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A study designed to examine several student and instructor characteristics to see what relationship each had with student ratings of their instructors concentrated on such variables as (1) student sex, age, major, level of education, grade point average, or course grades previously received from the instructor in relation to student ratings of teachers, and (2) instructor sex, age, faculty rank, degree held, major area, or length of teaching experience with respect to ratings by students. A 2-page student scale provided for ratings of instructors on each of three 7-point continuums: (1) aloof, egocentric, restricted behavior versus friendly, understanding behavior, (2) evading, unplanned, slipshod behavior versus responsible, systematic, businesslike behavior, and (3) dull, routine behavior versus stimulating, imaginative, enthusiastic behavior. Student scales were administered to 4,402 students in classes taught by 87 different instructors. Simultaneously an instructor characteristics scale was administered in each of the classes. The study showed that student ratings are not influenced even by variables such as grades previously earned from the instructor being rated, that ratings were different among various departments within the School of Education, and that younger instructors received higher ratings than older instructors in each category. (DG)

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# College Student Ratings of Instructors

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## Introduction

Mr. Fred M. Hechinger, education editor of the New York Times has written:

> "Students have persuaded the educational leadership that the student's voice on campus matters deserves to be heard and that their complaints about inadequate teaching and a curriculum out of step with contemporary society are often justified" (Hechinger, 1965).

He further states that students now seek to sit on educational policy-making committees, a responsibility that faculty members often shirk.

These student complaints are dramatized by unrest on campuses throughout the country. Students at large universities complain about being disturbed and somewhat threatened by the dehumanization and the loss of identity they perceive in the multiversity. Many are deeply concerned about the nature of our system of higher education and want change, most noteworthy in the improvement of instruction.

Frederick Rudolf, professor of history at Williams College, finds nothing new in the desire of students to bring about change and reform on American campuses. He states: "For a few years the college is the oyster and they (students) will have it served up exactly as they wish it, unless there are those who help them to some other, perhaps wiser choice (Hechinger, 1965)." Some faculty and administrators are helping

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by cooperating with student organizations wanting to improve instruction. At the City College of New York, a joint student-faculty committee was established to develop in a truly collaborative fashion some type of course evaluation. A program evolved consisting of the distribution of course-instructor questionnaires to instructors on a voluntary basis. The instructor distributed the scales, collected them and was free to use them in any way he wished. He could send them to the office of the Chairman of the Department of Student Services where a confidential report would be prepared and returned to him. Of 400 instructors requesting to participate, only 144 sent the collected data to the Department of Student Services for scoring.

Other faculty groups are responding to students who want to have a greater role in the affairs of their institution. In 1965, Cornell University appointed a Committee on the Quality of Undergraduate Instruction chaired by Dr. Alfred E. Kahn (1965). Although appointed by the executive branch of the university, the members worked closely with the student body to study the academic aspects of undergraduate education at Cornell. The comprehensive report that resulted from the study included the following findings:

1. Grossly inadequate teaching occurs in more instances than is tolerable.

2. There can be no doubt that student dissatisfaction with undergraduate instruction has basis in fact.

3. There is only one ultimate determinant of the quality of undergraduate instruction and only one ultimate source of its improvement - the individual teacher himself.

The committee recommended unanimously that "teachers obtain anonymous student evaluations of their courses" and, with one member dis-

senting, "that the university give Student Government financial and technical assistance in preparing and publishing competent and responsible campus-wide student evaluations of courses."

A similar committee at Michigan State University, The Committee on Undergraduate Education, was appointed in 1967 by the school's president to reexamine the undergraduate program and to propose desirable changes. In a section of their final report concerning student evaluation of teaching, the committee stated that "an instructor should know when students do not approve of a particular technique or approach (Adams, 1967). The committee recommend that a special all-university office by given the responsibility and adequate support: to revise or develop new Student Instructional Rating Forms; to collect and disseminate normative data relative to these forms; and to analyze the results and prepare summary reports." They further recommended that "Faculty members be encouraged to have these summary reports sent to their department chairman so that the results can be involved in decisions pertaining to them."

The number of colleges and universities using some method of student evaluation is increasing rapidly and not without some adverse consequences. Obviously, there are many dangers when student rating of faculty performance may be a factor in a teacher's professional standing, possibly affecting his promotion.

If studies are not methodologically sound, popularity might rate higher than intellectual rigor; or political views might influence decisions that ought to be arrived at by a process of free inquiry.

Other questions concerning the validity of student ratings are equally critical, and this report summarizes a study designed to

examine several student and instructor characteristics to see what relationship each had with student ratingsof their instructors.

The research was carried out within the School of Education at Colorado State College (Greeley, Colo.) during the 1967 winter quarter. The specific instructor population was identified as all faculty within the School of Education who were teaching courses during winter quarter. The student population was all those who were enrolled in those courses.

No attempt was made to identify effective and ineffective instructors. Instead, the study concentrated upon variables believed to have some relationship to student ratings. Therefore, the major questions studied were:

1. Does student sex, age, major, level of education, grade point average, or course grades previously received from the instructor being rated have any relationship to ratings of instructors?

2. Are instructors who differ in sex, age, faculty rank, degree held, major area, or length of teaching experience rated differently by students?

A further question concerned the accuracy of students' reports of their grade point averages (gpa). This was done to check the validity of student information. If large discrepancies existed between students' reported gpa and their actual gpa (determined from college records) the remaining information provided by students would be suspect.

To collect the necessary data, a one-page Student Scale was constructed (see attached). The scale asked students to provide information about themselves and to rate their instructor on each of three seven-point continuums. The referents on each continuum were identified by Ryans as being important teacher traits or patterns of behavior (Ryans, 1960). These were:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I. | aloof, egocentric, restricted behavior | vs. | friendly, understanding, behavior |
| II. | evading, unplanned, slipshod behavior | vs. | responsible, systematic, businesslike behavior |
| III. | dull, routine behavior | vs. | stimulating, imaginative enthusiastic behavior |

A short Instructor Characteristics Scale was designed to obtain from faculty such information as sex, age, rank, degree held, major area and length of teaching experience.

Next, a group of doctoral students were trained to administer the scales. At the instructors' convenience, 4,402 Student Scales were administered in the existing classes taught by 87 different instructors. At the same time, the Instructor Characteristic Scale was administered.

Correlation analyses were performed to answer the questions. One statistical technique used to analyze the data was multiple regression as presented by Ward and Bottenberg (1963). In this approach the contribution of a variable or a set of variables to estimation of a criterion was measured by the difference between two multiple correlation coefficients (RSQ's); one obtained for a regression model in which all the predictors were used, and the other (RSQ) obtained for a regression model in which the variable or subset of variables under examination was deleted (Ward, 1962).

## FINDINGS

Based on statistical analysis of data collected on 87 instructors from 4,285 usable Student Scales, the following conclusions were

reached:

1. Students remembered and accurately reported their grade point averages. The correlation for 100 randomly selected student-reported gpa's and their actual gpa's was .96.

2. Student ratings of instructors were not substantially related to student's sex, age, grade level, major area, grade point average or grade(s) previously received from the instructor they rated (Table I).

TABLE I

CORRELATIONS AND RSQ's BETWEEN CRITERIA AND STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

| Rating Continuum | Student Characteristic(s) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Reported GPA | | Previous Grade(s) | | (Sex, Age, Level, Major) | |
| | N | r | N | r | N | RSQ |
| I | 4,032 | -.03 | 753 | .14 | 4,285 | .006 |
| II | 4,032 | -.02 | 753 | -.01 | 4,285 | .015 |
| III | 4,032 | .03 | 753 | .18 | 4,285 | .019 |

As indicated in Table I, the highest correlation (.18) was obtained between students previous grade(s) earned from the instructor they were rating and their rating of that same instructor on continuum III. Also, there was no relationship, reflected by correlations of -.03, -.02 and .03, between students grade point average and their ratings.

When the student characteristics of sex, age, grade level, and major were used collectively to predict ratings, the RSQ's were all less than .02. To demonstrate the low predictability of this set of characteristics, the regression weights associated with each characteristic were used to predict how two hypothetical students would have rated an instructor. These predictions are found in Table II.

TABLE II

PREDICTED INSTRUCTOR RATINGS FROM STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS FOR TWO HYPOTHETICAL UNLIKE STUDENTS

| Characteristics of Student | | | | | Predicted Rating on Continuum | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student | Sex | Age | Level of Educ. | Major | I | II | III |
| 1 | Male | 35 | Graduate | Educ. Admin | 3.5 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| 2 | Female | 18 | Freshman | Elem. Educ. | 3.3 | 2.8 | 2.3 |
| | | | | Difference | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.4 |

Based on the regression equation, in which sex, age, level of education, and major area were used, Student No. 1, a 35-year-old male graduate student majoring in educational administration would be predicted to rate an instructor 3.5 on continuum I, 2.7 on continuum II, and 2.7 on continuum III. Another student (No. 2), an 18-year-old female majoring in elementary education was predicted to rate an instructor 3.3, 2.8, and 2.3 on the three respective continuums. These small differences in predicted ratings (0.2, 0.1, and 0.4) for quite dissimilar students demonstrated the low relationship between this group of student characteristics and student ratings of instructors.

3. Generally, mean student ratings of instructors showed more relationship to instructor characteristics (Table III).

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Insert Table III

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For the instructor characteristics of sex, age, degree held, faculty rank, and number of years experience, collectively, the RSQ was .27 for continuum II ("evading vs. businesslike"). This means that 27% of the variability of ratings on continuum II is related to this set of instructor characteristics.

4. The greatest reduction in the index of predictability (RSQ) was observed when the "department" classification variable was deleted from the equation. The RSQ value for continuum I

TABLE III

RSQ's FOR INSTRUCTOR CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENT MEAN RATINGS ON CRITERIA FOR EIGHTY-SEVEN INSTRUCTORS

| Model | Instructor Variables | Variables Deleted | Continuum Predicted | RSQ Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sex, Age, Rank, Degree, Dept., Yrs. Exp. | None | I | .15 |
| | | | II | .27 |
| | | | III | .18 |
| 2 | Age, Rank, Degree, Dept., Yrs. Exp. | Sex | I | .15 |
| | | | II | .27 |
| | | | III | .18 |
| 3 | Sex, Rank, Degree, Dept., Yrs. Exp. | Age | I | .15 |
| | | | II | .19 |
| | | | III | .18 |
| 4 | Sex, Age, Degree, Dept., Yrs. Exp. | Rank | I | .15 |
| | | | II | .24 |
| | | | III | .18 |
| 5 | Sex, Age, Rank, Dept., Yrs. Exp. | Degree | I | .15 |
| | | | II | .27 |
| | | | III | .18 |
| 6 | Sex, Age, Rank, Degree, Yrs. Exp. | Dept. | I | .05 |
| | | | II | .14 |
| | | | III | .08 |
| 7 | Sex, Age, Rank, Degree, Dept. | Yrs. Teaching Exp. | I | .14 |
| | | | II | .25 |
| | | | III | .16 |
| 8 | Sex, Dept. | Age, Rank, Degree, Yrs. Exp. | I | .11 |
| | | | II | .13 |
| | | | III | .13 |

dropped from .15 to .05; for continuum II from .27 to .14; and for continuum III from .18 to .08.

Mean student ratings according to major areas reflected this reduction in RSQ's. For example, means calculated for each department on the "aloof vs. friendly" continuum ranged from 4.0 to 5.8, on the "unplanned vs. systematic" scale from 3.9 to 5.4, and on the "dull vs. stimulating" scale from 4.1 to 5.2.

5. The correlations of the three student rating criteria with instructor age, faculty rank, highest degree held, and years of teaching experience yielded twelve correlations varying from -.27 to +.15 (Table IV).

TABLE IV

INTERCORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN INSTRUCTOR CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR AVERAGE RATING BY STUDENTS

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) Continuum I | | | | | | |
| (2) Continuum II | .47 | | | | | |
| (3) Continuum III | .71 | .67 | | | | |
| (4) Age | -.17 | -.15 | -.25 | | | |
| (5) Faculty Rank | -.15 | .15 | -.06 | .51 | | |
| (6) Highest Degree Held | -.16 | .12 | -.05 | .37 | .79 | |
| (7) Yrs. Teaching Experience | -.18 | .00 | -.27 | .86 | .54 | .37 |

Nine of these were negative, suggesting that older, more educated and more experienced instructors were rated lower than younger and less experienced instructors. Further, because mean student ratings were used as an indicator of each student's rating, correlations were attenuated. If each student's actual rating scores were used, correlations would have been higher and the inverse relationship magnified.

## DISCUSSION

To involve students in any system of faculty evaluation seems perilous. Yet it is students who have the most contact with instructors. To ignore them seems even more perilous. The results of this study confirmed that student ratings are not influenced even by variables

such as grades previously earned from the instructor being rated. Since student ratings were found to be relatively unbiased, more confidence could be placed on the results of how certain instructor characteristics were reflected in students' ratings. As was mentioned, these results suggested that ratings were different from various departments within the School of Education.

Further, the younger instructors with less faculty rank, and fewer years of teaching experience were consistently rated more "friendly, understanding; systematic, responsible, businesslike; stimulating, imaginative, and enthusiastic."

Probably as important as the specific findings, the investigator made several observations that did not lend to statistical analysis:

a. The multiple regression approach used in this study was effective in analyzing the degree to which certain student and instructor characteristics were reflected in student ratings.

b. Ryans(1960), using factor analysis, identified three patterns of teacher behavior in the Characteristics of Teachers study. However, in the present study, when each of these patterns was placed on a rating continuum and administered to college students, the inter-correlations among ratings were high (Table IV). This suggested that the traits Ryans identified as being independent do overlap. Therefore, a total student rating score of an instructor could have been obtained by adding the student ratings made on each continuum.

c. The study gave a large portion of the student body a chance to rate their instructors. Often, when such a route is not provided or such a desire is thwarted, the upshot may be a poorly organized student-directed evaluation resulting in a faculty "blurb" sheet.

d. After student leaders in charge of developing an instructor evaluation program talked with this investigator, they appreciated the time, sophistication, and financing needed to carry out a methodologically sound student evaluation. And, after examining the complexity of the issues, these student leaders agreed that some degree of confidentiality should

be maintained and that student publications on course evaluations should contain more objective information such as the number and type of exams given.

## SUMMARY

As a consequence of the study reported here, we now have more information on the nature of college students ratings of their instructors, at least at Colorado State College. We have shown that some information reported by students is accurate. We have shown that student ratings are not influenced by such variables as previous grades received from the instructor they rated. And we have shown that instructors who differ on certain characteristics are rated differently by their students.

Still other equally important issues remain unanswered. We need to know what student characteristics, if any, do influence their rating of instructors. We need to know if a parallel study performed within another academic area or at another institution will yield similiar results. And, we need to know if there are other instructor characteristics that better reflect student ratings.

Yet, in terms of students rating their instructors, the question: "to rate or not to rate" can best be answered by citing a quotation attributed to Aristotle: "You get a better notion of the merits of the dinner from the dinner guests than you do from the cook."

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STUDENT SCALE

A Code_____ C Code_____
B Code_____ D Code_____

The School of Education at Colorado State College is involved in a research study to examine the nature of student ratings of instructors. We are asking you to participate by providing the information found on this scale. You can be assured that the information you provide will be considered confidential and will be coded to insure your anonymity. To insure the validity of the study it is extremely important that you complete the following information to the best of your ability.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

I. NAME (please print)_____
last first

II. INSTRUCTOR RATING

Please indicate by making one mark on each of the three horizontal lines, where you feel the instructor in this course is located:

aloof egocentric restricted behavior — 1 2 3 4 5 6 — friendly understanding behavior

evading slipshod unplanned behavior — 1 2 3 4 5 6 — systematic responsible businesslike behavior

dull routine behavior — 1 2 3 4 5 6 — stimulating imaginative enthusiastic behavior

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

III. STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Please provide the following information about yourself to the best of your ability:

A. Sex: Male(0)_____ Female(1)_____

B. Your age (in years to last birthday):_____

C. Check level of Education: 9( )Fros. 2( )Soph. 3( )Jr. 4( )Sr. 5( )Grad. 6( )Other

D. Check the category below that describes your area of study:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1( )Elem. Educ. | 4( )Educ. Admin. | 7( )Mgmt. & Research |
| 2( )Sec. Educ. | 5( )Psych. Coun. & Guid. | 8( )Other |
| 3( )Spec. Educ. | 6( )C.S.P.W. | |

E. a. If you have previously taken <u>one course</u> from the instructor you are rating, what number grade did you receive? (number should be in terms of a 4-point system) Num. grade_____

b. If you have previously taken <u>more than one course</u> from this instructor, what is the average of those grades? (Report to one decimal place on 4-point system) ____.____

F. What is your overall cumulative Grade Point Average to date? (Report to one decimal place on a 4-point system) Overall GPA ____.____