
Anonymous Student Evaluation of College Teaching

LEONARD A. OSTLUND, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma

I. THE PROBLEM

Various methods of evaluation of college teaching by students have been reported. Some educators are opposed to such evaluations on the basis that students lack objectivity, experience, and maturity. While the writer agreed that this viewpoint had some merit, nevertheless, he favored providing students with opportunities for evaluation. It was believed that teachers might gain important information and that student morale would be enhanced. Representative studies were used as examples. These were discussed in terms of values and shortcomings (1, 4, 5).

One study reported student evaluation in terms of a check list scored according to likes and dislikes. However, reasons were lacking. In general, the writer opposed the use of check lists for several reasons. In the first place, answers such as "poor," "good," etc. were given, but reasons or explanations were lacking. Secondly, a student may not think about an item until he sees the list. Nevertheless, he will mark it so that no items remain unchecked.

In another experiment, essays were written by students concerning what they were getting out of the course. These were graded by a colleague. The use of a colleague was intended, probably, to remove the experimenter's subjectivity. However, the fact that a colleague was to grade the papers might have influenced the students to write favorably toned reports in order to achieve favorable grades. Moreover, students sometimes distrust teachers and experimentors. Under these conditions, the students' statements would be guarded indeed.

At another point, the authors of this experiment suggested that the results should be given to the administration. The writer viewed this suggestion as unwise. Unless the full circumstances of any experiment are thoroughly understood, the results may be misinterpreted. If this suggestion were carried to its logical conclusion, such data would play an important part in administrative decisions regarding professors. The writer believed strongly that the results should be considered as impressions, available only to the teacher to be used for his own purposes.

The writer has been concerned with the difficulties inherent in evaluation by students. The present article described an approach designed by the

writer was carried out by a colleague which has proved useful in private self-assessment.

The writer believed that students must be convinced that the results cannot and will not be used for or against them. Several stipulations met this condition. The first was that an anonymity was necessary. This raised the objection that if students need not identify themselves, they might write irrelevantly. This calculated risk must be taken. Secondly, in order to eliminate affecting grades, responses must not be given to the instructor until after semester grades have been published.

II. PROCEDURE

The data were obtained by a colleague from several of his own classes. He pointed out that critical assessment of people is sometimes necessary and that there were obvious difficulties inherent in obtaining student evaluations of teaching. The instructor then explained that he was asking the class to evaluate him. He stated that the responses would not be read until semester grades had been published. He asked the class to vote on a representative who would be honor bound not to read the responses, but deliver them in a sealed envelope after the semester. When the instructor left the room, the class elected a representative. The instructor then handed out blank sheets and cautioned the students not to sign them. While the students wrote their evaluations, the instructor sat in front of the classroom in order to minimize comparison of notes or ideas.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

Upon receipt of the responses, most teachers would be content to read them and take action if it was felt desirable. The results of the present experiment were analyzed as an example of what might be done.

The data were treated by content analysis. Statements were categorized according to the central idea, as expressed by descriptive adjectives. The following statements have been chosen as typical examples:

Patient—"He never gets annoyed even when the student cannot explain himself."

Sincere—"I get the feeling he means what he says; he keeps his promises."

Understanding—"He seems to know how freshmen feel about college."

Enthusiasm—"He enjoys talking about the class work."

Informal—"He doesn't make us feel that we are way down here and he is way up there; I feel I can relax."

Experimental—"I don't like his class because I think he is experimenting with us all the time."

Nervous—"He seems to be on edge; his wife ought to take him away for a good rest."

Dress—"He wears some weird tie and shirt combinations but maybe they don't pay professors enough to have expensive wardrobes."

Each statement was scored according to emotional tone—whether unfavorable, favorable, or neutral. This was done in keeping with a procedure reported previously by the writer (2, 3). The number of words was counted as an indication of saliency. The results were tabulated in terms of totals of statements and words, which were converted into percentages.

IV. RESULTS

The results were summarized in a table. Personality accounted for 45% of all statements and Methodology totaled 42% of the statements. The remainder was categorized as miscellaneous. There was little difference

between the percentages of words and statements for each individual category. Concerning effective tone, the totals were 90% favorable and 10% unfavorable.

V. SUMMARY

In conclusion, it was believed that the experimental procedures described herein had produced fruitful evaluation. The use of essays permitted full expression of students' opinions. Moreover, anonymity, students' choice of representative, and post-semester delivery tended to protect the students and to eliminate instructor bias.

LITERATURE CITED

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