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Panel: Peer-Based Faculty Evaluation v. Student Evaluation of Teaching

Leah Akins

Dutchess Community College

Laura Murphy

Dutchess Community College

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Maintaining peer-based faculty evaluation: a case study involving student surveys of teaching

Dr. Leah M. Akins
Professor of Engineering and Technology
akins@sunydutchess.edu

Dr. Laura Murphy
Professor of History
murphy@sunydutchess.edu
Dutchess Community College - SUNY
Poughkeepsie, NY

Research Questions:

- What is the purpose of Student Surveys of Teaching?
- Who are they for?
- How are they delivered?
- How is the data collected?
- How and with whom is the data shared?
- Are they effective measures of teaching?
- What do they actually measure?
- Why are they used so extensively?

Research revealed that ...

Akins and Murphy: Panel: Peer-Based Faculty Evaluation vs. Student Evaluation of Tea

- While student opinions about their educational experiences are important and valuable, *student surveys of teaching are not reliable measures of teaching effectiveness.*
 - Research indicates that survey results are influenced by the gender, race, ethnicity, and perceived attractiveness of the instructor.
 - For example, “SET are biased against female instructors by an amount that is large and statistically significant,” and “gender biases can be large enough to cause more effective instructors to get lower SET than less effective instructors.”
 - “it is not possible to adjust for the bias, because it depends on so many factors”
- Anne Boring, Kellie Ottoboni, and Philip B. Stark (2016). “Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness.” In *ScienceOpen Research*. <https://www.scienceopen.com/document?vid=818d8ec0-5908-47d8-86b4-5dc38f04b23e>

Research also revealed that ...

- Students who have a strong desire to take a course are more likely to rate instructors higher.
 - Of particular concern in general education required courses.
- Students who feel they come to a class with some prior knowledge will rate instructors higher.
 - Of particular concern in STEM classes.
- Online implementation of student surveys is very problematic.

Stephen L. Benton and Kenneth R. Ryalls, “Challenging Misconceptions About Student Ratings of Instruction”, The IDEA Center*, *IDEA*, IDEA paper #58, (April 2016),

https://www.ideaedu.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Challenging_Misconceptions_About_Student_Ratings_of_Instruction.pdf

Experience told us that ...

- If students are not in possession of readings and other materials used by the instructor to deliver instruction, then the students' opinion of instruction might be lower, since they are not able to prepare fully for class without these materials.
- If students acknowledge that they are not putting in the time to do the readings and other preparations for classes, regardless of the reason, then their opinion on instruction should have less standing.

Contract Negotiation Challenges

- Quantifying teaching effectiveness normalized by trends in higher education
- Including student voice in a meaningful way
- Administration's lack of receptiveness to evidence that challenged their assumptions
- Silence agreement limiting ability to mobilize membership
- Interest-based bargaining (IBB) framework w/o training favored management even when their position was not supported by evidence

Statement of Purpose

Contract language:

“The purpose of professional evaluations shall be to recognize and encourage outstanding professional performance by providing a process that includes supervisory, peer, and self-review.”
(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 24)

Statement of Purpose

Contract language:

“The Student Survey of Teaching process provides a mechanism to bring the student voice in to the faculty evaluation process (see section 7.02). As is the case throughout the evaluation process, the intent and purpose is to use this information to assist the faculty member in his/her growth and development as an educator.”
(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 53)

Statement of Concern

Contract language:

“All consideration of these data shall be undertaken with the understanding that student feedback is an important but limited vehicle for understanding the effectiveness of an individual’s teaching. **All faculty and administrative supervisors’ evaluation of student survey results will be informed by a clear understanding of the research that demonstrates that student survey responses may reflect biases based on gender, race, sexual orientation, appearance, academic rigor, subject matter of the course, and students’ desire to take the course, work habits, and confidence about and prior knowledge of the subject matter.** Therefore, data can be used to guide future professional development and shall not be used to initiate disciplinary procedures.” (2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 53)

Student Survey of Teaching (SST)

(refer to survey form)

- **Statements 3.1 through 3.6** are to collect data on the administrative issues.
- **Statements 3.7 and 3.8** are to collect data on the subjective opinion of the student about the instructor.
- **Statements 3.9 through 3.12** are provided to collect data that might illuminate reasons for implicit bias.

Limitations on Use of SST Data

- **What goes to administration?**
 - “Part A of the Student Survey of Teaching must consist of statements that the union and management have agreed are more likely to lead to reliable student response.”
(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 54)
- **Use of survey data by administration?**
 - “These data can only be used by OAA to initiate a conversation with the department chair to discuss institutional and departmental trends.”
(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 54)

Limitations on Use of SST Data

- **Use of survey data by faculty?**
 - “The quantitative data collected from Part A of the Student Survey of Teaching shall not be included in any PDR [Professional Development Report], tenure application, or promotion application.”
(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 54)

Faculty-only Evaluation Committee

Contract language:

“The Student Survey of Teaching form and process shall be annually reviewed by an all-faculty committee. This DUE committee will consist of faculty members from a range of academic disciplines, including at least two part-time faculty members, and including two faculty who specifically represent DUE. Hereafter, the committee is referred to as the Evaluation Committee.”

(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 53)

Faculty-only Evaluation Committee

Contract language:

“Any revision to any portion of the form or process that is recommended by the Evaluation Committee and approved by the Office of Academic Affairs shall be formally negotiated between DUE and the College prior to implementation.”

(2016-2020 Full-time Contract, p. 53)

Strengths and Weaknesses of Approach and Outcomes

Strengths:

1. Maintained a faculty evaluation system based primarily on peer-review by department chairs
2. Administrative access to student survey data includes questions based on evidence found in scholarship while limiting access to all data
3. Surveys cannot be used for “summative” evaluation
4. All-faculty standing union committee evaluates process and surveys
5. Maintained paper-based, in-class survey delivery

Strengths and Weaknesses of Approach and Outcomes

Weaknesses:

1. Without continued education of faculty, chilling effects may occur
2. Peer-evaluators not immune to influence by problematic student survey data
3. Tendency to view student feedback as a fault of the faculty member rather than inherent bias
4. Administrators still insist on the importance of their access to the (problematic) data without any rationale for why or how they would use the data

Lessons Learned

- Possible to challenge dominant corporate narrative
- Excellent, important scholarship makes challenging power structures possible
- Educating faculty on the research concerning student surveys is essential
- Addressing exploitation of adjunct/part-time faculty strengthens the profession as a whole
- Silence agreements in collective bargaining make it difficult to mobilize faculty
- The “interest” in Interest Based Bargaining can be used to silence dissent

Additional Materials

Please see our paper in NCSCBHEP 2019 conference proceedings to access the following materials:

- Bibliography of articles on student surveys
- DCC Student Survey of Teaching form