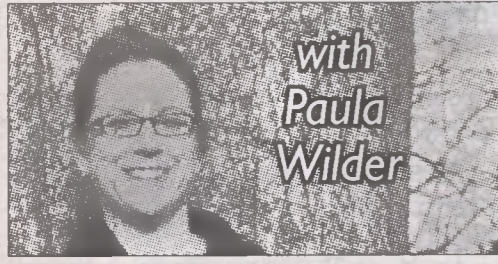


Today's Lesson: Course evaluations



with
Paula
Wilder

The professor pulls out a white envelope containing papers full of empty bubbles and empty spaces. Pencils are required. The professor leaves and the students begin writing.

This is the process of course evaluations.

When I first came to Guilford, I had no idea how important these evaluations are. This is true for other students as well.

First-year Julia Levi-Goerlich said, "I think it is a waste of time."

According to Associate Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Physics Steve Shapiro, course evaluations are not a waste of time and figure importantly in faculty renewal, promotion, and tenure.

Shapiro referred me to the faculty review process located on the Guilford Web site. The evaluations are mentioned several times and do hold considerable weight.

"The Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) uses course evaluations and many other sources of information in their deliberations," said Shapiro.

I asked students whether they realized that course evaluations were used in the review process and most were surprised.

Senior Zane Campbell said that he took the evaluations seriously but wasn't aware of the FAC guidelines. He thought they were mainly for the professors' benefit.

"Professors take them seriously because they feel it is important and they want to improve their teaching," said Campbell. "But now that I know that the FAC uses them in the evaluation process, I think it can really help both the professors and the school see how well they are doing."

In addition to the review process, professors do use the evaluations to assess if they need to make changes in the courses.

"I knew they were reasonably important, but the professors that talked with me already have tenure," said junior Art Fulks. "They just said they actually read them for consideration for the future classes."

But according to the review process guidelines, professors must write a self-evaluation and part of that is based on the course surveys.

First-year Margie Farmer's comments might require an explanation from her professor in his self-evaluation and might raise some questions with the FAC.

Farmer had a bad experience

and reflected this in the evaluation.

"I needed (the professor) to show me what to do, not tell me," said Farmer. "He is the worst teacher and I wrote it all down in my evaluation and gave him all Fs."

After hearing this, I asked Shapiro what happens when a student gives professors scathing

ever they want and get away with it."

In contrast, senior Crystal Harris believes that anonymity is best.

"I think (anonymous evaluations) are a good way for students to be honest in their opinion of their professors," said Harris. "It is always a good thing to have the ability to freely speak your mind."

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Zane Campbell, senior

reports - warranted or not.

"There are some problems with any sort of evaluation process," said Shapiro. "In the self-study that (the professors) submit to FAC when they are reviewed, faculty address many things, including what students have written in the course evaluations. FAC will see both the course evaluations and the faculty member's response."

Senior Jamie Metrick thinks some unwarranted responses might be resolved if students had to put their names on them.

"The anonymity of it means that people know they can say what-

Campbell knows that some students don't take them seriously or use the evaluations to complain.

"There have been people who rush through them so they can leave class early," said Campbell. "Others have problems with a teacher and give them the worst ratings and complain in the comment section, but that is rare."

Sophomore David Watters agrees with Campbell, but believes the presentation should be different.

"(The evaluations) could be done in a much better way," said Watters. "They are usually done

at the end of the year and the end of class and people just want to leave."

These same issues have been studied for decades. However, all the studies have ambiguous findings.

Some studies state that evaluations are valuable, others say they have no value, and even others criticize schools that use them in the review process. Yet others report that utilizing them as part of the review process helps hold professors accountable.

Some studies show a gender/race bias when it comes to evaluating professors. Women and non-Caucasians are evaluated much harsher than white male professors are.

Even though the results are conflicting, the truth is that Guilford does use the evaluations, so here are the conclusions I've drawn:

Take the evaluations seriously. Write as if your name is attached.

Don't use it as a personal attack.

Be honest, but fair.

The bottom-line - when we fill out those empty bubbles and empty spaces at the end of this semester, we need to make sure our comments have validity.

Consider the fact that we are talking about a real person who has a real stake in what we say and how we say it.

Guilford College Theatre Studies Senior Company presents

Bonjour, Là, Bonjour

April 17th & 18th, 2009



All performances will take place at 8 p.m. in Sternberger Auditorium, located in Founders Hall.

Admission is free and no reservations are required.

Adult themes make this play appropriate only for mature audiences.

"Tremblay's Bonjour, Là, Bonjour takes place in 1973 in Montreal, Quebec. After a three-month stay in Europe, a young man named Serge returns home to see his family. Personal and collective interactions hold the action together as the play jumps between past and present.

As family members fight to create a secure sense of self in a suffocating environment, the overlapping stories create a rich and complex picture of family dynamics.

Finally, Tremblay celebrates social nonconformists who define love in highly individual and controversial terms. Bonjour, Là, Bonjour asserts that it is important to live honestly and courageously, being true only to one's self, rather than socially defined norms."