

## An Analysis of Course Evaluations: Quality of Teaching and Overall Value of Courses

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### Introduction/ Theoretical Framework

Practicing effective teaching has long been a concern for faculty within the higher education community. Research has been conducted concerning the impact final grades have on student evaluations (Gramlich & Greenlee, 1993; Krautmann & Sander, 1999), the relationship between instructor characteristics and student evaluations (Wollert & West 2000; Best & Addison, 2000), the amount of content learned in the class (Rodin & Rodin, 1973), and whether or not students chose to enroll in certain courses (Coleman & McKeachie, 1981). While much research has been conducted, little exists in colleges of agriculture.

The theoretical framework is rooted in reflection. York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2001) stated that “reflective practices facilitate learning, renewal, and growth throughout the development of career educators” (p. 1). Schon (1983; cited in Zeichner & Liston 1996) stated that reflection takes two forms: *reflection-in-action*, which refers to reflection that takes place during teaching due to an unexpected reaction, and *reflection-on-action* which occurs during both the preparation stage and the post-teaching stage. This study employed course evaluations to provide a form of student feedback that can assist in the reflection-on-action stage. In addition, course evaluation results are used in selecting instructors for salary increases, promotions, and tenure (Cruse, 1987). What COA course evaluation items do students weigh the highest in regards to effective teaching and the overall value of courses?

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyze college of agriculture course evaluation items at a southern state university in regards to effective teaching and overall value of courses. To fulfill this purpose, the following objectives were developed:

1. Determine if relationships exist between individual course evaluation items and the overall quality of teaching rating.
2. Determine if relationships exist between individual course evaluation items and the overall value of the course rating.

The University Senate produced a uniform course evaluation to be used campus wide which was tested for validity and approved for use by the University Senate. This study is correlational in nature. The population was comprised of the course evaluations from the spring 2006 semester. A convenience sample was taken and consisted of completed spring 2006 course evaluations ( $n = 167$ ). The course evaluation forms are divided into sections. This study evaluated the following sections: course section, instructor section, and the learning outcomes section. These sections were comprised of eight, six, and five items, respectively.

## Results/Findings

Objective one was to determine if a relationship exists between individual course evaluation items and the overall quality of teaching rating. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) technique was used to determine that the summary item “overall value of the course” ( $r = .74$ ) had the highest correlation. The instructor item “presented material effectively” ( $r = .74$ ) had the second highest correlation, followed by the instructor item “stimulated interest of the subject” ( $r = .70$ ) having the third highest correlation. With a correlation of .59, “had good knowledge of subject matter” was the lowest rated instructor item. The course items “textbook contributed to understanding” and “graded assignments returned promptly” were the lowest correlated course evaluation items with correlations of .47 and .48, respectively.

Objective two was to determine if a relationship exists between individual course evaluation items and the overall value of the course rating. The (PPMC) technique was used to determine that the summary item “overall quality of teaching” ( $r = .74$ ) had the highest correlation. The instructor item “stimulated interest of the subject” ( $r = .69$ ) had the second highest correlation. With a correlation of .66, the third highest correlated instructor item was “presented material effectively”. All five learning outcome items had correlations of .54 or greater with four of the items having a correlation of .61 or greater. The course items “textbook contributed to understanding” and “graded assignments returned promptly” were the lowest correlated course evaluation items with correlations of .42 and .51, respectively.

## Conclusions/Recommendations

The instructor items “stimulated interest of the subject” and “presented the material effectively” are most heavily weighted by students when evaluating effective teaching and overall value of a course. According to Davis (1971), these instructor items have a very high correlation when compared to the overall quality of teaching and a substantial correlation when compared to the overall value of the course. When using course evaluations to reflect-on-action, instructors should recognize that students weigh certain instructor items higher for overall quality of teaching as well as the overall value of the course. Furthermore, when instructors reflect on the textbook and the promptness of returning graded work, these two variables are less influential on the overall value of the course and the overall quality of teaching than other items on the evaluation. This is not to say that instructors should haphazardly select textbooks or have poor timing when returning graded work.

## References

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