I just got my Spring student evaluations back from my department. Our eval process is pretty good -- if nothing else, it's better than what you get from RateMyProfessor.com, where students go mainly to vent about whoever pissed them off during the year.

Actually, I say that, but students always assure me that's not what happens on the site. They claim students don't just log on and bitch about the teachers who gave them low grades, which is what I've always assumed. It's what I would've done, if they'd had the Interwebs back in my college days. But my students swear that most of the reviews they read online are accurate, and helpful when "shopping" (sweet!) for a good teacher later.

I make it a point never to look myself up on RateMyProfessor (and if you ever look me up, DON'T TELL ME WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT ME BECAUSE I DO NOT WANT TO KNOW). But I do know that, according to the site, all teachers can be accurately and fully assessed with three questions: 1) Is the teacher nice? 2) Is the teacher easy? 3) Is the teacher hot?
That's... great. Thanks for that. Reeeeeeaaaally puts education in perspective.

My department's official questionnaire is more in-depth, luckily. Students respond to questions about the teacher's knowledge, in-class abilities, clarity, accessibility and fairness. They rate us on a scale of 1 (You Suck) to 5 (You Rock) in several areas, and then there's space where they can write out some more qualitative feedback after that. Nowhere on our evaluations is hotness a factor. Thank God.

My numbers are usually fine, typically nestled in the average-to-slightly-above average range. I get positive responses to questions about my commitment, overall subject knowledge and my enthusiasm. I get, err, slightly less positive responses about the value of the reading materials I assign and actual writing tasks I make them fulfill. Fair enough.

Still, it's hard to rely on your students' assessment to get a sense of how you're doing sometimes. On the one hand, they're the ones who sat in front of you for a semester, so they should be the ones to evaluate how you did.

On the other hand.

Here's a quick overview of the responses I received this semester on the qualitative part of the eval form, sampled from the 124 students I taught across four sections.

- One student said I was the best teacher he ever had, and that I helped him feel more confident about his writing. Another student said I was the worst teacher in the history of teaching and should be taken out behind the school for a beating.
- One student expressed gratitude for the specific and thorough feedback I provided on her written work. Another student in the same class complained that she never received any helpful or constructive comments from me, and accused me of giving her grades based on a process involving a dartboard and heavy drinking.
- One student felt I would look more professional if I started wearing ties in the classroom. ("No offense.")
- One student thanked me for being the most "insperational" writing teacher he ever had. Sigh.
- One student felt our class readings which explored various contemporary church vs. state issues were "the single most wasted day ever spent while alive."
- One student thanked me for helping her understand the importance of knowing how rhetoric shapes her perceptions. Another student in the same class said I should stop talking just because I love the sound of my own voice, because "no one in class gives a crap." (Wow. Also, ouch.)
- One student said I shouldn't change a thing about my class because strong writing skills can benefit anyone, in any major or profession. Another said he'd never taken a more useless class in his life, since he knows writing will not be relevant in his chosen career as a professional sports agent.

So! Ok then! Let's call it a job well done, people! I guess! Have a great summer!

_labels: college students, evaluations, School, teaching_

posted by didactic pirate at 9:54 AM

17 Comments:

 nova June 8, 2010 at 11:43 AM
Hmm... well clearly the well-thought-out and meaningful comments were all positive, and other people just didn't get anything out of the class. (Which is not, by any means, your fault.) I really really would dread reading those evaluations. You're brave!

Reply

 didactic pirate June 8, 2010 at 12:01 PM
I hope it doesn't sound like I was trying to dumb down the students who were critical. These were actual comments, for better and for worse. And I should say that the majority of students who fill out evals don't actually take the time to provide any written feedback at all. In the end, it all sort of rolls off your back. You take them, you think about them, and then you keep on keepin' on.

Reply

chksngr June 8, 2010 at 12:13 PM

I've never seen you teach...but I would be willing to bet high amounts of cash money that that student who thought the class on grammar was "the single most wasted day ever spent while alive." has probably had at least ONE day spent under worse circumstances. If not, then they have never had a hangover of any significant proportion...

Reply

Ruthie June 8, 2010 at 12:44 PM

"First of all," he wrote, "I know how to read already. And second of all, reading about people's church vs. state problems is pointless, since most Americans have the same religion anyway."

headdesk. /headdesk. /headdesk again.

...the one class session we spent addressing issues of grammar and mechanics was "the single most wasted day ever spent while alive."

STUDENTS LIKE THIS are the reason that I am still tutoring NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COLLEGE JUNIORS about subject/verb agreement...not because they simply don't know it, but because they actually write sentences such as "The girls whom were watching the baseball star laughs."

Just sit back, relax, and be confident in the knowledge that he will be experiencing RWS280 AND 310W. Hopefully with Professor Fish. She'll teach 'im to think grammar is a waste of time, HA.

Reply

Beta Dad June 8, 2010 at 2:10 PM

Not bad, overall.

I was bummed after I got my first evals, because one hater gave me all 1's and screwed up my numbers for the whole class. Most of my negative comments have been along the lines of "grades too hard" or "gives too much homework." I can live with that.

Anyway, your tales of academic adventure are always inspiring!

Reply

Anne June 8, 2010 at 2:57 PM

My first year teaching I had an evaluation in English101 that said, "she grades too much on our writing, which isn't fair because we aren't all good writers but some of us try really hard." I paraphrase, the actual comment wasn't nearly as articulate as that. I have often been resentful that students with lousy attendance, or other "didn't even try" qualities get to evaluate me. Your evaluations sound awesome, quite frankly; sign me up! (for what it is worth, in 11 years of FT teaching, I have accumulated all of 5 comments on RMP.com and all of them say I am nice & easy (though not hot?) -- makes me feel like it is a dating website, and not an academic one.

Reply

Stephanie June 8, 2010 at 3:12 PM

Absolutely NO other blogger makes me laugh quite so unrestrainedly ... all by myself ... here in my office ... (and why doesn't spellcheck like "unrestrainedly"?)

Reading your blog makes me want to teach in a classroom - or bungee jump - which might be less terrifying.

Reply

Didactic Pirate June 8, 2010 at 4:17 PM
@Stephanie: thanks for your kind words. Teaching is a little like bungee jumping, at first -- except without that springy cord that keeps you from smacking your face into the ground. But it does get easier with time. And more fun. And, of course, I tend to write about the "challenging" students, rather than the great ones, which I should probably change. Because there definitely are great ones. Those stories just aren't as good...

Reply

Judi June 8, 2010 at 5:26 PM
Now i want to know what D.P. wears to class. T-shirts? Tank tops? Oh, wait right, you wear a pirate outfit. Not sure a tie goes with that ensemble.

Reply

Didactic Pirate June 8, 2010 at 5:59 PM
Judi, You hit the nail on the head. I wear the following to class every day:
#1 - Gnarly head scarf or tricorn hat to shield my grizzled head from the sun;
#2 - Eyepatch (obviously);
#3 - Hook on left hand, good for chalkboard scraping when I need to get students' attention; and
#4 - Live parrot on left shoulder, who always, always laughs at my jokes.

And THAT'S how I get respect in the classroom. Clearly, a tie would clash.

Reply

chksngr June 9, 2010 at 9:09 AM
Maybe a nice hoop earring would lend some class to your wardrobe?!?!?

Reply

Living Shallow, Living Well June 9, 2010 at 6:59 PM
No one on earth would be able to resist reading what people say about them- how juicy!!

Reply

Didactic Pirate June 9, 2010 at 7:17 PM
@chksngr: Yes! Why didn't I think of the hoop earring before? Plus, the wife will surely find it sexy.

@Living Shallow: it really is almost impossible to resist. I have a few colleagues that choose never to read their evals. I don't know how they do it.

Reply

SciFi Dad June 10, 2010 at 3:20 AM
Everyone's going to get good and bad comments, depending on perspective. I would have had a more negative comment, not necessarily about the prof, but about the course if it was compulsory and I found it useless. (I studied engineering in the late 1990s. I had some choice words about taking drafting... like with pencils and stuff.)

My own personal evaluation highlight came from my high school physics teacher, who wrote, "Kill this child now before he has a chance to breed."

Reply

otherworldlyone June 10, 2010 at 12:47 PM
Thanks for the comment at mine.

I enjoyed this. And thanks for the tip on where to find the hot profs. :)

Reply

Aunt Becky June 10, 2010 at 2:12 PM
I TA'd in college (stop laughing) for organic/inorganic and biochemistry (no, shut the fuck up) and I take my hat off to you: I'd kill the fuckers. Those fuckers were my PEERS and I was still like, ARE YOU EVEN TRYING?

I don't know how you do it.

Reply

@Aunt Becky:

Heavy drinking is how. Heavily.

Reply

I'm not sure how you do it.

Reply

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