ABSTRACT

Universities use diverse informants to evaluate teaching effectiveness and student learning. Professors evaluate students before and/or after instruction. Students evaluate their instructors, and also may evaluate other students (student peer evaluation). Finally, instructors evaluate other instructors (faculty peer evaluation). This Special Session discusses the multidimensional construct of teaching and the process of measuring learning and teaching effectiveness. We consider the implications of using faculty (expert) versus student (novice) evaluations, and the contexts within which they are most appropriate.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTORS

Most marketing departments use end-of-term student evaluations of teaching (SET) to assess instructor effectiveness. These allow instructors to gain a clearer idea of their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom from the point of view of students, and they provide input so department chairs can better match instructors with attributes important for each course.

Unfortunately, the use of SET sometimes leads instructors to feel pressured to please students, even at the expense of learning outcomes. Previous research has explored the relationship between student learning and student evaluations of teaching (Feldman 1989). One of the most important questions about SET measures is their construct validity, the degree to which they measure what they purport to measure. To answer this question, researchers have compared SET ratings to objective measures of student knowledge (embedded assessments) to examine whether the measures are positively correlated.

INSTRUCTOR AND STUDENT EVALUATION OF STUDENTS

The utility that students gain from a course should be a direct function of instructor teaching effectiveness. However, prior research shows the concept of teaching to be multidimensional and calls for instructors to be evaluated across a variety of dimensions (Marsh 1991). Exactly what those dimensions are is subject to controversy. For instance, Feldman (1989) identified 28 dimensions whereas Marsh (1991) found a nine-factor structure. Some argue that the attributes of good teaching will also vary across courses, instructors, and genders. Feldman (1989) found generally high correlations between student and faculty evaluations of teaching, but significant differences between the weights placed on the various dimensions.

The education literature is replete with research on instructor evaluation of student performance. Ideally, instructors have set goals or objectives for their courses and then evaluate students to determine if those have been met. Since instructors are experts in their fields, most believe they are most qualified to evaluate student performance. Instructors use objective methods of evaluation such as exams, papers, and projects as well as more subjective methods such as class participation.

An alternative source of student evaluation is by student peers. Students clearly are not experts in the subject area, so can they provide valid evaluation of another student's performance? Some literature suggests that they can. A link has been found between peer evaluation and student satisfaction with projects that require teamwork (Pfaff and Huddleston 2003). In the workplace, team evaluation may increase sharing of the workload, performance, and satisfaction (Eretz et al. 2002). Students can provide a backup source of evaluation.
for more subjective aspects of a course such as class participation (Lord and Melvin 1994).

On the other hand, the validity of student peer evaluations has been questioned. Student peer evaluations may be biased by the popularity of students and even by race and gender effects (Ghorpade and Lackritz 2001). This Special Session looks at the effectiveness of student peer evaluation. How accurate are student peer evaluations in comparison to instructor evaluations? Is one or the other most appropriate depending on the context?

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTORS

Finally, faculty peer evaluation is part of a larger trend toward more systematic assessment of faculty teaching effectiveness. Faculty peer evaluation plays an increasingly important role both in retention/tenure/promotion decisions, and in the context of faculty development and mentoring programs. Many academics contend that certain aspects of teaching are best assessed by other faculty members. However, skepticism exists, largely because instructors believe that what constitutes good teaching is subjective and personally defined. In this Special Session, we describe the variety of formats and procedures used by various colleges and universities, and discuss research examining exemplar faculty peer evaluation programs (e.g., Osborne 1998; Yon et al. 2002).

REFERENCES


