

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

Student Feedback/Evaluations

Uses

Abuses

Method

Review of literature

1. Most anecdotes from non-refereed publications
2. Journal articles

Discussion with Deans and Chairs of promotions committees

Uses of Student Evaluations

1. Faculty tenure/promotions
2. Curricular development

Evaluations by students in three areas

A. Faculty as lecturer(s)

B. Faculty as clinical tutors (ward
attendings, etc.)

C. Faculty as role models

The title most sought by
academicians is “professor”

Yet . . . professors do not profess.

de Angelis, JAMA 2003

There is universal agreement that
'professors ought to profess.'

The traditional 3-legged stool of academic medicine comprising of education, patient care and research is broken. The education leg is being currently held together by peanut butter and bubble gum combined with the unselfish persistence of faculty dedicated to teaching.

De Angelis. Ibid.

“At a minimum, medical schools must recognize the importance of teaching in promotion and tenure decisions.”

Promotions committees – departmental as well as university – request a ‘teaching portfolio’ which includes student evaluations.

Faculty promotions inter alia are based on
student evaluations of professors.

How are student evaluations obtained?

Most schools ask some/all students to fill course/clinical rotation evaluations which often include space for comments on individual faculty.

The hidden curriculum in undergraduate education.

It refers to:

“.... Processes, pressures and constraints which fall outside the formal curriculum and which are often unarticulated or unexplored.”

BMJ, 2004

Most role models were male doctors

Female doctors were perceived as
having “humane” qualities

Only a small percentage of positive role models were non-white – though about 40% of students were themselves non-white

Lemp, BMJ 2004

What do students actually evaluate?

What do student ratings actually measure?

Popularity

or

Quality of instructions

1993 Study (J of Pers. Soc. Psychology)

- - - 30 second silent videos significantly predicted global end-of-semester student evaluation of teachers.

There is considerable influence of subtle affective non-verbal behaviours on teaching process and are identifiable from thin slices of behaviour.

- Ambady (1993)

The validity of student rating measures of instructional quality was questioned in the 1970s. By the early 1980s, however, most expert opinion viewed student rating measures as valid

Greenwald, 1997

. . . . Student ratings are valid, but contextual variables such as grading leniency can affect the level of ratings.

McKeatchie, 1997

“Higher expected grade consistently and significantly raises student opinion of instructors.”

Langbein, 1994

Female faculty are evaluated more
harshly than their male colleagues.

Langbein, p. 551, 1994

. . . . What students perceive as effective teaching may not correspond with what the institution perceives as effective teaching.

Obenchain. College Teaching, Vo. 49

Popular teachers are not always
effective teachers

A former student about an attending:

“I hated his guts. He is truly a S.O.B. But I learned a lot from him.”

Some comments/responses from
Professors

Dr. O

“I have to make sure they walk out happy.”

“The student in college is being treated as a customer in a retail environment; and I have to worry about customer complaints.”

Prof. D

“If you get good evaluations that is just one evaluation you have cleared. But if you don't, it does not matter how else you do.”

Chr. Higher Ed.

A Cornell professor had to change after he started receiving poor ratings.

“In my mind, I became a teaching teddy bear. The students could do no wrong & I did everything to keep them happy . . . no matter how childish or rude their behaviour, no matter how poorly they performed . . .”

Chr. Higher Ed.

A Cornell professor improved his ratings after
“adding hand gestures, varying the pitch of
his voice and being more exuberant.”

Chr. Higher Ed.

About bitter & nasty comments

“It is worth examining whether we want . . . entire careers to be derailed by a bunch of snitty undergraduates who did not want to do an extra term paper.”

-- A few nasty comments can raise questions about a professor's competence.

Examples of bitter, nasty comment:

“I will not donate to Alumni Association
so long as this person is on the faculty.”

Undergraduates are known to make
comments not always related to
teaching.

“She should not wear that outfit. Her
hips are too big.”

Chr. Higher Ed.

“This prof cannot speak good english.” (sic)

Chair:

“An assistant professor up for tenure, threw a party and informed the students about her upcoming tenure. She reportedly (allegedly) asked the students to help her.”

Personal Communication

How Influential are the Student Leaders?

Usually act as spokesperson

Remain in that position for four years

Treated by faculty as quasi-faculty member

Could set the tone and dominate ethos

“The amount of student feedback in the course of a single academic year lacks the reliability.”

However,

“As the number of ratings increases The data gains reliability.”

Solomon et al, 1997

Billings-Giagliardi (2004) used “thinkaloud” interviews with students.

Conclusion:

“.... a number of problematic issues that may threaten valid interpretation of typical evaluation items for a medical school course.”

Problems:

1. Students are uncertain about the meaning of educational concepts such as independent learning, feedback, etc.
2. Students consider a number of factors, in addition to, or instead of actual teaching performance.
3. Students compare faculty members to one another.
4. Students 'filtered' judgments because of interpersonal concerns.
5. Ratings tend to skew toward positive end of the scale.

Faculty Defensive Typology

Demosthenes

“The Orator”

Hugger

“I love you all.”

The Advocate

“The students are right.”

The party giver

“I am one of you”

“Too many have been grievously wronged by the institutional discrimination that has resulted from the use of such ill-conceived and poorly utilized instruments as student evaluations.”

- Prof. Goldman, Wichita State University

What are the alternatives?

1. Peer Reviews
2. OSTE
3. Semi-structured Interviews
4. Random selection of students
5. Combination of all of the above

The methods in which evaluation of faculty
are collected influences ratings.

Gathering information that accurately reflects student perceptions requires that students buy into the evaluation process - - - -

Sampling can reduce evaluation demands placed on students and preserve reliability and increase the validity.

Kreites et al, 2005

Sampling can reduce evaluation demands placed on students and increase the validity of mean evaluation scores.

Kreiter et al. Medical Education, 2005

Until we learn more about what student responses to systematic surveys of teaching really measure, it is probably unwise to rely predominantly on them

Langbein (1994)

Sir James Paget: “...the personal character, the very nature, the will, of each student had far greater force in determining his career than any helps or hindrances whatever...The time and the place, the work to be done, and its responsibilities, will change; but the man will be the same, except in so far as he may change himself.”

Sir James Paget: “If a man of science cannot be business-like, it is the fault of his brain, not of his study; he would have been the same in any other pursuit in life.”