Student Interest In Evaluating OSU Administration

Do students wish to evaluate the OSU Administration in the way they already evaluate professors and courses?

Given a chance to indicate what aspects of the university the students considered it most important for them to evaluate, one group has recently given priority ratings to items on a list of services they receive at OSU. While not yet fully developed as a scientific survey reaching a fully representative sample of students, still I believe the ratings given by the students provide a significant indication of the general direction of student priorities for expanded evaluation beyond merely the classroom and the professor.

The sample survey asked students who had just completed a course evaluation to indicate what other aspects of the university community they would "consider most important to have such an opportunity to render an evaluation." On a list of 14 activities the students were asked to give a rating number 10 to the most important, 9 to the next most important, etc., in their opinions of priorities to assign. The totals of the priority rating numbers given by the students appear below:

1. Registration and scheduling of classes and exams: 245
2. Administration (Pres., Deans, Dept. Chmn.): 211
3. Incidental fees (Convos, OSPIRG, etc.): 184
4. A.S.O.S.U. (Govt., Funds, etc.): 161
5. Student Advising: 155

The other activities trailed behind with 117 down to 62 points in this order: Spectator Sports, Student Health Service, OSU Daily Barometer, Off-Campus Housing, MU Food Service, Campus Housing, Memorial Union, Dorm Food Service, and KBVR Programs & Production.

Before accepting a role as chief scapegoat for adolescent student unhappiness, perhaps the faculty should insist that all aspects of this University come under evaluation by students and that the method of evaluation provide protection against anonymous mischief as well.

Fred W. Decker
Atmospheric Sciences

20 December 1972
ANONYMOUS STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING

It seems incredulous that either faculty or administration will accept anonymous student evaluations of teaching as evidence for salary, promotion and tenure. How much credence should be given to such evaluations? Do these anonymous documents become a matter of public record in the personnel file of each faculty member?

Our local expert in the area of letters to the editor, the Gazette Times, will normally not print letters without the name, address and a handwritten signature of the writer. At such times as the Gazette Times does accept anonymous letters, those letters published are carefully screened. No such policy protects the faculty from the capricious or malicious.

The student evaluation of teaching form, like many examinations, can have ambiguous questions or convey a particular concept in the mind of the author that is interpreted with a different set of value judgments by the person answering. For example, on one evaluation form a question obviously written by a "clean shaven" author drew a very negative response from a student. His response was, "Personal appearance very poor. No beads, no levis, no leather jacket."

Or how about the student who claims that the instructor doesn't talk loudly enough because his cheap tape recorder won't pick up the lecture in the back of the hall?

Communication by both the written and the oral word seem to be a problem. Under the system of anonymous student evaluations there is no possibility for communication. There is no possibility for the accused to confront his accuser. If the administrator uses this hearsay evidence to deprive a professor of salary, promotion or tenure, it would seem that the administrator renders his verdict upon the recommendation of an anonymous jury.

Originally student evaluation of teaching was designed to help improve instruction. Within the span of two or three years, student evaluation of teaching has become an administrative tool to reward or punish the professor.

What has happened to academic freedom? Shouldn't the faculty member be accorded the same civil rights enjoyed by others?

December 21, 1972

Karl F. Driica
Physical Education
Evaluating Evaluations

The academic community has begun to evaluate student evaluations of teaching effectiveness, judging from three articles which appeared in the December, 1972, issue of "Universitas" cited below and now on deposit in the Reserve Book Room of the Library for faculty perusal.

In "The Teacher Evaluation Frenzy - Its Causes and Consequences" Prof. George H. Douglas of the University of Illinois asserts that the students do not necessarily evaluate "purely objectively, with the altruistic motive of improving teaching quality at their institutions" but rather use evaluation for "the imposition upon the institution of student educational ideology...to pressure professors into conformity in matters of grade distribution, work load, and the like." Prof. Douglas says the "surrender of professors to the current rating fancy...is a negation of the original purpose of the college....(which is) high quality, rigorous, adult education."

Prof. Charles A. Moser of George Washington University writing on "Teaching and Its Evaluation" suggests that evaluators who make decisions on pay, promotion, and tenure "should have the opportunity to observe a teacher directly." He writes, "The evaluator should not be wholly satisfied with hearsay reports, either from students or from other faculty." He recommends three sources as "written course materials, evaluations of students and fellow faculty, and his own direct observation" for the evaluator to use.

At the University of Florida the University Senate has received a proposal that each professor's file be available for summary of the evaluation by the student government, which would then publish the resulting summaries. In his article on "Teacher Evaluation" Prof. Arthur A. Broyles asks why professors should be singled out for the "honor" of publication of their confidential personnel data. He answers, "I suspect it is because professors as a group no longer have the desire to struggle for their own welfare." He warns of the risk of "increased antagonism between students and professors" likely to arise from publishing summaries of the contents of professors' files.

D. W. Phelps
Health Department

December 29, 1972.