

In-depth look at SRTEs; numbers

Tenure and promotion at Behrend is based on teaching (40 percent), research and scholarly activity (50 percent) and community service (10 percent).

Part of the teaching criteria is based on SRTEs, or Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness.

The SRTEs are those forms which students complete at the end of the semester to evaluate courses and instructors.

The SRTEs are divided into three sets of questions.

The first set of questions is University related. There are two questions on all forms: "rate the overall quality of this course" and "rate the overall quality of the instructor."

The second set, the departmental division, is comprised of five to fifteen items selected by the academic unit.

As stated in "Appendix A: Statement of Practices for the Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness for Promotion and Tenure" in the Sept. 1994-95 "The Pennsylvania State University Administrative Guidelines for HR-23: Promotion and Tenure Procedures and Regulations," "these items should be selected to reflect the nature of the discipline, type of class and other factors the department faculty deem to be appropriate."

The third division consists of individual faculty items "to supplement the two global questions and the departmental core."

The Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost of the University are responsible for

making revisions to the SRTEs and also develop the evaluation questions in cooperation with faculty members and administrators from each academic unit and the Faculty Affairs Committee of the University Faculty Senate.

In order to interpret the survey results, the percentage of students in

in the upper fives and in the sixes out of a scale of one to seven.

"The faculty members have set those standards (the upper fives to the sixes) by discipline based on those scores."

Considering the SRTEs' reliability and validity, Lilley said, "If you use them in their limited mean, they form a good basis for comparing faculty."

Lilley also said that peer reviews should be used to evaluate faculty.

"There are two very important questions to ask about the measurement," said Dr. Eric Corty, assistant professor in psychology. "One, is the measurement reliable? Two, is the measurement valid?"

Dr. Roger Knacke, head of the Division of Science said he thinks that overall the SRTEs are reliable and valid.

He said SRTEs are one indicator of effective teaching but other things such as peer reviews should be used as well.

"A series of student evaluations in different courses over a period of time does give a good indication (of teaching effectiveness). It's the record over the long haul that's important."

Knacke continued, "Students have to realize that they have a real responsibility here and take the evaluation of faculty seriously."

Dr. John Magenau III, director of the School of Business, said the SRTEs are reliable to a certain degree.

"They can be reliable in terms of consistency of measurement but it also depends on the question," he said.

"Every form for evaluating teaching has its limitations. SRTEs are a legitimate way of measuring teacher effectiveness but they should be used with other information about teacher effectiveness because they have their limitations."

He also said that peer reviews should be used to evaluate faculty as well.

How much SRTEs count Lilley said "is a matter of professional judgment."

"The faculty member has the responsibility to provide the evidence and my colleagues and I weigh the evidence," said Lilley.

Corty said that depending on how many people are in a class and who fills the SRTEs out, whether they are "good" or "bad" students or like or dislike the teacher, a biased sample may result.

"You don't want to look at SRTEs based on a small number of people. Seventy percent is the lowest you should go (for the number of people)," he said.

Dr. Richard Progelhof, director of the School of Engineering and Engineering Technology, said he does not know if the scores are accurate.

"I don't know how accurate they are. I don't know how much the numbers have been biased."

According to Progelhof, how the information is interpreted is a problem. He said it must be assumed that the students answered thoughtfully and honestly and that there was no pressure from faculty.

Progelhof also recommended using peer reviews to evaluate faculty.

"No one has a clear picture of what counts in teacher evaluation."

- Chris Dubbs

the class completing the survey is looked at as well as whether the course is required or is an elective and the grades the students expect to earn.

Results of the survey include the percent of students selecting each response category, the number of students selecting each response category and the mean for each item.

Only the first two questions are used for everyone and those questions are used in personnel decisions according to Behrend Provost and Dean John Lilley.

Lilley said the best faculty score is

Behrend the instructor is present so students will not discuss the course or the instructor.

The second change made was in the statement that is to be read during administration of the SRTEs.

The old statement read, "This is your opportunity to express your views about this course. In addition to providing feedback to the instructor, your evaluation will be used as a part of the instructor's annual performance review and may become part of his or her overall assessment for promotion and tenure. Your thoughtful responses will therefore be appreciated."

The new statement says, "The SRTEs are the primary means of gathering feedback from students about the content and quality of a course. The results are used by the University to assist in the evaluation of the teaching effectiveness of the instructor."

Someone other than the instructor is supposed to read this statement, but at Behrend faculty members are asked to read it.

Whereas the old statement explicitly states that SRTEs may be used for promotion and tenure and the new one doesn't, Lilley said the new statement still says that in its two sentences.

Guidelines

According to the April 4, 1994 "Guidelines for SRTE Administration," the SRTEs are to be administered in the following way:

1) SRTEs are supposed to be administered during the last two weeks of the semester, but not on the last day of classes.

2) "The evaluation process should be conducted during the beginning of class and should be scheduled for at least 15 minutes."

3) The SRTEs should not be administered on the same day which a test is given.

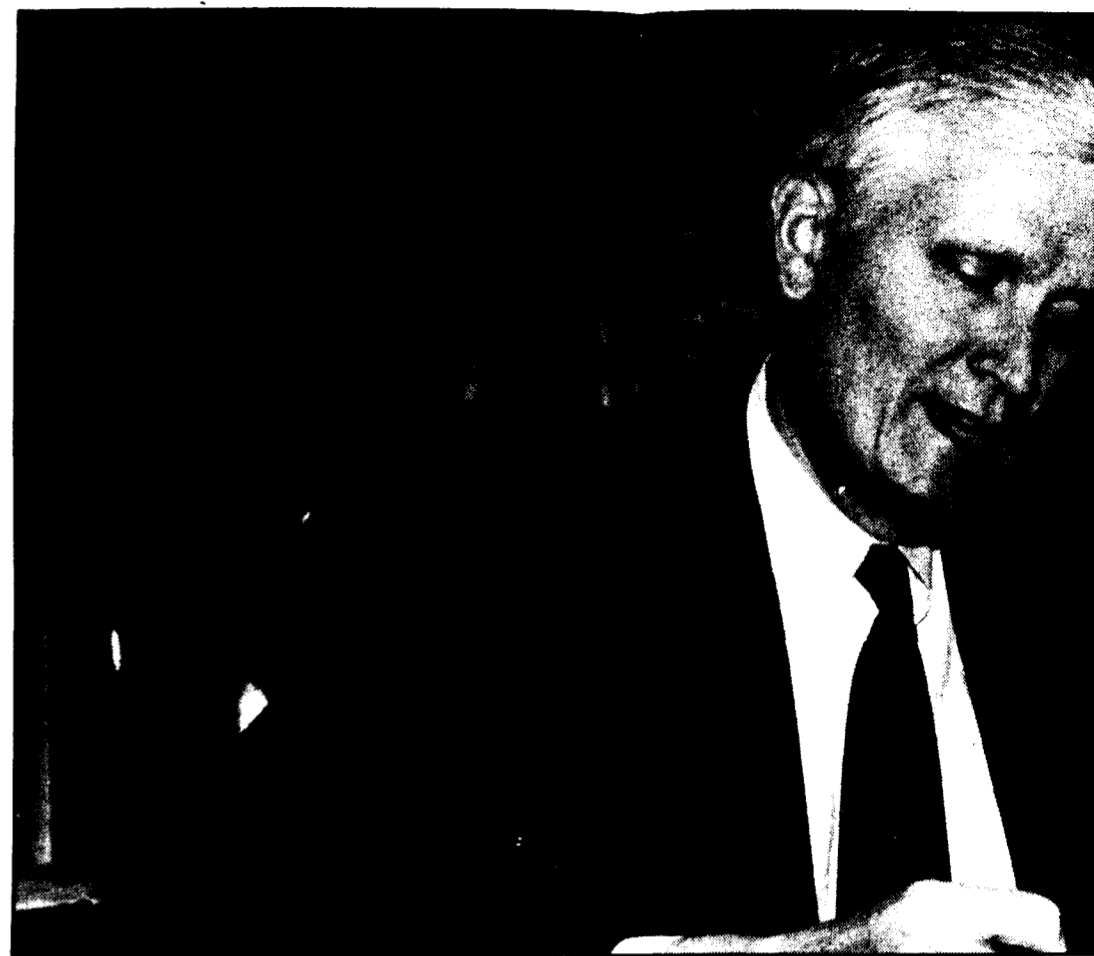
4) A student is supposed to "distribute, collect and place the forms in an envelope" and then deliver them to the division or school office for day classes or the registrar's office for evening and Saturday classes.

Behrend operates differently at this step because the instructor distributes the form.

5) The teacher is to "refrain from being sarcastic about the process or making personal appeals for favorable evaluations."

In Sept. two changes were made.

The first was that the instructor should not be present during the evaluation. However, according to Provost and Dean John Lilley, at



FINAL DETERMINER: Provost and Dean John Lilley has the final say on whether tenure before faculty are evaluated by the University-wide committee and

Dr. Colleen Kelley, assistant professor of speech communication, said, "If the instrument was really to measure what we were doing in the classroom it wouldn't allow just these two questions ('rate the overall quality of this course' and 'rate the overall quality of the instructor') to judge your worth as a teacher."

She continued, "There's a real climate of pessimism and a fear that you're going to say or do something in the classroom that's going to come back on you. The hoop gets higher and higher every year. If you don't 'fit,' whatever that means, you're out of here."

Chris Dubbs, assistant professor of creative writing said, "No one has a clear picture of what counts in teacher evaluation."

Dubbs recommended "that SRTEs certainly continue to exist but that they be only one of numerous measures of how effective an instructor is."

Dr. John Fizel, associate professor of economics and member of the CITE (Committee to Improve Teaching and Its Evaluation) committee, said "I'd be curious to see how non-educational factors such as coffee and doughnuts and pizza parties during the last week of classes contribute to scores on SRTEs."

"Your life's on the line. Your career's on the line...I mean people are insidiously enticed into SRTE enhancing behavior when the only teaching evaluation instrument you have."

He said certain factors must also be taken into account. He said the factors include the time of day the class is, how many students are in the class, the size of class, whether the class is required or is an elective and whether the class is in or out of students' majors.

Dr. Mike Simmons, associate professor of communication, said he doesn't think the SRTEs are particularly good or particularly bad but should be used with discretion and their limitations realized.

"I don't know if they adequately separate course evaluation and teaching evaluation."

He said that because students don't know if they've learned something valuable until they're out in the workplace it might be better for them to complete evaluations when they have graduated.

Dr. Jack Martin, assistant professor of management, said "We don't really get any information out of them (SRTEs) that helps us become better teachers."

"I don't know if they (SRTEs) adequately separate course evaluation and teaching evaluation."

- Dr. Mike Simmons

"Your life's on the line. Your career's on the line..."

- Dr. John Fizel