



Lehigh ADVANCE Men Advocates

Statement on Gender Bias in Student Course Evaluations

Standardized student course evaluations play a significant role in the review of Lehigh faculty for merit raises, re-appointment, tenure, and promotion. They also often figure in the assessment of candidates for open faculty positions. While it is understood that these evaluations are imperfect indicators of teaching effectiveness, it is important for evaluators of faculty to be aware that these imperfections may not be present in equal measure for men and women.

A large body of social research has documented gendered evaluation processes in a variety of institutional settings, including the academic workplace. These processes systematically put women at a disadvantage when their performance is being rated. There is no reason to think that student teaching evaluations are an exception to this general phenomenon. In fact, most recent exploratory studies of students' evaluation of college and university teaching suggest that the same processes at work elsewhere in society are present when students evaluate professors.

For instance, one study (Sprague and Massoni, 2005) shows that when students describe good men teachers, they use many descriptions (e.g., funny) that are different from the ones they use to describe good women teachers (e.g., nurturing). The teaching activities that prompt these gendered descriptions differ. As a result, women may have to engage in more time-demanding forms of pedagogy in order to garner the same global teaching ratings as men who teach according to conventional gender expectations.

In another study (MacNell *et al.*, 2014) instructors in an online course presented themselves as both male and female to separate class sections, masking their true gender identities. The study concluded that "regardless of actual gender or performance, students rated the perceived female instructor significantly more harshly than the perceived male instructor."

At Lehigh, global ratings of teaching effectiveness (questions 1, 2, and 14 on course evaluation summary reports) are the ratings usually employed in the review of current faculty and job candidates. Faculty conducting these reviews must be made aware of the likelihood that these ratings routinely advantage men and disadvantage women.

References:

- MacNell, L., Driscoll, A., & Hunt, A.N. (2014). What's in a name: Exposing gender bias in student ratings of teaching. *Innovative Higher Education*, 40, 291-303.
- Sprague, J., & Massoni, K. (2005). Student evaluations and gendered expectations: What we can't count can hurt us. *Sex Roles*, 53, 779-793.

Suggested Further Reading

1. Bachen, C. M., McLoughlin, M. M., & Garcia, S. S. (1999). **Assessing the role of gender in college students' evaluations of faculty.** *Communication Education, 48*, 193–210.
2. Basow, S. A. (1995). **Student evaluations of college professors: When gender matters.** *Journal of Educational Psychology, 87*, 656–665.
3. Bennett, S. K. (1982). **Student perceptions of and expectations for male and female instructors: Evidence relating to the question of gender bias in teaching evaluation.** *Journal of Educational Psychology, 74*, 170–179.
4. Burns-Glover, A. L., & Veith, D. J. (1995). **Revisiting gender and teaching evaluations: Sex still makes a difference.** *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 10*, 69–80.
5. Feldman, K. A. (1992). **College students' views of male and female college teachers: Evidence from the social laboratory and experiments – Part 1.** *Research in Higher Education, 33*, 317–375.
6. Feldman, K. A. (1993). **College students' views of male and female college teachers: Evidence from the social laboratory and experiments – Part 2.** *Research in Higher Education, 34*, 151–211.
7. Miller, J., & Chamberlin, M. (2000). **Women are teachers, men are professors: A study of student perceptions.** *Teaching Sociology, 28*, 283–298.
8. West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). **Doing gender.** *Gender & Society, 1*, 125–151.
9. Young, S., Rush, L., & Shaw, D. (2009). **Evaluating gender bias in ratings of university instructors' teaching effectiveness.** *International Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 3*, 1–14.

Cited below is a continually updated website that provides a bibliography of more recent studies with annotated comment:

Savonick, D., and Davidson, C. (2015, January 26). **Gender Bias in Academe: An Annotated Bibliography of Important Recent Studies.** Retrieved from <https://www.hastac.org/blogs/superadmin/2015/01/26/gender-bias-academe-annotated-bibliography-important-recent-studies>