Philosophy of Student Evaluations of Teaching
Andrews University

Purpose

Student evaluations provide the students', or consumers', perspective of teaching effectiveness. The purpose of administering and analyzing student evaluations is to promote quality teaching by providing the student perspective to key stakeholders. Thus, faculty and administrators can review student evaluations to determine faculty strengths and areas of practice that may need improvement. Student evaluations are not meant to be the only measure of teaching effectiveness.

Student evaluations have proven to be both reliable and valid measures of teacher effectiveness (Benton & Cashin, 2012). According to the research, reliability coefficients of student evaluations range from near .80 for classes with 10-14 students, to .94 for classes with 50 or more. Student evaluations are valid when used in the following ways:
- To inform faculty of areas in which they might improve teaching and courses
- To inform administrators in decisions about promotion and teaching awards
- To inform administrators of areas for faculty professional development & growth
- To inform administrators of skills of graduate students and adjuncts for hiring purposes
- To inform students when they are selecting courses

Concerns have been raised that student evaluations of teaching may be affected by response rate and/or the grades students receive in a course. Research has shown that there is no relationship between response rate and student evaluations, and only a spurious relationship between grades and student evaluations (Feldman, 2007; Wode & Keiser, 2011). Correlations do exist, as they should, between student evaluations on questions related to learning and engagement and actual learning measured in final exams (Benton & Cashin, 2012).

Much research has been done on what good teaching looks like. Chickering & Gamson described seven principles of good teaching practice (1987; 1991). These principles are intended to be used as guidelines to improve teaching and learning. The seven principles are:
- Encourage student-faculty contact
- Encourage cooperation among students
- Encourage active learning
- Give prompt feedback
- Emphasize time on task
- Communicate high expectations
- Respect diverse talents and ways of knowing.

The IDEA Center, a non-profit organization, has developed a student rating of instruction instrument (available at www.theideacenter.org). In research using this instrument, questions on the following items explained 85% of the variance in their overall teacher rating item (Benton & Cashin, 2012). Teachers . . .
- Stimulate student interest
- Foster student collaboration
- Establish rapport
- Encourage student involvement
- Structure the classroom effectively.

Feldman (2007) identified and ranked 28 instructional dimensions by their importance, according to correlation with student achievement and with overall evaluations. Important dimensions are shown below:

High Importance
- Teacher's clarity and understandableness
- Teacher's stimulation of interest
- Students' perceived outcome of impact of instruction
- Teacher's preparation and course organization
- Teacher pursued/met course objectives
- Teacher motivates students to do their best

Moderate Importance
- Clarity of course objectives/requirements
- Teacher's sensitivity to/concern with class progress
- Teacher's encouragement of questions and openness to opinions
- Teacher's elocutionary skill
- Teacher's knowledge of subject
- Teacher enthusiasm
- Teacher availability and helpfulness

The dimensions identified for Andrews University's student evaluation form took the guidance from these sources into consideration. Possible questions, categorized by these guidelines and Andrews goal statements are shown in a table below.

Timing of Evaluations

Student evaluations have traditionally been done at the end of each course, with results provided to faculty after the course is over, sometimes 6 months later. With this schedule, there is no way that faculty can intervene with the course in question. According to research, student evaluations administered "any time during the second half of the term seems to yield similar results" (Benton & Cashin, 2012).

Use of Results

Individual and aggregated results will be used in accordance with the purpose and intent of student evaluations of teaching. Results from each course will be shared directly with each faculty so that faculty might make adjustments in course delivery or identify areas for professional development. Individual faculty results and aggregated results by department will be shared with department chairs and school deans for goal setting and promotion. Aggregated results by faculty will also be available for faculty and administrators. Aggregated results by school and institutional results will be used to inform professional development initiatives. Some broad areas that could be expected are pedagogy, learning styles, faith integration, institutional goals, and assessment.

A number of universities are making results from student evaluations available to students. The positive side of this practice is that students gain direct benefit for filling out the ratings each semester, as they are better informed in the course selection process. The practice also quickly identifies faculty who need additional support to hone their skills. The negative side to this is that faculty may become fearful or resentful of the student rating process. A decision to share results with students would need to be carefully considered with input from all parties. No recommendation on this practice is being given at this time.

References

Benton, S. L., Cashin, W. E., (2012) *Student ratings of teaching: A summary of research and literature*. IDEA Paper No.50. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development.

Chickering, A.W., and Gamson, Z.F. (1991). *Applying the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. New directions for teaching and learning*. Number 47, Fall 1991. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987) *Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education*. AAHE Bulletin, 39 (7), 3-7.

Feldman, K.A. (2007). Identifying exemplary teachers and teaching: evidence from student ratings, pp. 93-129 in R.P. Perry & J.C. Smart, (Eds.), *The scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education: An evidence-based approach.* London: Springer.

The Idea Center, available at http://www.theideacenter.org/

Wode, J. & Keiser, J. (2011). *Summary of findings on the relationship between grades and course evaluations at Columbia College Chicago.* Columbia College – Chicago, Research on Student Course Evaluations, available at http://www.colum.edu/Administrative_offices/Academic_Affairs/evaluation_and_assessment/courseeval/research.php

Organization of Questions for Student Evaluation of Teaching

IDEA teaching approaches	Seven Principles	Feldman's Ratings	AU Goal	Questions
structuring the classroom		Moderate: Clarity of objectives & requirements		1. The learning objectives or goals for this course were clearly stated.
structuring the classroom	time on task	High: preparation & organization		2. The instructor was well prepared and organized.
structuring the classroom		High: clarity & understandable	communicate effectively	3. The instructor made the subject clear and understandable.
structuring the classroom		Moderate - low		4. Methods of evaluation were fair and accurate measures of my learning. 5. The grading system of this course was appropriate for the objectives of the course.
stimulating student interest		High: stimulated interest		6. The instructor stimulated my interest in the subject.
establishing rapport	student-faculty contact	Moderate: availability & helpfulness		7. The instructor was available to provide help when needed
establishing rapport	prompt feedback	Low	communicate effectively	8. Timely, thoughtful, and helpful feedback was provided on tests and other work.
fostering student collaboration	cooperation among students		collaborative leadership, problem solving/innovation	*Not included at this time*
encouraging student involvement	active learning		intellectual discovery & inquiry	9. The instructor kept me involved in the learning process.
encouraging student involvement	high expectations	High: motivates to do best work	intellectual discovery & inquiry	10. The instructor motivated me to do my best work
	diverse talents and ways of knowing	Moderate: encourages questions/open to opinions	diversity	11. The instructor was sensitive to and respectful of all people.
			faith & learning	12. The instructor helped me to understand the course content from a Christian perspective.
			communicate effectively	13. This course helped me to express my ideas more clearly.
			critical thinking	14. This course helped me to critically evaluate different sources and/or points of view.

October 3, 2012

IDEA teaching approaches	Seven Principles	Feldman's Ratings	AU Goal	Questions
Global question		High: perceived outcome/impact		15. How would you describe your level of learning in this course? poor, fair, good, very good, excellent
Global question				16. Independent of the instructor, my overall rating of this course is: poor, fair, good, very good, excellent.
Global question				17. Independent of the course, my overall rating of this instructor's teaching effectiveness is: poor, fair, good, very good, excellent.
Global question				18. What was done particularly well in this course?
Global question				19. What could be done to improve this course?