



The “Excellent Teacher” Item The IDEA Center

Three individual items on the IDEA student rating form provide “global” indices of teaching effectiveness—*As a result of taking this course, I have more positive feelings toward this field of study; Overall, I rate this instructor an excellent teacher; and Overall, I rate this course as excellent.* Of these, the one rating the instructor as excellent has been somewhat enigmatic, both because of its unusually high average (4.18 on a 5-point scale) and because so little of its variance was accounted for by “extraneous” factors (factors that, although influencing student ratings, are not under the control of the instructor—chiefly, student characteristics like motivation to enroll or general academic work habits). Such factors accounted for less than 9 percent of the variance on the “excellent teacher” item, compared to 30-35 percent of the variance on the other two global items. A recent study helps to explain these differences.

The 20 “teaching method” items on the IDEA Diagnostic Form are routinely combined to form 5 scales for describing teaching approaches—*Stimulating Student Interest; Fostering Student Collaboration; Establishing Rapport; Encouraging Student Involvement; and Structuring the Classroom.* Scores on these scales were combined optimally to predict ratings on the global items. They predicted ratings on the “excellent teacher” item more accurately ($R^2=.85$) than on “increased positive feeling” and “excellent

course” (R^2 of .64 and .73, respectively). Whether or not students regard the instructor as “excellent” appears to have little to do with extraneous circumstances but a lot to do with teaching approach.

The 20 “methods” items that comprise these five scales are composed of a mixture of items; five clearly describe the approach the teacher adopted, and another five clearly reflect the skill with which the instructor executed a given technique. The other 10 are a combination of “approach” and “skill.” The five “skill” items were much more closely related to “teaching excellence” than were the five “approach” items; the average correlation for the former was .81 and for the latter .54. One skill item (*Explained course material clearly and concisely*) correlated .90 with the rating of teaching excellence.

When students rate the excellence of their instructor, they tell us a lot about their perceptions of the instructor’s teaching skills, some about how the teacher approached instruction, and very little about the students themselves. Although most faculty participants in the IDEA system are rated favorably on this item, those wishing to enhance their rating would be well advised to focus improvement efforts on sharpening their communication, motivational, and rapport building skills.