

CHAPTER 8

MEANINGS, TRADE-OFFS AND EQUITY ISSUES

Christy's case study provides valuable information for understanding how the evaluation of teaching is conducted in the context of a research university, and how evaluative information is used at the department level to make administrative decisions. The case study also raises important issues for the evaluation of teaching in higher education. Some of the main issues raised by the case are:

1. Midwestern University was facing pressures for accountability from external organizations, such as North Central Association, and the State Department of Education. The pressures for measuring outcomes were reflected in the university's performance-measurement budget, the implementation of institutional assessment efforts, and the emphasis on quantitative measures. The emphasis on measuring outcomes and the pressures for accountability were also felt at Christy's department where a committee was struggling trying to find meaningful ways for assessing student outcomes over time. How the external pressures were influencing decisions of teaching and learning in other departments? Were department administrators encouraging certain practices that could emphasize certain kinds of teaching over other; could some of these practices diminish the quality of education or the freedom for faculty to experiment with certain kinds of teaching that don't produce outcomes that are easily measured?
2. Midwestern University was devoting great efforts in the evaluation and improvement of teaching on campus. These efforts resulted in the creation of a Teaching Board, Teaching Academies, and the implementation of Teaching Assessment and Professional Development Initiatives in addition to those provided by the campus Office for Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI). The instructional specialists from OISI worked with several of the units that provided support for teaching assessment and professional development. In this way, the different units counted with valuable help from highly prepared staff that had experience in both teaching evaluation and development. On the other hand, OISI's had a particular approach to instructional development. Even though their specialists stated that they were sensitive to the context of instruction, the help that they provided was oriented towards generalizable principles of teaching. The existence of campus offices providing professional development with different teaching orientations proven be especially valuable for Christy as well as the decision of her department about using multiple sources for evaluating teaching and paying attention to the complexities of the context of instruction. What could be the unintended consequences and the trade-offs that could result from the increasing practice

of using OISI staff support and teaching orientation in the new units providing professional development on campus? What could be the consequences for departments that are not as sensitive as Christy's department of the complexities of teaching? What are the unintended consequences for OISI staff as a result of the increasing demands for instructional support?

3. Midwestern University was stressing in its Strategic Plan the importance of using technology on teaching. The Executive Committee at Christy's department also found that students tended to give higher evaluations to instructors using technology in their teaching. It was unclear if other professors were feeling the pressures for using technology, or if there was an underlying assumption in their departments that using technology was synonym with teaching quality. Are some colleges and departments emphasizing for faculty to use technology in teaching? How is technology being used in different departments on campus? What are the unintended consequences of this policy for both teaching evaluation and improvement?
4. The campus-wide system for evaluating teaching emphasized the use of student ratings of instruction over other of information. This system collected information from students through a survey that was administered at the end of each academic semester. The evaluation included two global items to make decisions about teaching quality and a set of specific items selected by each department to provide the instructor with feedback on teaching. OISI staff was conducting focus-group interviews with students for obtaining more information about student perceptions on the instructor teaching, but this service was optional. When analyzing evaluation data OISI staff were sensitive to the required versus elective nature of the courses. They, however, did not analyze differences across disciplines, class size and student level (graduates versus undergraduates), variables that were identified by a recent study as influencing the ratings. OISI's staff were also not paying attention to other variables such as instructor gender, race, and ethnicity when analyzing the data from the evaluation because they did not believe these variables could influence the ratings. The Executive Committee at Christy's department found over a period of 10 years, that gender was a variable influencing negatively the evaluations of teaching and that its influence increased depending on the age of the instructor. Other variables, such as race, gender, ethnicity and accent of the instructor, as well as course content, student motivation towards the course, and grade expectations were also found by the department administration to negatively influence the ratings in some cases. It is unclear if the equity issues raised by the possible influence of those variables on the TES ratings, as it was identified in Christy's study, take place in other departments evaluating teaching on campus. Are Women and Minority professors in other departments obtaining lower evaluations of their teaching in relation to those of the campus norm? Would instructors teaching non-Western required courses experiencing similar problems than those identified by Christy's department?

5. The campus and college policy legislation took for granted the validity of the ratings and did not question the meaning of the scores. Interviews with Christy's students and analyses of the evaluations of her teaching indicate that students may follow different process when making decisions about teaching and that "fair grading" might be one of the most important aspects that students take into account when rating their instructor's teaching. More research needs to be conducted to know what is the meaning of the construct "good teaching" as understood by the students? Is one element or a set of elements of good teaching so important that they will influence student ratings even if the other criteria of good teaching are noteworthy? What is the process followed by students when making decisions about teaching? Do different groups of students follow different processes or pay attention to different aspects when rating their instructor's teaching?

Of the five issues, issues four and five have especial significance because they question the validity of the evaluation in representing the goodness of teaching, raise equity concerns, and because disregarding them could result in serious consequences that could affect the lives and careers of faculty. These two issues are also the most relevant to the nature and purpose of the study. Because of their importance, the second part of the study centered on studying these issues with more depth.

Collecting Information About Meanings, Trade-Offs, and Equity Issues

The second part of the study involved two main process of data collection. The first process included collecting information from a sample of women and minority professors from the college of Liberal Arts and Sciences to study the possible influence of different variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, and the instructor accent on student evaluations of teaching. The second process involved obtaining information from a sample of undergraduate students from the same college to study the meaning given by students to the construct "good teaching" and the processes followed by different students when rating their instructors. The findings obtained in these two processes are described next.

Review of TES Summary Profiles

In this part of the study, a letter of invitation was sent to all women and minority professors working for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Midwestern University. The letter requested professors to send a copy of their Teaching Evaluation System Summary Profiles, and a copy of each of their TES semester reports for further analyses. The TES summary profiles and the TES reports requested in order to examine if there was a pattern showing that women and minority professors tended to be rated below average in the TES evaluations.

Of the approximately 200 women and minority professors who were invited to participate in the study, twenty professors sent their TES Summary reports. Eleven professors declined to participate because they had retired, moved to another university, were not administering the TES forms, or were recently hired. Two instructors declined to participate because they were going for tenure that year and did not feel comfortable with releasing their evaluation information at that time. The professors who participated did not provide copies of their TES semester evaluation reports because the Office that conducted the evaluation only provided them with copies of their TES summary profiles. Of the twenty instructors who provided their summary profiles, 18 were women and 2 were men. In addition, fourteen women and minority professors, ten of whom did not share their TES summary profiles for analyses, conceded a personal interview about their experiences with the evaluation system.

The analyses of the TES summary profiles provided evidence of significant differences among the instructors. For example, professors differed in the number of years of

teaching experience from two to twenty three years. Most instructors taught every semester but there were some instructors who taught only once per year. Some instructors taught courses with a similar class size during all their years of teaching while other instructors had courses where class size changed over time. In some cases, class size increased from 5 to 214 students over the years or over a semester. The TES ratings of some instructors improved as class size of their courses decreased, but for some instructors class size did not seem to influence their ratings. The ratings of some instructors improved as the level of their course increased, but for other professors the level of the course did not seem to be related to their scores. There were also instructors whose ratings had improved over time and other instructors who began to obtain higher ratings at the beginning of their teaching and then their scores decreased over time.

The meaning of low ratings varied among different instructors and between time to time. In some cases, the meaning of low ratings was obtaining a score of 1.7, but in other cases low ratings were equivalent to 3.7 and sometimes to 4.5 points, using a five-point scale. There was also one instructor, whom in spite of receiving the same score over three semesters move from the low to the low average to the average classification. These differences illustrate that what is considered below average varied depending on the ratings of the other faculty who administered the TES evaluation forms in a particular semester. This happened because the university used a norm reference approach to compare instructors at that time.¹

¹ During the spring semester of 2001, OISI' s staff changed the way in which they analyzed the TES forms. Instead of using a norm reference approach, they began to use a criterion reference approach.

The differences among the instructors who provided their TES summary reports for analyses, and the small response rate made difficult to determine if the lower ratings obtained by some of the faculty members were influenced by possible biases of students towards women and minority professors or by other circumstances. This was also in part due to many differences found among the instructor, their courses and their students, such as teaching experience, class size, course level, course content, and so on. The use of a norm reference comparison approach created a problem because what was considered low one

semester was not necessarily considered low during another semester. Indeed, there were cases in which what was considered to be below average in one semester, it was considered to be average or high average in other semesters.

The use of a quantitative approach for examining the possible influence of race in the evaluation was not very useful given the small response rate and the many contextual variables under which the instructors were teaching. A holistic and situational approach may be more valuable than a quantitative analysis. In this way, it would be possible to know if the ratings are low because of student negative biases against women and diverse faculty, or because of any other contextual variables or because of a combination of several variables.

Faculty Interviews

In addition to the analyses of the TES Summary Profiles, interviews were conducted with fourteen instructors from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Midwestern University. Instructors were asked about their perceptions on the benefits of the TES evaluations and the possible influence of race, gender and several other variables in the evaluations. Even though no patterns were found to determine the influence of gender, ethnicity and race in the scores during the analyses of the TES Summary Profiles, the personal interviews with the instructors provided some evidence of the influence of these and other variables in the evaluation.

In general, interviewees shared similar concerns and views about the benefits and problems with the TES evaluation forms, than those stated by the Executive Committee members at Christy's Department. Student comments in the back of the evaluation forms

were considered the most valuable part of the evaluation. Some of the benefits of student comments were described by a minority professor:

The most useful part of the evaluation is the comments that students make in the back of the forms. I take those comments seriously. It is the most important evaluation of your teaching that you can get because they tell you if they are learning the subject matter, and how much they are learning. This is, of course, when student comments are carefully thought and tied to their experiences in the course. Of course, there are also cases when the comments you get are not useful because they are about their lack of interest on the content.

Another instructor however, stated that student comments were not always valuable.

It depended on their relevance to classroom instruction”

Student comments about teaching are sometimes vicious or may bring good suggestions for improvement. Helpful comments provide information about their classroom experiences. But you also get comments that have nothing to do with the teaching.

Another instructor added:

The TES ratings aren't too useful but sometimes someone will write something that is useful. I ask my students to talk about particular assignments. Sometimes someone says, " I like this person ties," and that is not a useful comment. In general, the scores aren't particularly helpful. They are usually about the same. So, if it is the right kind of class and all liked you and the course, all are interested in the content, then you have happy students. If it is a lecture class, TES reflect more the student than the professor. If students are not interested or not show to class all the time, they don't give you good evaluations. The number in part is popularity, if they are expecting a good grade they give you a high score too.

Interviewees were also concerned about the possible influence of several variables related to the characteristics of the course, the instructor, students and the institution on the TES ratings.

Course Related Variables that Could Influence the Evaluation. The interviewees identified two main course-related variables that they believe influence the TES ratings, the type of course content and the amount of content coverage and workload.

The courses identified by the interviewees, as those receiving the lowest TES ratings were required courses that focused on a Non-Western culture. The professors interviewed believed that the reason for which students tend to give lower ratings to these courses was that they did not appreciate the worth of the course content. Interviewees who taught this kind of courses said that some of their American students demonstrated a very negative attitude towards the course content. These instructors added that student negative perceptions about the course were independently of whom taught the course. As an American instructor said:

When students take a course because they feel required to take it, they resent it, especially if the course is a Non-Western course like mine. I always have to deal with student negative attitudes towards the course content, although minority students tend to give high evaluations in these courses. Student bias against certain course content is real. Let's face it, we are in the Midwest. There is a large student body who comes from communities where there is no diversity. They are not only uninterested, they resent when you bring it in the classroom. This is an influencing factor in the TES scores but unless they make comments about this in the forms how can you prove it?

Another American instructor teaching this kind of courses, added:

Some students are hostile to the course content. They resent taking required courses, especially if the course centers on a Non-Western culture. This creates serious barriers for teaching but it also works the other way around. For example, Latinos and African American students may rate a Non-Western course high because they have a genuine interest in the course, even if the course is required.

An African American instructor illustrated his perception that students did not value the course content, this influenced the TES ratings:

Students' views and assumptions can feed to the evaluation of your class. For example, in one occasion one student wrote: "I thought this was a class on American history not in African American history or on American education not on African American or Latino education. If you include those topics, even if it is only one session, they feel the only reason they had to learn about that content it is because you impose your views. It is because of your ethnicity or race. They don't see the content as a legitimate subject matter.

Other professors identified the amount of content coverage and workload as influencing factors of the TES evaluations. According to some interviewees, TES ratings could increase if the instructor reduces the amount of content covered or workload. As a minority instructor said:

I used to obtain low scores in my undergraduate courses. In the back of the TES forms my students consistently said that I was unfair. So, I went to OISI and I asked their staff to do a statistic analysis of my graded exams and class assignment. The analyses shows that students in my course performed well, indeed the curve was skewed towards high scores. In terms of performance, 2/3 of my students did well (they got A's and B's). But students were still complaining about fairness. So, I talked to some of my former students and asked them why they thought that I was unfair. I found that what students meant was that I was giving them too much work, and they disliked that. This influenced their perception about my course and my teaching.

The following semester I began to decrease the amount of content covered and workload. I also changed the number of credits for my course (from 3 - 4 credit hours) to satisfy my student pressures for decreasing the workload. Then, my ratings start improving. Some students still complain about the amount of reading, but I can't eliminate more content or workload. There is important content that they need to learn, even if they don't see it as important.

Another instructor teaching a required course added that negative student attitudes towards the course workload or amount of content coverage may be higher when students are taking a course outside their major:

A lot of times students complain ' I don't like the reading materials' or 'it is too much reading, too much information. It is boring.' Students outside the major are those who complain the most about the amount of reading. If they come from math or engineering, they aren't use to read as much as our students and they see this as something wrong with your teaching. The amount of reading and how much they like the material influence the way in which they rate the teaching. Unfortunately, there is little that the instructor can do about the style of the material or students motivation towards the content.

The instructor added:

TES evaluations also make things harder for the instructor because they include ridiculous questions. Some items ask students if they think the materials were the best chosen. A lot of times, students write that they don't know. What they can tell you is if they like the material, but not if the selection was the best selection or if that was a bad decision of the instructor. Students aren't qualified for making an assessment about the appropriateness of selecting a material for a course.

A Department Head said that the amount of course workload and student grade expectations were factors that his department paid attention when using TES ratings for administrative decisions:

When we analyze the ratings obtained by our faculty, we pay attention to what students said in the form regarding their expected grade for the course and the amount of course workload required from hem. We do this because we have found that these two factors seem to be correlated with obtaining good ratings.

Another administrator added that in his department they found that students had a tendency to give higher ratings to instructors who were more lax about course content and coverage:

Teaching assistants in our department usually get very high ratings when they teach. But, something that we have observed is that in many occasions these TA's are very lax about educational goals and about content coverage. This is not to say that students are not good sources for evaluating teaching, but these are important aspects to consider when making inferences from the evaluations.

Instructor Related Variables. The interviewees also identified some instructor-related variables that could influence the TES evaluations, such as having an accent, and the gender, race and ethnicity of the instructor.

Most of the interviewees believed that students had a negative attitude towards professors who were second language learners, and in general towards any one who had an accent. As an instructor commented:

You often hear students complaining about accents. I don't think it makes a difference in the class but you hear people complaining about a Chinese accent or even about an Australian accent. Students need to be exposed to diversity but some of them are pretty narrow-minded and probably will relate to someone who looks like them rather than to someone different.

Other interviewees believed that the instructor gender, age and ethnicity influenced the TES ratings. As a Department Head stated:

We think there is a systematic bias in the ratings against women and minorities and in relation to the type of course. For example statistics courses are traditionally rated low. Students do take more seriously older faculty members than they do younger professors, women or minorities.

An American professor at another department, added:

Students are hostile to women and non-white faculty. Some are hostile to the content. I think racism is an issue for the evaluation. Some students are resentful of women in a position of authority, and this manifest in their evaluations.

Other Department head added that in some occasions, students in her department brought issues of diversity to her attention. She referred to some minority students in her department who complained about their White instructors:

When I became a Department Head, there were few professors who were receiving complaints about their teaching from minority and women students. Because the department is supportive of diversity, we pay more attention to these comments. When something like this happens, we investigate what is the problem. We also meet with student organizations to know more about other student complaints about a particular instructor.

Minority professors teaching minority students faced other issues regarding high student expectations. As one of these instructors said:

Sometimes, being a minority professor is difficult when your students are also minority students. Some of them think that you will not demand as much from them as you do from other students because you are a minority person and understand their problems better. This can affect their evaluations of your teaching.

An international professor stated that race, gender and ethnicity could influence the TES evaluations of teaching in an indirect way, by affecting the context of teaching. She illustrated how a race related incident in her class affected her teaching and her ratings:

I usually receive high ratings for my teaching. I have been in the incomplete list of excellence for teaching every semester that I taught with the exception of one. That semester I experienced a difficult situation in terms of classroom discipline due to the behavior of an African American student in my class. Someone in the class was talking about an inner-city school in her presentation. The African -American student was very unhappy with the other student presentation and started raising her voice to her classmate. She was offended by her classmate comments and became very aggressive towards the other student. So, I told her that she could comment and criticize the other student presentation, but that we all needed to respect each other in the class. As an instructor I thought that I could talk to my students about how to talk to others. The African American student got very offended by my comment, she even stopped coming to class.

Later I learned that the student had been commenting about the incident with other students and faculty members in the college. One of my peers told me that the African American student felt that my comments to her were racially motivated. She said that she felt her freedom of speech was affected, and that is why she decided not to come back to my class again. I felt very hurt about the comments made by that student because I never intended to affect her freedom to speak or her right to express her criticisms in class, I just wanted for her and for all of us to participate in the discussion a respectful way. That was the first time in all the years that I have lived in the US when I realize that I was an outsider. I was so sad that semester that I even thought about resigning. My class ambiance changed because of the incident. I did not feel the same confidence, I was concerned about what to say and how my comments could be misinterpreted by other students. My teaching was affected because of what happened and that was reflected in my ratings. The incident made me realize how important is for me the classroom climate and how delicate issues of race relations are in America.

Another instructor stated her belief that student bias manifested in the way in which students interacted with the instructor and in their expectations about the instructor:

It is the attitudes and pre-conceptions. Often with faculty of color, many students assume your knowledge is limited to your ethnic or racial group. This also happens with women specializing in women studies or African studies. If you move outside of your area, they kind of get surprised that you know about other issues. This works to the disadvantage of students and faculty as well. They are too uncritical of your experience and suspicious of something you say outside of your area of expertise.

Another instructor added:

There is a general framework of assumptions that students bring to the classroom and you have to deal with it. If you make remarks on gender and race, they question your bias. They make the distinction between scientific knowledge and political views or political correctness. They assume your comments are not scientifically supported, you always find this.

A minority professor who was also an administrator at her department, illustrated how student preconceptions about minority instructors manifested in her course:

Students respond different to different biasing factors. Student biases against women and minority professors can be appreciated in their personal interactions (civil and collegial). Students usually don't write negative comments about race or ethnicity in the evaluation forms but they show their negative attitudes when they are in the classroom. They are also against instructors who have an accent, they are very little tolerant to people who don't speak English as their first language. When I start teaching, students were more obvious in their negative attitudes towards women and minority faculty because there were only few professors of color working for the college. Now things are a little better but you still have to deal with students who don't want to have you as their teacher. If you include multicultural materials in your class, they dislike that. They think the only reason you include these materials is because you are a person of color.

The same instructor added that she also found similar negative preconceptions from her peers:

Sometimes you also experience negative attitudes from your colleagues. For example, two few years ago, I went to Anguila² for the summer. A few days after I came back, I was in a reunion and I said that I traveled to that island. One of my male peers who listened to my conversation about the trip interrupted me and then corrected me by saying "Angola, you went to Angola." I said to him, "NO, Anguila, Angola is in Africa. I didn't go there. I went to Anguila." But he kept correcting me, as if I didn't know where I had traveled. Situations like this make you irritable to a certain extent.

An American instructor also shared his perceptions about student negative preconceptions about women and diverse instructors:

Students of color are more comfortable in courses taught by faculty members of color. There is a kind of alienation that students of color may have with White faculty members. But, there are also white students who are racist and anti-Semitic. There are a lot of prejudices that people have. Unfortunately, this doesn't come in the evaluation forms. When you ask the questions: rate the overall teacher effectiveness, if students don't feel connected with the instructor because of his/her race then, this influences their ratings.

² Island located in the Caribbean Sea, east of Puerto Rico

Another professor shared her experiences about the different expectations that students had for men and women faculty members:

In one occasion, I got a comment "you aren't friendly enough". I don't know if this kind of comment is legitimate or not. So, I tried to be friendlier. However, what is professional in a man might be taken as unfriendly in a woman. If the class is large and the course is required this adds to the possible factors that could negatively influence the scores.

There were also some interviewees that stated that although students were biased towards women and minority professors, the way in which the instructor approached student bias was very important. As an African American instructor commented:

Dealing with student bias presents a challenge for minority faculty. You can't get cut out personally challenging a particular point of view, you have to help people to talk, discuss, listen and learn. You can still get good ratings in spite of student biases. Sometimes you disarm people who think you will get to them when they realize you respect their views. You have to focus the class into finding evidence for supporting their arguments. Students appreciate that. If you get personally affected, it could affect them negatively. This is not to say that you can completely control people views about your teaching. Students may rate you low as an instructor anyway, but you can influence their classroom experiences and the evaluation by the way in which you address the questions. If you get a biased question from a student and you use the question to address a good point, students can learn more. Students don't want professors who are argumentative and don't serve the whole logic of the class, but their individual concerns.

An Asian American instructor added:

Race and gender influence the evaluations but the evaluation forms don't include any items to help you find evidence about this. So, it is hard to know when it happens. Instructors can also reverse the bias by the way they deal with it in the classroom. For example, in one occasion some of my students wrote (in the back of the evaluation forms) that one of the things they liked the most was that I addressed issues of diversity without trashing Western Civilization like other instructors they had. As an instructor you can make a point, but you need to remember that there are students who are sensitive to the way in which you make your comments.

Two instructors added that the influence of race, gender and ethnicity existed but it was also combined with other variables such as gaining teaching experience and receiving professional development. As a minority instructor said:

At the beginning of my teaching, I taught a required course where most of my students (90% - 95%) were Caucasian students. Some liked my class, but there was an overwhelming number of students who didn't want to have me as their teacher. Gender, race, age and personal philosophy influence student evaluations of teaching, but these factors don't take place in isolation. They are combined with other variables, such as your teaching experience, the course that you teach, and so on.

At the beginning of my teaching I wanted my students to share comments about the readings, I wanted them to read and to interact in class discussions. My students were expecting other kind of teaching. They wanted someone who lectured for them, assigned homework, and basically took charge for their learning. I never taught undergraduate students before, so I did not realize that I was asking them to do something their other professors were not doing. My low student ratings and the comments made by students in the back of the forms that semester reflected students unhappiness with my teaching style. Students complained that my teaching style was so professorial, that they felt uncomfortable with my teaching. They also wanted me to be more organized. So, I spent time working on the structure of my course, I became more structured.

Over time my student ratings have improved. During a semester, I went to ACT and participated in some professional development activities that they had. These activities helped me to improve my teaching. It was very helpful for me to interact with peers, share our syllabus and teacher experiences.

Some professors also believed that the negative influence of race, gender, and ethnicity could be moderated by the effect of other variables, such as nature of the course content and student motivation towards the course. As a professor stated:

There are issues about race relations. American students complain more when the instructor is a minority professor. The scores are not lower for minorities and women faculty when they teach race and gender related

courses, but it is possible to find White students who do not like to take these courses. When students complain about an instructor, we usually make a qualitative assessment of the teaching and try to know more about the situation.

One of the interviewees believed that even though not all students were biased against women and minority professors, the number of students who had biases was enough for not obtaining high ratings:

There are some biases that could influence your TES scores or make them less high. This doesn't happen with all students, I don't think it is a large number of students, but it can be enough for not obtaining the perfect scores. If this shows up, it will affect your ratings. It may vary also from department to department. A woman in physics may have more problems in her TES than a woman in English. If a woman is teaching a class where there are more male students and just few females, student expectations may not be as higher of her and her scores will show that.

One of the Associate Deans of the College, sharing the perception that race, gender and ethnicity could negatively influence the TES evaluations of teaching, said that more research was needed on this important area:

This is not the first time we have received concerns from faculty about the negative influence of race, gender and ethnicity on the ratings. Indeed, some professors recently complained to the Teaching Academy staff about this. But, we need to do a better job to be sure if this is happening and if it is not a teaching problem. In the many years that I have been conducting peer observations of teaching, I have found that the negative influence of those factors on student ratings is true in about 50% of the cases. In the other 50%, it is a teaching problem. I think we need to look at these issues more deeply. That is why peer evaluations are so important.

The only instructor who did share the belief that race, gender or ethnicity influenced the scores, said that student motivation towards the content, the ability of the instructor to speak English well and fair grading were the most influential variables influencing the TES ratings:

There is no gender or race factor influencing the TES ratings. The only factor in the ratings is student motivation and whether or not the professor speaks English well (a problem in certain departments, not mine) and gives fair exams and assignments. It's the luck of the draw insofar as an instructor's ratings are concerned. Last time I received superlative evaluations. This term I am teaching a course I regularly teach, and I expect poor ratings because the students simply are unmotivated. I'm the same person as always. The TES system needs to be changed or even discontinued, nothing will change the system short of a pervasive boycott by the faculty and the faculty don't have the nerve to attempt that.

Some interviewees also identified other variables that could influence the evaluation.

As one instructor stated:

Charisma is an issue in the evaluation. Being really overweight might also be hard to overcome as an instructor. Students also look at the way you dress. In one occasion, I had a teacher assistant who was overdressed and students commented about that in the evaluation forms. Sometimes you also get positive comments when they like the way you dress.

Another instructor added:

I am surprised that you don't include sexuality as part of your analysis. I'm out lesbian who teaches a cultural diversity course and I am positive that who I am, and the course that I teach, means that I get lower TES ratings. An analysis of TES ratings should include sexual orientation, I'm tired of being collapsed into 'female.'

Student Related Variables. Some interviewees said that in their experience undergraduate students tended to give lower ratings than graduate students. In similar way if the course was outside the major, or if students lacked the prerequisite knowledge for the course, they tended to give lower ratings.

A professor described the influence of student class level (undergraduates versus graduates):

Undergraduate students are not always motivated towards the course and expect you to motivate them, they don't have an intrinsic interest in

learning. You have to make them want to learn. Teaching graduate students is different. They have intrinsic interest for taking a course. This is reflected in the evaluations of the course. Undergraduates usually give lower ratings.

Another instructor, sharing this perception, said that his department paid attention to student class level when evaluating teaching:

Undergraduate and graduates students are different. For evaluation purposes, our department pays attention to the kind of students taking the course because it is harder to teach undergraduate students. Graduate students are intrinsically motivated to take a course, which makes things easier for the instructor. Graduate courses also have smaller class sizes than do undergraduate courses.

Student major was also identified as another influencing factor on the TES evaluations. As a professor said:

When students take a course in their major or a course in their field of interest, they are more motivated. Their expectations for your teaching are also different, they are more positive. Having students with different interests and motivations, and knowledge background affects the kinds of classroom interactions, the kind of text or class materials that work well with students, and the kind of class discussions. These differences among students also influence the evaluation of your teaching. If you teach only students majoring in your area you will receive higher ratings than if you teach a course where there is a mix of major and non-major students.

The lack of student background knowledge for a course and its influence on the TES evaluations were illustrated by another professor:

Student prerequisite knowledge for the course is very important. I can't talk about the human genome project if my students don't have the prior knowledge. Some people assume that because all of them are freshmen or sophomore they all bring a similar knowledge background to the course. But, you can't assume that, in my experience students come from different levels of knowledge and experience with the subject. Students lacking the needed background struggle more with the course and tend to give you lower ratings if you don't provide them with the needed background. For the instructor this creates a difficult situation, especially if your course is a

prerequisite for other courses. You struggle trying to cover important content that is needed for the next level while you are trying to spend extra time with those students who lack the required knowledge. It is not good if you don't cover all the important content, but it is not good either if you end teaching for only 10% of your class.

The problem of addressing the needs of different students, especially those outside the major or who lacked the needed background for a course increased for instructors teaching large classes. As the same professor added:

If in addition to having different kinds of students with different experiences and motivations towards the subject, you also have a class of 100 students or more in the classroom, it is almost sure you won't receive high TES ratings for your teaching. Class size makes things more difficult for you in addressing all the many different needs. In my department, not even the best teachers do well in required courses with very large classes.

Interviewees also said that student expectations about grades were another variable influencing the TES evaluations. As an Asian American instructor commented:

The evaluation forms ask some questions that present problems. For example a problematic item is: 'What grade do you expect to get in the course?' If students say that they expect a high grade and later they give a low rating, the evaluators assume that grades don't influence student perception. But, what OISI's staff don't realize is that if you ask this question, 80% of the students will say they expect to get an "A." They expect a perfect grade even if their performance doesn't reflect their grade expectations. Another problematic item is do you think the grading is fair? What someone thinks is fair may not be fair for others.

The instructor added:

Faculty members who are under a lot of pressure tend to give higher grades to students. When I was a graduate student I only gave a few A's but now you can see that more students receive A's now than they did before. That is why I call this grade inflation. The overall assessment of teaching needs to consider this. If we increase standards for evaluating teaching, we also need to increase standards for student assessment. Now, the increased number of students receiving "A's" is a reflection of the customer/client view of students as in a commercial relationship.

Another American instructor commented on the way in which her students defined fair grading:

In my experience the way in which the professor grades students affects the ratings. No matter how students perform in the course, they think that if they worked hard they deserve a perfect grade. The problem is that you can work a lot but if you don't do a good work it doesn't matter how long you spent working on a paper. Sometimes students have problems with writing, and don't realize that in order for them to get a good grade in some courses they have to write clearly and effectively. If they don't write well, they will not get a perfect grade even if they spent a lot of time working on their papers. For example, in one occasion I gave a B - to a student. When he came to my office to complain for his grade, he said: I put a lot of hours working on this paper and I just got a B. I asked him what grade he thought he deserved. He said, " I deserve an A" even though he doesn't have the capacity for making that assessment.

Sometimes when you explain to them why they got certain grade, they realize why they did not get an A, but many times they don't change their belief that if they worked hard they deserve a perfect grade. It is hard for students to realize that no matter the effort if the paper is not a good paper. They judge their work according to how hard they worked, but a lot of times, students who work hard still get a low grade. Then, they see this as unfair even though they did not performed at the highest level.

Institution Related Variables. According to a Department Head, what was good teaching varied from institution to institution. For instructors to be successful in the evaluation, they needed to make adjustments:

Each institution uses formal information to know more about the interaction of the instructor with students. Usually, assistant professors or even those who have prior teaching experience and have done well in other institutions don't do well when they begin to teach at a new institution.

A minority instructor added:

I think student criticisms have diminished in my undergraduate course, as I became more experienced teaching undergraduates. When I started teaching, I was using the models of teaching that I had from my undergraduate

studies at another university. My undergraduate courses were very labor intense courses. So when I start teaching my undergraduate required course, I designed the course as those undergraduate courses that I took as an undergraduate. I learned over time that what worked in another university did not work here, at least not with my undergraduate students.

The interviewees also said although Midwestern University was implementing many projects and initiatives for improving teaching and its evaluation, there was a need for the institution to improve the evaluation system. One of the interviewees believed that in order to do that, the university needed to recognize that there were problems with the evaluation:

The University needs to find ways for improving the evaluation of teaching. The Office that conducts the evaluations also need to realize that there are problems with the form. However, OISI staff will not agree that the evaluation forms are dreadful. They are very proud of the forms. Every time someone complains about them, they say that the problem is not the forms. They argue that the forms were not created for making comparisons but for providing faculty with feedback about teaching. I personally think that the form presents serious problems and it is not always appropriate for all the courses. To my knowledge, no one has looked at the consequences of using the forms for a different purpose or their adequacy for assessing courses taught under very different conditions.

In addition, according to some interviewees for Midwestern to improve teaching it was also important that the Teaching Improvement Board was open to more than one approach to teaching. One professor, who was also a college administrator, said that the approach promoted by the Board was not flexible enough to include all kinds of projects. She thought that this Board restricted funding to some projects that could be more appropriate for some departmental needs:

The Teaching Advancement Board is trying to improve the way we evaluate and improve teaching. However, they don't provide funding for projects when they don't fall within their agenda. We tried to prepare a proposal about student learning because we think there is a need of finding better ways for assessing learning. Our project was about student learning

and the creation of learning environments for undergraduate students, but they discouraged us because they didn't see it fitting within the kind of studies that are been supported by the Board. They couldn't see the connection with teaching. I think the problem is that they see teaching as teacher-oriented, while we see teaching more as student-oriented. I think we should put effort into evaluating learning, on what students are learning and why.

Other professor identified the relationship between teaching and research as another important aspect that Midwestern needed to pay attention when improving teaching, because the emphasis put by Midwestern on research interfered with the departmental interest for improving teaching:

In a research university like Midwestern, the emphasis is on research. This is reflected on the tenure and promotion processes. The University is making an effort for improving teaching, but research still has more priority. So, you work in your teaching, but you can't neglect research. If you have to prioritize, research is first.

The importance that research had over teaching was shared by another professor:

Research has more weight than teaching in the evaluation process. Over time research has become even more important since obtaining tenure has become more difficult. People at the University talk more about teaching but research has become more important in tenure cases.

The emphasis on research was consistent with the rankings given by external organizations and the University. Because these rankings focused particularly on research productivity, some departments were facing the prospect of improving teaching at the expense of research. As one of the Associates Dean added:

It is hard for some departments to improve teaching, especially for nationally ranked departments. Most systems rank highly departments where faculty teaching is not presumably high. The emphasis is on research productivity. There is a tension for supporting teaching in departments where research is the priority.

An instructor in one of the Departments of the College illustrated this tension:

When I started working for Midwestern, my student ratings were high. I was included in the list of excellent instructors just after my second year. I thought I was doing just fine until some of my colleagues told me that when people do too well on the ratings, there is a perception that they might be neglecting their research. I was doing fine in my research but after receiving the same message from more than one colleague and the administration, I decided to do something to decrease my ratings. I began to increase the amount of reading in my class. Then my ratings went down.

Some new Departments faced additional challenges trying to improve teaching. As an instructor of one of these Departments said:

Improving teaching can be a challenge in a department like mine. On one side you have to get a certain number of students registered. But, many of the students who want to be in this program are students who have problems with the reading and writing requirements. If you want your course to be at the same level as other undergraduate courses, some of these students will drop out.

But you can not afford this when you are trying to build a specialization. So you end up offering two courses, one that has the same level of difficulty as other undergraduate courses where you know there are going to be many dropouts, and another course that doesn't have the same level of difficulty and requires less from the students. In this way, you compensate for the number of dropouts.

The interviewees also talked about the responsibility for instructors to adapt their teaching to different students. As a minority instructor said:

You have to take into consideration those who are in the class, not to decrease standards but to relate to student interests. It isn't fair if you ignore that.

Another instructor added:

The subject that we teach, in most cases, inherently includes the lives of all people. So, the only way you can't make the course relevant to student lives is when you distort the content. You must make the content related to all social experiences. It is a knowledge issue, how can you construct a course where there is only information about the lives of only one sector of the society? You can

teach a course that specializes on certain content, but most courses should be reflective of the diverse experiences of different people in the society.

An American professor also described how she tries to relate her course to different students in her classroom:

I teach a Non-Western required course on Latin America. Sometimes I have African American and American students taking the course with Latino students. I try to address issues of diversity that relate to my students. When I have African American students in my class and we discuss about slavery, I try to present it in a way that is not demeaning. I try to be honest and respectful. As a white American instructor teaching diverse students, this is an issue that I pay special attention. In one occasion, I received thank you notes from the African American students in my course that liked the way in which I presented this topic.

Studying Trade-Off and Issues of Meanings

To study the issues related to the meaning given by students to the construct good teaching, and the processes followed by them when rating their instructors teaching, an online survey³ was designed for a sample of students from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The survey also included questions about student perceptions about the importance of having

³ See Appendix A for a copy of the survey

an instructor of the same race and gender of the students and about student beliefs regarding instructor responsibility for adapting his or her teaching to different kinds of students. The letter of invitation to participate in the survey was sent to a random sample of 1523 undergraduate students. A total of 200 students responded to the survey for a response rate of 13 %. Because the administrative procedures for obtaining permission to invite students to participate in the study took approximately three months, the invitation for responding to the online survey was sent two weeks before the final exams of the spring semester of 2001. The timing of the invitation for responding the survey might have influenced the response rate.

Findings of the online survey indicate that there was proportional participation of the undergraduate students who responded the survey by class. Of the 200 students, 22% were freshman, 23% were sophomore, thirty one percent were junior, and 24% were seniors. Women accounted for most of the responses (63%), while men respondents were only 37%. Although there were a few students who only responded to the multiple-choice items of the survey, most students wrote lengthy responses to illustrate their perceptions and comment on their responses to those items.

Students of different race and ethnicity were also represented among those who responded to the survey. The following table illustrates the percentage of response by ethnicity and race in relation to the number students of each classification within the student population at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences:

Table 5

Student Response Rate by Ethnicity.

Race /Ethnicity	Number And Percentage Of Respondents By Ethnicity	Percentage Response Rate In Relation To The Student Population At The College
Asian	N = 50 (25.5 %)	2.9 %
African-American	N = 28 (14%)	2.3 %
Caucasian	N= 68 (35%)	0.8 %
Hispanic	N = 26 (13.27%)	3 %
Native American	N = 3 (1.53%)	13 %
Other	N = 21 (11 %)	6.6%

* Three students did not indicate their race of ethnicity when responding to the survey.

The survey included multiple choice and open-ended items. Student responses to each of the survey items are described next.⁴

1. Current evaluation forms include two mayor items. These two items are general and request students to grade the instructor and course as to overall effectiveness. When you have to rate an instructor with these two items, how do you decide how good the teaching was? How do you decide if the instructor was a good teacher?

When asked about how they decided to assign their ratings at the moment of completing the global items in the evaluation forms, 61% of the respondents indicated that they paid attention to their instructor ability to deliver the course content, to their use

⁴ Chi Square was the test selected to examine the statistical significance of differences among the students' responding to the multiple-choice items of the survey. Although there were differences among students as a whole, differences also existed within each of the subgroups. One exception was the small group of Native American Students who did not answer any of the open-ended questions of the online survey. No significant

differences were found among the respondents by gender, class (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors), race and ethnicity.

of different teaching methods and instructional media. A few other students said that the instructor's pace when delivering a lecture was important for them when making their decision of assigning a score.

Forty-four percent of the respondents indicated that they assigned their scores depending on how much they learned from the course. Other twenty four percent of the respondents said that they decided how good was the teaching depending on certain characteristics of the personality of the instructor, such as being open-minded, caring, confident, enthusiastic, responsible, patient, engaging, creative and with a good sense of humor. In addition, twenty four percent of the respondents said that they gave a rating based on how good was the rapport of the instructor with students, how sensitive s/he was to student needs and how responsive s/he was to them. These students expected instructors to be sensitive not only to student academic needs, but also to student needs for an open classroom climate in which they could express their opinions and feel supported. Some students within this group also stated that they expected their instructors to create an environment in which there was no sexism or racism and where learning was fun.

Seventeen of the respondents stated that they decided how to rate their instructors based on the instructor motivation towards teaching. Twelve percent of the students stated that they decided how to rate their instructor's teaching based on the instructor grading. For this group of students it was very important how well they did in exams and the course, and how well their grade reflected the amount of workload required of them. These students also expected the assessment procedures to reflect the content covered in the course, and wanted their instructors to make clear the criteria for students to get an "A."

Some of the respondents went into describing what they considered it would be fair or unfair. For example, some students said instructors would be fair if exams were consistent with the level to which the course was taught and with the amount of content covered in the course. One student added that it would be unfair for an instructor to include something in the exam that was said in the lectures and was not in the textbook, because this would result in penalizing students who didn't go to class.

Another group of students said that they make the decision about how to assign their ratings based on how well the instructor covers the course content; how applicable is the learning from the course to real life situations; or how much the instructor challenged them to learn. Other students based their decision on the quality of the class notes provided by the instructor; his or her teaching style, the clarity of the instructor expectations, and the amount of class workload. Four percent of the respondents stated that they make the decision of assigning certain ratings based on their overall experience in the course.

2a. When assigning a score for rating the instructor in what cases would you give an instructor a "1" for an overall rating?

When asked in what cases they will give an instructor a rate of 1 point (using a scale from 1-5), students differed among them in their perceptions. There were many groups of students selecting many different aspects to which they gave importance when making the decision about how to assign the lowest score in the TES evaluation forms. Some students gave this score to instructors who had a negative attitude towards them, were unprepared or did a poor job delivering the content. Other students gave more importance to the instructor good communication skills and to the instructor motivation towards teaching. Some students

within this group said that having an instructor who speak English as a second language was the most important reason that they considered when giving the lowest score.

Other group of students stated that they would give the lowest score if the instructor was unfair, if he or she was too harsh at grading or if there was not correlation between the exams and the content covered in the course. Other group of students said that they would give a score of one if the instructor was not available, wasn't knowledgeable about the content or they did not learn too much from the course.

There were also some students who stated that they would give the lowest rating if they didn't perceive the content covered was worth to be studied, and other students who would give the lowest score if the instructor were biased against some groups of students. Other respondents would give the lowest score if the instructor was unavailable, not enthusiastic, not punctual, disorganized, and insensitive to student needs. Lacking good sense of humor, not using different teaching methods, being unprepared, or disorganized were also identified by other different groups of students as the aspects that could influence their decision for assigning the lowest score in the evaluation forms.

There were also students who said that they never give a score of one and stated to feel uncomfortable with giving very low ratings.

2b. When assigning a score for rating the instructor in what cases would you assign "3" for an overall rating?

When asked in what cases they will give an instructor a rate of 3 points, students were divided into three main groups. The first group would give a score of three points if the instructor was a good instructor but lacked some characteristic that they valued. For example,

some students said they would give a score of three if the instructor was good but was boring or not enthusiastic enough. Other students said that they would give a score of three points if the instructor was a good teacher but wasn't "cool." Other students said they would assign three points if the instructor was good but didn't seem to care too much about teaching or didn't establish a personal relationship with his or her students. A small group of students also stated that they gave a score of three points if they didn't like the instructor's teaching style, and other students stated that they give that score when they are not impressed by the instructor's teaching. There were also students who would give a rating of three if the instructor was good but students didn't learn a lot or they have to learn on their own. This group of students stated that it was the instructor responsibility to teach them and help them to learn, not theirs.

The second group of students stated that a score of three was for instructors who had both strengths and weaknesses. Some students within this group said that they give the score of 3 points to instructors who were average, not good but not too bad either.

The third group of students would give a score of 3 points if they considered that the instructor was not a good teacher. For example, some students said that they will give 3 points to instructors who were not good because they were not knowledgeable or because lacked good lecture skills. Other students said that they would give a score of 3 points to instructors who were subjective in their grading, not accommodating to student needs, unavailable, disorganized, unfair and not helpful. Instructors who gave too much homework or who went beyond the course content would receive a score of three points by other

students whom saw this as an example of bad teaching. However, other students said that they would give 3 points to teachers who did not go beyond the course content.

There were also different groups of students who gave a score of three points if their instructors weren't good because they had some of the following characteristics:

- Skipping course content,
- Not being understandable,
- Being unfair in designing the course workload,
- Not being tuned with the teaching assistants or making students fall asleep in class.

There were also students who said that they would give a score of 3 points when they didn't feel that they could make a judgment about the teaching, and other students who said that they didn't like to give "middle scores." So, they only assigned extreme ratings (either very good or very bad).

2c. When assigning a score for rating the instructor in what cases would you give a "5" for an overall rating?

When asked in what cases they would give an instructor a perfect score of five points, students differed among them. Although most students stated that they would give the highest score to instructors that they considered knowledgeable, enthusiastic, interesting and who make them want to learn, there were also many groups of students who paid attention to many other different aspects. For example, some students would only give the highest score to teachers who are caring and to those who don't see teaching as a chore. Another group of

students would give the highest score only if their instructor was well prepared and was available for student questions.

Other students said they would give the highest score to instructors who have very good communication skills while other students would give the highest score only to instructors who make their expectations clear for their students. There were also students who would give the highest score only if they learned a lot from the course or if the teaching was challenging.

Different groups of students paid attention to different instructor characteristics when assigning a perfect score. Among the main characteristics listed were: being funny, personable, friendly, enjoyable, flexible, patient, respectful, good grader, considerate, realistic, caring about the content, consistent, organized, supportive, and creative.

Other characteristics listed by other group of students included grading on time, listening to student questions and responding to them. In addition, not covering information beyond the syllabus, going out their way to help students, using critical learning activities, and not talking about research in class were identified by other students as the most important criteria for assigning a perfect score. Some students said that they only gave the highest score if they believed the course was worthy or if the instructor presented multiple perspectives in the course.

There were also students who said that they had never given this score and who felt uncomfortable with giving the highest scores. Some of these students said that they usually don't give a perfect score because they would only give such score to someone who was extraordinary as a teacher.

3. When you rate an instructor's overall effectiveness,
 - a) Do you compare him/her with an ideal teacher or an ideal of teaching? Or
 - b) Do you compare the instructors to other instructors that you have had?

One hundred thirteen of the students (57%) responding to this item selected the option (a), which means that they compare their instructors to an ideal of teaching at the moment of assigning their ratings. Eighty-four respondents (43%) indicated that they do not compare their instructors to an ideal of teaching when completing the evaluation forms.

One hundred thirty one students (67%) selected option (b), which means that they compare their instructors to other instructors that they had before when assigning their ratings. Sixty-five students (33%) responded that they don't compare their instructors to other instructors when deciding how to assign their ratings. Two students did not answer this question.

Students who compare their instructors with other instructors stated that it is almost impossible for them not to make comparisons. Students who do not compare their teachers said that they did not do this because they considered that it was unfair to make comparisons given that different instructors have different styles and work under different conditions. A third group of students stated that although they tend to compare their instructors at the beginning of their courses, over time they get so used to their instructors that by the end of the course they don't compare them to other instructors anymore.

4. The evaluation forms also include a series of items describing certain aspects about teaching, e.g. eye contact, fairness, clarity, honesty, really know the content. How important are they compared to the first two general items included in the form?

When asked if the items included in the evaluation that describe certain aspects of teaching were as important as the global items of the form, 147 students (75%) indicated that they considered both kinds of items to be equally important. Thirty-two students (16%) responded that they believe the items describing different aspects of teaching are more important than the two global items included in the evaluation forms. Eighteen students (9%) responded that they consider the specific items to be less important than the global items included in the evaluation form. Two students did not answer to this question.

5. What elements or aspects of teaching are important to you when describing good teaching?

When asked about what are the elements or aspects of teaching that were important for them, students provided an extensive list of aspects that included instructor characteristics and behaviors similar than those described below. The three elements that were named by most students were: being knowledgeable, clear and fair at grading. Other important elements of good teaching as named by different students included: having an instructor who was friendly, patient, able to answer student questions, someone who had a passion for teaching, and who was sensitive to student needs. Other elements selected by students were having an instructor whom was confident, with good handwriting, good voice, able to relate to students, personable, and well prepared. Students also said that they valued having an encouraging instructor, who used active learning techniques and multiple modes of teaching. In addition, other students said that the most important for them was having an open-minded and inspiring instructor, with good communication skills, who challenged them to learn more. Moreover, other students said that it was very important for them having a teacher who

smiled and who was calm, expressive, interesting, caring, sensitive to student needs, considerate, and with a good sense of humor.

6. Are any of the specific aspects included in the evaluation form more important for students? Is one or several of these aspects so important that it will influence your ratings even if the other criteria of good teaching are noteworthy?

Students believed that some specific aspects included in the evaluation forms were more important than others, and in some cases, that a single aspect or several of these aspects influenced their ratings even though the other criteria of good teaching were outstanding. They, however, did vary among them when deciding what were the essential elements that could influence their ratings.

The most important aspects according to the respondents were fair grading and the instructor ability to speak English properly. Some students also stated that for them it was very important having an instructor whom was enthusiastic, caring, knowledgeable, always available, and who answered student questions. Other students stated that it was very important for them having an instructor who was not rude or pompous, but one who was dynamic, with good lecturing skills, honest, clear, personable, and with a good sense of humor. There were also students who said that other important elements were the instructor personality, his willingness to teach, and the cultural relevance of the instruction.

7. For you, what criteria are the essential ones?

When asked this question, most students selected three criteria of good teaching that they identified as essential for them. These criteria were fair grading, clarity and the instructor's ability to effectively communicate in English. Other elements selected as essential were having good presentation skills, being honest, well prepared, enjoyable, and committed

to teaching. In addition, being a coherent lecturer, having good hand-writing, and a friendly personality as well as caring for the course content, teaching relevant material, maintaining eye contact and providing recognition were identified as other essential aspects of teaching. Other essential criteria selected by students were providing recognition to students for their work, being confident and having logical presentations.

8. In an early part of this study, some students identified "fair grading" as an important component of the evaluation. Do you share this perception?

When asked if they shared the perception of Christy's students about the importance of fair grading, students said that they did share that perception and that fair grading was a very important aspect, if not the major factor for them when evaluating teaching. Indeed, one student said that in his opinion, professors who are not fair deserve to receive zero points in the evaluations of teaching. Students also stated that that their professors would be unfair if they are inaccurate in their grading, they do not explain the criteria for grading students, or if they favor one or several students over other students. In addition, instructors would be unfair if they are biased against students of different gender, race or those who do not share the same points of view of the teacher, and if they disregard the level of the course when designing assessment procedures and assigning grades.

9. When you think about fair grading, what do you mean?
 - a. Is it consistency? the instructor indicates how s/he is going to grade the course at the beginning and follows this: s/he does not change the pre-established grading
 - b. Is it level of difficulty? the instructor grades at the same level that s/he taught the course? and no harder than it is in other similar courses?
 - c. Is it consistency with the amount of class workload?

One hundred thirty-seven students (71%) selected option (a), which indicated that for them fair grading is consistency with the pre-stated grading procedures. In other words, the instructor indicates how s/he is going to grade the course at the beginning and follows this; Thirty-eight students (20%) responded that they do not see fair grading as consistency, and 19 students (10%) indicated not to have an opinion on this respect. Five students declined to respond to this question.

One hundred thirty five students (69%) selected option (b), which means that they believe fair grading required for the instructor to grade at the same level of difficulty that s/he taught the course. Forty-five students (23%) responded that they do not define fair grading in this way, and 15 students (7.7%) stated not to have an opinion on this respect. Four students did not respond to this question.

One hundred fifty eight students selected option (c), which means that they defined fair grading as consistency with the amount of course workload. Thirty-five students (18%) stated that they did not define fair grading as consistency with the workload. Six students did not respond to this question.

Almost all students who responded to this item selected more than one option, which evidences that students define fair grading in more than one way. This can also be observed in the following comments made by students about fair grading.

Comment On "Fair Grading"

When asked to comment about fair grading, students said that fair grading was very important for them. Some students said they don't worry too much about their grades, but

the majority of the respondents gave high importance to the fairness of grading. There were some students who said that they have never been graded unfairly while others said that they have been rated unfairly by several of their professors. One student, who tends to receive high grades, also stated that although he knows that there is unfair grading, he couldn't complain because he is one of those students who usually receives preferential grades.

Other students provided some examples of situations in which they felt they were graded unfairly. For example one student said that in one occasion, his instructor told him that he was getting an "A" in the course but later he received a "B." Another student said that he had teacher assistants who graded students low just to be mean to students.

10. Can you give a specific example as to what would be unfair grading?

When asked this question, students provided additional examples to illustrate what would be unfair. For example, some students indicated that taking attendance and grading class participation was unfair because it penalized students who missed classes. Other group of students said that it would be unfair to penalize or to reward students for their agreement with their instructor opinions or points of view. Moreover, other students said that unfairness would take place in the following cases:

- If the instructor does not makes clear what are the grading criteria
- If the instructor changes the grading procedure by adding new requirements in an assignment without telling his or her students about the change and penalizes students for not included the new requirement.
- If the instructor test students in something not covered in class

- If the instructor is biased against certain kinds of students or if he gives higher ratings based on prior grades received or on how much s/he likes his or her students.
- If the instructor is inconsistent in the way he grades different assignments and students
- When a test is so long that students can't finish it within the time of the class
- When studying hard doesn't result in a high grade
- When the instructor assigns only certain number of "A" and "B" grades
- If the instructor determines a student grade by comparing his or her student papers with the papers of other students
- When the instructor uses grade ranges rather than exact scores
- When using the curve when you did very well and everybody did poorly
- If the instructor doesn't give reasons for taking points off from an assignment
- Having "obscure" material tested
- When no student received an "A" for the course
- If 50% of the class drops and the other 50% gets D's and F's
- Having the grades based only in a few tests or papers
- Using essay tests
- Not using the curve to grade students
- In Math courses, grading only the results of a problem but ignoring the process used by students when solving the problem.

11. Do you consider it important for an instructor to be culturally sensitive in teaching his/her course?

When asked if they consider it important for an instructor to be culturally sensitive in teaching his/her course, 119 students (61%) stated that they believe this is important. Thirty-six students (18.5%) responded that they do not think an instructor should be culturally sensitive and 40 students (20.5%) stated that they have no opinion on this respect. Four students did not respond to this question.

Should the Instructor Design the Course Based on the Kind of Students Enrolling?

When asked if the instructor should design his or her course based on the kind of students enrolling, 39 students (22%) responded that they believe this is a responsibility of the instructor. Ninety seven students (55%) indicated that they do not believe instructors should design their courses based on the kind of students enrolling, and 39 students (22%) indicated not to have an opinion on this respect. Twenty-four students declined to respond to this item.

a) Comment on "cultural sensitivity"

When asked to make a comment about their responses, students explained with more depth their beliefs about cultural sensitivity. Most students said that although their instructors should be respectful of all students and avoid making offensive comments about other cultures, they should not accommodate their teaching to the different cultures of their students. Some students granted that cultural sensitivity could be appropriate in some courses but not in all of them, it will depend on the type of content being covered.

Students supporting the importance of cultural sensitivity said that it was very important and necessary for instructors to accommodate to the culture of their students, treat students on the same level of intelligence, challenge stereotypes and encourage tolerance among them. One student went into saying that in his opinion a good teacher should cover as many cultures as relevant to those students taking the course and to use culturally relevant

materials in class. Another student sharing the view that cultural sensitivity was important, said that instructors should not design tests that are culturally insensitive and that instructors should admit if they didn't know something about their students' culture and learn about it. Other students said that their instructors should be culturally understandable and consider all sides of an issue for all groups and not for only a few students. In addition, a minority student said that although he valued the consideration of the instructor towards his culture, he would like his instructors to avoid patronizing or stereotyping diverse students like him.

There were also students who disagreed with the importance given to cultural sensitivity. For example, one student stated that cultural sensitivity provided inadvertent discrimination because by catering the course to the needs of some students, the instructor discriminated against others. Other student stated that instructors couldn't please everyone. He added that, "as long as there is no blatant racism then I don't see anything wrong with not being culturally sensitive." He did grant that he would agree with being culturally sensitive if this was related to what was being taught in the class. There was also a student who stated that "education should not be sacrificed in the name of cultural sensitivity."

One of the students, who didn't believe there was a need for paying attention to cultural sensitivity, added:

I think cultural people tend to be too sensitive. I mean, if a teacher is openly degrading to a particular culture or minority, then THAT is TOTALLY out of line. It doesn't belong in the classroom (nor, IMHO in any room). But, it's unrealistic to expect a teacher to discuss a work of art or literature from the Civil War era without touching on the topic of slavery. There is a point at which 'cultural sensitivity' just becomes ridiculous."

Another student added that, "people should stop being so easily offended at things", and another student said that he had never heard there was a problem regarding cultural sensitivity:

I am so white that I have never had a problem. I came from an all white high school in the middle of no-where and have only a few friends of different ethnicities. I have never heard any of them complaining about anything like cultural sensitivity.

An American student added, " I am definitively biased on this as I am white and come from a predominantly white suburb. I don't know what it feels like to be discriminated against."

Although most students who made comments made comments about cultural sensitivity, saw it as sensitivity towards different students culture, there was one student who stated that "if cultural sensitivity was cultural holidays, then it was the student responsibility to notify the professor of those needs." He added that he did not know what was meant by cultural sensitivity. Another student also added that it would be hard for professors to be "culturally sensitive" when "you are teaching 500 students in a lecture hall."

13. Do you consider it important for instructors to connect class instruction with life experiences outside the classroom?

When asked if they considered it important for instructors to connect class instruction with life experiences outside the classroom, 97 students (50%) responded that they considered this to be very important. Seventy-seven students (40%) responded that they gave little importance to this. Eighteen students (9%) responded that they did not believe it was important for instructors to connect class instruction to life experiences outside the classroom. Six students declined to respond to this item.

14. In an early part of this study, some students indicated that it is important in some classes to have an instructor of the same gender, race or ethnicity. Is this important for you too? Could this influence your evaluation of the teaching? In what ways?

When asked if it was important for students to have an instructor of the same gender, race or ethnicity, the majority of the respondents said that this was not important for them, nor would influence their ratings. This perception was shared for both minority and non-minority students. Several students, however, added that although they did not have a problem with having instructors of different race and gender, this would influence their evaluations of teaching. As an American student mentioned: "I don't think I have a preference. But certainly, race, gender, and ethnicity must (also unconsciously) influence my evaluation."

Other students added that although they did not evaluate their instructors differently because of their gender, race or ethnicity, they felt that it was easy to relate to an instructor that shared the same characteristics. Some of these students said that although they could relate to instructors like them, they wouldn't feel comfortable with having an instructor of a different race teaching a course of another culture or race. As a student commented: "It would be confusing to have a Caucasian teaching African American history. In the same way, it would be confusing having an African American teaching East Asian Languages and cultures." An American student did state that she appreciated "having teachers with a diverse background" because there were "so many white men that I can listen to without questioning the objectivity and validity of their opinions and statements."

Another student stated that more than gender, race or ethnicity, it was important the attractiveness of the instructor. Although this comment might be an indication that he didn't

take seriously the question asked. As he said, "the only thing that would influence me is what a friend calls the 'ugly mug theory.' If I find the teacher repulsive to look at, I will learn less in the class. If the teacher is attractive or lively, I tend to pay more attention.

Other students stated that more important than having an instructor of the same gender, race or ethnicity, it was that the instructor spoke the language well. For example, a student said, " So long as they speak the language of the course like it is their native language. I don't care if they are an ape." Another student added: "ethnicity would be an issue if I couldn't understand what the instructor was saying because of an accent." In any case, if students did not understand the instructor because of their accent or lack of communication skills, this seemed to influence their perceptions about the goodness of teaching. As a student said:

It's not something we like to admit, but gender, race, and ethnicity can play a significant role in an instructor's evaluation. For me, it is important that English is clearly and correctly used, and I'd like that the instructor connects with me in some manner.

Several students shared this perception and stated that more than race, gender or ethnicity, the instructor's accent could influence their perceptions about the quality of the teaching. As a student said:

The only importance that this (race, gender, and ethnicity) have is if the instructor can be understood. If the instructor is of different ethnicity, and grew up in another country, and is not easily understood, the he or she would not be a good instructor.

Some students did mention that they would like the campus to have more diverse instructors. As a student mentioned, "I would like to have more variety than the standard white male. I'm not a minority, but I would like to have teachers from different ethnicities and

racism to learn from different points of view.” Some students also said that if the instructor was respectful and genuine, they did not feel a need for having an instructor of their same gender, race or ethnicity. For example, a Hispanic student stated that although there were not enough Hispanic instructors on campus, if the teacher was sensitive to the student culture, he would easily get along with them.

There was also a student who stated that he did not believe gender, race and ethnicity was an issue because "he did not believe in racism."

15. In the first part of the study, a group of students indicated that teachers should not coddle or indulge some groups, not create grade inflation, and should be held to high standards (knowledge and behavior). Do you agree with this perception?

When asked if they believe that the evaluation should not coddle or indulge some groups of students, nor create grade inflation, and should be held to high standards, 113 students (59%) responded that they agree with high standards and that the evaluation should not coddle some groups of students. 26 students (13.5%) responded that they disagree with the emphasis on high standards, and 54 students (28%) indicated not to have an opinion on this respect. Six students declined to respond to this question.

a. Comments on standards

When commenting about holding high standards in teaching, most students stated that they did support the idea that all students should be treated equally and that instructors should set standards and teach effectively to all students. A student added that standards were important and that "it would be wrong to lower the bar of education." Most students also expected their instructors to be professional in both teaching and grading. Students,

however, supported the idea that although standards should be high, they needed to be realistic and instructors should spend time helping students who required extra-help.

Students also mentioned that not having high standards resulted in favoritism and "was not conducive to a positive learning experience for anyone involved." Some students added that high standards should be mandatory and said that there was no reason for some groups of students to get special treatment. As a student stated, "we are all smart students attending a highly prestigious school and we should be held to the same standard."

There were, however, some students who did support the idea that there were cases, in which instructors could be more flexible in relation to standards. For example, one student said that

If students put a lot of effort towards a class and were not able to grasp the material, the instructor could give a higher grade based on the amount of effort that the student allocated to the class.

Another student added that instructors needed to "teach to the top and test to the middle as the best approach." Other student suggested that "instructors should have a reasonable amount of A's and B's and such without a curve."

Do You Take The Evaluation Seriously?

When asked if they take the evaluation seriously, 134 students (69%) indicated that they do take the evaluation seriously. Fifty-two students (27%) responded that they do not take it seriously, and 8 students indicated not to have an opinion on this regard. Five students did not respond to this item.

How Can The Campus System For Evaluating Instruction Be Improved?

When asked about suggestions for improving the current system for evaluating teaching on campus, some students said that they believe the evaluation process was fine but the majority of the students felt that the system needed improvement. Some of the suggestions for improving the evaluation system included:

- a) Having more than one evaluation throughout the semester
- b) Have more specific questions included in the evaluation forms⁵
- c) Take the evaluations seriously and let students know that their opinions mattered.
Make them aware that the TES forms were not ignored, this would increase student seriousness when completing the forms
- d) Include a note in the evaluation form reminding students to take their time when filling the forms
- e) Avoid giving the TES evaluation forms at the end of the class
- f) Fire the bad teachers
- g) Eliminate the TES forms
- h) Make the filling of the evaluation forms to be voluntary
- i) Release evaluation results online, so students can see how fellow students rated the instructor and the course
- j) Hire someone to sit in the class and see what kinds of questions should be asked in the evaluation that relate to that particular class. Avoid using evaluation questions that are not appropriate or important for a specific class. Tailor the questions to the class and teacher.

- k) If an instructor receive overwhelmingly lower evaluations, this should be investigated by the university
- l) Have a shorter TES form
- m) Lose the “fill in bubbles” because they made students not to care about the evaluation
- n) Print results that students could read
- o) Discontinue tenure
- p) Improve the forms, so they are better measures of how students like the teacher
- q) Have more short answer questions on the forms... maybe different questions for each class
- r) Require all instructors to administer the TES forms

Some students provided examples to illustrate their belief that their evaluations were not taken seriously. For example, a student said, " you will never get people to care, if there is not going to be something that is gained, some people will never care about it." Another student commented:

I think the evaluation should be taken more seriously. The teacher assistant that I had for economics was horrible and everyone in our class gave her the lowest evaluations for her teaching. She was the worst teacher I've ever had. I even came to her for extra help, but she never explained well nor seemed to want to help. Regardless of our poor ratings, she is again a teacher assistant for a different course I'm in this semester. Many of my friends wish to write to the department and ask if these evaluation forms aren't doing anything, then why do we waste our time filling them out.

Students also stated the need for evaluation forms to improve and be tailored to the characteristics of the instructor and the course. A student stated that the evaluation forms

⁵ Some students suggested that the evaluation forms could include questions similar to those included in the

asked "all the wrong questions and that they needed to be appropriate to the individual class and teacher."

There was also a student who talked about how and when students wrote comments about teaching. As he said: "When I have an average teacher I usually don't take the evaluation seriously, but if I have an excellent or a very poor teacher I like to make a point on that paper."

Social and Legal Consequences of the Evaluation

The findings from the data collected from faculty members and students provided evidence that student evaluations of teaching can, in some cases be negatively influenced by several variables. In general, the interviewees did not identify negative consequences that could result for the influence of these variables in the case of professors who received very low evaluations. According to the interviewees, this happened because of the research orientation of the University that stressed the value of research over teaching. The interviewees, however, recognized that given the current pressures for accountability, the role of teaching on administrative decisions had increased and that instructors could be affected in their salary increases, or even denied tenure or promotion, if their TES ratings were very low and their research productivity was also low.

Some minority professors, however, cited the case of another minority instructor who was recently denied tenure because of his very poor TES ratings. The professors acquainted with the case believed that what happened to the instructor was evidence of bias and a non-

survey.

supportive climate for minority faculty on campus. A minority instructor commented about the case:

This was a professor who did not get tenure because of his TES ratings. There is a rumor that his department used his poor ratings to get rid off him. Some colleagues who knew this case think that the department did not wanted to support him for tenure and used his ratings against him. Apparently, the professor research was on track but his TES ratings were very low. In this case, teaching was used against the instructor as excuse for denying tenure.

The interviewees said that they believe this was a case of bias because they didn't know about any other case in which the campus had ever denied tenure to an instructor on the basis of poor TES ratings. Indeed, they said to know several cases in which instructors who obtained very poor ratings were granted tenure on the basis of their research.

In addition to being denied a salary increase or even tenure, instructors believed that the emphasis given to the TES ratings was resulting on some negative consequences. Two instructors mentioned that they knew professors in their department who eager for obtaining high TES scores when going for tenure or promotion tried to find ways of winning students.

As a minority professor commented:

Professors are under pressure for paying more attention to the TES scores. You see this especially with woman. It is not uncommon to know about courses where students bring snacks because their classes end late, but there are people who are bringing food for their students or even inviting them to their homes for dinner a few days before the evaluations. You can't tell me that this is not aimed to somehow influence their scores.

Another professor commented other negative behaviors shown by faculty that were interested in increasing their scores:

I have students who come from different departments on campus. Some of them have told me that they had professors who stay in the room when

students are filling the forms or who leave the room but not before telling students how they want them to fill the forms. I also have heard about other people who do things like this. I believe this happens in cases where people are under pressure for getting high ratings.

Legal Safeguards for Faculty Affected by the Evaluation

To learn about the possible legal consequences that could result from the evaluation, three attorneys, specializing on employment discrimination, tort law and constitutional law, were interviewed. One of the interviewees was the legal counselor for the American Association of University Professors during the last 10 years.

When the interviewed were asked about the legal safeguards that instructors could have if the evaluation presented serious flaws, the three counselors said that there were limited courses for faculty in these cases. This was because unlike civil law countries, the US legislation was less broad in its protection of individual worker rights. As Player, Shoben and Liebowitz (1995) says,

The statutory law in the United States stands virtually alone to recognize individual job security or industrial justice to the individual worker as a basis for regulating the power of employers to hire, fire, and establish terms and conditions of employment. (p. 1)

When applying this to the university level, one counselor said,

In general, there is nothing that can be done if a person is not evaluated in a fair way by the university, unless they are denied due process (tenured faculty) or if the faculty were unionized. This is because there is no premise in the US employment law that workers have to be fairly evaluated. Unless it is stated in your contract that you will be evaluated fairly, you can not contend the evaluation, you can be fired without any reason, with a valid reason, or no valid reason. The only exception is the Civil Rights legislation, outside this legislation there is no protection.

Another counselor added:

Traditionally, most faculty members have a provisional appointment for a few years before they get tenure. If they are denied tenure, there is no 14th amendment violation. There is no due process to contend the evaluation process because the evaluation forms are inappropriate or invalid. Tenured faculty can only be dismissed by just cause. They can be fired due to incompetence, but the institution will have to prove this. They can be dismissed because of different kinds of misconduct. However, I don't know of any case when a professor was dismissed because of his or her incompetence in teaching.

The third counselor also said:

There are universities where administrators are talking about post-tenure review. The purpose is to see if the professors are performing at their institution expected level. Some universities have rejected this system. The evaluation should be formative in any case, it is not for dismissal but you find institutions that want to use the results for making administrative decisions. An example of this is Arizona, a state where a series of bad reviews had taken place, and some people are saying that if a professor performs very low for 3 years in a row, this can be a cause for dismissal. The question is, can you contend the validity of the instruments in this case? There are some cases, as draconian like the Arizona's case where one professor rated low in research and teaching is arguing that the system isn't fair. But outside this case, there are no cases on the validity of student ratings for evaluating teaching.

Even though professors could not contend the evaluation because of its flaws, the three counselors agreed that the instructors could sue the university if the evaluation resulted in a civil rights violation. As the legal counselor for the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) stated, "if there is influence of race, sex, national origin or freedom of speech in the evaluation, then the situation could raise to the level of a constitutional rights violation."

Another counselor added:

In general you can not contest the evaluations, but if the evaluation hurts women and minorities, then the adverse effects of the evaluation are not justifiable. This will be a violation of the civil rights legislation. In this

case, it can be a lawsuit. If there is a history of flaws of the evaluation system, the university should investigate if the system is exposed to liability because of its possible impact on women and minorities.

The third counselor said

The only protection for faculty is in the case of employment discrimination, they can sue the university if it is known that that women and minorities systematically receive lower evaluations and the department administration doesn't act upon it. Sex discrimination or racial discrimination can be an issue if they are not corrected, if the department administration knows that there is a problem of lower evaluations and doesn't act upon it.

National origin can be an issue too. The court has held the position that having an accent is an element of national origin. So, if the instructor has an accent this can not be used to justify discrimination because this is an element of national origin and it is protected by the Civil Rights Act. If the instructor is rated low in communication skills because of its foreign accent, the instructor can content that there was discrimination because the evaluation was rating his or her national origin. There may be a justification, however, if the foreign accent disables the instructor from teaching. Then it will be a need for studying if the decision was justifiable, but if the instructor is fluent, he or she is protected.

The counselors also said that another resource for instructors was to sue for defamation, although this was difficult to prove. As one counselor sated:

If the institution has been circulating false accusations saying that the instructor is incompetent, s/he can sue for defamation. It is hard to prove though. It is almost impossible to argue that the evaluation system misrepresents the goodness of your teaching, unless you can show that the evaluators did know the flows of the evaluation system. To my knowledge, there is no legal case about a faculty member suing a university because of defamation. This is an area where there are no cases.

The counselors did clarify, however, an important distinction between institutions.

Public universities like Midwestern were more vulnerable to be sued because they were State funded institutions.

Summary

After Christy Evan's case study was completed, two issues were selected for in-depth analyses. These issues focused on the meanings, trade-offs and possible equity concerns regarding the teaching evaluation system on campus.

Data collection in this part of the research involved collecting information from a sample of women and minority professors and a sample of undergraduate students from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Midwestern University. Information from the instructors was obtained from the analyses of their Teaching Evaluation System (TES) Summary Profiles, and through open-ended interviews. Of the 200 women and minority professors included in the sample, 17 instructors provided copies of their TES Summary Profiles and fourteen instructors, ten of whom did not provided copies of their TES summary profiles, were interviewed. Information from students was collected through an online survey that was administered at the end of the spring semester of 2001. Of the 1523 students selected in the random sample, responded to the survey.

Results from the analyses of the TES Summary Profiles did not provide enough evidence for determining if there was a pattern showing that TES evaluations were biased against women and minority professors. This was partly due to the changing nature of the campus norm every semester, as well as the small number of professors who submitted their TES Summary Profiles, and the existence of many contextual differences among the subjects. Some of these differences included the years of teaching experience, courses class size and discipline been taught, the required versus elective nature of the courses among others.

Faculty interviews provided evidence about the possible negative influence of several variables in the TES evaluations. Some of the variables identified by the instructor included:

- a) Course related variables: course content, amount of content covered and workload.
- b) Instructor related variables: age, personal philosophy, teaching style, charisma, weight, sexual orientation, race, gender, ethnicity, accent, as well as fairness.
- c) Student related variables: motivation towards the course content, class level, major, prerequisite knowledge, and grade expectations
- d) Institution related variables: Characteristics of students and expectations varied from one institution to another

The negative influence of the TES ratings in relation to the instructor variables was said not to take place in all cases by some of the interviewees. The interviewees believed that the bias associated with these variables was not always present in the evaluation forms but manifested itself in different ways, such as during instructor-student interactions during the course and on student expectations and preconceptions about the instructors.

Instructors said that student bias towards the race, gender and ethnicity of their instructors, posed challenges for minority faculty members, but some interviewees believed that the bias could be reversed depending on the way in which the instructor reacted to student biases.

Although Midwestern University was trying to improve teaching and its evaluation, some professors felt that there was a need for the university to recognize that there were problems with the evaluation system that needed to be addressed. Some instructors also believe that teaching evaluation and improvement initiatives needed to be flexible enough to

address different views of teaching and different needs. Instructors also believe that the research orientation of the institution and the external pressures from organizations ranking departments on the basis of their research productivity interfered with faculty interests for improving teaching. New Departments faced additional pressures trying to improve teaching while recruiting students for their programs.

The findings from the online survey show that students paid attention to different characteristics and instructional behaviors when defining good teaching, but in general, they saw teaching as instructor oriented rather than student-oriented. This view of teaching contrasted and was opposite to the view of teaching hold by the campus administrators who encouraged an scholarly view of instruction in the different policy documents and during their interviews, as described on chapter five.

Students varied in the way in which they assigned their ratings to their instructors. Some gave low ratings to instructors who lacked pedagogical skills, were unmotivated, unfair, biased against some students, were insensitive to student needs, among other characteristics. There were also students who would give the lowest rating if they believed the course content was not worthy or, if the instructor spoke English with an accent.

Students said they assigned "middle scores" in different ways. Some, assigned this score to instructors that they considered to be poor teachers, while others gave this score to instructors, who although good, lacked a characteristic that they valued, such as being caring and committed to teaching. Another group of students gave a middle score to instructors who had both strengths and weaknesses as teachers, and other students said that they gave a middle score when they could not make a judgment about the teaching.

Students also differed in the way of assigning the highest scores in the evaluation forms. Some behaviors, such as covering content beyond what was stated on the syllabus, was perceived as a highly valuable or as a very negative behavior that could influence student decision for assigning or not a perfect score. There were also students who said that they would never give extreme scores, and other students who said to feel very uncomfortable with giving "middle scores."

Students used more than one process when rating the overall effectiveness of their instructors. Some students compared their students to an ideal of teaching, while others compared the instructor to other instructors. There were also students who rate their instructor effectiveness based on their own overall experience with the course.

Most students also said to value the specific items of the evaluation forms as much as the "global" items included in the form. Students, however, differed in their selection of the aspects that are important and essential for them when describing good teaching. Although most students identified fair grading, clarity and instructor's ability to communicate effectively in English as the most important and essential criteria of good teaching, there were many students who selected other different instructional characteristics and behaviors.

Students as a whole did identify "fair grading" as of the most important components of good teaching that could influence their decision of assigning certain score. Fair grading was defined in different ways from consistency of the workload with the workload of similar courses, consistency with pre-established grading procedures, or level of difficulty of the course. Not receiving a promised grade, not receiving an "A" for the course, were also selected as some of the several other ways in which students defined fair grading.

Most students stated that professors should be culturally sensitive and described cultural sensitivity as being respectful of students and their cultures. While the instructors interviewed believed that it was the responsibility of the instructor to adapt his or her teaching to the different students taking the course, most students did not believe this was a responsibility of the instructor.

Students were divided, although most agree, that it was important for the instructor to connect their teaching with life experiences outside the classroom. They didn't believe it was important to have an instructor of their same race or ethnicity, although some students granted that this would make easier for them to relate to their instructors. Some students expressed their interest for increasing the diversity among the professors on campus, and a few students said that even though they did not mind having an instructor of another race or ethnicity, race or gender, this would influence their evaluations of teaching.

Most students were supportive of the idea that the University should maintain high standards and avoid coddling some groups of students. The majority of the respondents said that they take the evaluation seriously, and made suggestions for improving the evaluation system.

Although students differed in their responses, these differences remained within each of the subgroups of students. There were no significant differences among students because of their class level, race or gender.

Findings indicate that students valued teaching and rewarded their instructors who care about teaching. There was also evidence from student comments in the online survey and from the interviews with the professors interviewed, that some students maybe paying

attention to aspects other than teaching when completing the evaluation forms, and that some of them could be biased against certain instructors, especially those teaching a Non-Western required courses, or those who were different to them because of their race, gender, ethnicity or because they spoke with an accent. But, given the complexities of teaching and the multiplicity of variables involved, there is a need for studying how these and other variables interact at the individual level and within the context of teaching. Because of the complexities and the importance of the issues, a holistic mode of inquiry could be more appropriate than a quantitative approach in understanding the role of race, gender and other variables in the evaluation of teaching.

It was also found that many of the characteristics or behaviors mentioned by students when defining good teaching were included and encouraged by the kind of professional development provided by OISI's staff. However, two very important criteria of good teaching as identified by professors and students were not being addressed by this office. One of them was related to the fairness of grading, and the other was on the influence of diversity on teaching. Although OISI staff did include the topic of cultural sensitivity as part of the training that they provided, this focused only on suggesting that instructors avoid making cultural remarks and being respectful to all students. But, the training didn't include an examination of student sensitivity towards different students, and about how student diversity manifested and influenced the teaching and learning process. Interviews with instructors provided evidence that instructors could benefit from learning more about how to address diversity in the classroom and its implications for their teaching, especially regarding

race relations, and how instructors could address some minority student requests for an instruction that challenged stereotypes and avoiding patronizing diverse students.

It is also important for the University to pay attention to the pressures put on instructors for improving their TES ratings. Some of the professors interviewed referred to some unintended consequences that could result from the emphasis on obtaining high ratings, such as having some instructors manipulating the way in which students rated their instructor's teaching.

Issues of gender, race, and ethnicity deserve further study, and should be taken more seriously by the university because in some cases their neglect to this issues could result on civil rights violations. Issues of national origin are also important because they can also result on civil rights violations but they present a dilemma. The majority of the students who responded to the online survey said to feel uncomfortable with having an instructor who is not clearly understood because s/he speaks English as a second language. Indeed, some students said that this would be one of the important criteria for them to assign the lowest TES rating. In response to student concerns about the instructor ability to communicate in English, Midwestern had created a training program for foreign faculty and students. Campus administrators also provided students with an e-mail address that they could use to report cases where the instructor wasn't fluent in English. However, it is important for the institution to ensure that student complaints about a particular instructor are due to problems related to the instructor fluency an not biases against certain instructors.

A dilemma that could take place would be in courses that are especially difficult for students to learn. Students may want to have a native speaker in these cases rather than an

instructor who spoke English with an accent. It can be argued that it is important for students to be exposed to diversity, but at the same time, having an instructor with a strong accent in a very difficult subject can make harder for students to learn. The challenge for the university is to decide what could be best in these cases without incurring in discrimination that results from a civil rights violation.