

Daily Nebraskan

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Anonymous evaluations favored

I am not sure Paul McBrearty is right in asking for signed student evaluations; the reasons given in the Aug. 26 Daily Nebraskan editorial in favor of anonymous evaluations seem to outweigh those against.

The boldest and most secure students will undoubtedly ask what they want to over their signatures, and can do so now. Vindictiveness might be prevented by signing them, but the vindictive evaluation is easily identified and uni-

and misleading numbers to make judgments about faculty, independent of context. Faculty rightly fear the mindless administrative use of mindlessly quantified data.

It is probably harder to evaluate teaching than to judge the value of published research. It becomes somewhat easier if one remembers that the individual teacher wants to know what he or she did well or poorly. Administrators, on the other hand, need to know only which 10 percent or 15 percent of a unit are outstanding teachers and which 10 percent of 15 percent really need help. The rest of us are probably in the middle.

These judgments are not much more difficult to make about teaching than they are about scholarship.

Frederick M. Link
 chairman, UNL English department

Guest Opinion

versally ignored. Teachers will feel pressure to give high grades whether evaluations are signed or not, but teachers who can't resist such pressures are known to their colleagues as well as to students as easy marks.

McBrearty's arguments exaggerate the dangers of anonymity. When I read evaluations, I don't look at one but at the overall pattern. If one or two students give me all D or F grades and the pattern suggests that most students felt I did a good job, I ignore the exceptions unless they make specific comments that merit my attention. If they do, those comments will be echoed in the majority of evaluations as well.

If I see a set of evaluations that suggests that a colleague's teaching is outstanding, I can take a look at the distribution of grades for that course, the teacher's own evaluation of the course, the specificity of student comment, and the syllabus — all in the light of what I know from previous sets of evaluations for that or similar courses my colleague has taught. It is possible to have a superb class or a superb teacher; it is also possible to have a very poor class or a very poor teacher.

Required or large classes tend to get lower evaluations than elective or small classes. No one course and no one semester will establish a pattern, but we have no better measure of teaching effectiveness than the comment of students in many courses over many semesters.

The danger is not in having evaluations anonymous; one must always remember that students not only feel relatively powerless compared with teachers, but in fact are. (Consider as one example the absolute refusal of grade appeals committees to consider whether a student's grade in a course was fair in any non-computational sense.)

The danger lies in turning data from student evaluations into numbers and then using those "anonymous"

Editorial policy

Unsigned editorials represent the opinion of the fall 1982 Daily Nebraskan. They are written by this semester's editor in chief, Patti Gallagher.

Other staff editors write one editorial in her place each week. Those will carry the author's name and title after the final sentence.

Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees or the NU Board of Regents.

The Daily Nebraskan's publishers are the regents, who established the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the newspaper. According to policy set by the regents, the content of the student newspaper lies solely in the hands of its student editors.

Bumper stickers...

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"The bumper stickers are sold in drugstores, gift shops, stationery stores, variety stores, department stores, truck stops . . . anywhere that people pass through with time on their hands," Harris said.

"You don't want to get too sophisticated," he said. "That's not the market I'm reaching for. The eggheads are not going to go in for something as earthy as a bumper sticker."

"You don't see my bumper stickers on Cadillacs. You don't see them on Mercedes. I don't kid myself. When I sit down to write a bumper sticker, I'm thinking of the average working guy, probably under 30, Mr. Average Joe. He works a factory job, and he grabs a beer after work. Maybe he's in a plant, or he drives a truck."

"And then he stops in at a store. He sees a rack of bumper stickers. They jump out at him in Day-Glo colors. He starts to laugh. He thinks they're funny."

"He starts looking at them. 'MAFIA STAFF CAR.' 'CAR IS OK — DRIVER NEEDS SOME BODY WORK.' 'THE LORD GIVETH, THE IRS TAKETH AWAY.' 'TEACHERS DO IT WITH CLASS.'"

"Then one catches his eye. Maybe it's 'TO ALL YOU VIRGINS — THANKS FOR NOTHING.' This strikes him as something that would be hilarious on his car. He wants to impress people. He wants to show them he has a sense of humor. So he puts down his buck, and I have another customer."

Harris doesn't have a bumper sticker on his own car, a beige 1981 Cadillac Seville. His wife won't let him.

"She won't have a bumper sticker on our car," he said. "She doesn't like the way a bumper sticker looks. She likes to eat as a result of the bumper stickers I write, but she won't put one on the car."

Harris takes a certain pride of authorship: "I'll be driving down the street and I'll see a bumper sticker I write. Maybe 'DON'T HIT ME — MY LAWYER'S IN JAIL.' I'll get the urge to pull the guy over and say, 'Hey, you got that bumper sticker on you? I wrote it, baby.'"

But he never does. He merely takes quiet satisfaction in knowing he reaches an audience far bigger than even the biggest of the blockbuster authors. And he thinks that business will get even better.

"Someday I think every car will have a bumper sticker," he said. "Maybe even mine."

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