Information from RateMyProfessors.com

Bleske- Rechek and Fritsch (BF) recently analyzed publicly available data from the organization known as “RateMyProfessors.com.” BF focused on the ratings of those instructors of a large public university (with the condition that only those instructors with 10 or more would be included). They make the following points, among others:

1. “The primary objective of the current study was to determine the reliability of students’ ratings. If students who choose to post ratings on RateMyProfessors.com are at the extremes or are rating according to idiosyncratic perceptions, then variance in student ratings should be high when there are fewer ratings, and student consensus should increase (variance should decrease) with number of student raters…Counter to concerns about the reliability of student ratings, degree of variance in a given instructor’s ratings was not associated with how many students had rated them…” [p.5]

2. “Although degree of variance in a given instructor’s ratings was not tied to how many students had provided the ratings, degree of variance in instructors’ quality ratings was tied to the overall perception of the instructors’ quality… Instructors with low and (especially) high mean ratings had the least variance in the ratings they received…” [p.6]

3. “…students agree about low quality instructors and, in particular, high quality instructors….Moreover, while we replicated previous research with student evaluations of teaching that has shown instructors in math and natural sciences are rated as more difficult, we also showed that students (a) did not rate math and natural sciences instructors as any lower in quality than other instructors and (b) showed as much consensus in their ratings of math and natural sciences instructors as they did about instructors in other disciplines. In the aggregate, students agreed about which instructors were highly effective (in terms of clarity and helpfulness) and which were not, across instructor sex and discipline. This strong student consensus about quality coincides with research showing that manipulating teacher expressiveness and content coverage can have a large impact on students’ ratings of instructor effectiveness regardless of students’ own personalities…” [p.9]

People who work with instructional policy and student attitudes may benefit from this study, even though BF analyze data from a single postsecondary institution. April Bleske- Rechek and Amber Fritsch (both of the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire) provide details about their analysis, including one page of references, in an article (“Student Consensus on RateMyProfessors.com”) published in the peer-reviewed electronic journal entitled Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation (November 2011, Vol. 16, No.18, pp. 1-12). Their article contains a number of other notable conclusions and comments so interested parties way want to download the complete article from http://pareonline.net/.

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[Abstract by Willard Horn, Director of Research, Analysis & Accountability, Chancellor’s Office, California Community Colleges, 12/11/2011]