

Course evaluations must have quality attention from students

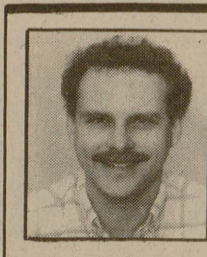
It's that time of the semester again: Instructors will be asking for students to fill out evaluation forms as the courses come to a close.

Graduate students are in a unique position at a university: We are both students and teachers. This gives us a different perspective on issues of student-teacher interaction. The majority of the graduate students I know take their evaluations very seriously; we read them and try to learn from them. We are not very far removed from our own experiences with poor instruction and we don't want to do to our students what has been done to us.

Students sometimes fill out evaluations in ways which don't help. I will mention three problems: irrelevance, inconsistency and lack of perspective.

In any large class, there will always be a few people who think that their instructor is a number one creep, and some who will consider her or him the reincarnation of a deity. These expressions of mental and emotional aberration find their way onto the evaluation forms all too often. "This guy is a geek." "I have never met a more wonderful person." Even more ridiculous are comments about personal appearance and beauty (or lack thereof). "Why do you wear your hair that way?" The worst, however, are those who make a salacious statement. Any of these irrelevant remarks guarantee that your evaluation will not be taken seriously by anyone.

Right up there with irrelevance is inconsistency. How is an instructor supposed to evaluate his or her performance when some students say one thing and others say exactly the opposite? The following are examples from real life. "Slow the lectures down."



Jeff Farmer
Columnist

"Move a little faster." What is this guy supposed to do? How about these: "In some cases seems to go into over-explanation." Someone else says "explain more." Or these: "Is happy to answer all questions." and "Some people feel intimidated by asking questions." Finally, my favorite; these two comments appeared on the very same evaluation form: Under the positive remarks was "made things interesting," but under ways to improve was "keep students interested."

Such comments are difficult to interpret. I think part of the reason for inconsistency is that the students don't stop to think very much about what they are saying on the form. Did the instructor go too fast (or slow) for the whole class or just for you? Maybe you should have taken a different class; it doesn't help anyone to trash the teacher because someone mis-advised you. Another possible reason is that many students only evaluate the instructor from their own standpoint—if they got a good grade they are happy, and if not, they are hacked off.

This brings us right along to lack of perspective. The best predictor of how a student will evaluate an instructor, sad to say, is that student's own grade in the course. The people who get "A's" give me high marks and the ones who get "F's" take me to the cleaners. I got an

evaluation once where I was told that I went way too fast; this person wanted me to slow down. But this person also admitted that they were absent from class "more than nine times." Amazing. Just once in a while I would like to see someone honestly say: "This instructor tried pretty hard and basically did a good job—I failed because I spent too much time at the Chicken."

OK, I'm through complaining. Believe me, I'm not bashing students here. I'm just trying to make a point: The system of evaluations can't be any better than the quality of the comments made. If you think evaluations don't count, and do a crappy, indifferent job, then you can bet that yours (at least) won't. I like students, and I love teaching mathematics; I want to do the best job I can, and I want my students to help me by giving me feedback that is rational, relevant and helpful. I don't think that's too much to ask.

The evaluation system needs reform, without a doubt. Perhaps we need to have students actually sign an evaluation form that the professor will never see, but that can be used by the department head or dean (this would probably eliminate the stupidities about hair style). But the system won't get better as long as the evaluations are polluted with silly and emotional remarks; this just gives more ammunition to those who oppose using evaluations at all.

This is my last column for The Battalion this semester; I'd like to wish everyone in Aggieland a good summer: May you work well, study hard and play safely. And when it comes time to evaluate your professors this week, take a couple of extra minutes and do a quality job.

Jeff Farmer is a graduate student in mathematics.

Mail Call

Participate only in real safe sex

EDITOR:

I have two close family members whose lives have been irrevocably altered by different medical problems: Alzheimer's disease and leukemia. Neither disease has a known cause or cure. Neither person had an opportunity to avoid the disease. Each was a random victim.

In reading The Battalion recently regarding the proposal to put condom vending machines in A&M residence halls, it occurred to me that while each of us has the privilege of choice in life he or she ought to exercise that choice wisely.

AIDS is an easily preventable disease. Why engage in pre-marital or extra-marital sex and take even the slightest chance with a killer disease?

The term "safe sex"—often used regarding condom usage—is a misnomer. Sex in a faithful marriage is the only safe sex. Anything else is unsafe regarding disease and unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. Even birth control methods are not 100 percent safe.

The issue for or against the condom vending machines is a difficult one.

I would only hope that A&M students would exercise their options by making a choice between abstinence and flirting with AIDS rather than choices concerning where, when and how conveniently they may purchase condoms.

If Alzheimer's and leukemia patients could have prevented their disease by avoiding a particular thing, I know of two people who gladly would have done so.

B.F. Sueltenfuss
Parent of two A&M students

No need for respectful protests

EDITOR:

In response to Damon Arhos' opinion column of Tuesday, April 17, I must say that I was very surprised that it was even written.

Though I agree protests should be peaceful and that both sides of an issue should be heard, I hardly think that protests should be respectful. They are made to wake people up—not put them to sleep.

In addition, I do believe that UT should not be embarrassed but proud that its students feel strongly enough to risk going to jail for an issue they believe in. That is—if his comparison of UT to Texas A&M holds true.

I refer Mr. Arhos to the 1989-90 University Regulations of this Institution, specifically the "concessions" section (68) and Appendix VII No. 2, which deny individuals the right to voice an opposing opinion, pass out literature or hold a sign at any function the administration has approved and sees fit to pimp upon us.

For example: If the Neo-Nazi's of America were a recognized student organization and received a permit to hold a rally in the MSC Flagroom and you were a Jewish student on his way to the post office, you would be asked to leave or arrested if you refused to leave while performing any of the above acts.

Though there are two "Free Speech" areas on campus (God only knows where) why should a person light a candle in daylight when he can turn on a floodlight in darkness (If he doesn't mind burning his fingers)?

That floodlight is protest.

Clan H. Cameron '91

EDITOR'S NOTE: University Regulations 1989-90, Section 68, "Solicitation on Campus," reads in part: "The term 'solicit' is defined as advertising, selling, taking orders or donations, proselytizing and collecting and distributing literature."

"Only those who have been issued a concessions card by the Concessions Committee are permitted to solicit or sell on University property."

"Those who have been granted permission to solicit or sell on University property must carry the concessions card with them at all times when soliciting or selling as permitted."

Appendix VII No. 2 defines disruptive action partially as "seizing control of any building or portion of a building for the purpose of interfering with any University-authorized activity."

The appendix also states that it "shall not be construed to infringe upon any right of free speech or expression guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States or the State of Texas."

No woman 'fortunate' to get Williams' aid

EDITOR:

This letter concerns a letter to the editor written by Mr. Albert Watts, a former student.

I can't think of a woman who would consider it "fortunate" to have Clayton Williams Jr. come to her "aid" on some dark night.

I must give you some credit, Mr. Watts.

At least you have enough guts to keep your sexist attitude on the record.

Jill Emery '90

Have an opinion? Express it!

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length.

The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent.

There is no guarantee that letters submitted will be printed.

Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer. All letters may be brought to 216 Reed McDonald, or sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111.

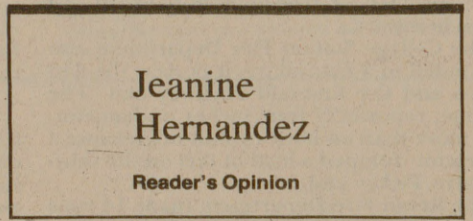
Co-op offers students alternative to traditional education methods

In reference to Greg Damron's letter of April 23, 1990 I offer the following advice: The seminar you call a "sham" was designed to give liberal arts students an idea about how they can gain work experience in their field of study, not just a summer job. As for the Placement Center, I cannot say what opportunities they intended to mention; however, as a liberal arts co-op student myself, I can tell you that cooperative education increases the marketability of students in what are considered non-technical majors.

Since Damron is a psychology major, I would first ask him what type of job he is looking for. Within the Cooperative Education Program, psychology majors can be placed in personnel positions, public relations positions and other support areas.

However, if someone is looking for clinical psychology jobs, then they should try their department because Cooperative Education does not handle research or clinical job areas within a major. If one does choose to try a co-op term, then they should pay close attention to the following:

Damron's reference to the three alternating work terms shows that he does not understand how the Cooperative Education Program works. The program is designed to give



Jeanine Hernandez
Reader's Opinion

students work experience while they continue their education. The three semesters equal one year of work experience which increases a student's ability to get a job once they graduate.

From his letter, it sounds like Damron is looking for a summer-only job or an internship. Summer-only jobs

The program is designed to give students work experience while they continue their education.

and internships are handled by academic departments and not the Cooperative Education office for several reasons:

- (1) Co-op gives you academic credit,
- (2) Co-op is designed for students to

return and continue work for additional terms, and (3) Co-op provides access to job listing for approximately 80 liberal arts employers and 500 technical employers who hire liberal arts for jobs such as technical writing, public relations and various support offices.

If students are interested in just a summer job or an internship, they should try their department; however, Cooperative Education, from my experience, seems to offer liberal arts the most variety of jobs, plus the only requirements for entrance are a 2.5 GPR and 45 credit hours. Cooperative Education allows you to apply to as many companies as you like and you may continue to apply as long as you are a student with Texas A&M University.

My last piece of advice for you Mr. Damron is that before he knocks something he really should find out what the program is about, and more importantly, which part of the bureaucracy controls the program. The Placement Center is separate from Cooperative Education, and therefore the two cannot be seen as equal avenues for employment opportunities.

Jeanine Hernandez is a senior English major.

The Battalion

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Adventures In Cartooning

by Don Atkinson Jr.

