

Costin F, Greenough W T & Menges R J. Student ratings of college teaching: reliability, validity, and usefulness. *Rev. Educ. Res.* 41:511-35, 1971.  
[Dept. Psychology, Univ. Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL]

Student ratings can provide reliable and valid information on the quality of college instruction. Such information can be useful for departmental evaluation and for helping teachers improve their performance. Various factors other than student ratings must also be considered when appraising the effectiveness of teaching. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (SSCI)<sup>®</sup> indicates that this paper has been cited over 195 times since 1971.]

Frank Costin  
Department of Psychology  
University of Illinois  
Champaign, IL 61820

March 12, 1982

"Academicians do not generally greet their departmental committee appointments with enthusiasm, especially since they often perceive them as unwelcome intrusions to scholarly activities. The circumstances under which this *Citation Classic* was conceived are therefore rather unusual, for they grew out of a committee assignment.

"In the spring of 1969 I was asked by Morton Weir, then head of the department of psychology at the University of Illinois, to chair a committee whose charge was to review critically the research on student ratings of instruction and to present conclusions concerning the usefulness of this mode of evaluation. It was anticipated that such information could help the faculty make rational decisions about the worth of student ratings, not only for improving one's teaching but also for purposes of salary increases and promotion. Joining me in the enterprise were my two colleagues, William Greenough and Robert Menges. They became valuable members of the team.

"The committee's task was timely, for much debate had been going on among our faculty concerning appropriate ways of obtaining students' opinions of instruction and its worth. Furthermore, students' demands

that they be given a voice in evaluating their teachers were increasing, reflecting a national trend consistent with students' growing concern about the quality of college instruction. As elsewhere, informal, 'unofficial' student ratings of instruction were being circulated in a kind of 'underground press.' A significant number of faculty members felt that since students were already publicizing their appraisals of teaching, the use of a more systematic, research-based approach should be considered.

"Once into our task, we discovered a wealth of material for critical analysis, not only that which had already been reviewed by others but also much that had not yet been considered in any systematic fashion. It was probably inevitable that as our work progressed we began to raise questions and seek answers that went beyond our original charge. For example, although we concluded that student ratings could be reasonably reliable and that useful information concerning the teaching process could be derived from well-conceived rating systems, we also emphasized that many other factors should be considered in dealing with the broad problem of evaluating instruction. (Our article summarizes these on page 531.)

"The committee report was well received and apparently influenced a significant number of our colleagues to regard more positively the potential usefulness of student ratings of instruction and to take a greater interest in developing appropriate instruments.

"Having completed the report we decided that we had already gone a considerable distance toward filling a gap in the literature on student evaluation of instruction. Several months later, after expanding its scope, the work was accepted for publication in the *Review of Educational Research*.

"The numerous citations resulting from this publication reflect not only the concerns many college teachers and researchers have about the use of student ratings but also the importance of making available a comprehensive and critical analysis of both their advantages and limitations. The widespread and continuing interest in what we did is gratifying testimony to what a committee appointment can sometimes lead to! More recent work in the field has been reported by myself and others."<sup>1,2</sup>

1. Costin F. Do student ratings of college teachers predict student achievement?

*Teach. Psychol.* 5:86-8, 1978.

2. Braskamp L A, Caulley D & Costin F. Student ratings and instructor self-ratings and their relationship to student achievement. *Amer. Educ. Res. J.* 16:295-306, 1979.