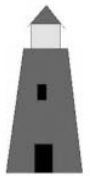




THE BEACON



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HPERS Question and Answer Session

by: **Mary Blackinton, Ed.D.**

Co Chair Health Professions Educational Research Symposium

We've seen the flyers around campus, and everyone is asking: What is HPERS? HPERS stands for the Health Professions Educational Research Symposium. This is an exciting, first-time conference that will be held here at NSU January 12-14 2007. The purpose of the conference is to provide an interdisciplinary forum to learn about educational research as applied to the health professions. In addition, it is an excellent opportunity for health profession educators from around the country to share and disseminate their educational research findings. The conference is sponsored by the Institute for Educational Research in the Health Professions, which is a committee inspired by Dr. Fred Lippman to promote educational research in health professions education.

Upcoming Events

All HPD faculty are invited to attend these luncheon seminars.

RSVP to Kathleen Hagen at ext. 1235 three days before these events.
 12:00-1:15pm Chancellor's Dining Room
 (5th floor of the Terry Building)

Faculty Research Development Seminars

hosted by the
 Faculty Research
 Development Committee

Wednesday, November 15, 2006.
 Melanie Crandell and Ken Seger from the College of Optometry

What exactly is educational research, and how is it different than other forms of research? Educational research seeks to expand the body of knowledge we have about teaching and learning. When applied to education in the health professions, it answers questions like:

- How can I evaluate the professional behaviors of my students in the classroom or in clinic?
- What are the valid contents to include in my class, and how should they be organized to enhance student learning?
- Are my student assessment techniques (tests, practical examinations, essays) valid and reliable?
- Were the objectives/outcomes of my course or curriculum met?
- What are the predictors of student success in our program or on licensure examination?
- Does student performance in the classroom correlate to performance in clinical settings?

Now Available

If you missed last April's presentation on the Perry Scheme from Dr. William Rapaport of the University of Buffalo, you will be able to view it on a CD created by the I-Zone. The CDs are available for a two week loan from the Testing Center (5th floor of the Terry Building, room 1524). Call or e-mail Kathleen Hagen at x1235 or khagen@nova.edu if you have any questions...

Educational research is similar to research in the health professions in that it seeks to add to our knowledge about the profession of teaching so that our teaching is EFFECTIVE. In contrast to research in our professions, however, educational research rarely uses controlled conditions, lab rats or randomization. One form of educational research for example, called Classroom Action Research, seeks to improve learning by using a classroom assessment techniques to determine what students are learning or which areas are unclear.

What type of programming will HPERS include? HPERS will include a combination of learning opportunities, including nationally known keynote speakers, research platforms, a plenary session, poster presentations, and workshops. There will also be time for socialization with other faculty to exchange ideas and information.

We have several really exciting speakers who will be participating in our symposium. Dr. Noreen Facione and Dr. Peter Facione are our keynote speakers, and they will engage the audience in a discussion about "Linking (Continued on Page 6)

The Beacon is a quarterly publication of The Center for Teaching and Learning. Contact information:

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ASK THE EXPERTS: "STUDENT EVALUATIONS: A CRITICAL REVIEW - PART 1"

by Michael Huemer, Ph.D.
University of Colorado at Boulder

Informal student evaluations of faculty were started in the 1960's by enterprising college students.⁽¹⁾ Since then, their use has spread so that now they are administered in almost all American colleges and universities and are probably the main source of information used for evaluating faculty teaching performance.⁽²⁾ There is an enormous literature on the subject of student evaluations of faculty (SEF).⁽³⁾ The following is a summary of some developments in that literature that should be of special interest to faculty, with particular emphasis on criticisms of SEF that have emerged recently. But I begin with the arguments in favor of the use of SEF.

Reliability and Validity of SEF

A test is said to be "reliable" if it tends to give the same result when repeated; this indicates that it must be measuring something. A test is said to be "valid" if it is measuring what it is intended to measure. E.g., a scale that always reads "5" whenever a red object is placed on it is "reliable" but not "valid" as a measure of weight.

Most researchers agree

1. that SEF are highly reliable, in that students tend to agree with each other in their ratings of an instructor, and
2. that they are at least moderately valid, in that student ratings of course quality correlate positively with other measures of teaching effectiveness. In one type of study, multiple sections of the same course are taught by different instructors, but there is a common final exam. The ratings instructors receive turn out to be positively correlated with the performance of their students on the exam. The correlation is in the neighborhood of .4 to .5, meaning that 16 to 25% of the variance in one variable can be explained by variance in the other.

SEF also tend to correlate well with retrospective evaluations by alumni; in other words, former students rarely change their evaluations of their teachers as the years pass.⁽⁴⁾

Furthermore, other methods of evaluating teaching effectiveness do not appear to be valid. Ratings by colleagues and trained observers are not even reliable (a necessary condition for validity) - that is, colleagues and observers do not even substantially agree with each other in instructor ratings.⁽⁵⁾

Usefulness of SEF

Instructors who received results of a midsemester evaluation tended to have higher ratings on end-of-semester evaluations than those who did not, suggesting that SEF cause changes in teaching behaviors which result in higher ratings. The improvement was greatest when (a) the professor's self-evaluation was very different from the students' evaluation, (b) the professor received professional consultation on the interpretation of the evaluations, and (c) the student evaluation forms included specific items (such as, "Professor gives preliminary overview of lecture"), as opposed to vague items such as, "How well planned are lessons?"

In spite of the above, SEF have come under fire on several fronts.

Grading Leniency Bias

The most common criticism of SEF seems to be that SEF are biased, in that students tend to give higher ratings when they expect higher grades in the course. This correlation is well-established, and is of comparable magnitude, perhaps larger, to the magnitude of the correlation between student ratings and student learning (as measured by tests) described in section 1 above.

Thus, SEF seem to be as much a measure of an instructor's leniency in grading as they are of teaching effectiveness. The correlation holds both between students in a given class and between classes. It also holds between classes taught by the same instructor, when the instructor varies the grade distribution. And it affects ratings of all aspects of the instructor and the course.⁽⁶⁾ Many believe that this causes rampant grade inflation.⁽⁷⁾

Optimists have suggested that this correlation might be due to the fact that greater teaching effectiveness on the part of the instructor leads to both higher grades and higher ratings of the instructor; thus, the effect might actually be a sign of the validity of student ratings. However, this hypothesis fails to explain (a) why the correlation also holds among students within the same class (who presumably are beneficiaries of the same teaching effectiveness), (b) why it holds between classes taught by the same instructor when the instructor varies the grade distribution, (c) why there is a greater correlation between grades and ratings when one looks at the student's relative grade (i.e., the student's grade in this class compared with his/her grade in other classes), as opposed to the student's absolute grade. These and other facts are explained by the leniency bias hypothesis: people tend to like those who praise them (particularly if the praise is greater than expected) and dislike those who criticize them. The instructor who grades leniently in effect praises the students, who then like the instructor more. They then reward the instructor with higher ratings in general.⁽⁸⁾

Despite some dissenting voices,⁽⁹⁾ the influence of grades on student evaluations seems to be an open

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ASK THE EXPERTS

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secret in colleges and universities. In one survey, 70% of students admitted that their rating of an instructor was influenced by the grade they expected to get.⁽¹⁰⁾ Similar proportions of professors believe that grading leniency and course difficulty bias student ratings.⁽¹¹⁾

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HOW VALID ARE STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF INSTRUCTION?

by: Stan Cohen, Ed.D.

In many institutions of higher learning, faculty are rewarded for research, publications, obtaining grants, consulting, and administration of programs. Classroom teaching frequently ranks near the bottom in importance. In fact, the publish or perish concept is a reality in these institutions with the unfortunate outcome that excellent (but not prolific) teachers are dismissed.

Although in recent years NSU has been actively supporting the academic arenas in addition to the teaching role, we have not lost sight of the primary goal of HPD, namely, to create a learning environment that will produce the best possible health professional practitioners. That learning environment is designed and carried out by our instructors, so improvement of instruction for all teachers is of paramount importance.

For years we have depended on student ratings as one measure of teacher competence. There is great controversy over this issue. For the most part, students seem to favor

evaluating their professors' teaching and they tend to consider the process legitimate. On the other hand, many teachers do not feel students know enough about content or methodology to rate teacher competence.

The research certainly supports the notion that while some students are lacking knowledge to do in-depth assessments, every day they are exposed to some kind of instruction. Students certainly know whether a subject was effectively taught to them, and they can also report whether they were excited about the process of learning it. If properly used, student ratings can be important in identifying outstanding teaching.

Those arguing against the validity of student evaluations claim that variables outside the scope of instructor effectiveness can cause students to rate an instructor higher or lower than would be warranted by teaching ability alone. Such variables might be class size, instructor experience, time of day, cultural differences, instructor popularity,

lenient grading practices, instructor attractiveness, work load for a class, and difficulty of tests.

Research has shown that the qualities students see in their teachers are more important than instructor popularity, easy grades, or attractiveness. Students give high marks to teachers who are able to present material clearly. Students tend not to mind how much work is assigned or the difficulty of tests as long as the tests fairly reflect what content is taught. In fact, easy courses often get a mediocre rating even though they are well attended. Student satisfaction studies show that positive emotions like enthusiasm, excitement, and respect are far more relevant than negative ones. Indeed, there is an abundance of literature dealing with the educational benefits of student-teacher rapport. Students know by their teacher's behavior if he/she really cares about them as individuals. Students often describe such a teacher as warm and open to student questions. Students gauge a teacher's openness by watching



THE ARGUMENT FOR CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

Why should we have classroom assessments and who should do it?

Based on the last SACS accreditation feedback, one of their conclusions was that HPD needed a more comprehensive way of assessing classroom instruction. They pointed out that student evaluations and student testing results were valuable, but suggested we also consider adding things like classroom observations. Observations by trained educators focus only on methodology and would consider criteria well established in the literature. They would not be evaluating content itself, but only the way the material is presented. Peers and deans would observe and assess the quality of content.

Both good content and good methodology produce great instruction. The process never ends because both of these are forever changing and improving. No matter how many years we have been teaching, we can always get better – all of us!

The HPD Center for Teaching and Learning has piloted a set of methodology criteria for several years, and we have developed a comprehensive set of behaviors that affect learning based on education standards. The primary purpose of this assessment is to help every teacher become the best he or she can be.

In certain cases, a dean or chair may request an assessment of a faculty member. If the Center for Teaching and Learning receives a request from a dean or chair to perform a classroom assessment of a faculty member, the assessment will be done only with the knowledge and permission of the faculty member. An appointment will

Sean's Soap Box

be made, a pre-observation form completed, the observation will take place, and a follow-up summary will be written and shared with the faculty member and dean or chair.

Only trained observers of instruction with Ed.D. or Ph.D. degrees in education will be carrying out these observations. The observers are handpicked from the Fischler School of Education and Human Services and the Center for Teaching and Learning. The observers' expertise is strictly in methodology, and they are qualified to carry out this mission. The assessments are straightforward and will include constructive suggestions for improvement. The assessment rubrics may be viewed online at <http://www.nova.edu/hpdtesting/ctl/rubrics.html>

HOW VALID ARE STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF INSTRUCTION?

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his/her responses to student challenges in tests or in the classroom. Even if a view is found to be incorrect, students respect instructors who consider viewpoints other than their own.

Another argument sometimes made against student evaluations of instruction claims that students lack the depth of knowledge necessary to adequately judge their instructor. This argument can be countered by research which compared student ratings, professor self-evaluations, and ratings by expert education judges. Those professors rated excellent by their students were also rated highly by the experts and by the teachers themselves. The only significant difference was that student ratings were lower than the other two groups.

A final argument against student evaluations of instruction claims that measures of student achievement (test scores) show little correlation to student ratings of their teachers. While it is true that early research supported that notion, I believe those study designs were faulty. Newer research is showing that teacher ratings are positively related to student learning. Also, more recent research shows that qualities of teachers highly rated by students show that clarity of presentation, which includes logically organized material on a level students can understand, is most important. When instructors can translate complex subject matter into simple concepts, students see the threads that hold the facts together. That enables the student to begin to develop the critical insights their teachers have. In addition, students believe that an instructor's ability to frequently use concrete examples is an essential aid to understanding and fostering thought about course content. Simply encouraging students to memorize material does nothing to stimulate enthusiasm for the subject and does not help in integrating the information into a useable framework.

All these studies show that the teachers whom students will remember as great are the ones who are able to demonstrate their own pleasure in learning and infect their students with that same love of learning, who see both the big picture and the small details in their field of expertise and are able to present them clearly to their students, and who demonstrate caring and respect for their individual students.

The author of this paper welcomes your response. What say you? Let's debate these issues.

THE TWO SHORTS COMPETITION



*From left to right: Peter Holub (2nd place), Kathleen Hagen (coordinator), Peter Murray (presenter), Nathalie Garbani (3rd place), Ken Seger (presenter), Harvey Feldman (1st place), and Mary Blackinton (co-chair).
Not shown: Judith Parker (2nd place) and Sarah Ransdell (co-chair).*

On September 27, HPD faculty had the opportunity to hear presentations from the entrants to the Two Shorts Competition. The idea for the Two Shorts Competition was originated by Drs. Mary Blackinton and Sarah Ransdell of the College of Allied Health and Nursing. The purpose of the competition was to give a boost to ideas for educational research prior to the deadline for abstract submission for the Health Professions Educational Research Symposium (HPERS) that NSU will host in January 2007.

Entrants and the titles of their presentations were:

- Dr. Harvey Feldman (College of Allied Health and Nursing – PA program), *The 4-F Club: An Extracurricular Education-Enhancement Project for Physician Assistant Students.*
- Ms. Nathalie Garbani (College of Allied Health and Nursing – *Vascular Sonography* program), *Predictors of Achievement in an Allied Health Program: Maturity and Experience.*
- Dr. Peter Murray (College of Dental Medicine), *Stem Cells.*
- Dr. Judith Parker and Dr. Peter Holub (College of Allied Health and Nursing – OT program and Health Sciences program, respectively), *Modeling Professionalism in the Online Environment.*
- Dr. Ken Seger (College of Optometry), *Examination of Young Children (Stay Alive).*

The winner of the third place prize was Ms. Nathalie Garbani. Her research into characteristics of successful students in the vascular sonography program has found that maturity and prior health care experience count as much as (if not more than) grade point average in determining success.

The winner of the second place prize was the team of Dr. Judith Parker and Dr. Peter Holub. Their presentation on how to model professionalism for online classes demonstrated ways of overcoming some of the hurdles faced by online instructors.

The first place winner was Dr. Harvey Feldman. In addition to a small cash prize, he is automatically accepted to present his work at HPERS. Dr. Feldman has developed an extracurricular learning activity in the form of a series of online quizzes on course material and medical history undertaken by PA students. Top quiz scorers compete for prize money in an end-of-year comprehensive quiz. By studying for these quizzes, students report a deeper understanding of the material presented, enhanced retention, and improved library research skills.

The Center for Teaching and Learning was pleased to provide the prize money for the Two Shorts competition and to host the luncheon at which the entrants presented their work. We hope to have even more entries next year.

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

by Kaye Robertson

Director of the NSU Health Professions Division Library

NEW SERVICE FOR FACULTY

Delivery to your desktop is an idea whose time has come for the Health Professions Division. We in the library are constantly searching for new ways to provide services that make your job easier.

As anyone who spends time searching the medical literature knows, HPD Library provides a wealth of journals, both in print and online. Happily, with over 21,000 titles available full text online, you can usually call up your article and read it at your computer. For the remaining titles that are available in print on the library shelves, you had to journey down to the library, find the journal, and make copies. Now we will do the work for you and deliver the article in .pdf to your desktop. Use the same interlibrary loan form as you would for ordering articles not available locally. We will note that you are

faculty and will proceed to scan the article and send it to your email.

We are continually changing our subscriptions to electronic format as they become available. Many of the publishers, especially societies and associations, have not yet made the switch. And many of the journals are available only for recent years, or are embargoed (not available) for the current year online. So the print journal collection remains a valuable resource for older journals as well as those not yet digitized. We are just making them more accessible to you by providing this service.

Please take advantage of this service. And please come by to see us! We still like to see you in person, even if it's just for a chat.

HPERS Questions and Answers

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assessment to teaching and research in the health professions." Our plenary session will include three outstanding speakers from 3 different professions to talk about developing an educational research agenda: Dr. Gail Jensen (physical therapy), Dr. Duncan-Hewitt (pharmacy), and Dr. Hoppe (optometry). Our concluding speaker is the engaging Ruth-Marie Fincher, who was one of the authors of the white paper for the scholarship of teaching in medicine.

How can I get involved in HPERS?

First and foremost, visit our website at www.nova.edu/hpers to read more about our conference programming. We encourage all faculty to attend our inaugural conference. The cost of the conference is only \$100 for NSU faculty and \$50 for students or interns. The conference includes an ice cream

social Friday evening, lunch on Saturday, and break foods. The cost for faculty outside NSU is \$185. We also want to encourage our NSU colleagues to submit abstracts for a poster presentation, 30 minute platform, or 2 hour workshop. The deadline for abstract submissions is November 1, 2006, and they are submitted on our website. All abstracts will undergo a peer-review process of 3 reviewers, and notices on acceptance will be emailed by December 1.

Who do I call with questions? Visit our website at www.nova.edu/hpers or call Dr. Mary Blackinton at 954-262-1278 or email maryb@nova.edu.



Quotes to Brighten Your Day...

Success is never final. Failure is never fatal. It is courage that counts. - *Winston Churchill*

Don't wait. The time will never be just right. - *Napoleon Hill*

Success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. - *Winston Churchill*

The only place you'll find success before work is in the dictionary. - *May B. Smith*

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow. - *Helen Keller*

There is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way. - *Alfred Souza*

The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up. - *Mark Twain*

Ideas for our next issue

If you have a great teaching technique, let us know and we'll share it with your colleagues. Caught in the act - tell us good things you've seen faculty do!