

Resource Guide

Student Ratings of Teaching: What Can They Tell Us?

While there are many ways to assess teaching, student ratings (also known as student evaluations) of teaching are certainly the most common. Student ratings cannot tell us everything we may want to know about the teaching and learning in a class, but they can be useful as one component of teaching assessment when we look at what information they can show. Below are three areas in which student ratings can be useful formative feedback for instructors.

- **Dimensions of Ratings that are Most Often Found Reliable**

After examining several different factor analysis studies, Hativa reports that the most reliable dimensions of teaching that can be rated by students are those behaviors that have a high correlation both to evidence of actual student learning and to students' perception of satisfaction with the teacher because of those behaviors. These so-called "general teaching behaviors" are: "**making the lessons clear, organized, and engaging/interesting**; and **maintaining interactions** (questioning and answering, discussing), and **rappor with students** (interest in and care/concern about students and their learning, motivating students)" (226). Thus, when looking at student ratings of teaching, these areas are most likely to show valid and reliable results.

- **Student Experiences of a Course**

Beyond reliability and validity, we also know that student ratings of teaching tell a great deal about how students feel about **consistency and fairness, instructor tone, and instructor investment in student success**. As seen in the above point, they also reveal a great deal about how students experience a course and instructor organization.

- **Student Perception of Learning**

While not necessarily a reliable or valid tool to measure actual student learning, student ratings of teaching do tell us a great deal about students' *perceptions* of their learning in a class. This information can be quite helpful to an instructor as a way of assessing how introductions to, treatments of, and frameworks around various lessons have supported or hindered students as they work with content and skills in a course. Instructors can also glean information about the extent to which students can identify when they are learning (or have learned) in a course. This is certainly helpful in assessing how one might assist students in understanding the learning process in a particular discipline in different ways.

Clyson, Dennis E. "Student Evaluations of Teaching: Are They Related to What Students Learn?: A Meta-Analysis." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Vol.17, 48-62.

Hativa, Nira. *Student Ratings of Instruction: A Practical Approach to Designing, Operating, and Reporting*, 2nd Ed. Create Space, 2014.

Wieman, Carl. "A Better Way to Evaluate Undergraduate Teaching." *Change Magazine*. January/February 2015.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at ctl@slu.edu.