Student Ratings: Evidence vs. Myths—Things a Chair Needs to Know

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Individual Development and Educational Assessment

Founded in 1975

Not-for-profit status in 2001

Mission:

• To serve colleges and universities committed to improving learning, teaching, and leadership performance
“Ratings of overall effectiveness are moderately correlated with independent measures of student learning and achievement. Students of highly rated teachers achieve higher final exam scores, can better apply course material, and are more inclined to pursue the subject subsequently.”

(Davis, 2009, p. 534)
Objectives

- Describe causes of misconceptions
- Describe misconceptions associated with student ratings of instruction
- Describe recent research on teacher standards, expectations, and student ratings
- Discuss implications for faculty development and evaluation
Misconceptions Persist


• These misconceptions are unsupported by research and make valid use of ratings difficult.
Reasons Why Misconceptions Persist

- Confirmation bias
- Emotional attachment to belief
- Consistent with every day experience
- Part of more general view of students
Common Misconceptions about Student Ratings

- Students not competent to rate teaching
- Students cannot make consistent judgments
- Student ratings are just popularity contests
- Students cannot appreciate good teaching until they are out of college a few years
Common Misconceptions about Student Ratings

- Student feedback cannot be used to improve instruction
- Emphasis on student ratings has led to grade inflation
- Students just want easy courses
- Others?
Students not competent to rate teaching

- **Evidence to the contrary:**
  - **Student ratings correlate positively with:**
    - Student achievement measures
    - Instructor self-ratings
    - Ratings by administrators, colleagues, and trained observers
Students cannot make consistent judgments

Evidence to the contrary:

• Student ratings are consistent, stable, and generalizable

• Ratings consistent for teaching behaviors, student self-ratings of learning, and overall impressions of course/instructor
Student ratings are just popularity contests

Evidence to the contrary:

• Effect of teacher personality on ratings is weak
• Student ratings can assess more than just popularity or course satisfaction
Students cannot appreciate good teaching until they are out of college a few years

Evidence to the contrary:

- Retrospective ratings by alumni correlate positively with those given by same students years earlier
Student feedback cannot be used to improve instruction

- **Evidence to the contrary:**
  - Student ratings feedback leads to more improvement than no feedback
  - Ratings combined with consultation targeted at specific teaching behaviors leads to greatest improvement
Emphasis on student ratings has led to grade inflation

- **Evidence to the contrary:**
  - Expected grade has little effect on ratings
  - Correlations do not necessarily imply grade inflation
Students just want easy courses

Evidence to the contrary:

• Course workload and subject matter difficulty positively correlated with student ratings

• Amount of reading and non-reading assignments unrelated to students’ desire to take a course

• Stronger desire to take a course when instructor expects students to take share of responsibility for learning
Questions and comments?
Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between students’ ratings of teacher standards and expectations and their self-reported progress on relevant learning objectives?

2. What is the relationship between students’ ratings of teacher standards and expectations and their ratings of the course and instructor?
Instrument – IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction

Specific teaching behaviors influence certain types of student progress under certain circumstances.

Teaching Behaviors
Items 1-20

Student Learning
Items 21-32

Circumstances
Students: Items 36-39, 43
Course: Items 33-35
Student Learning Model: 2
Assumptions

Objectives: Using the scale provided, identify the relevance of each of the twelve objectives to this course. As a general rule, prioritize what you want students to learn by selecting no more than 3-5 objectives as either Important or Essential. The weighting system used to generate the IDEA report weighs Essential objectives "2," Important objectives "1," and Minor objectives "0."
(Scale - M = Minor or No Importance, I = Important, E = Essential)

1. Gaining factual knowledge (terminology, classifications, methods, trends)
2. Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories
3. Learning to apply course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions)
4. Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to this course
5. Acquiring skills in working with others as a member of a team
6. Developing creative capacities (writing, inventing, designing, performing in art, music, drama, etc.)
7. Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity (music, science, literature, etc.)
8. Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing
9. Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems
10. Developing a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values
11. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view
12. Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers
Assumption 2:
Effectiveness determined by students’ progress on objectives stressed by instructor
Measures of teacher standards and expectations

- Item 45: “The instructor expected students to take their share of responsibility for learning”
- Item 46: “The instructor had high achievement standards”
- Response scale: 1 (Definitely False) to 5 (Definitely True)
Outcome measures

- Student average progress on relevant learning objectives
- Item 41: “Overall, I rate this instructor an excellent teacher”
- Item 42: “Overall, I rate this course as excellent”
Sample

- Student ratings data were analyzed from over 300 institutions using the IDEA Student Ratings System (SRS) during the years 2002 to 2011 (N = 490,196 classes).
Results

- Students gave higher ratings of their own progress when they perceived the instructor had
  - high achievement standards ($\beta = .53$), and
  - high expectations for students’ share of responsibility for learning ($\beta = .36$).
- $R^2 = .47$
Students gave higher ratings of the excellence of the instructor when they perceived
- high achievement standards ($\beta = .65$), and
- high expectations for student’s share of responsibility for learning ($\beta = .47$).
- $R^2 = .40$
Results

- Students gave higher ratings of the excellence of the course when they perceived
  - high achievement standards ($\beta = .65$), and
  - high expectations for students’ share of responsibility for learning ($\beta = .48$).
- $R^2 = .42$
“SETs [student evaluations of teaching effectiveness] are multidimensional, reliable and stable, primarily a function of the instructor who teaches a course rather than the course that is taught, relatively valid against a variety of indicators of effective teaching, relatively unaffected by a variety of potential biases, and are seen to be useful by faculty, students, and administrators.”

(Marsh, 2007, p. 372)