



Bulletin

Student Evaluations

Recently an arbitrator released his decision in a case at Ryerson University that focused on the use of student evaluations. Student evaluations were deemed to be ineffective as the sole measure of teaching effectiveness and, as such, are to be used as one source - not the primary source - for evaluating teaching effectiveness in promotion and tenure decisions.

William Kaplan, Sole Arbitrator, stated in his decision statement, "It is probably impossible to precisely measure teaching effectiveness. But the difficulties in doing so cannot serve as a justification for over-relying on a tool - the SET* - that the evidence indicates generates ratings but has little usefulness in measuring teaching effectiveness. At the same time, FCS** results can continue to be used in tenure and promotion, when the results are presented as frequency distributions, and when the end users are appropriately educated and cautioned about the inherent limitations both about the tool and the information it generates. As noted at the outset, FCS results provide information about the student experience, and, contextualized, are appropriately considered for tenure and promotion although, to repeat, not for reaching conclusions about teaching effectiveness."(<https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onla/doc/2018/2018canlii58446/2018canlii58446.html>)

The issue concerning the effectiveness of student evaluations at STFX is arguably

exasperated by the low response rates (attributed to an on-line approach) that many Members experience. The StFXAUT met with Dr. Kevin Wamsley, Academic Vice President & Provost, about this issue and both parties agreed that student evaluations would continue to be administered and the results provided to Members. The results of those evaluations, however, will not be the sole nor primary determinant in tenure and promotion decisions. The evaluations are to be part of a set of teaching effectiveness evaluation tools that will be used in any assessment.

Several sections of our *Collective Agreement* explicitly reference the use of student evaluations: Faculty and Part-time Academic Instructors (Article 2.2.5 Student Course Evaluations, p. 89), Lab Instructors (Article 4.6 Performance Evaluations, p. 199), Nurse Educators (Article 5.6 Criteria for Evaluation, p. 209), and Dietetic Educators (LOU Criteria for Evaluation). Other sections do not explicitly mention student evaluations but, if used, would fall under this agreement: Librarians (Article 3.2.1 Evaluation Criteria, p. 167), Coady Program Teaching Staff (Article 6.7 Performance Evaluations, p. 222), Extension Program Staff (Article 7.7 Performance Evaluations, p. 257), and Learning Skills Instructors (Article 8.6 Performance Evaluation, p. 247).

You can access the StFXAUT *Collective Agreement* at www.stfxaut.ca

*Student evaluations of teaching (SET)

** Faculty (Faculty Course Surveys)