

ULFA Statement on the use of Student Evaluations of Teaching

A review of the literature on the use of Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET) reveals that discriminatory attitudes including but not limited to racism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and sexism are endemic to this form of performance review, especially those that are anonymous. It is therefore the Association's recommendation that SET be used for the purposes of self-evaluation and can not be *required* for the purposes of external evaluations in Salary, Tenure, and Promotion decisions, unless submitted by the academic staff member themselves.

Many of the older studies have been contentious or contradictory, but it does seem that on the whole that women are systematically rated lower than men, especially by male students. Both genders are at a disadvantage if they are gender non-conforming or act outside of what are considered to be stereotypically gendered behaviours. "...women must work harder to demonstrate both warmth and competence merely to be rated equally to their male peers, and they are more susceptible to the negative reactions from others in both domains." (El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, & Ceynar, 2018, p.3). Racialized faculty also tend to receive lower ratings, as do non-native English speakers. SETs can be more of a measure of likeability, attractiveness, and charisma than actual teaching effectiveness, and students have been show to do equally well (or better) when taught by low-rated instructors than highly rated ones. A review of the literature (attached) overwhelmingly shows the inherent biases in these evaluations.

CAUT has recently (November 2017) produced a [Draft Model Clause on the Evaluation of Teaching Performance](#) which states in section 2.2 that "Anonymous commentary, regardless of how it is collected, shall not be seen or used by individuals other than the member" and in section 2.6, "Student opinion surveys shall not be used for teaching performance evaluation". It also stipulates, in section 2.4, that any evaluation should take into consideration all factors about the class include the subject matter, class size, and experience of the instructor, all which have been shown in the literature to affect student evaluations. It goes on to recommend that the context of the course, pedagogical methods used, and the rest of the teaching dossier submitted must be given due consideration. CAUT's website has a short statement on the [Use of Student Opinion Surveys](#) which simply states that "Because surveys of student opinion about teaching to not measure teaching effectiveness, and because research shows that they involve prejudices to the disadvantage of equity-seeking groups, student opinion surveys should not be used in any career procedures and decisions making involving staff."

Other institutions in Canada have been grappling with this issue as well. A highly contentious vote by the U of A's GFC favoured the continued use of SET, but not without [controversy and conflicting evidence](#). The University of Ontario Institute of Technology released a working group [final report](#) earlier this year which notes that the use of evaluations is more useful for formative (self-evaluation) purposes than summative (external evaluation) due to the evidence that SET may not be statistically valid.

Universities in the US have been more successful in creating strong statements advocating against the use of SETs for evaluative purposes; for example, see [TEP Statement on Student Evaluation of Teaching, University of Oregon](#), which based its recommendation on many of the same resources cited in our literature review. See also "[A guide to best practice for evaluating teaching](#)" from the University of

Washington which discusses other ways that teaching could be evaluated for tenure and promotion purposes, and how to counter bias in SET. Some alternatives include peer reviews, alumni reviews, midterm reviews, and self-assessments. Examples of self-evaluative techniques that can generate constructive feedback from students may include but are not limited to instructor administered, stop, start and continue mid and end-term questionnaires or brief self-generated surveys that ask students to identify what they have learned and/or what they see or understand differently as a result of the course content.

The Faculty Handbook has recognized that the evaluation of teaching should not be based exclusively on student evaluations, as stated in Article 12.01.1 Teaching Effectiveness: *“Effectiveness as a teacher implies a concentrated and successful effort to create the best possible learning situation for students. It involves continuing attention to course work, course design and related activities; and to the supervision of students in alternative modes of learning. It may involve participation in seminars and colloquia, the design of innovative methods of teaching, or other contributions to the teaching activities of the University. Effectiveness as a teacher may be assessed by a variety of means including evaluation by fellow Faculty Members and through student appraisals though no assessment will be based mainly on student appraisals.”* This means that evaluations are NOT a required part of the package submitted. It is incumbent on members, department chairs, and Deans to be aware of the many other ways that teaching may be assessed and include, or advise their members to include, those other forms of assessment in their evaluation packages.

In closing, the Association recommends that the use of SET be for the exclusive use of the instructor, and should not be used for evaluative purposes unless submitted by the academic staff member. If they are used, they should be used mid-term to avoid some of the effects, and faculty, chairs, and Deans need to be educated on the potential biases within SET and how to adjust for them. Putting value in other evidence such as teaching materials, narratives around teaching, and peer reviews of teaching and standardizing the use of other measures will render SET unnecessary for summative evaluations.

Approved by the Executive Committee, Meeting No. 13, February 28, 2018