

Tips on Evaluating Teaching

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The research literature in cognitive social psychology shows that we all use gender and race as primary frames through which we perceive one another and has identified factors that can either exacerbate or mitigate these biases. Research on student evaluation of teaching shows students hold teachers accountable for gendered expectations in gender-specific ways. Students also punish women more than men for bad grades. Here are some ideas that evaluators who want to mitigate the consequences of bias should consider.

Increase the reliability of quantitative measures

- Ask only what students are competent to answer
- Be concrete: general or overall assessments invite stereotyping
- Make Standards explicit (instead of “is available,” state expectation and ask if it is being met)
- Minimize Saliency of Gender (avoid loaded words like “caring”)
- Minimize Time Pressure (keep the number of items short)
- Use multiple measures of teaching effectiveness (see below)

Improve the analysis of quantitative data

- Use Medians: they are less susceptible than means to the distorting impact of outliers
- Analyze Variance: examine the distribution of scores within the same class and for the same instructor across classes.
- Do multivariate analyses, controlling for students’ gender, race, expected grade, and whether or not the class is required.

Increasing the Validity of the Evaluation

Evaluation Research Methodologists stress two crucial steps should precede evaluation: 1) making the desired outcomes clear and concrete and 2) specifying the indicators of those outcomes. What are the goals you are trying to achieve in evaluating teaching? What would be valid and reliable indicators of the degree to which those goals are being achieved? Here is a start:

Goals	Indicators
Communicate Current Content of the Field	Syllabus
Student learning	Student work
Teaching practices that enhance learning	Observation of interaction in classroom settings Exercises, labs, and other assignments
Teacher skill development	Reflective essays discussing modifications over time Participation in training opportunities

Done correctly, the development of this material is not onerous and promotes the development of a teacher’s skill. Faculty begin collecting the data in their first semester of teaching. Department mentors periodically review materials and provide advice that faculty can incorporate in future semesters. Departments then provide a written assessment of progress over time as part of the Tenure and Promotion dossier.

More detailed standards for evaluating teaching and learning are at <http://www.cte.ku.edu/documenting/>

Laube, Heather, Kelly Massoni, Joey Sprague, and Abby Ferber. 2007. The Impact of Gender on the Evaluation of Teaching: What We Know and What We Can Do. *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* 19, 3: 87-104.

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