GUIDEBOOK
For Evaluating Teaching

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Extra

PART III:
Collecting Evaluative Information About Teaching: Other Student Sources and Colleagues

Abstract

In Part III of the Guidebook, we continue our discussion of specific strategies that are utilized for collecting information from students — written appraisals, interviews, and achievement tests. Later sections include collecting information from colleagues — course materials, instructional development and advising and classroom observation. Readers are urged to review Exhibit 3 in Part II for our perspective. See **NACTA Journal** *March 1984, p. 19.*

Section 8: Method of Collecting Data From Students: Written Appraisals

Student written comments to open-ended questions are used extensively by faculty, primarily for examining strengths and weaknesses of their courses and instructional style. Students can be asked to comment about specific components of a course or about the course in general. The questions can be about assessments of current practices or suggestions for improvement. Written comments are one of the most resourceful pieces of information to faculty in revising their courses and their teaching style.

Examples

Developing a set of open-ended questions is a relatively easy task. They can be written on a chalkboard, plain sheets, or included as part of the student rating form. Suggested items are listed on page 24 of the **ICES Catalog.**

In the ICES system, four open-ended questions are included on side two of every ICES form. They are:

1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the instructor?,
2. What aspects of this course were most beneficial to you?,
3. What do you suggest to improve this course?, and
4. Comment on the grading procedures and the exams.

Exhibit 10. Generalizations About the Technical Quality of Student Written Appraisals

1. Student written comments to open-ended ICES questions are diverse and include comments about both the instructor and the course. (1)
2. Students tend to focus their comments on instructor characteristics (enthusiasm, rapport) and what they learned rather on the organization and structure of the course. (1)
3. Students give few detailed suggestions about how to improve a course. They are better critics than course designers. (1)
4. Faculty regard student written comments as less credible than student responses to the ICES global items when the information is for personnel decisions. Faculty regard written comments as more credible when the purpose was self-improvement. (7)
5. Global overall ratings of the instructor and course based on student responses to scaled items, written comments, and student interviews are similar. Thus the method of collecting information does not influence student evaluations of the overall teaching competence of an instructor or the quality of the course. (6)

Suggestions for Use

Student written comments are best used for improvement purposes. Written comments about specific aspects of a course or teaching strategy are specially helpful to gain a flavor of the course from the student's perspective. If written comments are used for personnel decisions, they need to be used judiciously. Some safeguards are listed below.

Using Student Written Appraisals for Personnel Decisions

1. All comments from all students are seldom practical to record and transmit to another person.
2. A random sample of comments can be used to counteract bias in selection.
3. A summarization of the comments should be done by someone other than the instructor being evaluated.
4. Comments from students in very small classes generally need to be interpreted within the context of the small class size.

Using Student Written Appraisals for Improvement

1. Student comments can be requested at any time during the semester and can be done frequently, but precautions such as anonymity and the instructor's

ability to treat negative remarks constructively are necessary.

2. If an instructor desires information about a specific feature of the course, the question should be specifically worded. (The categories of the ICES catalog can be used to identify major areas.)

3. Some students may get very personal and critical in their comments, so an instructor needs to be prepared to deal with all kinds of responses.

4. Students are better at writing what they liked/-disliked and considered to be worthwhile/worthless then analyzing why or at making suggestions for improving the course structure or teaching style.

5. It is not recommended that students be asked to include their names on the evaluation. However, students may be reluctant to be candid if they think their identity can be determined by their handwriting style.

6. An instructor needs to view written appraisals as constructive criticism and consider the potential impact of negative comments on the student-instructor relationship if comments are collected during the semester.

7. Instructors can prevent unnecessary bias by reading the final student evaluations after they turn in the course grades.

8. Discussion of the student comments with another faculty member or a staff member from the Office of Instructional Resources can be very helpful in discussing problems and suggestions for improvement.

Section 9: Method of Collecting Data From Students: Interviews

An interview with enrolled students is used to provide information about the course and the instructor's teaching style. The interview can be conducted individually or in groups and the interviewer can be a faculty colleague or a professional staff trained in faculty development and evaluation. The interview can be highly, semi- or non-structured and the purpose could be for a personnel decision or improvement.

A group interview is recommended if the instructor wishes to learn how students react to a specific aspect of the course. If the interview is properly handled, students have considerable freedom to express their views and the interviewer has the opportunity to pursue topics and concerns brought up in the interview. Thus an interviewer can uncover unusual strengths and weaknesses as well as contrast students' comments with evaluations obtained by other methods such as scales and written comments.

Although the interview has several advantages, the cost of interviewing is substantial relative to student ratings or written appraisals. Individual interviews are especially expensive because of their labor intensity. Thus interviewing is seldom a routine way to gain information from students.

Exhibit 11: Generalizations About the Technical Quality of Student Interviews

1. Global overall ratings of the instructor and course based on student responses to scaled items, written comments, and student interviews are similar. Thus the method of collecting information does not influence student evaluations of the overall teaching competence of an instructor or the quality of the course. (1,6)

2. Student interview summaries are rated as more trustworthy by faculty for promotion than are student responses to the ICES global items and student written comments. (7)

3. Representativeness of student comments in the interview can be suspect if not all students participate in an interview and/or if individual students in a group dominate the interview and try to persuade others to go along with their views. (4)

Technical Quality

Generalizations regarding the technical quality of group interviews are presented in Exhibit 11.

Suggestions for Using Student Interviews

There are several ways group interviews can be conducted. Two of the most common both involve someone other than the instructor being in charge of a 20-30 minute interview conducted during class time. In one approach, the interviewer (either a colleague or staff member trained in faculty development and evaluation) organizes students into small groups of 5-6, asks each group of students to decide on strengths and weaknesses of the course, and to make suggestions. This can be done in approximately 10 minutes. In the latter part of the session the evaluator collects information from each group and summarizes the major themes, asking the groups to help form a consensus of opinion. The evaluator writes a summary and shares the written report with the instructor. In the other group interview approach, one person conducts the interviews, while another person records the comments. All students in a class are interviewed as one group. (Suggestions for conducting this type of interview are listed below under "Using Student Interviews for Improvement.")

Using Student Interviews For Personnel Decisions

1. The information obtained from an interview is qualitative and difficult to summarize in numerical terms. Thus its use for personnel evaluations is most appropriate when an indepth review and analysis of the instructor's behavior is needed.

2. Students should be informed of the purpose of the interview.

3. If several groups are interviewd, an interview schedule can insure uniformity of procedures.

Using Student Interviews For Improvement

1. The interviewer(s) can be faculty colleagues or staff trained in faculty development and evaluation. The interview is best considered as an initial step in an ongoing process of change and development.

2. The interviewer(s) can benefit by meeting with the

instructor to discuss the instructor's goals for the course, perspective of the course, and potential problem areas, course requirements such as tests, and arrange for a follow up session to the interview.

3. The interviewer(s) should develop and use a semi-structured interview schedule.

4. If possible, one person of the team can take the lead in asking the questions while the other takes extensive notes. Since students' confidentiality needs to be protected, tape recording the interview is unwise. There is no reason why the instructor should have access to interview notes (or to tape recordings, if available).

5. Groups of 10-15 students are preferred. Interviewers need to try to obtain comments from as many students as possible and not let vocal students dominate the input and tone of the interview. On getting the show of hands, the interviewer can obtain the degree of agreement or disagreement to an expressed opinion.

6. At least 20 minutes generally is needed for a group interview. The instructor can introduce the interviewer but is not to be present during the interview. The interviewers can introduce themselves and inform students of the procedures to be used and the distribution of the report. Arranging in a semi-circle or around a table often makes the interview more informal and conversational.

7. A 1-3 page written summary of each interview helps the interviewer focus on the major points raised in the interview. The report should be diagnostic and descriptive in style; impressions of the interviewer are to be clearly identified as such.

8. The interviewer(s) can maximize the value of the interview by meeting with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss the interview summary and to discuss alternative practices.

Section 10: Method for Collecting Data From Students: Tests of Achievements

Most faculty consider student achievement as the most defensible criterion for assessing the competence of an instructor and/or the attainment of the course learning objectives. Unfortunately, achievement tests,

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Exhibit 12: Three Major Ways of Judging Amount of Student Learning

1. Different instructors teaching the same course can be compared in terms of student performance on a common exam, provided the students in the classes are relatively comparable in ability, prior knowledge of subject matter, and motivation. Unfortunately seldom are all differences among students in various classes of little or no consequence. (3)

2. Pre and post-course test score differences can be used to obtain an index of learning. There is an obvious problem with this strategy. For example, an instructor could construct difficult pre-course exams and easy post-course exams, which would result in large pre-post differences. (3)

3. A pre-established number of students in a course who answer correctly a specified percentage of test items; e.g., 75, 80, or 90 percent can be used as an indicator of student learning. (3)

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homework assignments, or course grades are seldom used as indicators or measures of teaching competence. Their lack of use is due to tradition and to interpretation problems.

Technical Quality

Measures of student achievement, when used as criteria for assessing instructor competence are to be appropriate, valid, reliable, and fair. An **appropriate** measure assesses student outcomes that are intended to be affected by classroom instruction. For example, a history instructor should not be judged by his/her students' performance on a general achievement exam. A **valid** measure assesses student performance on the specific goals and objectives of the course. A **reliable** measure produces similar results on different administrations. If the scoring of a test or assignment is not done with care, the results can not be trustworthy. Finally, when comparisons are made among performances of students in different sections of the same course, a **fair** measure would not place any instructor of a course section at an advantage or disadvantage. For example, all instructors should have the same knowledge of and access to the test prior to its administration. Exhibit 12 lists major ways in which student achievement can be judged.

Suggestions for Use

Student achievement can be an extremely important piece of information for an overall evaluation of an instructor if the display of test information is interpretable. Interpretation is dependent upon type of test employed and thus a description of the examination procedures and philosophy adopted by an instructor is essential to understanding the display of the achievement data.

Using Tests of Achievement For Personnel Decisions

1. Student performance in classroom exams is one important piece of evaluative information. Despite its intrinsic value as a criterion for evaluation, it seldom can be the sole criterion for assessing teaching competence.

2. Comparisons among performances of students in different sections of the same course are only valid if the course goals are specified, students are randomly assigned to each section, and testing conditions are constant for all students (e.g., identical tests, testing time).

3. Absolute and relative evaluations of student performance should be clearly identified. If no comparisons can be made among different sections of classes, then judgments about achievement in a given class may require consultation with other colleagues familiar with the course content and types of students enrolled in the course.

Using Student Achievements For Improvement

1. Frequent informal quizzes can be given as a check on progress for both the student and the instructor. This strategy also affects the study habits of some students

which may be beneficial in courses where a consistent steady study pattern is needed.

2. Information collected from students through the use of matrix sampling (not all students receive every item, but a portion of students receive a portion of the test items) can result in more coverage of the material for a given length of time. The tests can not be used for grading but total time spent taking exams by students is greatly reduced.

Section 11: Colleagues as Sources

Colleagues include faculty peers, departmental administrators, and professional staff trained in faculty evaluation and development. Colleagues have the best perspective to evaluate relevance and recency of content, course goals, accuracy of content presented, and the professional behavior of the instructor. However, colleague evaluations of instructional competence must be done with considerable care and planning. A formal peer evaluation program in which faculty in a department are serving as evaluators can influence professional relationships and department collegiality as well as the relationship between the departmental leadership and the faculty. Although faculty members may consider a formal system more fair than an informal one, they still may be reluctant to engage in an elaborate formal system of evaluation. If a pervasive judgmental climate emerges, it can be counterproductive. If faculty members think they are spending too much time evaluating others or are being continually evaluated, they may regard evaluation as an unnecessary intrusion on their time to carry out their responsibilities as a scholar and teacher. Thus each departmental faculty needs to develop its own plan of colleague evaluation, and faculty involvement is necessary before a credible system is operative.

There are three areas in which colleagues who have the necessary expertise in the discipline of the faculty member being evaluated can provide useful information: (1) observations of the instructor in the classroom, (2) appraisal of course materials, and (3) evaluation of instructor in instructional development activities and advising.

Course Materials

Faculty colleagues are especially useful in providing evaluative information about an instructor's course syllabi, assignments, testing and grading practices, text selection, and student achievements. Not only is this form of evaluation relatively nonthreatening to the instructor, but this type of evaluation properly uses the expertise of the faculty colleagues. Peers do not need to enter the classroom to conduct this evaluation, and they can do it in a relatively short period of time. A meeting with the instructor also allows for an explanation of course goals, the type of students enrolled in the course, and special problems and constraints.

Suggestions for Using Evaluations of Course Materials

1. A number of areas of course materials can be evaluated by faculty peers. A checklist can be organized into three areas — course organization; readings, projects, and laboratory assignments; and exams and grading.

2. Instructors can realistically only be evaluated for those decisions regarding the course for which they have full control.

3. Colleagues need sufficient knowledge of the instructor's field to adequately judge the relevance and currency of course materials.

Instructional Development and Advising

Faculty are also in a good position to evaluate out-of-class instruction activities such as instructional and curricular development, academic, vocational or professional advising and instructional research. However, colleagues who evaluate a faculty member need more than secondhand knowledge to conduct a comprehensive evaluation. A checklist of items classified into four areas (colleagueship, participation in university community, vocational and personal advising, and academic and thesis advising) may be desirable. This can be used as a guide to obtain a comprehensive assessment of an instructor's involvement in out-of-classroom activities.

Classroom Observations

Classroom behavior is the third area that colleagues can evaluate. Observations of classroom behavior are intended for evaluating the teaching process and its possible relationship to student learning. The focus is on the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of both the instructor and the students in the classroom. The effects of instruction such as student learning are not studied per se.

EXHIBIT 13: Generalizations About the Technical Quality of Classroom Observations

1. An observer may affect the teaching-learning process in the classroom. The instructor and students may act differently when an observer is present. (5)

2. Colleague ratings based on classroom observations are not highly reliable. Based on classroom observations, colleagues do not agree on an instructor's classroom instructional effectiveness. (2)

3. The relationship between observed instructor behavior in the classroom and student learning is not very strong. Certain instructional behaviors do not always result in increased student learning. (2)

4. Colleague ratings are not highly related to student ratings of the instructor's effectiveness in the course, if class time was well spent and if the instructor was open to other viewpoints. (2)

5. Colleagues and students reasonably agree on specific instructional practices. They agree on descriptions of activities but not on their judgments of instructional quality. (2)

6. Colleagues are more generous in their ratings than are students. Almost all colleagues rate their peers as excellent or good instructors. (2)

Technical Quality

Generalizations regarding the technical quality of classroom observations are presented in Exhibit 13.

Suggestions for Using Classroom Observations

Peer evaluations of a faculty member's classroom behavior can be based on checklists, rating scales, or written appraisals. Colleague written appraisals are open-ended and provide the best opportunity for a colleague to not only select what to observe or to judge but also how to interpret the information and structure the evaluation. Colleague evaluation is particularly appropriate for examining specific instructor behaviors of interest to the instructor. Peer evaluations are generally more useful for improvement purposes than for personnel decisions. Suggestions for each use are listed below.

Using Classroom Observations For Personnel Decisions

1. Those observing need to respect the instructor being evaluated. A faculty member with a strong personal dislike or lack of respect for a colleague may have difficulty being fair.
2. Observations by more than one colleague are recommended, since colleagues — quite naturally — rely on their own experiences, values, and definitions of effective teaching in making evaluations. Cross-checking of interpretations and judgments is a good strategy for establishing reliable and credible information. Agreements may not be even possible or desired, since observers often vary in their definitions of effective instruction.
3. At least three or four classroom observations for a given class over a single semester are needed to insure adequate representation. An observation is suspect if only one classroom visit is made.
4. Colleague judgments about classroom teaching style and relationships with students need to be used judiciously. A focus on substantive issues, such as sequence of topics, recency and accuracy of the content presented, scholarship, ethical and professional conduct such as racism or sexism is the most appropriate.
5. If different colleagues are writing appraisals, based on observations, the areas to be evaluated should be agreed upon in advance. The quality of teacher performance observed can be left to the discretion of each colleague conducting the observations.
6. A summary of different colleague evaluations can be made to point out and possibly reconcile differences in observations and judgments. This summary should be communicated to the instructor rather than the individual colleague assessments.

Using Classroom Observations For Improvement

1. Colleagues should be only one source from which to collect evaluative information.
2. Faculty from similar academic disciplines can best assess an instructor's ability to present his/her scholarship to students, appropriate level of difficulty of material presented, relevance of examples, integration of topics, structure of the lecture, and congruence between intents and accomplishments by the classroom activity.
3. During in-class observations, an observer cannot simultaneously record every transaction or behavior. Thus, a focus on specific areas is beneficial. General areas to observe include: (1) importance and suitability of content, (2) organization of content, (3) presentation style, (4) clarity of presentation, (5) questioning ability, and (6) establishing and maintaining contact with students.
4. A method for recording the classroom observations is desirable. A rating of class behaviors rather than frequency of occurrence of specific behaviors is recommended.
5. Faculty who trust and respect each other are necessary for open and honest exchange about strengths and weaknesses and possible ways to improve.
6. Faculty members with considerable teaching experience and competence are generally the best evaluation consultants for instructional improvement purposes.
7. A consultant trained in faculty evaluation and development can be employed to point out strengths and weaknesses, and to discuss alternative ways of organizing the course structure and teaching.
8. A colleague and the instructor should meet before the initial observation is made. In this meeting the colleague can receive copies of the course materials, learn the overall goals of the course and the intent of the class period(s) to be observed, discuss a method of observation, and arrange for post observation meetings. Instructors may also suggest concerns and course dimensions on which they would like feedback. A written appraisal of the observation to be communicated to the instructor is most useful if it includes information about specific teaching behaviors. If the report includes suggestions for alternative ways to improve teaching performance, the report is generally considered more useful.
9. A meeting following the observation is especially valuable for discussing the observations.
10. Videotaping classroom activity can often provide instructors with an insightful portrayal of their teaching. Videotaping, however, should be

used cautiously. Since the medium focuses on the teaching performance and physical appearance of the instructor, more than one videotaping may be needed before the instructors can concentrate on the content of the lecture and their teaching skills.

11. Colleague appraisal based on classroom observation or videotape is especially useful in a continuous program of evaluation for course improvement purposes. The issues of confidentiality, authenticity of the behavior, obtrusiveness of the observers, and subjectivity in evaluating classroom behaviors can more easily be dealt with if the instructor has the opportunity to respond and discuss the evaluations.

Conclusion: Part III

Students and colleagues are generally considered the primary sources for information on the evaluation of teaching. Hopefully, we have summarized in Parts II and III the most important aspects in an overall strategy utilizing those sources. In Part IV, we complete our discussion of strategies with self as a source, alumni and records. Additionally, we conclude with sections on how to synthesize the various strategies in preparing quality documentation. Part IV will be published in the December 1984 issue of **NACTA Journal.**

Part III — Bibliography

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Extension Education System In the Third World

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Introduction

World poverty is overwhelming in the rural third world, a fact which has fueled the exodus of millions into hopelessly crowded urban centers (UN, 1979). To alleviate rural poverty, a realistic approach could be to perceive the farming systems and practices utilized by small farmers as factors in social adaptation for survival and to assist the farmers in improving them. Peasant farmers should be persuaded that change is possible and that they have sufficient knowledge and ability to make change happen. Therefore, rural people should be provided with community education for development through which "community members come together to identify their problems and needs, seek solutions among themselves, mobilize the necessary resources and execute a plan of action or learning or both" (Compton & McClusky, 1978, p. 229). The extension education system can provide information regarding social, economic, cultural, and human needs of people in the rural Third World and then assist them to utilize the information to achieve community education to make life better for themselves.

Purpose

Many foreign students in the United States are enrolled in agricultural extension and education (Thuemmel & Welton, 1979). This study documents the self-reported perception of a group of international graduate students of extension education about selected policies, characteristics, and responsbilities of the extension education system in the context of the Third World. Results of the study could be used in the design and implementation of rural community development programs in the Third World.

Procedures

This research employed a descriptive survey in the form of a national census study. The study population was 115 international graduate students in extension education from 33 countries at 26 land-grant universities as of Autumn 1982. The data for this investigation

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