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Prepared by Dr. L. Hyers for the *Alternative to SRIS/ Student Evaluations of Instructors Workshop*
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Student Ratings of the Performance of their Professors

Well-Known Problems with Instructor Evaluations

- Student apathy
- Measures not tailored to specifics of the course
- Bias
 - Student performance
 - Interest in the material
 - Difficulty of the material
 - Timing of Evaluations and Recency effects
 - Halo effects
 - Implicit bias
 - Overcompensation Effect

Dr. Hyers Ran an Informal Poll of Students on Challenges of Instructor Evaluations

- N = 10 out of N = 16 research students in psych lab, Junior and Senior Psych Majors
- All saw SRIS/faculty evaluation forms as good (the format, range of items, anonymity, ability to give feedback, and opportunity to give professors “credit for a good job”)
- Summarized some of their views of the problems

Students Self-Report of Difficulties "Grading" Instructors

Students' Lack of Expertise

- "Considering that the professors' faults are not obvious to me, I tend to rate them very high"
- "We aren't professors so I feel like it is difficult to truly rate certain aspects"
- "I often struggle to submit helpful feedback."

Students' Struggle with Whether or Subjectivity is Part of the Evaluation

- "Personally I have never had an issue with any of my professors, and if I did not do as well as I would have liked, I hold myself accountable before the professor."
- "I recognize that each student has a preferred learning style, just like professors have their own instruction style, and I wouldn't give a poor grade based on this."
- "Depending on how I feel about the professors themselves it can be hard to accurately 'grade' them on certain aspects."
- "Ratings may differ by each student's opinion or preference. For example, I have a class where I find the instructions to be clear and organized, but other students seem to feel like it is not well organized."

Students' Lack of Awareness of the professors Pedagogical Strategies

- "I struggled with 'how well-prepared professors were for class', because I do not think about their preparedness when I come to class."
- "'Did your professor clearly explain the expectations of the course', sometimes those questions bother me because it's really hard for me to answer that with just a yes/no"
- "Some questions like 'the instructor was accessible to students' may be difficult, especially if I had never reached out to the professor outside of class."
- "We don't really pay attention to the course objectives so it can be hard to even judge if they have been met."
- "In terms of fairly grading, that is also difficult"
- "I do face some difficulty because I do not pay as much attention to their way of teaching, providing feedback, etc. in the courses and I instead focus primarily on the course content."

Students Self-Reported Understanding of the Purpose of Instructor Evaluations

- **Unaware or Incorrect Understanding of Instructor Evaluations** *misunderstandings in blue
- “I honestly don’t know”
- “If I’m correct, I believe it’s for other students to know (as well as faculty to know) the rating of a professor if they’re interested in taking their class.”
- **Partially Correct Understanding of Instructor Evaluations**
- “It can allow a professor to know how the students feel about them.”
- “The professor wants students to reply with feedback on the rating forms so they can get a sense of how to look over whatever changes they can make within the curriculum to help the students improve.”
- “To see if there is an issue with the professor. I have also heard that it relates to pay, determining raises but I could be wrong.”
- “Doesn’t do any good doesn’t lead to change “I’ve had poor professors in the past, and we’ve expressed that in these forms, but I’ve never seen any kind of change”
- **Correct Understanding of Instructor Evaluations**
- “In order to help the professors improve courses.”
- “I would assume they are evaluated and then gone over with the professor with the head of the department or other administrators to see how they can improve their course and their teaching.” “So that the higher ups at the university can see how their staff is doing.”

Students Self-Report of Potential for Bias in Instructor Ratings

- Yes I think **bias is an issue**, possible, absolutely, perhaps, I guess sometimes...
- I can't speak for everyone, but sometimes **if I am struggling in the class** or not fond of the material we're studying, I have to try not to be too biased.
- If **students do not show up for class** or choose to focus on other things instead of the class, they will have a different input than others. If the student does not have interest or disagrees with the course or does not like the professor, they will try to speak poorly about them.
- I also think the **intersectional identities of professors** can play a huge role in students' attitudes about the course.
- Personally, I find that I'm more likely to **rate them better if I like the professor themselves**, even if their teaching style or the course material is presented in a way I do like or find conducive to learning.
- **Classmates could be biased, but likely due to their own success in the class. For example, if a student failed a class, I think they would be much more likely to give a poor rating, even if the professor was thorough and organized.**
- I personally believe that I give biased answers to my **professors considering how they treated me** in each course.
- **Not likely due to gender or age, however, I do think that ethnicity and personality might have an effect.**

Strategies for Living with SRIS/Faculty Evaluation Forms

Considerations for Instructors

- In the era of PowerPoint, Ted Talks, desktop publishing, etc., students expect polished performances from instructors (e.g. (polished lectures, assignments and handouts, clearly articulated evaluation)
- Students expect flexibility (e.g. diverse assessment methods, facile accommodations to learning styles, dynamic response to student performance during the semester)
- This is a challenge--an idealized combination of structure and flexibility
- Adding in standardized evaluation forms can send message of entitlement to students that can dehumanize their instructors, turning the professor performance into a consumer transaction
- Professors should be prepared by looking over the ratings forms--during syllabus and lecture development
 - Is this “Teaching to the test” (aka Adjust teaching style to the SRIS)???
 - May help with tenure and promotion
 - Limits intellectual and pedagogical freedom
- There is a certain rigidity to the ratings and the values they reinforce (e.g. instructor control, structure, etc.)
- Professors can incorporate mid-term ratings, so that change is experienced with current students within the semester –win win for instructor and student alike

Considerations for Students

- They should be made aware they are rating profs so they can think about the dimensions throughout the semester
- They should be able to give ratings early enough to improve the course they are in for their own benefit
- They could be far more engaged in instructor performance, as real advocates for their professors’ improvements
- They could be self-rating, too—classroom dynamics are not just top down, everyone in the class shapes the experience
- Why not go over ratings with students (not just with colleague peers and what the students call “higher ups”)—make it a dialog

Evaluators/Administrators

- Take these ratings with a grain of salt
- Weigh them fairly against other indicators of good teaching

Questions/Thoughts?

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