

THE USE OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS BY FACULTY, ADMINISTRATORS, AND STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Student evaluations were first developed and administered to provide feedback for instructors to improve their own teaching effectiveness (Lill 1979). Over time, these evaluations have become the primary (and sometimes only) method used by universities to evaluate a professor's classroom effectiveness (Seiler and Seiler 2002; Yunker and Sterner 1988). Additionally, most universities now rely heavily on these evaluations in the decision process for faculty appointment, retention, tenure, and promotion (Lill 1979; Marks 2000; Seiler and Seiler 2002). As a result, positive student evaluations play a critical role in the successful advancement of faculty members in their academic careers.

It is generally accepted that student evaluations can be an effective indicator of instructor effectiveness (Koon and Murray 1995; Marsh and Dunkin 1992; Seldin 1993). No consensus exists, however, as to the appropriate criteria that should be used to measure teaching effectiveness (Marks 2000), and some researchers question the overall reliability and validity of existing student evaluation instruments (Kleiner 1989; Lill 1979; Marks 2000). In fact, due to reliability and validity problems, Barnett (1996) argues that universities should not use student evaluations for personnel decisions like promotion and tenure.

Furthermore, students may not be motivated to complete instructor evaluation forms in a comprehensive, thoughtful, and deliberate manner because they are not typically apprised of the results of the evaluations and do not understand the impact of these evaluations (Dunegan and Hrivnak 2003). Perhaps as a result, peer-to-peer websites such as www.ratemyprofessor.com have emerged. At these websites, students evaluate faculty and can see the evaluations and comments of their classmates.

Given their importance in the appointment, retention, tenure, and promotion process, it is critical to understand how student evaluations are currently being used, how they should be used, and the impact of evaluations on student and faculty behavior.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How are student evaluations used by junior faculty? By senior faculty? Do they help improve instructor effectiveness?
- Should student evaluations be used in the retention, tenure, and promotion process? If so, are they currently being used properly? If not, how can the status quo be changed?
- How can the reliability and validity of the evaluation instrument be improved? Should the AMA develop a standard student evaluation form so that comparisons can be made across universities?
- Should student evaluations be given online? If so, should they be able to modify their evaluations over a certain time period? How would this change the current evaluation process? What impact on validity and reliability would online evaluations have?
- Should companies be viewed as customers of marketing departments? If so, should they provide feedback on faculty teaching effectiveness?
- Do instructors engage in activities and behaviors to directly influence their classroom evaluations? Is this ethical behavior?
- How are evaluations on peer-to-peer websites (e.g. www.ratemyprofessor.com) different than classroom evaluations? What is the nature and extent of student and faculty use of these peer-to-peer websites?

REFERENCES

Available upon request.