Gender and Student Evaluations of Teaching
Author(s): Kristi Andersen and Elizabeth D. Miller
Published by: American Political Science Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/420499
Accessed: 24/09/2008 14:21

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless
you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you
may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at
http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=apsa.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed
page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the
scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that
promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
ture for its own sake. Rather, it is to set the intellectual stage for your work, clarifying what is known about a particular topic and what new (or different) can be discovered. While thoroughness in the literature review is a virtue, a more important one is developing a structured, coherent argument.

It is useful in the early stages to find a book on which to model the structure of your dissertation. The model will provide you with guideposts. After having written the dissertation's first chapter, for instance, you can get a sense of where to go next. The stronger the analogues between dissertation and book (in methodology, tone, and substantive focus), the more useful the guideposts.

**Conclusion**

The right dissertation topic may propel a career forward. A cleanly executed dissertation with significant findings bodes well for the future, and prospective employers know that. The wrong topic can cost months of wasted effort, or never get done, derailing an otherwise promising career.

There is only a little bit of truth to the adage that you should love your dissertation topic at the outset because you will hate it by the time your are done. Actually, the dissertation should be the high point of your graduate career. It permits you to move from being a consumer of knowledge to a producer of it.

**References**


**About the Author**

Bert Useem is Professor of Sociology at the University of New Mexico. He is the author of two books on prison riots, the most recent Resolution of Prison Riots: Strategy and Policy (with George Camp and Camille Camp).

**Gender and Student Evaluations of Teaching**

Kristi Andersen and Elizabeth D. Miller, *Syracuse University*

In 1992, *PS* published a report by APSA’s Committee on the Status of Women regarding the current status of women in the discipline, including recommendations for improvement in recruitment and hiring, tenure and promotion procedures, faculty development, and graduate programs. Here we raise a subject which was not considered in the previous report but which has generated a good deal of concern among women scholars: the potentially damaging effects of gender bias in student evaluations of teaching, specifically with regard to student expectations.

Many teaching colleges have long used quality of teaching as the primary qualification for tenure, and recently many research universities have begun to pay more systematic attention to teaching in evaluating faculty members for promotion and tenure. How to evaluate teaching for either “formative” or “summative” purposes is subject to quite a bit of contention (see, e.g., Marsh 1984); in particular, the use of closed-ended student evaluations of teaching, or SETs, have generated controversy.

A number of female political scientists, like their colleagues in other disciplines, have expressed concerns about possible bias in the kinds of questions used in standard SET forms, and about their departments’ interpretation of the responses to these questions. A few anecdotes can be used to illustrate the basis for this concern:

At a large private research university, her department discusses an Asian-American woman’s tenure case. Some of her teaching evaluation scores are low. In her teaching statement the professor says that she believes this is due to gender and racial bias: that, in particular, some white male students are uncomfortable with her classroom authority. A senior white male faculty member dismisses this, saying “I read over the open-ended responses, and they don’t say anything about her being Asian or a woman.”

A female faculty member at a liberal arts college is denied tenure. Though her colleagues say her research is strong, some tell her they voted against her tenure because her teaching style “just didn’t seem to fit with the rest of the department.”

A community college uses a hard and fast cut-off, based on average SET scores, to determine qualification for tenure: if a faculty members’ scores are below 4.0 on a 5 point scale, he or she simply cannot be considered for tenure.
These studies are of two types. Lab-
tential biases in student evaluations.

General Observations

Many studies have examined po-
tory studies usually consist of stu-
te readings descriptions of “pro-
rs” and/or watching videotapes
or slides of “lectures” and then com-
peting SETs. These studies attempt
to control for variables other than
gender, such as class size, gestures,
and subject material. Observational
studies are “real-life” studies, usually
analyzing actual SETs from certain
semesters at a given university.
These studies try to obtain as much
demographic information and in-
clude as many diverse classes as pos-
able. If these are the techniques that
students associate with (the more
numerous) male professors, women
may not be perceived as “legitimate”
professors and academics if they
choose, for example, to use more
participatory or cooperative teaching
methods.
Thus many female instructors find
themselves in a double bind. Tradi-
tional stereotypes of professors
(though this may be changing) tradi-
tionally include primarily masculine
characteristics. When confronted
with women faculty, students may
expect a more nurturing role, but
then judge that behavior as less than
professorial. On the other hand, if a
woman is more assertive, students
may perceive her as too masculine.
It seems as if women faculty must
fulfill their gender role (nurturant)
and their professional role (compe-
tent and knowledgeable), which ac-
cording to some stereotypes may be
incompatible. Anecdotal evidence
certainly suggests that many female
faculty feel that no matter how they
act, their behavior is “not quite
right” (Sandler 1991).
In general, the studies we exam-
ined found that evaluations of male
and female professors do appear to
be based in part on differing expec-
tations: that male professors will be
authoritative and decisive, for exam-
ple, and that female professors will
be responsive and sociable.
A laboratory study in which stu-
dents read descriptions of teaching
situations of which half included out-
of-class socializing with students
found no difference between nonsoc-
ial and social males, but female in-
structors who were unfriendly out-
side of class received lower ratings.
Evaluations of equally friendly male
and female professors from slide
“lectures” found male professors
received higher ratings (Kierstead et
al., 1988).
Other expectations can play a part
in evaluations (and may interact with
gender) as well. Students with high
GPAs tend to give lower evaluations
(Langbein 1994; Sidanius & Crane
1989). On the other hand, the higher
the expected grade in the class, the

Student Evaluations
of Teaching

Student Expectations of
the Instructor

One important consistency that
emerges from these studies is the
following: student expectations of
the instructor, including expecta-
tions based on gender-role beliefs, play a
significant role in student evalua-
tions. If the professor lives up to or
surpasses those expectations, ratings
will generally be positive. If the pro-
fessor fails to live up to the expecta-
tions, student ratings of the instruc-
tor and the course will tend to be
negative. “Instructors who fit stereo-
types received better evaluations
than did instructors who deviated
from stereotypical expectations” (Ki-
erstead et al., 1988, 344).
Obviously students may have mul-
tiple and possibly conflicting expec-
tations about how instructors will
behave. The two most obvious
sources of these expectations are
gender and discipline. These stereo-
types may encourage teaching styles
and approaches perceived to be
“male”—more adversarial, more au-
thoritative—rather than those with
which women may be more comfort-
able. If these are the techniques that
students associate with (the more
numerous) male professors, women
may not be perceived as “legitimate”
professors and academics if they
choose, for example, to use more
participatory or cooperative teaching
methods.

Student Evaluations
of Teaching

Gender and Student Evaluations of Teaching

General Observations

Many studies have examined po-
tential biases in student evaluations.
These studies are of two types. Lab-

higher were the evaluations (Tatro 1995; Langbein 1994; Sidanius & Crane 1989; Marsh 1984). Langbein found that the lower the expected grade, the lower female professors' evaluations were compared to males. A multivariate analysis produced this result: “female faculty are rewarded, relative to men, for ‘supportive,’ ‘nurturing’ behavior, but they are punished, relative to men, for ‘objective,’ ‘authoritarian’ behavior that is role inconsistent” (Langbein 1994: 551). Several studies found that if a professor displays a mix of feminine and masculine characteristics, student evaluations will be higher than for those who only show one or the other (Freeman 1994; Basow 1994b; Martin 1984).

Teaching Styles and Student Expectations

Perhaps the most thorough study on gender differences in teaching styles and student evaluations was conducted by Statham, Cook, and Richardson (1991). These scholars combined classroom observations, student evaluations, and interviews with professors. Their sample of classes included a wide variety of disciplines at a large university, and included classes taught in departments where male faculty predominated as well as classes taught in departments not predominantly male; it also included professors at different ranks. From both the interview and the observational data, they found “striking differences” in the emphasis of teaching for men and women.

Women tended to focus more on the student as the locus of learning; men, on themselves. Although both sexes claimed to use an interactive style, women did so more extensively, taking more pains to involve students and to receive more input from students. In keeping with these observations, women placed more emphasis on students’ participation (Statham, Cook, and Richardson 1991, 126).

Though students overall rated their men and women professors as equally effective instructors, “for the most part, adherence to the gender-appropriate model was rewarded with higher evaluations.” Women received positive evaluations the more they interacted with students by acknowledging their contributions, responding to their request, and “personalizing” instruction by revealing their own experiences and bringing students’ experiences into the classroom. Women were judged less likable if they did not interact extensively with students, instead choosing simply to present material. Men’s competence ratings and likability ratings, on the other hand, were higher when they adhered to stereotypical masculine styles in their classrooms, using a “teacher as expert” style: presenting material, admonishing, and interrupting students (Statham, Cook, and Richardson 1991, 130–31).

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this literature. First, the controversies surrounding SETs and the extent to which the standard SET forms fail to measure important dimensions of teaching quality (Fox and Keeter 1996) suggest strongly that teaching evaluation should involve multiple methods. Over-reliance on SETs should be avoided.

Second, it is clear—particularly from Statham, Cook and Richardson's study—that male and female faculty tend to approach teaching differently and judge the quality of their own teaching differently. Certainly in in-service training provided by colleges and universities as well as in evaluative stances taken by administrators, diverse teaching styles, including those student-centered styles more often favored by women professors, should be legitimized and valued. Male faculty and administrators may need to be educated away from the perspective that time spent interacting with students inside and outside the classroom is a waste of time.

Third, students react differently to men and women faculty in part because they have differing expectations about how men and women in these positions will and ought to behave. “In constructing evaluation instruments that measure specific behaviors, items tapping both types of behaviors ought to be included to avoid favoring one or the other approach.” (Statham, Cook, and Richardson 1991, 152). Department chairs and committees who use SETs that they have not designed to evaluate their colleagues' teaching for the purposes of salary review, contract decisions, or promotion and tenure should keep in mind some of the ways that students' reactions to male and female professors’ teaching styles have been found to differ. In particular, they should be aware that students appear to evaluate “likability” and “competence” for men and women on somewhat different bases.

References


The Status of African American Faculty in Political Science Departments in the Southern Region

Shirley Tolliver Geiger, Savannah State University
Toni-Michelle Travis, George Mason University

Editor’s Note: A report titled “The Status of African American Faculty in Political Science Departments in the Southern Region” was presented to the Executive Council of the Southern Political Science Association at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association in Atlanta, November 5, 1996. The Report was written by Shirley Tolliver Geiger of Savannah State University and Toni-Michelle Travis of George Mason University, co-chairs of the Association’s Committee on the Status of Blacks in the Discipline. Questions regarding this report should be directed to Shirley Geiger, Master of Public Administration Program, Savannah State University, Savannah, GA 31404 or e-mail: geigers@tigerpaw.ssc.peachnet.edu.

Copies of the full report, with description of survey methodology, data, twelve tables, and references can be obtained from Dr. Geiger. Only the “Introduction” and “Conclusions” sections of the 30-page report are included here. A copy of the full report is also available on the SPRA web page at http://www.olemiss.edu/orgs/spsa.

Introduction

This report examines the status of African American faculty in political science programs in the 16-states that constitute the APSA’s southern region where roughly one quarter (n = 325) of the nation’s degree-granting political science programs are located. Over half of the country’s African Americans (58%) live in the region, and today African Americans account for an average of 25% of the college-aged population in 12 of the southern states. The region’s racial demographics take on particular significance in light of the conclusions of a report by the Southern Education Foundation that, some 40 years after the Supreme Court’s ruling in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and one hundred years after Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), “substantial remnants of segregation continue to shape higher education [in the southern region]” (SEF, 1996, p. xv). Even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the federal court ruling in Adams v. Richardson (1973), lack of racial/ethnic diversity among faculty and students is one of the most intractable remnants of the legally segregated dual educational systems.

African American college students are still under-represented in the South’s traditionally White post-secondary institutions (TWI), but the shortage of African American faculty is equally, if not more profoundly, acute in every institution and in every state (SEF, 1995). With specific reference to political science departments, Preston and Woodard (1990, 37) use the term “disquieting” to describe the low number of Black faculty across the country. The find-