

Editorial

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Who are Better at Evaluating Faculty Teaching Peers or Students?

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In any Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System it is important to define the broad range of roles that faculty must play in order to be successful. It is also important to identify the sources of information necessary to evaluate faculty performance in their various roles.

One of the roles that are always present in any comprehensive faculty evaluation system is that of Teaching. There are a plethora of articles and books on the most appropriate sources for evaluating this role such as Dean, Department Head, Peers, Students, Self, etc. Of these sources, students have received the greatest amount of attention over the past 50 or more years. For many of those concerned with the use of student ratings of faculty teaching, peer evaluation has been presented as the antidote. This typically manifests itself in the form of peers conducting classroom visitations and observations. When peers conduct classroom visitations and observations they typically represent a very limited sample of class meetings and are conducted without the benefit of a reliable and valid observational checklist. In addition, peers tend to judge the observed faculty member's performance against their own personal standards, which may or may not be appropriate. Therefore, typical peer evaluation of classroom teaching, tends to yield unreliable and invalid data upon which to judge a particular faculty member's teaching performance.

Students, on the other hand, are daily observers and participants in the faculty member's classroom. They are able to engage the faculty member in discussion and verify the veracity of the information being presented in the classroom. They are able to attest to the ability of the faculty member to motivate and lead or direct their learning. Therefore, when students are provided with professionally constructed, appropriately administered and correctly interpreted student rating forms, they are an excellent source of reliable and valid measures of the quality of classroom teaching. Over 90 years of studies on student ratings emphasize that the students are the best source of information on the design, delivery and implementation of classroom teaching.

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