Student Evaluation Of Teaching: Still Awful After All These Years

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Introduction

• Over the years, though widely criticized, SET have become one of the most important and widespread ways for assessing instructional effectiveness in most institutions of higher education.

• A variety of purposes
  • Faculty development (formative evaluation)
  • Personnel decision making (summative evaluation)
  • Measure students learning

• SETs should not be used as the only evidence of teaching effectiveness. Rather, when they are used, they should be part of a holistic assessment strategy
Current Literature on SET Issues

• Purposes: For what?
  • Unclear, unspecific, or unattainable objectives

• The Instrument
  • Absence of an explicit theoretical framework
  • Format
  • Challenges to reliability (Computing & Measurement- accurate and consistent results)
  • Challenges to validity (Measure what they claim to measure?)
Current Literature on SET Issues

• Data Collection
  • Sampling (enough and representative?)
  • Response rate
  • Time of distribution

• Data analysis and Interpretation
  • Inappropriate unit of analysis (average or compare averages of SET scores do not make sense statistically)
  • Ignore variability or nonresponse
  • Biasing factors beyond the faculty member’s control
    o Course-related factors
    o Instructor-related factors
    o Student-related factors
Recommendations for Effective Practice

Purposes for what?

• Clear and specific purpose. Each purpose demanding a particular perspective and criteria for using the collected information

• Focus on student satisfaction (student as a consumer) or teaching effectiveness (student as a learner)

• Combining multiple purposes into a single instrument raises difficult challenges

• Students, faculty, and administrators should develop a shared understanding of how student evaluation information is used and its purpose at the institution
Aspects Assessed: What?

- What is effective teaching? Articulate clearly the definition of effective teaching and theoretical guidance.
- The structure of teaching quality is multidimensional.
- Students, faculty, and administrators should have a clear understanding on what constitutes effective teaching practices.
- Develop specific indicators or criteria that outline the behaviors or outcomes.
- Provide specific explanations for what would be considered baseline, effective, and exemplary for each criterion.
• Survey of 912 students at midsize public university in a midsouthern state

• Nine emergent themes. Four themes were not represented by any of the items in the university evaluation form
  - Student centered
  - Expert
  - Enthusiasm

Represent three of the most prevalent themes
  • Ethical

Aspects Assessed: What?

• Important considerations to the institution's mission, vision, and values

• Engage faculty throughout the process. This engagement would afford opportunities for improvement through pedagogical discussion and the exchange of ideas

• Careful considerations when adopting any existing instrument
Aspects Assessed: What?

- The **number** and **nature** of elements depend on:
  - The agreed-upon purpose, definition, and framework
  - Level of instruction
  - Online courses vs. in-class
  - Type of discipline, program, and course's requirement

- Evaluate the **content** and **format**
  - Is it specific?
  - Is it only interpret in a single way?
  - Does it state only a single thought or concept?
  - Is it consonant with characteristics and requirements of the program, level, and discipline?
  - Does it involve the evaluation of some clearly observable characteristic or behavior? (Avoid inferences)
Aspects Assessed: What?

• Include *specific* open-ended questions in a separate section
  
  o Which aspect of the course is most helpful to you?
  o What one area of this course would you change?
  o What specific suggestions you can provide to help your instructor to improve?

• Share more specific opinions, experiences, and suggestions

• Draw attention to topics that may not be addressed in the closed-ended part
Involving Students in the Evaluation

• Several studies suggest that if students perceive their opinions count and understand exactly how the evaluations are used, they will be more likely to complete the evaluation
  o Demonstrate the evaluation system in class
  o Consider including language in the syllabus that addresses student evaluations
  o Remind students about confidentiality
  o A one-page handout
  o Orientation meetings, workshops, and focus group discussions
Involving Students in the Evaluation

• Faculty should explain to their students qualities of effective feedback
  o Specific
  o Describe the effect of the behavior
  o Focus on observable behavior rather than emotions
  o Offer alternatives for the criticism
  o Make the comments less personal and more reflective
Lauer, 2012. Survey of 185 students, 45 faculty at Rollins College, FL about course evaluation terminology

Faculty & students don't mean the same thing by "fair," "professional," "organized," "challenging," & "respectful"

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<th>student %</th>
<th>instructor %</th>
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Arreola (2007) pointed out that in order to make student evaluations meaningful and effective, they should “properly constructed, appropriately administered, and correctly interpreted” (p. 98).

References


