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Student Ratings of Instruction: Recognizing Effective Teaching: Second Edition

Nira Hativa

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Student evaluation of teaching (SET), or teacher evaluation by students in higher education, titled here student ratings of instruction (SRI), is a most frequently researched and discussed issues in American educational literature. This book is designed for faculty members of all types of higher education institutions and all academic domains who are frustrated, angered, or distrustful of their students' ratings, and would appreciate answers to their concerns. The book may also be of help to academic administrators—in answering faculty complaints about and objections to student ratings. The interpretation of student ratings as a measure of teaching effectiveness is very controversial. Every year, many new publications claim to "prove" that SRIs are unreliable and invalid, leading faculty and administrators to question the appropriateness of using student ratings to guide personnel decisions. This book presents dozens of concerns, beliefs, and misconceptions, and 'myths' regarding potential biasing factors affecting SRIs that have been reported over the years, and that seem to persist and continue spreading. It also presents highly established research evidence refuting these misconceptions and beliefs. This evidence reveals that SRIs soundly correlate with student learning, with the conceptual structure of effective teaching, and with other criterion measures of effective instruction (i.e. alumni, peer, expert, observer, and self ratings). It also shows that factors controllable by the instructor but unrelated to effective teaching (e.g., course difficulty/workload, grades) as well as factors uncontrollable by the instructor (e.g., class size, discipline) do not bias SRI results. Altogether, the book presents impressive research evidence for the reliability and validity of SRI results. One of the most popular but potentially damaging faculty beliefs is that they can "bribe" students and buy higher ratings by entertaining students, and by reducing difficulty/workload and giving undeserved high grades. Faculty holding this belief may be tempted to manipulate these factors, e.g., to grade higher and to lower the level of difficulty/workload, in order to receive higher ratings from students. These counterproductive behaviors may lead to watering-down the course material and to a decline in the work students invest in their courses, adversely affecting their learning and eventually resulting in and the "dumbing down" of college education. This book presents convincing research evidence that these manipulative behaviors are mostly ineffective in raising teacher ratings. The book incorporates the scholarship of a wide range of researchers and practitioners, including the author's own accumulated knowledge and experience throughout over 30 years of research and practice in this domain. Because this book is designed for administrators and faculty members of a wide spectrum of institutions and academic domains, the content is designed to be simple and intuitive, with no professional jargon or knowledge, so as to make reading easy and smooth for the entire range of target readers. The book also provides simple illustrations of many of the main issues involved, based on studies implemented by the author and often demonstrated through tables and graphs. This book complements another book by the same author that is being published concurrently: Student Ratings of Instruction: A Practical Approach to Designing, Operating, and Reporting. Nonetheless, it can be read independently of the other book. The two books jointly integrate and summarize the conclusions of the major relevant research and publications on student ratings to date, and constitute a reasonably comprehensive overview of the main theoretical and practical issues related to SRIs in higher education.

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