling Assessment. Today we are talking about scaling Student voice. Joining me today is Yvonne Chen. And Yvonne, could you introduce yourself?

Yvonne Chen: Hello, Drew. Thank you for having me. My name is Yvonne Chen. I am a professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

Drew Vartia: Today we're talking about scaling student voice and assessment. And the idea is that instructors often dictate what students will learn, how that learning will be evaluated, and the kind of feedback that will be given. Students, though, often have silent or silenced goals for their own learning.

We want to know what are some ways we can let students express their preferences specifically for evaluation and feedback? How can we do that in courses with increasingly large numbers of students?

So, Yvonne, something that you've done in your courses has been to ask students to construct their own rubrics for their own evaluation in a project that they're doing. Could you maybe describe that work just a little bit more?

Yvonne Chen: Of course. I am teaching HNRS 190. It's in the first year honor seminar on mindfulness meditation in the modern world. I know that there are little M's going on in alliteration.

Drew Vartia: It's my favorite thing. It's magnificent. It's totally...

Thank you. Thank you. I have 11 students right now in my class, and so when I think about engaging with students, I know that it is easily done in a smaller classroom setting. So in each classroom, we talked a lot about mindfulness practices. We practice mindfulness and we have a lot of discussion.

So, when I came to your workshop on Student Voices in Assessment, I found that perhaps that's a really good starter class to start talking about how what it might look like to incorporate student voices in assessment.

So, I threw the idea out there to my students. I say, here, this is our final assignment on the college thrive guide in which they have design and intervention and then really talk about what they have learned from that intervention.

So, I thought, let's just take a look at how they can design their own rubric. That hopefully will be a really good start. To my surprise, I shouldn't say to my surprise, I should not be surprised by a lot of things that

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honor students can do. They are all familiar with what a rubric is so in because again, it's a smaller class and I give them a lot of freedom and it's also a one credit course.

So I feel like that is a course. Like I mentioned before, I can experiment, I can try different things and I can give very loose instruction in which students are capable of responding positively and favorably. So I say just go ahead and take some class time. Take a look at our final assignment guidelines and develop some rubric that you like for me to measure you by.

Before coming to this podcast. I actually looked into what my students have submitted, I was really amazed by the freedom that they took. Some looked into the discussion, you know, some looked into the guidelines, and there really developed a point by point rubric system.

For example, if I ask them that you would need to meet with a librarian who came to art class, talk about how to use KU databases...

Then the student had, meet with the librarian. Yes and no. So, take a very literal approach. Some took a more creative approach. Some really felt like, did the students really demonstrate understanding of intervention?

And I felt like I want to respect their freedom and their voices, in part because so few classes do so. And also, it's a one credit course where I feel like I have a lot of experimental energy to give.

And they are also very receptive to that.

Drew Vartia: Something that you said made me wonder about these, say, 11 students. What was the sort of relative ratio of sort of strict self-imposed guidelines versus more open ended?

Yvonne Chen: I would say 20% are strict, whereas 80% have a lot of freedom to express what it is that they want me to grade their assignment on.

Drew Vartia: And that's where I was going with that. So it sounds like 20% of these are going to feel a lot like grading a rubric you might have developed yourself.

Is there any concern about evaluating the other 80% where you're going to have to think a little bit differently as you evaluate their work each time?

Yvonne Chen: I feel like if I were to do this again, I would actually meet with students one on one to talk about their own, individually designed to rubric. I want to get a better sense of what they meant by creativity, what they meant by this. Especially, I think, you know, when we design a really well-written rubric, we not only have criteria, but we also have descriptions within each criterion to describe what it means to meet expectations, what it means to be a novice in this area.

So, I would love to have a one on one conversation with them about So what do you mean by that? You give me an example of what it what it would look like to be successful for you. Can you educate me on your rubric?

And I feel like that by doing so. Would also humble me.

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I will bring this humility to the equation to show them that I'm really interested in learning about how you want me to evaluate you, rather than me a sage behind the podium when I when obviously I'm not, you know, I told them, quite frankly, at the beginning of our mindfulness seminar that I am a student of mindfulness.

I would never say I'm an expert in mindfulness who can be an expert in the mind and the practice of all these spiritual religions.

So for me, I feel like that that tone that I set at the beginning of the class, the discussions we have throughout the semester also help students that has made them be a little bit more emboldened to to be a little bit different.

Drew Vartia: I really like that. That brings in Student instructor partnership. And I think that that's coming at a moment where it's difficult to engage students and it's difficult to facilitate a sense of community for them. And I feel like what you're describing touches on both.

Yvonne Chen: Thank you. I would agree so and I feel like you know, they take so many large classes and anything that we can do to build that relationship will be instrumental in their personal and professional development.

Drew Vartia: So speaking of large classes, if we were to think about taking the technique that you've described and applying it to a class of more than 11 students, and I think what you've done is to pilot this in a really great size right, what recommendations might you have for doing this in a class of something more like 25 students?

And then maybe we can talk about what this could look like with a class of, say, 250 students. What are your thoughts there?

Yvonne Chen: So right now with 11 students, I gave each student a lot of freedom in designing their own rubric. If I have 25 students, I probably would engaging some in class discussions, breaking them into smaller groups and have them talk about what rubric is, how would they like their work to be evaluated.

I might try to gain some consensus through those small group discussions and bring those rubrics to a larger class conversation.

Try to get a pulse of what people are feeling, what might be important to them. I might also introduce what I have in mind, though I'm a little bit hesitant knowing that this is the population

I'm working with, right? I don't want to introduce them my rubric and then kind of just limit what they can go above and beyond.

So, I think I would still rely on this class discussion to solidify some important criteria that we want to incorporate and then bring those criteria up back into the smaller group conversation about so how might you write a rubric, what would you what would you say within this specific criteria?

What would meet expectation look like for you? What would a novice be like for you?

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So, I think it will be a lot of smaller conversations and class discussion. Bring it back to the smaller conversations and try to distill into a set of criteria that everyone feel comfortable with.

What I would also do is once we have a rough draft of the rubric, I also want to continue that conversation with my students.

I don't want them to be married to their rubric right away.

I think some people have second thoughts and I want to make sure that they have the space to bring up their concerns, if any.

So, I feel like I would love to engage in that conversation in the next few weeks just to get a sense of whether they truly feel comfortable.

If I were to do 250 people class on mindfulness, I would love the opportunity. Is anyone listening?

I want to know who should I talk with you? Registrar's office do you to 250 people. A class on mindfulness.

Just so you know, if you're listening and you're doing the first year seminar, just so you know, IU, Indiana University, our peer institution does teach mindfulness. One is in all of its first year seminar classes. that's. Great. Just FYI, registrar, provost, chancellor.

Okay. In all seriousness, for the 250 class, I feel like I do need to use classroom technology to help me manage that.

So what I would do is maybe share what a rubric is. Again, I am not going to assume all 250 students may have the same level of knowledge, you know, in terms of rubric, construction or what a rubric is, because again, I think making an assumption is the worst thing that any instructor can do.

So we will talk a little bit about that. I would perhaps share why it is important for me to give them the voice in rubric construction.

And it also depends on how I have built the relationship with 250 people, right, in the beginning of class. But let's just assume I built a really positive and trustworthy relationship with them.

You know, they all have a pretty basic understanding of what a rubric is. Let me use, you know, Slido to vote on, you know, some of the rubric criteria. We may ask them to express those rubric criteria they want. We can vote on them. And again, maybe we can make this like as an iteration, right? I don't want students to think that, well, once we vote on them, then we can't change. So maybe this can be a multi-day process again.

So vote on the criteria, I can spend time using Google Slides to kind of talk about what it means to meet expectations or what it means to be a novice in this criterion and then bring the process back to students and share with them.

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But I think I probably use a lot of class voting as a main mechanism for me to distill what that rubric will look like at the end of the day, rather than going through all the iterative process.

Because again, if I were just the only person managing the class, I think that would be difficult.

Drew Vartia: Yeah.

So, it sounds like with the smaller course you can allow a fair amount of individual flexibility, whereas with larger courses this is about consensus building toward a rubric that would be applied across the board to some extent.

I'm wondering if there's maybe some middle ground where once you have established a consensus-based rubric, is there space, is there a dimension or a criterion that that could be open ended where you say, okay, well, here's the four that we all decided were important for the fifth one?

You know, you write it in something.

Yvonne Chen: I will be open to the idea. And I think it also depends on the nature of the project, right? If there's a big final assignment, what would that look like for students?

If it is a three-page essay, what will it look like?

So, I feel like it definitely requires a lot of different practices and a lot of engagement with students. And I always say, if I could do this over again, I would only do it this once. I would apply this rubric construction in at least 2 to 3 different assignments just so the students get a feel of what it is like. I think sometimes we tend to focus on this one big assignment.

That's it.

That's your only chance to voice your opinions. But that's a little bit like a be-all-end-all type of game. And I feel like that's a little bit unfair. Especially I feel like the more, the longer I teach, the more I feel that students need a time to think about why this is important and why it is worthwhile for them to speak up.

Drew Vartia: That's a great point that, you know, a one off exercise can feel discardable as opposed to getting them used to this process and having that also be an element to their learning.

Yvonne Chen: Yeah.

Drew Vartia: So, in terms of what you've done in allowing students to construct their own rubrics, are there any pitfalls that you can think of based on your experience?

Yvonne Chen: My experience so far teaches me that while I have a group of students who are very open to constructing rubrics, it is helpful to share with them what I'm looking for.

I have this little bit dumbfounded, like I want to give them power, but then I'm going to tell them about the boundaries.

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But let me just tell you what I meant. So as I reviewed students rubric this morning, I realized a lot of them didn't give me very detailed ideas of what it means to say expressing creativity.

So what does that mean? You tell me more about it. So so I feel like if I were to do this again and I'm definitely will be doing this again next fall is to really encourage them, okay, you talk about this, can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by that?

Can you give me that example, what it might look like, even though you haven't done this assignment yet, but can you educate me on that?

And I think for students who may provide enough details, then perhaps I don't have to meet with them one on one.

But for those where I'm, I'm still a little bit unclear about maybe there will be an invitation to meet with each other to discuss that rubric further.

Drew Vartia: Yeah. So it sounds like providing multiple channels for clarity between you and your students. Yes. Yeah, that seems really smart.

Yvonne Chen: Thank you. Yeah, well, you actually did a very good job summarizing. I was like, that was an excellent summary, Drew.

Drew Vartia: Thanks.

Yvonne Chen: I'm a researcher.

Drew Vartia: No, no, no, no, no.

Yvonne Chen: This is really good to also help me understand, right. How to distill the thoughts like this is what I'm looking for.

Drew Vartia: And I think that's easy on my side only because all I have to do is think about what you're saying as opposed to generating these ideas that you're trying to come up with, you know?

Yvonne Chen: But I think your workshop has been really helpful in encouraging us to think about what it will look like, right?

Drew Vartia: Thanks. Yeah, I appreciate that. Is there anything else that you might add as a tip to faculty colleagues?

Yvonne Chen: My tips for colleagues who want to try is to be a little bit vulnerable, to be a little bit less in control, because I think using this mindfulness concept is we never have any control over anything.

And so letting go of the control is really scary for a lot of people.

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But I also know that there is space where people feel a little bit comfortable. For example, it could be, how about a contributing a discussion questions for our essay?

How about writing a multiple-choice question in the final exam?

And as an instructor, I get to pick and choose which multiple choices I want to include in your final exam and I think just experiment a little bit.

Students can feel when instructors are being real, being authentic and being sincere, they can really tell or not they say it out loud is a different story.

But I think people truly can tell whether you are serious about this.

And I think by experimenting and trying, we are also are encouraging a next generations of our students. They have thoughts, encourage them to just speak up more, to express themselves rather than hiding their thoughts and not feeling that they couldn't express it because they're interacting with all adults with a lot of fancy degrees. So be a little bit vulnerable within the confines of your comfort zone.

And if you don't try, right?

If instructors don't try, I think that's completely fine too. It's a very different way of doing things. You don't have to try and not trying doesn't mean that you don't value that thing. Just being exposed to this idea can also be very revolutionary and you experiment and when you're ready.

Drew Vartia: Yeah, I like that. And I think vulnerability goes hand in hand with a different word you mentioned earlier, which is humility. And I think together those can make instructors appear like the humans they are, which I think not only benefits students, but it relieves an awful lot of pressure for the instructor.

That has to be exhausting.

Yvonne Chen: And and, you know, and it really is a mirror. I think when I when I first started, I wouldn't do that, you know, to admit that, I don't know a lot about the content I'm teaching. I know I recently was in this imposter syndrome workshop with Nicole, you know, we talk about why do we have imposter syndrome?

We really, you know, contribute that to the structure, right? We have all a structure that reinforces and expresses that imposter syndrome. And so I think for me at this stage of my career is also think about what brings me this comfort, what is the vision I want to share with my students, what it is that I want to, what kind of legacy I want to leave in teaching. Not something people can inscribe on my tombstone, right?

But just like, what is that? I want to leave. I want what kind of energy I want my students to feel.

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And I feel like I can say I'm not an expert. I'm just not an expert in this. There's this. And that's why we have experts on our campus. So you can go and ask them these questions. But just I think sometimes you have to be really comfortable.

And I also know that I wouldn't want my students to feel that once they leave the classroom, they have to pretend to know everything. And no one knows everything. And so how can we bring this humility to everyone we interact with so hopefully that energy can be disseminated or spread?

And I think my mindfulness course is a perfect vehicle, right?

There will be a lot of unexpected learning moments, a lot of realization, even through simple breathing, through observing how our mind wanders and what they means, right? I feel like that's a fundamental skill for them to start observing in perhaps third person perspective, rather than always being so reactive to their emotions, to the likes that get on TikTok, to all these outside validation, and to always watch where our mind is going, right?

Sometimes we let our mind drive our bus.

If I could share one more thing about what I did with the Honors first year seminar before introducing to them about designing the rubric,

I also asked them whether they could contribute to discussion questions that I have for them. So, in the final college, thrive guide assignment, I also asked them to have this reflection, right? What does it mean to be in this class? What did you learn from this interaction? So I developed a set of questions, but I felt like before doing the rubric building, before inviting them to do that,

I also need to ask, so what kind of discussion question would you like to write about? And so we actually had the conversation first, and so they read through my questions.

They provide some comments, they edited, they thought about, can we also have this? And I think that by doing that gives them validation that, wow, my instructor is serious about wanting me to design my own rubric because she just modified our discussion, reflection discussions based on what we all collectively discussed.

So, I think it's really showing them that my words are my promises and you can look at the actions I took.

It's not just about all the empty words that we all say. Oh, all student voices are important. I'm really doing my best to practice that. Given the understanding I have about this what it means to incorporate a student's voice in the assessment? And I and I feel like again, this is a group of students who have interacted frequently enough who will be receptive to an idea like this.

Drew Vartia: That touches back on that point of sort of repeating the exercise and what you've just described sounds like that repetition also builds trust in the relationship that you have, which you're exactly right is really important.



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Yeah, well, Yvonne, thank you for describing your work and I hope that our audience learn something from it. I know, I certainly have. And thank you so much for being here.

Yvonne Chen: Thank you so much for having me. I had a great time.