Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) in Higher Education: How to Use SET More Effectively and Efficiently in Public Affairs Education

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ABSTRACT
The present study examined the impact of 13 aspects involved in student evaluation of teaching (SET). The study used student course evaluations of 1,410 university students in the Division of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne. These evaluations were collected in Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Summer 2010. The goal was to identify and prioritize influential variables in the SETs. The four items rated as most influential in the overall effectiveness of instructors’ teaching are ranked as follows: (1) clear explanation, (2) effective use of class time, (3) positive learning environment, and (4) stimulating course materials. The results showed that evaluation items in SETs are not equally influential in their effects on students’ overall rating of teaching effectiveness. Thus this study revealed that a prioritized list of aspects needs to be developed, and efforts should be concentrated on improving these aspects to increase effectiveness and efficiency in rating of teaching. Improvement strategies for instructors as well as future implications of the effective use of SET at the department or college level are discussed.
shared information would provide groundwork to initiate practical and proactive conversation among college and university instructors to meet the unique needs of their diverse student body and ultimately to improve the overall quality of teaching in their courses and learning environments for their students.

The reason for lack of effective responsiveness to SET is a result of the traditional focus on the utilization of SET data: privately owned data and personal improvement efforts. The outcome from SET informs individual instructors about aspects of their teaching that need to be improved. Data from SET can assist the instructors to be conscious of their strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and it can eventually contribute to improving their teaching effectiveness and enhance the quality of student learning (McKeachie, 1997; Pike, 1998). The instructors are personally aware of areas to be improved upon in their own teaching based on the results of SET from their own classes. They may share such evaluation information with their mentor, if any, and seek their advice on improving their teaching effectiveness. However, it is commonly found that individual instructors do not have a collective knowledge and understanding of their teaching effectiveness in the classroom as a group (e.g., department and college).

In most institutions, data from SETs remains as an instructor’s private material, exclusively shared with administrators. It is not mentioned or discussed in a collective manner such as during department-wide training or discussion. Such utilization of SET data is in some way due to the sensitive nature of the SET. The SET has been used as a primary indicator of teaching effectiveness of college and university instructors in the process of promotion and tenure decisions, annual reviews, and reappointment determinations (d’Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; McKeachie, 1997; Pike, 1998). Both individual and administrative uses of the SETs have been well accepted in an academic community and justify the collection of SETs.

College and university students routinely complete a summative course evaluation toward the end of each semester throughout their degree or nondegree programs. Questionnaires are generally the most frequently used format of SETs using rating scales. It is reasonable for students to assume that their feedback has an impact on the modification, transformation, and improvement in future lecture formats and materials, course requirements, assessment methods, and classroom management and interactions. College and university students, however, seldom see the changes they expect in their future courses that would probably be taught by either the same or a different instructor (Campbell & Bozeman, 2008; Griffin & Cook, 2009). Such nonresponsiveness toward their feedback could cause frustration among students and discourage them from providing genuine and considered feedback on their classes.

By using the SET data, instructors can easily identify weak aspects of teaching, since these aspects are often rated lower relative to other aspects. However, this simple prioritizing approach fails to provide which aspect(s) need
to be improved first and urgently. A study conducted by Wolfer and Johnson (2003) emphasized an importance of effective uses of SET data for individual teaching improvement and reported a challenge of identifying patterns of areas needed to be improved. Those areas can be used in a departmental level of training for teaching improvement of instructors. Without a systematically combined, prioritized set of information, instructors could arbitrarily choose some aspects over others based on their individual evaluation data with a hope that their future students’ overall satisfaction with their teaching and improvement efforts would be positive.

Extensive studies have investigated a range of variables on teaching effectiveness and documented inconsistent and inconclusive results of their effects on SETs (Campbell, Steiner, & Gerdes, 2005; McKeachie, 1997; Whittington, 2001; Wolfer & Johnson, 2003). Most of these variables (e.g., class size, curricular area, prior interest in the course topic, expected grades, workload/difficulty, whether a course is required or elective, challenging level of course, instructor characteristics, course format—whether online or traditional) are not in an instructor’s control and are not usually collected in routine SETs. Moreover, many studies disagreed on specific variables identified as more influential on SET scores than others. According to a study of Campbell and her colleagues (2005), SET scores are influenced by accumulated effects of a wide variety of variables that are both uncontrollable (e.g., gender, age, and race of instructors; class size; starting time; class with primarily quantitative content) and controllable (e.g., instruction delivery mode, time allocation for different activities) by instructors.

At the UK 2007 National Conference on Student Evaluation: Dissemination and Debate, higher education professionals proposed strategies to effectively use data from SET that are routinely collected from students (Griffin & Cook, 2009). This conference was a collaborative attempt to respond to the underutilization issue of the SET data and to redirect attention to what instructors actually can do to improve teaching effectiveness using the outcomes of the routinely collected SET data. Prioritizing actions by ranking the problematic aspects of teaching reported in SETs is one of the practical recommendations in using SETs more effectively and efficiently. These actions focus on variables, mostly under the instructors’ control, to improve the quality of teaching and students’ overall satisfaction with teaching. Instead of distracting educators’ attention with a wide range of variables that may accumulatively affect the SET data, there is a need to redirect our focus on variables under the instructors’ control. Indeed, in a comprehensive review of related literature, Campbell and her colleagues (2005) reported the need to pay more attention to variables under the control of instructors to improve teaching effectiveness. Then, the next question would be “Which controllable aspects are more influential?” The present study specifically addresses this question.
The SET measure that is employed by the Public Affairs program at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) contains one global rating item—“Overall, I would rate the instructor of this course as outstanding”—that refers to the overall satisfaction of an instructor’s teaching effectiveness as recommended by Cashin and Downey (1992). This study examined the impact of the 13 aspects (independent variables) on the overall satisfaction of the instructor’s teaching effectiveness (dependent variable) with the intention of distinguishing and prioritizing influential variables on the SET. Influential variables within SETs in public affairs education deserve more attention, and identifying variables that are within instructors’ control would be potentially crucial in improving teaching and, ultimately, in enhancing student learning.

**Methodology**

Students combine each of their experiences (aspects) to arrive at their overall evaluation of the instructor. Some aspects may be good and pleasant, while others may not. Some aspects are more influential than others to the students in forming their overall satisfaction level of an instructor’s teaching effectiveness. Thus, when they have a positive experience with those salient aspects, their overall satisfaction is likely to be positive. On the other hand, if they have a negative experience with salient aspects, they are likely to be unsatisfied even when other less salient aspects were positive. In the field of marketing and other studies in related areas, a number of researchers use the Fishbein model to predict which product with multiple aspects would be selected by customers (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This model has been used by many studies in customer satisfaction research including, but not limited to, patient satisfaction (Otani, Kurz, & Harris, 2005). Thus this well-established model is also relevant to Student Evaluation of Teaching studies. This model would suggest that to improve student overall evaluation, it is critical to improve more influential aspects than less influential aspects.

**Data Sources**

This study used student course evaluations from the Division of Public and Environmental Affairs (DPEA) at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW). Thirteen aspects (elements) were used to assess the course, and these items were considered as independent variables for the purpose of the study. The dependent variable was “Overall, I would rate the instructor of this course as outstanding.” The current set of items, including the overall evaluation item, has been used for SET since Fall 2008 at DPEA-IPFW. All items came from a pool of suggested items at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) program in the Indiana University System, and the pool of suggested items has been used for more than three decades.

The data were collected in Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Summer 2010 at DPEA-IPFW. The SET survey uses a Likert-type scale, and the operationalization of the survey for each item is as follows: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree.
Instructors distributed the SET survey at the end of each semester in class, but the instructor was not allowed to stay in the classroom when students were responding to the survey. One designated student collected the completed surveys and took them directly to the secretary of the division.

Data Analysis

The study analyzed the combining process of the 13 aspects in arriving at an overall rating of the course and the instructor. In other words, it evaluated the 13 aspects and attempted to find which aspects have more influence on students’ overall rating. To analyze the relative importance of the 13 aspects, a general regression model was used. The general model for the $i^{th}$ case is

$$ Y = a + \sum_{i=1}^{n} b_i x_i + e $$

where $Y$ is overall students evaluations of teaching, $a$ is the intercept, $b_i$ is a coefficient, $x_i$ is an experience of the $i^{th}$ aspect, and $e$ is an error term. The significance of $b_i$ and the value of $R^2$ are examined to test the model fit.

Results

There were 1,410 student responses. Among them, 545 cases (38.7%) were taught by limited-term lecturers, and 859 cases (60.9%) were taught by full-time faculty members. Six cases are missing values. The data set includes three university terms, and the distribution is as follows: 677 cases, 48.0% (Fall 2009); 680 cases, 48.2% (Spring 2010); and 53 cases, 3.8% (Summer 2010). To prevent possible identification of students and to lead to more honest and candid responses, the SET survey did not ask for students’ demographic backgrounds (age, gender, race, etc.). Instead of the sample statistics, we offer our division information. In the fall semester, 2009, there were 498 students enrolled in the Division of Public and Environmental Affairs (DPEA) at IPFW. Among them, 229 were male and 269 were female. The average age for male students was 23.8, and that for female students was 26.9. There were 453 undergraduate students, and 45 graduate students. Among undergraduate students, 76.2% were full-time students, and 23.8% were part-time students. Among graduate students, 35.6% were full-time students, and 64.4% were part-time students. Among all 498 students, white students accounted for 403—followed by black students (57), Hispanic students (11), Asian students (7), American Indian students (2), and others (12). There were 6 international students. The Division offers five majors: Criminal Justice, Environmental Policy, Health Services Administration, Legal Studies, and Public Management. The numbers of students in classes range from 6 to 45, and a typical class size is 30. There were nine faculty members in the division. Among them, three were female faculty members, and five were senior faculty members (associate or full professors). There were also 15 limited-term lecturers, although each of them typically teaches only one course.
In the data, average students’ responses for independent variables (evaluation items) are generally high; they range from 4.10 to 4.57. The average overall evaluation (dependent variable) is 4.23, and its standard deviation is 1.127. The descriptive statistics and the description of all aspects (items) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. 
Descriptive Statistics of Question Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1: My instructor is well prepared for class meetings.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: My instructor explains the subject clearly.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.121</td>
<td>1408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: My instructor is enthusiastic about teaching this course.</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: Course materials were thought-provoking and stimulating.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.101</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: My instructor is available for consultation.</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.929</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: I know what is expected of me in this course.</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.013</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7: The exams cover the most important aspects of the course.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.060</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8: My instructor evaluated student work in fair and appropriate ways.</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9: This course fulfilled the objectives described in the syllabus.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.904</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10: My instructor created an environment in which students felt comfortable asking questions and expressing their views.</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11: My instructor encouraged students to participate in their learning.</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>1403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12: My instructor made effective use of class time.</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.050</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13: I acquired new knowledge in this course.</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td>1403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14: Overall, I would rate the instructor of this course as outstanding.</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.127</td>
<td>1389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The multiple linear regression analysis was conducted, and the result is shown in Table 2. The $R^2$ is 0.828, and thus the model explains 82.8% of the variance in $Y$. The analysis revealed that certain variables are more influential than others when students rate their overall evaluation. The magnitude of influence is determined by the value of the coefficient. The larger the value of the coefficient, the more influence. The most influential variable is Q2.
(The coefficient is 0.364) followed by Q10, Q12, Q4, Q13, Q7, Q8, and Q5 (coefficients ranging from 0.134 to 0.052) in this order. All of them are statistically significant at the level of $\chi = 0.05$, and they are positively related. Other variables (Q1, Q3, Q6, Q9, and Q11) are not statistically significant at the level of $\chi = 0.05$. Compared to full-time faculty members, limited-term lecturers have more positive overall rating, and this relationship is statistically significant.

Table 2. 
*Parameter Estimates of All Question Items and Rank Order of Significant Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Parameter Estimates</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P Value</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.491</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Class preparation</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Clear explanation</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. Enthusiasm</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Stimulating course materials</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. Instructor availability</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. Student understanding of expectation</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. Comprehensive exam</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. Fair assessment</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9. Course objectives</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10. Positive learning environment</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11. Encouragement in participation</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12. Effective use of class time</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13. Gaining new knowledge</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N = 1368; $R^2 = 0.828$. Limited-term lecturers are a reference group.

**DISCUSSION**

As recommended in the UK 2007 National Conference in Student Evaluation, the present research attempted to prioritize aspects (variables) of teaching embedded in SETs that are more influential on students’ overall satisfaction of instructors’ teaching (“Overall, I would rate the instructor of this course as outstanding”) in SETs. The results of the study showed that evaluation items on the SET are not equally influential in their effects on students’ overall rating of teaching effectiveness. Among 13 evaluation items, eight items were statistically significant and positively influential, and five items were not statistically significant on the rating of the overall item addressing instructors’ teaching effectiveness.
Consistent with previous findings (Cashin & Downey, 1992), certain evaluation items are critically more influential to students’ overall rating of teaching than other items (see Table 2 and Figure 1). It was revealed that the most influential evaluation item is the clarity of instructor’s explanations of the course subject (Q2: My instructor explains the subject clearly). It was noteworthy that this clarity item is far more influential than the second most influential item, positive and risk-free learning environment (Q10: My instructor created an environment in which students felt comfortable asking questions and expressing their views).

The following items, in the order shown, are less influential on students’ overall rating of teaching, but gradually less influential. The rank order of these aspects would help readers to clearly understand their relative importance.

- **Third most influential item**—an effective use of class time (Q12: My instructor made effective use of class time)
- **Fourth most influential item**—stimulating course materials (Q4: Course materials were thought-provoking and stimulating)
- **Fifth most influential item**—gaining new knowledge (Q13: I acquired new knowledge in this course)
- **Sixth most influential item**—comprehensive exams (Q7: The exams cover the most important aspects of the course)
- **Seventh most influential item**—fair assessment (Q8: My instructor evaluated student work in fair and appropriate ways)
- **Eighth most influential item**—availability for consultation (Q5: My instructor is available for consultation)

Figure 1.
Relative Importance of Each Salient Aspect in Student Evaluations of Teaching
The top four ranked items (i.e., clear explanations, positive learning environment, effective use of class time, and stimulating course materials; Questions 2, 10, 12, and 4 respectively) are, to some extent, related to class preparation and are generally what instructors can attempt to control in their teaching. This result supports the previous finding that student ratings of teaching effectiveness are closely associated with identifiable skills of instructors, such as organization and grading skills (Jirovec, Ramanathan, & Alvarez, 1998). This finding provides a concrete pattern of areas needing to be improved that can be used in a departmental training for teaching improvement of instructors (Wolfer & Johnson, 2003). Such collective utilization of SETs can not only improve teaching quality among instructors in a department but also enhance student learning experience in a Public Affairs program.

However, an item directly related to class preparation (Q1: My instructor is well prepared for class meetings) was not shown to be statistically significant on the students’ overall rating of teaching. This direct measure of instructor preparedness was not identified as the top-ranking influential item. This result may indicate that instructor preparation is a prerequisite and that students may judge the outcomes of instructor preparation more than just the state of preparation.

To improve the overall quality of class preparation, an instructor can devote his or her time and effort to comprehending the topic and being prepared to explain the subjects clearly; contribute to creating a positive learning environment where students feel comfortable in sharing their opinions and posing questions; and plan the use of class time carefully. Moreover, these three items are also found in the Purdue University’s Course and Instructor Appraisal System that has been developed prudentially to create a comprehensive pool of SET questions. According to the system, these items can be categorized under (a) clarity and effectiveness of presentation, (b) student interest/involvement learning, and (c) respect and rapport.

The fourth-ranked item (Q4: Course materials were thought-provoking and stimulating), however, may or may not be under a direct control of an instructor, but an instructor may be able to stimulate student interest by exposing them to real-world examples such as conducting a research project of local sources and having a guest speaker with extensive experience and knowledge in a certain topic. The fifth-ranked item (Q13: I acquired new knowledge in this course) addresses students’ learning and has long been debated by extensive research (Denhardt, 2001) due to its measurement complication using the SET data alone. The sixth- and seventh-ranked items (Q7: The exams cover the most important aspects of the course; Q8: My instructor evaluated student work in fair and appropriate ways) among the eight influential items are about assessment-related skills and are rather objective evaluations of the course. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Jirovec et al., 1998). Based on the results of the present study, it is clear that when students think they have...
gained a new skill, they give credit to their instructors. There are many things instructors can do to respond to this finding. An instructor may be able to positively influence assessment and student learning by carefully developing exam questions, using fair grading systems, and proactively assuring students learning through constant review of key points, particularly during exam review sessions (Campbell et al., 2005). However, having close interactions with students, which is partially addressed in the eighth-ranked item (Q5: My instructor is available for consultation) indicates being available for consultation. To improve the quality of teaching among instructors at departmental and college levels, they can work collaboratively and provide input on development and implementation of comprehensive examinations, fair grading systems, and effective teaching and student learning strategies.

Among all the evaluation items, five did not show statistical significance. Thus these aspects are not likely to be associated with students’ overall rating of instructors’ teaching effectiveness (Instructors’ preparedness: Q1: My instructor is well prepared for class meetings; enthusiasm in teaching: Q3: My instructor is enthusiastic about teaching this course; students’ understanding of the course expectation: Q6: I know what is expected of me in this course; accomplishment of course objectives: Q9: This course fulfilled the objectives described in the syllabus; and instructor’s encouragement in course participation: Q11: My instructor encouraged students to participate in their learning). It is noted that two items address student learning behaviors (i.e., student understanding of the course expectation and course participation) and are used to solicit students’ evaluation of their own learning behaviors exclusively and partially. As noted earlier, students’ perceived learning of new knowledge is ranked as the fifth most influential item. These findings show that students gave credit to instructors for their perceived final outcome of the course (Q13: I acquired new knowledge in this course), but did not give credit to instructors regarding their process of learning. The students might have obtained new knowledge that was possibly influenced and encouraged by instructors, but they were not able to perceive the instructor’s influence. It can be partially explained by the previous finding that teaching behaviors of instructors that help students learn new knowledge might be evaluated differently from those that help students participate more in class activities and understand the course expectations (Cashin & Downey, 1992).

Instructors’ enthusiasm and the fulfillment of course objectives (Q3 and Q9) were not influential in the students’ overall satisfaction with instructors, when enthusiasm is typically considered as a positive asset of an individual, and the fulfillment of course objectives is another part of positively identifiable and observable skills. These findings imply that instructors’ enthusiasm in teaching the subject and a diligent delivery of planned course contents may not be highly valued by students as an important quality of instructors.
LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study was carefully conducted with solid methodology; however, there are some limitations. First, the data were collected at only one school in the university. Even though there are 1,410 cases and this number is quite large, it is not a random sample of all students. Thus it is not possible to generalize our results to all departments and all universities in the United States. Future studies are encouraged to conduct this type of study in different schools and universities. Second, because this is a cross-sectional study and not an experimental study, this type of design cannot establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Nevertheless, this study used a well-established model (Fishbein model) to support the cause-and-effect relationship where independent variables influence the dependent variable of overall evaluation of the instructor. If a future study employs an intervention design where influential aspects of teaching are improved, the cause-and-effect relationship can be more clearly established. Third, this SET survey used a Likert-type scale. The variables are, thus, ordinal. Some researchers argue the appropriateness of using a general regression model on ordinal data. However, research studies show that the use of regression models on ordinal data is appropriate and useful, and the results are generally robust (Labovits, 1970; O’Sullivan & Rassel, 1989). Many research studies have used regression models on ordinal data. Fourth, this study used the SET survey that had been carefully developed and used for more than three decades at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne. However, it is possible that the survey may not contain all salient aspects in teaching, and that limitation may bias the estimates. Further refinement and examination of the survey items are warranted.

As recommended in the UK 2007 National Conference on Student Evaluation (Griffin & Cook, 2009), proactive, ongoing discussions among university instructors need to take place on how to use the evaluation results and how to improve teaching effectiveness. To improve overall quality of the program and to provide recommendations and directions for their instructors, university administrators need to focus not only on numerical means or medians of SETs of individual instructors, but on areas that need improvement. The SET data of instructors in a department or college need to be combined and analyzed to prioritize actions, disseminate the outcomes, and make timely responses to students (Griffin & Cook, 2009). Both experienced and new instructors would benefit from this shared knowledge about teaching, and they could have an opportunity to reflect on and reevaluate their teaching.

In an effort to enhance the quality of teaching in the Public Affairs program at IPFW and other universities when appropriate, instructors need to follow up on these prioritized items in a timely, unified, and collaborative manner, disseminate relevant results to other instructors and students using multiple delivery means, including department or college websites and online learning tools (e.g., Blackboard), identify necessary improvement goals, prepare a clear
and detailed timeline, promote a positive use of the evaluation results, and solicit active student involvement in achieving goals (Griffin & Cook, 2009). Furthermore, the Public Affairs program needs to obtain multiple perspectives and data sources in identifying issues by using multiple measures (e.g., interviews, observations, focus group discussion, and curriculum review; Griffin & Cook, 2009). All of these improvement efforts can yield a meaningful result when all involved parties including instructors, students, and administrators in the program understand the value of a unified effort in improving the quality of teaching and are open to receiving constructive feedback from each other.

**CONCLUSION**

This study advances the existing knowledge of SETs that all salient aspects of teaching do not equally influence students’ overall evaluation of the instructor in Public Affairs education. Results from this study suggest that the clarity of instructors’ explanation of the subject is far more influential than other aspects in the SET, and it should be emphasized as a critical quality of university instructions to improve the overall evaluation of teaching. This finding is logical because students take a course to understand the material, learn the skills necessary to pass the course, and ultimately compete in the real world. An instructor’s clear explanation of the subject is the first key step of student learning. For clear explanation, it is necessary for the instructor to take time to be well prepared for the class. An instructor should know the subject well; but as the saying goes, a good player is not always a good coach. Accordingly, even though the instructor may know the subject very well, it cannot be assumed that the instructor is able to explain the subject clearly to students. In addition to the explanation side of teaching, other aspects, especially positive learning environment, the effective use of class time, and stimulating course materials should be pursued to improve teaching and accommodate better learning opportunities for students. These findings clearly show that an instructor needs to take time to prepare for the class and develop a solid and achievable plan of teaching before going to class. By prioritizing actions based on the scientific evidence and having a systematic improvement plan, instructors as a group can collaboratively and constructively assist each other on these issues related to teaching and learning in higher education. This approach would enhance the instructors’ overall teaching effectiveness and ultimately improve overall program quality.

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REFERENCES


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