

Proposal for Improving the Evaluation of Teaching as Part of a Merit System

LMU Committee on Excellence in Teaching

For many years, both at LMU and elsewhere, the main criterion for evaluating teaching, either for promotion or merit raises, has been student evaluations of teaching (SETs). The belief has been that high student evaluations correlate with effective teaching. Recent research [1,2,3,4] provides evidence that this assumption is wrong. In a comprehensive meta-analysis of many studies of multi-section courses in which students take a common final exam, published in Sept., 2016, Uttl et al found that students taught by instructors with higher SET ratings do not score higher on finals than those taught by instructors with lower SET ratings. In a 2014 study, Braga measured “instructor quality” by the effect instructors have on the performance of their students in subsequent courses, but found that this measure was negatively correlated with instructors’ SET ratings. These studies suggest two ways of defining teaching effectiveness and in both cases show that higher SET ratings do not correspond to more effective teaching. Other studies come to the same conclusion. Therefore, in evaluating faculty, student evaluations should not be used as a measure of teaching effectiveness. That is not to say that teaching evaluations have no value in examining characteristics of the classroom environment – the availability of the instructor, for example. It is important to realize, however, that SETs measure student satisfaction, not student learning. The LMU Committee on Excellence in Teaching therefore recommends that the Faculty Senate approve the following changes to the LMU student teaching evaluation forms and to the Faculty Handbook:

- 1) Question 8 should be removed from the LMU SET. Question 8 asks the student to rate the overall effectiveness of instruction.
- 2) The Faculty handbook should be amended by inserting in Section IIIA on Evaluation of Faculty the following paragraph:
“Student evaluations of teaching will be used only to provide insight into students’ experience of a course, and will not be used as a measure of teaching effectiveness. Whenever possible, departments should investigate whether there are research-based best practices for teaching in the discipline that can be identified and used to evaluate teaching. Any relevant evidence of an instructors teaching effectiveness should be considered. This might include, for example, peer evaluation, self-reflection and commitment to continued improvement in methods, instructor initiated informal feedback from students and/or peers, using standardized measures of learning, developing new teaching strategies, developing or using innovative methods and/or technology, development of new courses, modification of existing courses, disseminating materials and/or methods for use by other instructors, and participation in workshops and/or conferences on development of teaching.”

References

1. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/21/new-study-could-be-another-nail-coffin-validity-student-evaluations-teaching>
2. Uttl, B., White, C., Wong Gonzalez, D. (2016), "Meta-Analysis of Faculty's Teaching Effectiveness: Student valuation of teaching ratings and student learning are not related," *Journal of Educational Evaluation*, TBD.
3. Braga, Paccagnella, M., Pellizzari, M. (2014), "Evaluating Students' Evaluations of Professors", *Economics of Education Review*, 41, 71-88.
4. Wieman, C. (2015), "A Better Way to Evaluate Undergraduate Teaching, *Change*, 47/1, 6-15.