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ABSTRACT

In mid-1973, the Educational Research Service found that nearly one out of four districts surveyed had some form of student evaluation of teachers. Research indicates that informational feedback from students is an effective means of influencing teacher behavior--sometimes more effective than supervisory feedback. In considering student evaluation of teachers, the first issue is the purpose of the evaluation. The administration should also decide if it is going to consider only student evaluation of teachers or press for comprehensive client-centered evaluation. If a client-centered evaluation program is considered, Redfern recommends that clients be told how their evaluations will contribute to the overall evaluation program. Various recommendations for developing an effective client-centered evaluation program were made by Nation's Schools in April 1973 after surveying student evaluation practices from California to New Jersey. However, these recommendations are merely guideposts developed out of the experiences of others; each program must depend on its own constituency. Student evaluation of teachers is still only part of the total evaluation process. It all has to mesh to be effective. (Author/JG)

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STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

by

Susan J. Halbert

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PREFACE

This month's Bulletin on "Student Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators" was initially prepared by Susan J. Halbert as a presentation at the annual convention of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) which was held in Dallas, Texas in February, 1975.

Miss Halbert is currently Assistant Principal for Instruction at T. C. Williams Senior High School in Alexandria, Virginia. She earned her B.A. degree Cum Laude (1964) from Bucknell University and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and other national honorary societies. She received her M.A. degree in urban education (1972) from Newark State College, and is currently completing her Ph.D. in educational administration at Catholic University of America in Washington, D. C.

For those readers who might be interested in implementing a program of student evaluation of teachers, there is a positive postscript to this discussion at T. C. Williams Senior High School. Writes Miss Halbert: "The teachers have responded most positively to the students' proposal. Over 55 percent of the instructional staff of 112 teachers have indicated that they would like to use the questionnaire. Results are still coming in, but we feel that this is a good response to the first attempt at a highly controversial issue."

We feel that this subject deserves thoughtful consideration by school administrators, teachers, and students. It is this kind of student involvement and cooperation which helps in achieving common educational goals.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary,
Oregon School Study Council

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STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Introduction

Should students evaluate teachers and administrators? This is a question that many of us as teachers and administrators have asked, considered, and either accepted or rejected according to our specific purposes and points of view. It is a question that I have had to investigate during the past several months as a group of students in my own school began to develop a proposal for student evaluation of the instructional staff.

Evaluation, itself, is a delicate and often volatile task that requires everything from knowledge of subject matter and technique to basic skills in human relations. It requires understanding, diplomacy, tact, and guts.

Many say that students cannot assume such a difficult task. In fact, they have "no right" to assume that task. They are neither trained nor skilled in the area of instructional techniques and evaluation, and therefore they should "leave the evaluating to us." As a Wisconsin administrator indicated in a poll taken in October 1970 by Nation's Schools, "The whole idea makes about as much sense as asking an acidhead to rate his local police department."

Is this an accurate reflection of current attitudes toward student evaluation of teachers and administrators? Have attitudes changed even since 1970?

Attitudes Toward Student Evaluation

Polls of both administrators and teachers that were taken in 1970 and 1971 indicate somewhat evenly split reactions to the question, "Should students participate in the evaluation of faculty members?"

According to the poll of administrators taken by Nation's Schools in 1970, 40.5 percent answered yes, 42.5 percent answered no, and 17 percent were unsure. Less than five percent indicated that they actually had such an evaluation program. However, each of the programs in operation was felt to be beneficial to both students and teachers.

(See Appendix A.)

A 1971 teacher opinion poll conducted by the N.E.A. Research Division asked teachers if they favored or opposed formal evaluation of classroom teachers by the pupils they taught. Approximately 50 percent of the teachers favored student evaluation and 50 percent opposed it, with the large percentage falling in the middle of the continuum between tending to favor and tending to oppose. The poll revealed very little difference between the opinions of elementary and secondary school teachers. (See Appendix B.) An interesting aspect of the N.E.A. teacher opinion poll is that in 1970 almost three-fourths of the teachers indicated that they favored teacher evaluation of principals.

As for actual practice, a 1970 N.E.A. survey of school districts revealed only five districts in which students evaluated their teachers. A 1971 sampling of school board policies by the National School Boards Association revealed only one mention of student evaluation of teachers.

The picture today seems to be changing rapidly. By the middle of 1973, the Educational Research Service found that nearly one out of four school districts surveyed had some form of student evaluation of teachers. Education U.S.A. obtained similar results in a survey of current trends in evaluation practices.

The Move Toward Client-Centered Evaluation

What is the basis for the rapid change? How have students, teachers, and administrators overcome the many reasons given for not allowing students to evaluate teachers? How have they answered arguments such as teachers will oppose student evaluation, students are not mature enough to make objective judgments about teacher performance, teacher evaluation is the function of professional educators and not a proper role for students, or an evaluation program would be hard to supervise and control? How have they allayed fears that teachers will have to be "good guys" or that student evaluations will develop into popularity polls?

Several trends, including those reported by Education U.S.A., seem to be providing impetus to the growing movement toward client-centered evaluation. First, student evaluation of instructors is not a completely new practice. It can be traced back through the Middle Ages when students set up their own committees to report on professors who failed to cover required segments of learning in the specified time. Such professors were fined. During the 1920's student evaluation at the

college level progressed rapidly and is still widely used today.

Second, a growing body of research and literature has begun to change early skepticism to widespread confidence in the ability of students, from the intermediate grades to graduate schools, to make reliable and valid judgments of teaching performance. Elizabeth Dalton, in her article, "Pupil Selection of Teachers" (Educational Leadership, February 1971), states that published results of studies of teacher ratings by pupils indicate an uncanny ability on the part of pupils to describe good and poor teachers in much the same way as do knowledgeable adults. She does add, however, that Roy Bryan, in his development and use of the Student-Opinion Questionnaire, recognized that "Immature students obviously are not authorities on pedagogy." He emphasizes the difference between "expert knowledge of teaching methods and the effects of those methods." He explains:

This is much like saying that untrained persons, even children, can tell experts much about the effects of a television set on them--whether the picture is clear and the sound is right--but they cannot analyze the reasons for or prescribe the solution to malfunction.

Bryan contends in his publication, Twelve Teachers and Their Effects on Students, that student-reaction reports do help teachers to:

- (1) Determine the degree to which desirable characteristics exist,
- (2) discover unsuspected weaknesses and strengths,
- (3) maintain good public relations,
- (4) discover gaps between theory and practice,
- (5) get the proper balance in emphasis on competing factors in the teaching situation,
- and (6) get recognition for excellent teaching.

John A. Centra of Educational Testing Services supports Bryan's statements in Education U.S.A.'s recent publication Evaluating Teachers

for Professional Growth. Centra finds much to recommend the practice of student evaluation, at least on the college level. He indicates that teachers who overrate themselves on their own self-evaluation forms tend to modify their teaching styles after finding their students disagree. He also states that incorporating student ratings into faculty evaluation procedures can have a positive effect upon students. At least each student feels that he or she is helping the institution make important educational decisions. Centra characterizes student evaluations as "no less trustworthy than other methods now available to assess teaching performance, and when combined with other methods, they probably contribute to a fair judgment."

Centra's statements are verified in a report on Teacher Evaluation to Improve Learning by the Ohio Commission on Public School Personnel Policies (March, 1972). According to the report, research indicates that informational feedback from students is an effective means of influencing teacher behavior. In fact, student feedback can sometimes be more effective in changing teacher behavior than supervisory feedback. An additional advantage of student evaluation is that it is available to teachers whenever they wish to use it. Thus, evaluation can be an ongoing process and does not have to be dependent upon the assistance of a principal or supervisor.

A third aspect of the movement toward increasing client-centered evaluation is the nationwide focus upon accountability. We are all having to answer the demands which became so vocal and even violent during the sixties. The demand for action, the demand for answers, the

demand for information, the demand for involvement from students, teachers, and the general public--all have become focused in the word accountability. We are now developing ways to answer, at least in part, some of these demands. One of the approaches has been through the movement toward client-centered evaluation.

As George Redfern defines the term, client-centered evaluation generally refers to any situation in which school personnel are evaluated by subordinates in addition to superiors. He states in AASA's School Administrator (March 1972) that "client-centered evaluation is exactly what the beating on the superintendent's door that began in the sixties is all about."

- The need to which client-centered evaluation responds is by now familiar. It is people's need for more involvement in controlling matters that affect their daily lives. . . . The merit of client-centered evaluation is that it affords those who are served and led by professional school personnel a channel for direct, concrete participation in an administrative function that is vital to increasing the schools' productivity-evaluation.

A fourth and somewhat negative aspect of the trend toward client-centered evaluation has emerged in attitudes of students toward teachers. Some of these attitudes certainly reflect the growing concern and demand for accountability. Max Marshall explores reasons for students demanding the right to "grade" professors in his article, "Reverse Grading," (Educational Leadership, March 1971). He states that:

- By reciprocal justice, for example, if one side grades, so can the other. The two wrongs, however, instead of neutralizing each other, are compounded. The principles and errors are parallel, and consequences are as serious.

A second reason for the students' urge to criticize lies in their natural self-assurance. Today, if they consider the first few weeks of a course a bore, the teacher and subject never get a chance.

Youth's resentment of authority is another factor. Intrinsic in this resentment is a significant desire for retaliation. Teachers always please some students and irritate others.

A fourth reason for students rating their mentors is that they are now urged to do so. To ask an inexperienced student for his opinion is a flattering and appealing diversion, and administrative approval is always welcome.

Fifth, students may rationalize that appraisal is a moral duty. Occasionally a new idea is effective, of course, but taking criticisms literally, though commonly done, is exceedingly hazardous. However, the relief students feel when they have a chance to speak out may be mildly beneficial.

My personal experience in working with students on the issue of student evaluation indicates that there is some validity in Mr. Marshall's statements. T.C. Williams Senior High School is composed of approximately 1,800 eleventh and twelfth grade students. The school operates as an open campus. Students are required to attend classes, but during unscheduled class time they may go to the student center, to the library, to other staff members, or even completely off the campus. The staff encourages students to make mature, responsible decisions about their time, efforts, and activities.

In keeping with this philosophy, the school moved last year to a new scheduling process called arena scheduling. Instead of students selecting subject areas and being scheduled by a computer, students were able to personally select subjects, teachers, and class time for the coming year. The emphasis was upon (1) thorough exploration of

options with the help of teachers, counselors, administrators, and other students, and (2) mature decision-making and responsible commitment to the final schedule chosen in the arena.

The students and teachers responded most favorably to arena scheduling. Teachers became more involved in planning new programs and in counseling students. Teachers also became aware that they would have to advertise their programs in order to attract students in the arena. No longer could they depend on the computer for filled classes. Bumper stickers reading "Turn On to Science at T. C." began to appear everywhere--on bumpers, on doors, in the halls, and in the bathrooms.

The students also seemed to be more committed to the programs that they themselves had developed. Fewer students changed their schedules or voiced concern over student-teacher conflict. As the first year of arena scheduling progressed, however, a new problem emerged. Students began to feel that they needed more information to make mature decisions about selection of teachers and subjects. They felt that "word-of-mouth" was not adequate to acquaint students with the methods, styles, and personalities of various teachers. Therefore, they wanted to develop a questionnaire for students to use in evaluating teachers. Information from the questionnaire would be published in a Teacher Directory and distributed to all students who would be involved in the arena scheduling process.

And so the dilemma--the philosophy of the school and staff encourages mature, responsible decision-making by the students. It encourages their involvement and participation in developing the school

program. It encourages their exploration of issues and options. It encourages their suggestions for changing and improving the curriculum. In view of this, how does the school and its staff deal with the proposal for student evaluation of teachers?

Developing a Program for Client-Centered Evaluation

The first issue to be considered in answering this question is the purpose of the student evaluation. If the evaluation is designed as a personality questionnaire, a fault-finding expedition, or a form of retaliation, then the validity of the student evaluation must be seriously questioned. If the evaluation is designed for the improvement of instruction, then the process has the potential for making positive contributions to the growth of both students and faculty.

Joan Jacobson, a Wisconsin teacher of English and social studies, recommends in her article "Should Students Evaluate Teachers?" (Today's Education, May 1973) that students should become involved if:

1. A mutual feeling of trust has been developed between students and teacher.
2. Such information is used solely for the improvement of instruction and not for determining salary, tenure, or promotion.
3. The evaluation instrument is cooperatively developed or agreed upon by teacher and students.
4. Findings are discussed with students and with others at the teacher's discretion.

George Redfern makes several recommendations to administrators in answering a proposal for client-centered evaluation. He states that:

1. An administrative response must be genuine and satisfy the psychological needs being expressed in the drive for change.
2. The administrator must be reasonably sure that the change will improve--not weaken--the education process.
3. The administrator must also be sure that the change can be integrated and coordinated with existing programs in the school system and those under development.

If a client-centered evaluation program is considered for a school or school system, Redfern recommends that clients be informed about how their evaluations will contribute to the overall evaluation program. He states that this program should become more output-oriented, thus creating a direct line from client evaluation to educational output. Redfern suggests that "the effectiveness of client-centered evaluations will be maximized if they are incorporated into an ongoing evaluation system on a consistently recurring basis."

Let us assume that school administrators in a particular system become committed to the concept of client-centered evaluation and decide to accept a proposal for student evaluation of teachers. What are the next steps in instituting and operating such a program?

The administration should first decide if it is going to consider only one aspect of client-centered evaluation, such as student evaluation of teachers, or if it is going to press for comprehensive client-centered evaluation. Redfern recommends the latter so that "no segment of the client community or the professional staff feels that it is being denied a voice in assessing the performance of those in authority."

The next step is to anticipate resistance that may develop toward the new form and direction of evaluation. Resistance may be based upon

doubts or fears about self-image, potential vindictiveness, and unfavorable use of the results.

Redfern states that:

Many of these problems can be alleviated by careful planning of an integrated, cooperative, balanced program of evaluation in which the evaluatee himself participates in forming the judgments and actions based on the clients' input. Clearly communicating how the system will work and showing the responsibility for designing it are also desirable strategies for winning support and cooperation.

Planning for the client-centered evaluation should include safeguards against:

1. Influencing the client's evaluation through anticipation of rewards or fear of reprisals.
2. Creating security in the evaluation.
3. Making appraisals that do not tell the whole story.
4. Giving an unbalanced emphasis to the client evaluations in the overall evaluation.
5. Making the administrative evaluator uncomfortable in his role because clients' evaluations have been shared with him.

Specific procedures to provide safeguards might include the following:

1. Make the clients' evaluations anonymous.
2. Have the evaluatee receive the forms directly.
3. Let the evaluatee take the initiative in conferring with his evaluator regarding clients' assessments.
4. Let the evaluatee decide when to make the summary of the clients' evaluations a part of his personnel record.

Additional recommendations for developing an effective client-centered evaluation program were made by Nation's Schools in April 1973

after surveying various student evaluation practices from California to New Jersey.

1. Be sure the purpose is to evaluate instruction.
2. Involve teachers in the development of evaluation forms.
3. Make participation in the program voluntary, at least initially.
4. Utilize evaluation forms that can be readily scored, preferably those that can be easily adapted to mechanical and computer scoring.
5. Cut down the number of evaluations by utilizing a random sample of clients whenever possible.
6. Don't oversimplify the results.
7. Keep the results as confidential as possible.
8. Don't forget the limitations of student evaluation. Use it primarily as reinforcement for other evaluations.

All of these recommendations are merely guideposts that have been developed out of the efforts and experiences of students, teachers, and administrators throughout the nation. The various programs may appear similar, and yet each contains unique features that emerge out of the specific demands of that particular school or school system.

For instance, some programs use ready-made evaluation forms; others develop their own. Some programs utilize the same approach throughout the system; others may allow each school or department to use a different approach. Some teachers may show the evaluations to their supervisors; others may keep them entirely confidential. Some school systems may permit students to evaluate administrators; others may allow only teachers to evaluate administrators.

In other words, the decision you make and the program you develop for client-centered evaluation must depend upon your own constituency. Certainly the research and experience of others are important, but you must be the final judge of what fits your needs. Student evaluation of teachers or any other form of client-centered evaluation is still only part of the total evaluation process. It all has to mesh to be effective.

As I mentioned at the beginning, evaluation requires understanding, diplomacy, tact, and guts. Many schools will probably be facing decisions about these very issues in the near future. I know we must figure out how to turn around a movement that is the right thing to do for all the wrong reasons; or the wrong thing to do for all the right reasons. Either way--the very process will probably teach us as much as the results can ever promise.

Epilogue

The students at T. C. Williams High School have continued their investigation of student evaluation of teachers. They have met several times with representatives from the teaching and administrative staffs and have reviewed the material on student evaluation of teachers which was gathered during my investigation of the topic. After extensive discussion of basic purposes and concerns, the students have concluded their evaluation of the instructional staff should be for the purpose of improvement of instruction. Although the students are still interested in publishing the information gathered during the evaluation process, they have agreed to give the information directly to the teacher for improvement of his or her instructional program. Any further use of the information will be the prerogative of the teacher, including publication of the information or distribution of the information to the administrative staff.

During the week of April 7, 1975 the students will present their proposal for student evaluation of the instructional staff to the entire faculty for its support and approval. If the staff approves the proposal, the students will proceed with the pilot program for student evaluation of teachers, including evaluation of teachers and their specific instructional programs at the close of the 1974-75 school year.

One aspect of the students' initial proposal for student evaluation of teachers continues to be of major concern to the students--

that is, the need for more information about the teachers, their methods, and their programs in making intelligent decisions during the arena scheduling process. The students still want to have the opportunity to get this information before they have to decide about specific courses and teachers.

Consequently, the students have proposed that during a "staff development" or "records day" the students be invited to attend an open house at the school. During the open house the rising juniors and seniors will be given a brief orientation by the director of guidance and then will be able to visit individual teachers in their classrooms to discuss their programs for the next school year. This proposal has been accepted by the staff. The open house will take place on April 11, 1975 during Records Day. All rising tenth and eleventh grade students will be invited to attend. In addition, teachers have also volunteered to allow students to "audit" classes during a student's free time to determine if he or she is interested in taking the course next year.

The students have done outstanding work in their investigation and proposal of student evaluation of the instructional staff. They have involved students, teachers, and administrators in the entire process. They have voiced mature concerns about the decision-making process at the school. They have maintained strong beliefs about their goals and purpose while still remaining open to new information and differing opinions. They have proceeded systematically with their proposal through the bureaucracy to obtain approval for their revised purpose and procedure. The students have learned not only about student

evaluation of teachers, but also about effective ways of working with the system to obtain specific results. The instructional and administrative staffs have learned more about student evaluation of teachers, as well as about teacher evaluation of administrators. In fact, the administrative staff is now considering various ways in which teachers can participate effectively in the evaluation of administrators. Perhaps most important, the administrators have learned more effective ways of considering and channeling student dissent into positive action.

All of the investigation that has taken place during the current year provides a strong foundation for client-centered evaluation during the next school year. All of the information, investigation, and results of the pilot study have implications for future proposals and decisions. As George Redfern has stated, once an organization moves in the direction of one aspect of the client-centered approach, then other aspects of the organization tend to move in the same direction. This has proven to be the case in the introduction of arena scheduling to T. C. Williams High School. Student involvement in the decision-making process has become a priority at the high school. Hopefully, students, teachers, and administrators will continue to find positive ways to maintain this involvement and to encourage additional student-initiated activities in the total program.

APPENDIX A

Nation's Schools

1970 Survey of Administrators

HOW ADMINISTRATORS VOTED

1. Do you feel that students should participate in the evaluation of faculty members--through questionnaires, etc.?

40.5% Yes 42.5% No 17% Not sure

2. If yes, at what grade level should such an evaluation process be started?

31.7% K-6 34% Grades 7-8
22.3% Grades 9-10 12% Grades 11-12

3. Do you actually have such an evaluation program?

4.5% Yes 95.5% No

4. If you do have an evaluation program, have you found it to be beneficial?

100% Yes 0% No

5. What do you see as major obstacles to student participation in faculty evaluations? (please check as many as needed)

32.6% Students not qualified 48.3% Faculty opposition
32.6% Not proper role for students 32.2% Hard to supervise and control
5.5% Other obstacles

The opinion poll survey, conducted monthly by the editorial staff of Nation's Schools, is based on a five percent proportional sampling of 14,000 school administrators in 50 states. This month's poll brought a 46 percent response.

APPENDIX B

N.E.A. Research Division

1971 Teacher Opinion Poll

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Elementary</u>	<u>Secondary</u>
<i>Strongly favor</i>	12.0%	10.3%	13.8%
<i>Tend to favor</i>	32.0	39.1	36.8
<i>Tend to oppose</i>	31.9	33.1	30.6
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	18.1	17.5	18.8

APPENDIX C

Suggested Steps for Developing Staff Evaluation by Students

I. Key Preliminary Questions

- A. Should personal results be released only to individual teachers?
- B. Should the results be published to serve as criteria for student selection of teachers and classes?
- C. Should the results be shared with administrators?
- D. Should teachers participate on a voluntary basis?
- E. How many times a year should the study be conducted?
- F. At what time(s) of the year should it be administered?
- G. What factors such as teacher sex, years of teaching, etc. or student background factors would you like to relate to student responses?
- H. What kind of inservice follow-up program will be available to staff members?
- I. Will open-ended questions be asked?
- J. How will the study be financed?
- K. Should counselors or administrators be evaluated also?

II. Suggested Steps

- A. Form a student-faculty committee.
- B. Introduce idea to administration, department heads, faculty.
- C. Review existing questionnaires.
- D. Develop questionnaires.
- E. Send proposed questionnaires to staff for comments.
- F. Revise questionnaire.

APPENDIX C (continued)

- G. Send final questionnaire to all staff, ask for commitment, periods they wish to be evaluated by and number of students per period.
- H. Secure financing--develop final budget (district funding?). Write Teacher Background questions. Write Coding Manual.
- I. Meet with programmer--determining format of output-internal analysis.
- J. Prepare packets--include statement to be read to students, general instructions.
- K. Distribute packets to participating staff.
- L. Gather results at end of each period.
- M. Key punch.
- N. Do computer runs.
- O. Analyze results--relating student and teacher background data to student responses.
- P. Write final report.
- Q. Return data to teachers.
- R. Evaluate process--make revisions for future.

June E. Thompson
Awalt High School
Truman/Bryant Avenues
Mountain View, CA 94040
415-968-1647

APPENDIX D

Objectives of the Student Perception of Teacher Form

This instrument is to be used by the teacher for discovering one's own strengths and weaknesses in one's instructional program. These questions were prepared by the committee formed to investigate possible means of teacher evaluation. The committee, formed by the Student-Faculty-Administration Council, is recommending this teacher evaluation to be used for instructional improvement only. The questionnaire can be given to each one of the instructor's pupils to be completed anonymously, and the results of the questionnaire can be collected and kept confidential. Please feel free to take the initiative to alter this device to individual needs and to confer with evaluators regarding his assessments. More extensive course and teacher evaluations are available upon request of the administration. Aid will be supplied in calculations of results of the questionnaire and interpretation of findings, upon request.

Student Perception of Teacher

Always	Usually	Some of the time	Seldom	Never	Does not apply to me
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1. Knowledge of subject: I feel the teacher has a good knowledge and understanding of teaching field.
2. Clarity of presentation: Ideas are presented at a level which I can understand.
3. Fairness: Teacher is fair and impartial in treatment of all students in the class.
4. Success in stimulating interest: This class is interesting and challenging.
5. Enthusiasm: The teacher shows interest and enthusiasm for subject; appears to enjoy teaching this subject.
6. Attitude toward student ideas: Teacher has respect for the things I have to say in class.
7. Encouragement of student participation: Teacher encourages me to ask questions and express ideas in class.
8. Teacher recognizes and accepts own mistakes.
9. Length of assignments: They are of reasonable length.
10. Openness: Teacher is able to see things from my point of view.
11. Consideration of others: Teacher is patient, understanding, considerate and courteous.
12. Control: The teacher knows how to handle students who attempt to disrupt the class.
13. Availability: This teacher seems to feel a responsibility to help students both in and out of class.
14. Perception: Teacher seems to know when students don't understand the material.
15. Evaluation: Teacher's testing and grading methods seem fair, uniform, and are clearly understood by me.
16. Preparation: In my opinion, this teacher takes time preparing for each class.
17. Difficulty: Teacher recognized my ability level and the work was within the limits of what I can do.
18. Methods: Teacher uses a variety of teaching methods such as films, lectures, discussions, seminars, etc.

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