

Recommendations on the Use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

The Report of the 2017 Provost's Commission on Tenure Track Faculty recommended that *"the University P&T document contain cautionary language about the utility and reliability of student course evaluations as a measure of teaching quality."* [1] The present recommendation goes a step further to propose that student evaluations of teaching be used as formative assessment, and not as a quantitative measure in appraisals and in the promotion process.

Calvin: Here's the latest poll on your performance as dad. Your approval rating is pretty low, I'm afraid.

Dad: That's because there's not necessarily any connection between what's good and what's popular. I do what's right, not what gets approval.

Calvin: You'll never keep the job with that attitude.

Dad: If someone else offers to do it, let me know.

Calvin and Hobbes, Bill Watterson, Feb. 13, 1994

Mounting research and evidence show that:

- Student evaluations of teaching tend to measure *student satisfaction* rather than *teaching effectiveness*. [2]
- There can be statistical problems with student evaluations of teaching, such as low response rates and variability in class sizes and levels. [3]
- The use of student teaching evaluations in appraisal and promotion processes may divert faculty from activities that have a higher learning content. [2]
- There is evidence of bias in student evaluations, particularly that they "advantage faculty members of certain genders and backgrounds (namely white men) and disadvantage others." [4,5]

Recommendations:

- Reconsider questions used in student evaluations of teaching. Do away with questions not directly related to learning, questions such as, "How would you rate your professor?" Instead, ask questions about course design and impact.
- Use student evaluations of teaching as formative assessment rather than directly in performance evaluations.
- Involve the faculty in attending each other's classes (peer evaluation of teaching) and in reviewing others' self-assessments and course materials.
- Have faculty create a portfolio with many different quantitative and qualitative evidences of teaching effectiveness.

References

- [1] Report of the Provost's Commission on Tenure Track Faculty, University of Delaware 2017
https://provost.udel.edu/files/2014/12/Commission_on_Tenure_Track_Faculty_Report_Web-2au73x3.pdf.
- [2] Braga, Paccagnella and Pellizzari, "Evaluating Students' Evaluations of Professors," *Economics of Education Review*, August 2014, pp. 71-88.
- [3] P. B. Stark and R. Freishtat. ScienceOpen Research 2014 (DOI: 10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AOFRQA.v1).
- [4] Flaherty, "Teaching Eval Shakeup: Most institutions say they value teaching but how they assess it tells a different story," *INSIDE HIGHER ED*, May 22, 2018.
- [5] Basow and Martin, Bias in student evaluations," in *Effective evaluation of teaching: A guide for faculty and administrators*, edited by Mary E. Kite, Society for the Teaching of Psychology: 2012.