

PERSPECTIVES

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RE-evaluations

Student evaluations are a mixed blessing. Professors, especially at a public university, need to be accountable to the customers they are serving. Students should have some say in the methods and efficacy of the teaching professionals responsible for their education.

On the other hand, most University students are 18- to 22-year-old recent high-school graduates who often have little experience with higher education. With some safeguards and better access, the Emerald editorial board believes evaluations could become a valuable resource for students as well as a useful tool for promotion or rebuke of professors.

To begin with, all of the categories on the Scantron forms need to be available to students. Revealing four answers doesn't give students all the information they need, nor does it give them an impetus to answer the other questions accurately. In addition, evaluations need to be easily available to students in an understandable format. For the Emerald's recent article on evaluations, reporters had to spend a lot of time trying to get access to evaluations from each department, and the raw data from some departments had to be explained by a statistics professor.

The University has capable statistics professors and a great computer science department; all of the evaluation information could easily be distilled into a clear, readable format and posted online. Then evaluations could be used side-by-side with Duckhunt while students are registering for classes.

One major concern we've experienced regarding evaluations is a general lack of discretion between categories and a somewhat immature approach to evaluating professors. If a professor was an easy grader or gave easy tests, we know of many students who simply mark every category with an "A." If the professor was difficult, every mark is an "F." If evaluations were easily accessible and understandable so students could see the usefulness of taking a little more time filling them out, the data could become more relevant and accurate.

Our concern about the lack of discretion used by students on evaluations has another pitfall: If evaluations are used by departments to assess a professor's ability and determine promotions or disciplinary actions, professors may be led to "dumb-down" their coursework and inflate grades, in order to get an "A" in every category.

To remedy this problem, we would like to see only the handwritten and signed evaluations used to promote or rebuke professors. Departments could still use the Scantrons to get a sense of professors' ability, but handwritten comments are generally more thoughtful and easier to decode in terms of students' motives. And if you can't sign your name to a criticism, you must not believe in it a whole lot.

There are of course, special situations: What if a student believes a professor in his or her major teaches poorly, but the student will have to take more classes from that professor? For this, we believe students should have the option to sign their name but have the department withhold it from the professor. This way the department can assess the situation and the student is protected from possible retaliation.

Really bad professors require more than just an end-of-term evaluation, however. As we've said in the past, students are paying to learn and need to be more involved in their education. Students should go talk to a professor whose teaching style is ineffective or who acts inappropriately in class. Yes, this can be difficult, but the effort needs to be made. If the professor is equally inappropriate in office hours, then take complaints to the department head. Stewing about a bad professor all term and then writing a flaming evaluation doesn't help students who paid for that term. We all need to take an active approach to learning.

Professors should also take an active approach to improving their classes. A few editorial board members have had classes where the professor offered a midterm evaluation, asking questions about the teaching style and the assignments, and then made changes to be more effective for the rest of the term. This is a fantastic approach, and we would like to see more of it.



Giovanni Salimena

Giovanni Salimena Emerald

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON		EVALUATIONS EVALUATED				
		A	B	C	D	E/F
1. How accessible do you find student evaluations to be?	How useful do you find evaluations to be?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. How accurately do you think students fill out evaluations?	How much time do you think students spend filling out evaluations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. To what extent do you think Scantron evaluations should decide a professor's fate?	To what extent do you think handwritten, signed evaluations should decide a professor's fate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How do you rank the idea of evaluations?	How do you rank the current state of evaluations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Overall, compared to other issues of this size at the University, we think the idea of evaluations is an "A." But overall, compared to how good they could be at the University, we think evaluations rate a "C." They need work, so let's improve them and let them reach their full potential.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Letter to the editor

A man loses his right to life when he rapes

I've got something to say to Joe Bosnar ("Dead Men Don't Rape" sign hinders cooperation, support," ODE, May 22): Don't get so defensive.

Perhaps the girl's intention was not to accuse and condemn *all* men for rape, but to express a belief that a man can't rape again if he isn't allowed to live. I'm sure that if you had asked her what her sign meant, she would have told you.

Dead men don't rape. The point seems obvious to me. If a rapist is allowed to live, he will rape again, and again and again.

You wrote that her sign "apparently had only one goal: to blame all men and make all men look like rapists." You said

the sign made you uncomfortable and angry. What do you think the girl felt when she was raped?

I know you aren't saying that her pain is unjustified. But the way you jumped to conclusions about her sign is scary. I suggest you do more research the next time you write on such a sensitive topic.

In my estimation, a man loses his right to life when he rapes. I personally commend the girl with the sign for being brave and carrying her sign despite the naïve criticisms of people like Bosnar.

"Take Back the Night" is not about you, sir. It's about countless women who have been raped and abused by countless men. Don't presume to tell a rape victim what she can and can not say to express her pain.

Christine Macfarlane
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