

FACULTY ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Student evaluations of teaching at universities had their beginnings in the U.S. in the first part of this century. During the early years, student evaluations were almost always voluntary on the part of the faculty. During the late 60's and early 70's, in response to student demands and other forces, mandatory student evaluations became the norm. During this period there were several studies that demonstrated the validity and utility of student ratings and supported their use for both formative and summative purposes.

The propositions that teachers can learn from evaluations, that they help senior faculty judge junior faculty, and that they help administrators judge all faculty have been debated in the literature over the past several years. Regardless of the controversy, student evaluations are a widely accepted and mandated tool used for assessing quality teaching.

Among numerous research projects in the area of student evaluations, a preponderance of studies have focused in four general areas: 1) on associations between student evaluations and characteristics of instructors; 2) course evaluations and attributes of the course; 3) course evaluations and student characteristics; and 4) faculty responses to course evaluations.

The purpose of the reported study was to learn about the opinions and attitudes of faculty towards student evaluations. A survey was developed which was designed to examine three general areas: 1) opinions of faculty with regards to the various uses and weights given student evaluations; 2) whether the anticipation of student evaluations influenced instruction; and 3) attitudes and opinions regarding various student evaluation issues. A series of questions with scaled responses were developed for each of the three areas.

The survey instrument was mailed to all full-time (151) and part-time (144) teaching faculty at California State University San Marcos. The response rate of 35% produced 107 usable questionnaires.

Most of those responding expressed the opinion that student evaluations were most important in periodic evaluations of non-tenured faculty and least important in post-tenure reviews. Most faculty members did not see student evaluations as particularly influential on their own teaching. However, classroom management was the area where student evaluations were perceived as most influential and grades assigned was the area where student evaluations were seen as least influential.

Of the seventeen statements to which respondents were asked to give their level of agreement/disagreement, the statement with which most people agreed was, "Students are more likely to give higher evaluations to instructors who confirm their previously held ideas and beliefs." The statement that produced the greatest level of disagreement was "I choose to teach courses where I believe I will receive higher course evaluations." There were statistically significant differences found in 9 of the 17 Likert scaled statements based on demographic classifications. Gender produced the greatest number of associations (6). Women were more likely to hold the opinion that female instructors are rated lower than male instructors.

The results show a diversity of opinions with regards to student evaluations. Regardless, there is strong consensus that student evaluations should not be the sole determinant in assessing an individual's teaching skill and performance.

REFERENCES

References provided on request.