

Other Ammunition

I have been actively researching the issues related to the use (and misuse) of Student Evaluations of Instruction since 1989. It saddens me to say that it appears that Student Evaluations of Instructions are here to stay until such time as our educational institutions implode -- which seems to be in progress as we speak. Note the current political admissions that our EI-hi schools are failing and the recent drive to incorporate more and more K-12 Charter Schools (Michigan). Unfortunately, Charter Schools, like student evaluations of instruction, will not solve the problems related to teacher competence, grade inflation, poor learning environments, and poor student scholastic achievement scores. Solving problems, needless to say, require correctly identifying the root causes.

FOR STARTERS, GRADE INFLATION, POOR STUDENT ATTENDANCE, POOR STUDENT DISCIPLINE, AND POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE WHICH RENDER COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY DEGREES AND ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS MEANINGLESS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE USE OF SEIs. THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY THAT TWO PEOPLE CAN UNBIASEDLY EVALUATE ONE ANOTHER. THEREFORE, THE USE OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF INSTRUCTION (SEIs) TO MEASURE INSTRUCTOR PERFORMANCE ARE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS. THEY ALSO ERODE AN INSTRUCTOR'S AUTHORITY AND STATUS WHICH USE TO COMMAND A VERY HIGH LEVEL OF RESPECT AND ESTEEM.

Much of glue holding the problems together are rooted in a lack of discipline in the classrooms, a lack of respect for the instructors who willing share years of knowledge with their students, a lack of respect for our education facilities, misguided administrative teams who are business and customer oriented, and a society that just does not get. Such attitudes and concomitant behaviors are, by all account, pervasive throughout the general population. Let it suffice to say that education can only start when discipline has been achieved. And, no instructor who is perceived to be subordinate by students who fill out evaluations on the instructor can maintain discipline.

To fix the problems, we need to: Change the laws which serve to diminish the authority of instructors; change the laws that promote frivolous lawsuits against instructors and educational institutions (even if an instructor prevails in a court of law, he still loses -- financial cost, lost time, aggravation, impact on mental and physical health, irreparable damage to reputation, becoming excessively cautious due to fear of future lawsuits, etc.); and, abolish the laws that strip away individuals rights to use lethal force to defend oneself, and protect property against the social deviates that infest society (like sociopaths that threaten teachers or decide to come back to school to shoot their teachers because they have difficulty accepting the fact that they have not performed well).

You asked: What can be done to get Student Evaluations of Instruction outlawed? My answer: It will take a nation-wide campaign which can only be achieved with the support of virtually every union and nonunion faculty member in this country. The first thing that has to be done to get the majority of instructors to recognize the damage that has been done to society, the students, and the educational profession by those that have unwittingly and steadfastly promoted and supported the use of SEIs. Secondly, we need to elect lawmakers in every state, and in the US Congress that will abolish every foolish law that have been enacted over the past forty years that serves to undermine the social system, and the fundamental concepts of freedom (do we really have academic freedom in the classroom this day and age? -- I don't think so. Not when an instructor can get disciplined or fired for saying "****" or "damn" in the classroom because it offends someone's tender ears). Moreover, we need lawmakers that will make laws that permit instructors (at their sole discretion) to kick students out of their classes who are disruptive, that refuse to follow instructions, or who are disrespectful, without having to fear student retaliation. Why should instructors be forced to teach individuals who have no respect for them, or be forced to put up with deviant student behavior, or face a hearing or a lawsuit for removing them from class?

Moreover, we need to promote the concept that it is the instructors who are doing the students a favor when they share their knowledge and skills with the students. It is not the students who are doing the instructors a favor. We need to promote the concept that the knowledge and skills the instructors possess cannot simply be bought like a \$2.85 hamburger. Those things can only be achieved through guidance and hard work. And, we need instructors who are willing to help get rid of administrators who have shifted their support away from the faculty to students (the student-as-a-customer concept). The weight of control in the classroom must be shifted from the students back into the hands of the faculty. And, that means ending the administrative use of SEIs. In addition, we need administrators and control boards that are fearless when it comes to backing up instructors. Moreover, we need administrators: Who readily recognize the negative effective of SEIs, and are prepared to immediately stop the practice; who recognize the fact that some students can and will manipulate instructors and the system to enhance their grades or lighten their loads (there is ample evidence to show that students can and do lie or distort facts); and, we need administrators who are more than willing to look at and incorporate other more meaningful and effective methods to measure teaching effectiveness, and student academic achievement.

All of this, of course, starts with the systematic process of replacing administrators, and electing new congressmen (people who are not in the habit of lying to get hired or elected).

Donald Seagle, Ph.D.

With SETs collected each semester, asking a professor to teach students difficult material rigorously is akin to asking a condemned teacher to buy her own coffin.

D. Larry Crumbley