

Administrators Use of Student Evaluations of Professors

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Abstract

Although many studies have examined Student Evaluations of Teachers (SETs), very few have focused on the role of administration, specifically the department chair. This seems odd because administration at the request of the department chair, makes the decisions based on evaluations regarding faculty promotion, salary increments and course allocations. This study centers on the role of the department chair in choosing evaluation instruments that would be fair to faculty when making personnel decisions by considering the factors that influence student feedback. All the department chairs in the Arts and Humanities Departments in a State University College were interviewed and recorded for their suggestions regarding the creation and use of SETs that would be helpful to them in making personnel decisions. Responses from the 64 campuses of the SUNY system's Arts and Humanities departments regarding their evaluation questionnaires led us to the conclusion that an uniform questionnaire did not serve the department chairs effectively.

Key Words: Student Evaluation of Teachers, Department Chairs, Administration, Evaluation Forms.

Introduction

Students' evaluations of Professors began in the United States Universities in the 1920's and have continued universally until the present. Hundreds of studies have examined the usefulness of these practices. Most studies have focused almost exclusively on the faculty member to be evaluated so the emphasis is on concern for the fairness of the instrument to measure teaching effectiveness. All the studies accepted the purpose of the SETs (Student Evaluation of Teachers) as helpful information for self improvement and criteria for promotion, salary increases and tenure decisions. These studies focused on the need for accurate measurement for validity and reliability to insure that the teacher is treated fairly and judiciously. However, it was difficult to find any studies that were concerned with the administrators' viewpoint, which seemed strange since they are the ones most likely to utilize them.

This study focuses on the use of SETs made by administrators, specifically the department chairs of the School of Arts and Humanities, at a State University College of New York. Since the department chairs make the recommendations to the Dean for personnel actions, it seemed they should be the likely subjects to be studied. The ten department chairs that comprise the School of Arts and Humanities were interviewed separately as to their use of SETs. All of the departments in Arts and Humanities had been using the same form that was designed by the Philosophy department which seemed more appropriate for use of the Humanities Departments, rather than the Arts. This study was designed to create an evaluation instrument that would be general enough for use by all the departments, but specific enough to fit each area's needs.

The department chairs, when interviewed, said that they found some of the questions useful on the standard form, but did not adhere to the whole evaluation instrument. Rather, they made adaptations more appropriate to their purposes and needs. The more career oriented departments, such as Communication, Interior Decoration, Fine Arts, and Theater wanted more questions to evaluate the course besides evaluation of teachers. They were interested in knowing if the course would help the students in their future careers. Some of the chairs wanted to know the relevance of the sequence of the major courses so they could allocate appropriate resources and teacher assignments to accommodate the students. Scheduling courses according to the needs of students, balanced by the expertise of teachers could be accomplished more easily by showing faculty the concrete evidence of SETs surveys that carried more course information. Some departments need more information about courses because they are subject to accreditation requirements by outside agencies.

The State University of New York (SUNY) expects annual assessment reports of the General Education courses, so SETs are sometimes used by department chairs to assign courses that are expected to be evaluated in the future. None of the department chairs said that they depended solely upon SETs to evaluate their faculty. They hold informal conversations with students, observe classes, compare the grade spans of teachers, and study comments of students over semesters to detect trends. Most of the departments have forms for peer evaluations that were agreed upon by the faculty members in the department. Whenever faculty are to be considered for promotions, their peers are expected to observe and report on their teaching.

Department chairs said they did use some of the information derived from SETs for salary increments, promotion, and tenure decisions. SETs were found especially useful for part-time faculty whose classes were often difficult to observe because of scheduling demands. Some classes met in the evenings or at times when the department chair was not available. Most students in these classes were not majors so it was difficult to speak to them in informal settings. All of the department chairs said that they found the SETs useful for their end of term report to their Dean.

One important purpose for the use of SETs in college classroom is for the self improvement of teachers. There is a problem when SETs are given to students at the end of the semester, which does not allow the faculty member to effect changes. Each department chair was open to the suggestion of trying midterm evaluations for faculty who appear to need some improvement. The faculty member could either use the department form or create one that would be more specific to self improvement. Only the faculty member would see the results of the survey and would have the opportunity to make adjustments for the rest of the semester. Midterm evaluations might not only improve the ratings of the individual faculty member but also lighten the burden of the department chair at the end of the semester.

Questions Regarding Use of Student Evaluations of Teachers

Recent studies point to some confusion regarding the purpose of SETs. If evaluation is supposed to measure teacher effectiveness at promoting student learning, not all methods of securing the information accomplish this purpose. Other purposes of teacher evaluation often take precedence, such as using SETs by the administration to assess teacher performance for personnel reasons. Department Chairs use SETs to reassign classes to cover course demands. One of the more valuable functions is directed at faculty members who can derive suggestions from the SETs to improve their teaching. SETs also give students the opportunity to assess their learning over the semester. Although SETs are used by most American and European colleges and universities to assess teacher effectiveness and student learning, not all faculty or administrators are enthusiastic about the results derived from them. There is concern over grade inflation that might be aimed at improving student ratings (Eiszler, 2002). Student perceptions vary regarding the use of SETs. If they see their function for teacher self improvement, they are more likely to give higher rating than if they perceive them as criteria for tenure, promotion or salary adjustment. (Worthington, (2002). However, students are less inclined to believe that administrators really pay that much attention to their evaluation of teachers. Spencer & Schmelkin, (2002,p.398) after a review of literature regarding student perceptions, concluded that “students are not too optimistic about the overall weight put by administrators and faculty on student opinion”.

Untenured faculty tend to view student evaluations more seriously in that they believe that administrators consider them heavily when making personnel decisions. Faculty are also concerned about academic institutions that emphasize teaching rather than research. They fear that administrators expect higher than average levels of teaching effectiveness at the teaching institutions. If the SET instrument is the only criteria to evaluate the teacher's performance, then students can have too much influence on a teacher's career. Fortunately, the multi dimensional dimensions of teaching calls for administrators to combine other forms of evaluation as peer and chairs visit to class, examination of syllabus, teaching materials, tests, and interviews with other faculty and students.

Part of the problem with using SETs is determining exactly what consists of teaching effectiveness. Because teaching is so multidimensional in nature, there are many variables to consider when defining it. Olivares (2003) claims that one must first decide on a definition of teacher effectiveness in order to assess the validity of SETs. Stark-Wroblewski, Ahlering, & Brill (2007) argue that SETs and learning outcomes measures assess distinct aspects of teaching effectiveness. Therefore, a single score that depicts a global or overall rating cannot validly represent effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Neumann (2000) suggests that a rating guide that includes various teaching contexts and emphasized a range of scores, rather than a Mean was more effective at measuring teaching effectiveness. Anonymous evaluations which seem to protect the student from reprisal can have some negative consequences for faculty. Even though the intent seems positive, it does not protect the faculty from student reprisal. If students perceive that they received lower grades than they deserved, they might assign lower ratings to their teachers. With anonymity, faculty and administrators cannot determine which students gave low ratings to the instructor. Anonymous evaluations free students from responsibility for their opinions. Without opportunity to ponder their conclusions, they can make rash judgments based on dissatisfaction, or on one unpleasant incident that occurred in class. With no follow up, there is no way to tell if the students' complaints are valid or if they might be chronic complainers. Wright (2006, p. 419) sympathizes with faculty members who do not share this anonymity. He says, "apparently it is believed that faculty members are less trustworthy than students."

There has been concern that faculty might assign higher grades to students in exchange for better ratings. Grading leniency can be detrimental to the validity of SETs and a barrier to faculty controlled policies of rigor and honesty regarding academic standards. Olivares (2003, p. 243) sees a connection between grade inflation and faculty loss of power because "academic control has been put into the hands of students, thereby resulting in an increase in consumer-oriented teaching and a decrease in student learning."

Concerns arise about student's ability to assess course content and instructor's preparedness because they are required to respond to performance issues that are beyond their knowledge and experience. Students do not have the knowledge of the academic fields nor the selective criteria that makes the material more relevant and interesting to their students. "For example, asking students to rate the teacher's level of knowledge will yield only impressions of expertise that may be inaccurate and likely to be moderated by stereotypical association often linked to demographic features such as age, gender and physical appearance" Moore & Kuol (2005, p. 159).

There is a more cynical interpretation of the use of SETs, describing them as tools of administrators who wish to make personnel decisions easily and quickly. Johnson (2000) argues that SETs feed the need of the bureaucracy who desire an organization-wide systematic reporting of feedback which neither helps faculty nor students.

Academic freedom is another concern. When student responses are given too much credence, there is danger of infringement on instructional responsibilities of faculty. SETs can have too much influence on curriculum, content, grading and teaching methodology. Platt (1993) argues that SETs have a limited scope of usefulness and are designed to measure mediocrity. Limited knowledge of students who do not recognize the worth of rigor and academic standards that require effort could cause students to complain about legitimate course requirements. How many times during advisement do students ask for an easy course?

Arguments in favor of the Use of Student Evaluation of Teachers

Student evaluation of teachers has a long history in the United States, starting in the 1920's, so there must be some evidence of their constructive use. Many studies over the years have shown that students can provide useful information about teaching methods, equal treatment of students, and enthusiasm for course content by the faculty member. (Stockman & Amann 1994). Some researchers stress the opportunity given to faculty to improve their teaching (Hand & Rowe 2001). Positive response to criticism is helpful to both students and teachers because both can benefit from the learning experience. SETs can prevent the evaluation of faculty based on feedback from informal sources of hearsay and anecdotes.

SETs call attention to the teaching aspect of academic performance which sometimes gets lost in research emphasis of some universities. Research efforts gain public recognition for their contribution to society, whereas teaching recognition is more likely to be confined to the university. Attention to teaching can engender more equity of esteem and rewards between the teaching and research components of academe. Researchers are lauded for the reception of grants which carry an economic dimension that can ease the financial burdens of the institution. Researchers seldom have to undergo the scrutiny of student evaluation that influence their future at the institution in the manner that faculty from teaching institutions endure. Favorable results from SETs can bring recognition and teaching awards that compensate for the attention given to researchers.

When faculty employ the results of SETs for improvement of their class materials, course relevance and teaching performance, student learning improves. Student satisfaction increases because they can succeed in their studies which lead to student retention and improved graduation rates. With all their drawbacks, SETs are the quickest, most efficient and cheapest method of faculty evaluation by students.

So until our researchers develop something better, SETs will probably be used on college campuses for sometime into the future. Therefore it behooves administrators to examine some factors that influence students when they are evaluating teachers.

Factors for Administrators to Consider When Evaluating Faculty

There are many factors contributing to the evaluation of teachers which are out of the realm of the instructors teaching ability. Many outside influences that go beyond the classroom determine student reaction to their courses and their instructor. Such variables as size of class, age and gender of the instructor, level of the class, years of teaching, part of the major or minor, special interest course or general studies have a strong impact on student impressions. Department chairs, faculty committees, Deans and other evaluators must be concerned about extraneous variables that influence student ratings of teachers so as to view SETs as valuable means of feedback, but an imperfect measure of teaching effectiveness.

Attention must be paid to variables beyond the instructor's teaching ability so as to avoid misuse of data that can adversely affect their evaluation of their colleague's teaching effectiveness. Franklin (2001) found that the number of years that faculty members taught influenced their ratings. This information would expect to correlate with teacher's experience. In contrast, Morrell & Soviney (1990) found that tenured full professors did not always receive the highest ratings on SETs, but often their ratings were lower than assistant professors or even lecturers. Often the full professors taught specialized classes which were usually upper level. Comments from students indicated that they thought professors taught harder classes. First year students gave the lowest ratings to their professors while seniors and graduate students rated their professors the highest. Perhaps this preference is related to the students' expectations which might become more realistic as their years in college increase. The relationship between class size and the instructor's skill varied depending upon the numbers registered. Franklin (2001, p. 96) found that students ranked instructors who are teaching small classes, fewer than 20, most highly, followed by those around twenty to forty students. "The lowest ratings occurred in classes with forty to sixty students, but ratings are slightly higher for classes over 100 students." The author surmised that students in very large classes did not have high expectations from the professor for individual attention. Since most General Education classes attract large numbers, usually 40 to 50 students, lower ratings for teachers might be expected. The type of classes influence ratings with Arts and Humanities classes receiving the highest, followed by the Social Sciences, with Math/Science and Engineering classes last. (Morell & Soviney, 1990, Franklin, 2001) found that courses concerned with practice are rated higher than more theoretical classes, indicating a preference for career oriented courses.

Students are motivated to take courses for a variety of reasons. "Courses that appeal to their academic interest are much more likely to receive favorable professor skill ratings than general education courses." (Morrell & Soviney 2001 p. 9). They also found that classes taught for major or minor credit requirements receive highest professor ratings. Students are often familiar with the instructors and enjoy a relationship with them and other students in their major. Adjuncts and lecturers usually teach classes in their specialty and attract students with high interest in their field. This may account for the high ratings from some of the career preparation courses that employ actors, newspaper reporters, broadcasters and interior designers. There has been some controversy regarding the influence of gender on student ratings of teachers. Centra & Gaubatz (2000) reported that evaluations gathered from 741 different courses taught at twenty-one different institutions showed that female faculty received significantly lower evaluations from male students than female students. Yet, male and female students did not differ in their assessment of male faculty. Merritt (2008) reports that female faculty, on the average, receive lower evaluations than their male colleagues. She cites a survey by Hamermesh & Parker (2005) that found in a multivariate analysis of 17,000 students gathered at the University of Texas, revealed significantly higher evaluations for male faculty even when controlling for course type and instructor status.

Personality Characteristics

Researchers have long known that teacher's personality characteristics and non verbal behavior have a distinct effect on student evaluations. Abrami, Perry & Leventhal (1982) conducted a meta-analysis of the research on teacher expressiveness and concluded that it had a substantial effect on overall positive ratings of SETs. More recently, Sherelin, Banyard, & Griffiths (2000) reported that the enthusiasm and expressiveness of the instructor positively influence SETs, regardless of the content of the instruction. It seems that in some cases, a professor's smiles, gestures and other mannerisms can surpass the professor's knowledge, clarity, organization and other qualities that define effective teaching.

Psychologists tell us that their research demonstrates that the human mind functions along two very different tracks, one that generates automatic, instinctive reactions and another that produces more reflective, deliberative decisions. (Sloman 2002). The non verbal behavior of smiles, frowns, raised eyebrows, shrugs and other gestures cause reactions in students that can be either positive or negative. Dress, hairstyle, voice tone, cadence and accent can all contribute to the overall non verbal impressions that can be made by teachers. Because humans respond quickly and instinctly to non verbal cues, students can form opinions of teachers that are not related to teaching proficiency. Just as teachers can readily discern the attitude of students who appear bored, hostile or confused, the students can quickly make judgments on teachers.” From the moment a faculty member walks into the room, students perceive, process and react to non verbal signals” (Merritt, 2008, p. 242). Professors’ entertaining style also has an effect on SETs. Abrami et al. (1982) found that an entertaining style increased instructor’s ratings by about 1.2 points on a 5 point scale. Lecturers who provided more content and less style received “inconsistent and much smaller boosts” in their evaluations.

A professor’s natural voice can influence the students’ perception of the professor’s competence and warmth. Individuals with attractive voices that vary in sound, tone, and emotions hold the attention of students thereby appearing to stimulate student learning. Loud voices can appear more authoritarian and knowledgeable than soft voices which can leave women and Orientals at a disadvantage. Extroverted professors who use more body gestures and expressive language are perceived by students as enthusiastic about the course. The professor’s strong interest in the course ignites in students a similar enthusiasm that leaves them with the perception that they learned more from the course. The answers to the item on most evaluation forms regarding accessibility of the professors seems to be related to personality characteristics more than expanded office hours and detailed contact information. The students perceive warmth and friendliness in the professor as accessibility out of class which can again alter the ratings of a conscientious faculty member. Although many studies show a high correlation on faculty ratings between nonverbal and personality characteristics, this correlation does not hold true for student learning. The agreeable behaviors make learning more enjoyable for students, which do not diminish its usefulness, but do not replace course content. Some faculty can attempt to learn helpful mannerism or unlearn negative ones that will make their classes more enjoyable for students. However, if they wish to increase student learning, they might better devote their time and energy to their students, class preparation and materials.

Mid Term Evaluations

Although many studies have been conducted on student evaluation of teachers, little has been written on how this feedback is used by faculty members. Feedback is often viewed as a vital source of information on the organizational level by administration, but it is also essential on the personal level of the faculty member. The teacher receiving the performance feedback can react positively using the information to improve, sustain, enhance or develop their performance in the future. There is also the possibility that they can react to objective negative feedback in a less creative manner, by blaming the low ratings on the students. Moore & Kuol (2005) see the possibility for negative feedback to have the potential to facilitate improvement in engagement as well as performance in the classroom.

Research on the validity and reliability of SETs is mixed. Some studies show that the students were fair and accurate in their evaluation of teachers (Miller 1988, Hobson & Talbot 2001, Spencer & Schmelkin 2002). Others think that so many factors such as size of class, gender of instructor, expected grade, type of class, nonverbal behavior, etc. influence the answers of students to the point that SETs are unreliable. Even though the SETs are valid and reliable, they pose a fundamental problem to instructors being evaluated because they are usually conducted at the end of the term. The timing is especially important to faculty seeking tenure or promotion, as well as part time instructors, whose performance as determined by the department chair may depend on end of semester evaluations. One of our department chairs suggested the use of midterm evaluations by faculty who desired to improve their teaching and course materials. The questions could be created by the interested faculty and only they would see the results. There would be time during the rest of the semester for the faculty member to make any adjustments to improve teaching and the course material. Brown (2008, p. 178) agrees with the use of midterm evaluations because “88.75% of the students in his study reported that instructors should conduct their mid semester evaluations.” Students believed that conducting mid semester evaluations would improve theirs and the instructors’ performance, as well as improve students’ and instructors’ attitude toward class. “Students described teachers who conduct midterm evaluations as holding clear teaching goals, committed to teaching, fulfilling responsibilities and desire to see students succeed.”

One of the benefits to midterm evaluations concerns students' perceptions. They are more likely to think that attention is paid to their feedback, especially if they see changes that they suggested occurring in the classroom. Their attitude toward an instructor who obviously has their success as a goal will influence end of term SETs. Students and faculty have a sense of combined effort to make the classroom a more satisfying environment while facilitating learning. If the teacher uses the same midterm evaluation form as the one used at the end of semester, information on student learning would be more accessible. Both students and faculty have become aware of the emphasis on student outcomes of learning. The teacher can compare mid and end of term evaluation forms to gauge the difference in student attitudes toward their own success in achieving these outcomes.

Lewis (2001) commends teachers asking for evaluation from their students early in the semester, so they can make adjustments to their teaching. Davis (2007) suggests that when teachers share the results of the survey with them, students are more likely to appreciate their teacher's efforts to make adjustments and correct misconceptions. Students would be more likely to understand the difficulties teachers face when instructors share the various percentages of student responses to such questions regarding grading, amount of course work, relevance of assignments etc. If the majority of the students thought the grading was too strict and the minority of students thought it was too lenient, students might recognize the problems that face teachers in a classroom of students with such diverse levels of ability, interest and motivation. Interested teachers can access web sites from the faculty development offices of many universities that suggest that faculty secure feedback between the third and eighth week of the semester.

Diamond (2004, p. 217) found that small group discussions facilitated by the university staff development office helped students to share their feedback regarding their teachers and course work. Students had completed a short worksheet early in the semester pertaining to ways to improve their course work and teacher's instruction. The eighty-two teachers were given summaries of the results of the discussion groups for their consideration. At the end of the semester, teachers were surveyed to discern if the feedback had any effect on their teaching. "The lecturers refined grading procedures, implemented new approaches to teaching classes, clarified their expectations of students, and refocused content emphasis before the term ended.

On line Evaluations

Some evaluation surveys are available online which makes it quicker and easier to score both, closed and open ended questions than hand scored papers. Students' concern over anonymity can be handled with their choice to block tracking information. The instructor can explain that when students receive e mail from a faculty member it will contain a link to the survey. The survey is returned to the link, not the faculty member, so the user cannot be traced. Some faculty fear that the return rate of online surveys will be less than paper forms. Donovan, Nader & Shinsky (2006) found in a study involving 519 students that the response rate was higher for students returning traditional paper ballots, 83% versus 76% of students submitting online through Blackboard. However, they did find that students answering online generated more and longer open ended responses, and more constructive comments than did traditional paper format. Perhaps students found it easier to type their opinions in a time free atmosphere without anyone recognizing their handwriting.

Considering the Needs of Department Chairs in Constructing Evaluation Instruments

Although all the departments in Arts and Humanities were thought to be using the same form designed by the Philosophy department, interviews with the department chairs revealed that this was not the case. Many of the chairs had generated their own evaluation forms or made adaptations to the one in use. Some of the more career oriented departments felt that the present form did not reflect their particular objectives. They thought that the present form was better suited for the Humanities and the General Education courses that have larger classes and stress critical thinking, life values and character development.

The career oriented departments were interested in more questions that would evaluate their courses as well as the teacher. They wanted to know which specific courses helped students with their career plans. These department chairs also would like to find out if the textbooks were helpful, an appropriate concern today with the high cost of all books. The accomplishment of learning objectives preparing students for a career was a special concern for department chairs. Some departments must consider accreditation bodies that lay outside the college, so scheduling of classes in sequence for majors becomes more important. These department chairs suggest a separate form for majors that ask questions such as, "Do the sequence of classes meet your expectations?" or "Do they help strengthen the program?"

Questions that would involve courses that demand the hiring of adjuncts, such as media reporters, broadcasters, actors, artists, and producers, become critical to fulfill accreditation requirements. Departments such as Design, Sculpture, Theater, and Jewelry are interested in the finished product so they need forms that would measure the quality of the end product as well as student effort. All of the departments wished to assess higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, critical thinking and application to life. The chairs are aware of the SUNY assessment requirements and have participated in the course assessment process. They want to prepare students for a valid assessment experience that is consistent with SUNY goals. Therefore questions that pertain to student objectives and outcomes would be helpful.

Elements for Departments to Consider When Constructing Their Own Evaluation Forms

Emery, Kramer & Tian (2003, p. 44) make a case for each department to prepare its own evaluation instrument. They warn against using the same form for everyone because it “almost guarantees that it will be unfair for everyone. Therefore each academic unit should describe and give examples how the institution’s evaluation system applies to the characteristics and circumstances of that unit and its faculty.” They also point out the disadvantages of comparisons in using a general form and suggest that only the same courses should be compared, not a English course to a music course.

Since each department has its own needs and objectives, it seems likely they might want to construct their own evaluation forms. Some suggestions for consideration that are gleaned from many recent studies that might be helpful include the following.

1. Be conscious of the purpose of the evaluation instrument. The usual purposes include
 - (a) improvement of teaching and learning
 - (b) personnel and salary increase decisions
 - (c) allocation of personnel and course resources
2. Use multiple sources of data besides SETs, such as teaching portfolios, conversations with students, peer evaluations, grading trends, syllabus expectations, etc.
3. Make the wording on the forms more achievement oriented, rather than satisfaction oriented. Add questions concerning how much the student learned from the course rather than questions about how well the instructor knew about the subject matter .Students are not knowledgeable enough to make precise judgments (Emery, et.al.2003).
4. Require students to write comments on any ratings that are unsatisfactory
5. Check for validity, does the instrument measure what it is supposed to measure? Does it link the student’s observations to the quality of the teacher’s teaching skill? If it is trying to measure student learning, then outcomes should be observed.
6. Reliability can be observed by repeated use of the form to reveal consistent indication of the characteristics being investigated.
7. A balance of quantitative and qualitative questions is needed to promote objectivity and insight.
8. A balance of questions is needed regarding teacher performance, student learning and course satisfaction.

An examination of over a hundred of studies regarding student evaluation of teachers revealed that the items comprising the evaluation instruments fell into three large categories. Departments might examine their own forms to discern if they have questions concerning (1) student background, (2) qualitative and quantitative rates for teacher’s practice (3) quantitative rates for the course.

Many instruments had an added category asking students for an overall rating of the teacher and the course. Not as many asked the student how much they learned from the course, which is strange considering assessment of student learning is such a concern for educators. The student background section contained such questions as reasons for taking the course, status, grade point average, grade expected in this class, number of absences, current credit, load, gender, and age. Researchers have seen significant correlations between these variables and the ratings given to teachers. The strongest correlations were between reasons for taking the course, year in college and gender. Interestingly, the only questionnaire that asked how many hours spent per week studying for class was created by students at the University of California at San Diego. Items regarding teacher’s relation to the course concerned preparation, organization, stimulation of interest, ability to communicate the subject matter clearly, and grading policy, Other questions centered on the teacher’s relations with students and centered on their sensitivity to students’ needs, their progress, fairness in grading, and availability outside the classroom.

Most of the responses to the open ended questions focused on personality characteristics as openness to questions, and acceptance of opposing opinions. Items regarding the course centered on clarity of course requirements and objectives, usefulness of the syllabus, review for tests, use of class time, amount of work required, quality of texts and supplementary materials. Most forms had supplementary questions about recommending the instructor and course to others. A few had a question asking students how much they learned from the course. One might expect more emphasis on student learning since that is the chief objective of teaching effectiveness. Most of the forms asked open ended questions regarding satisfaction with course and suggestions for improvement. One would expect considerable space to be given to students responses to questions regarding self improvement, since it is a basic purpose of SETs. Concern over the use of feedback for self improvement has caused some authors to focus on feedback reaction from teachers. Moore & Kuol (2005, p.61), call attention to the significance of individual's reaction to feedback. "Feedback has a more direct bearing on subsequent efforts to improve, sustain, enhance or develop performance into the future." Usually it is the department chair who must discuss the feedback, either positive or negative with the faculty members. This delicate task can be more effective and satisfying if the evaluation instrument shows validity by testing for its purpose to assess for teacher effectiveness.

If department chairs follow their own suggestions to create their own evaluation instruments, they might want to investigate more thoroughly some of the factors that influence feedback by students. They might consider such factors as upper level, major or minor courses, general education courses, size of class, gender and non verbal behavior of the instructor, all of which can influence student's perceptions. Our Department chairs' attitudes toward creating their own evaluation forms rather than using the standardized form presently in use for all ten departments of the School of Arts and Humanities appear consistent with the other colleges of the State University System. Letters were sent to all 64 campuses of SUNY requesting evaluation forms used by their Arts and Humanities Departments. Only two Universities and one community college returned forms that were standardized by their Arts and Humanities Schools. Since the department chairs bear the responsibility for the use of student evaluations of teaching, including feedback, promotion and salary increments, it is hopeful that this research might help them in their critical decisions. One of these decisions might be to abandon the standard form used by all the departments in the School of the Arts and Humanities in favor of creating their own which would be more favorable to their needs.

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