



Photo by Andre Ranieri

Class evaluations are read and given more attention than some students might expect.

UNIVERSITY

Tenure, merit pay tied to teacher evaluations

By Karla Thomas
Emerald Contributor

At the end of every term, students fill out evaluation forms for most of their courses. What happens to course evaluations? Where do they go? Who sees them?

Written and computerized course evaluations are one of several factors used to determine faculty tenure and pay raises. However, every department handles course evaluations differently.

"I look at every single evaluation, both the summaries and individual comments," said Arnold Ismach, Dean of the School of Journalism. Ismach said he sometimes makes notes from the evaluations, and, if he deems it's necessary, actually talks to a few students from the class.

Evaluations are used as an indication of how the students perceive the teacher, Ismach said. If evaluations consistently show problems, he might talk to the instructor about finding a solution.

However, Ismach stressed that the evaluations are just one factor of many considered during tenure and promotion procedures.

"There is a danger in relying solely on student evaluations," he said. Interviews, course outlines, sitting-in on classes, scholarship and service are all considered when making decisions about tenure and pay raises.

Not all departments at the University are as small as the journalism school. The larger the department is, the tougher it becomes to treat evaluations with such individual attention.

Paul Armstrong, English department head, handles evaluations differently. He said he looks at the computerized summaries first and if the statistical data tips him off to any problems he will look at the signed, written evaluations. Unsigned evaluations cannot be used when considering tenure and merit pay raises.

Armstrong also said he scrutinizes the lower-ranked instructors first because they are the ones who are most likely to need guidance. He said he prefers to straighten out any teaching problems long before any tenure consideration.

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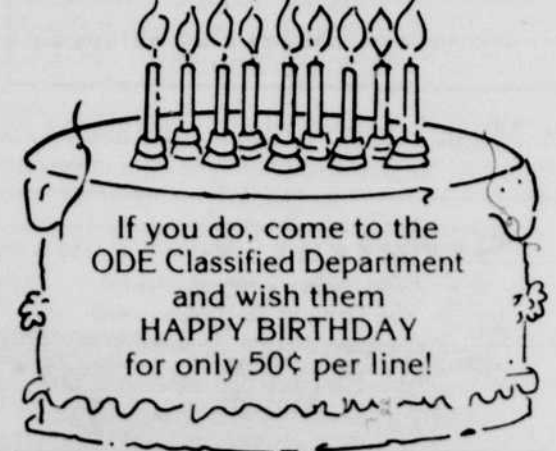
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