

# Numbers lead to controversy

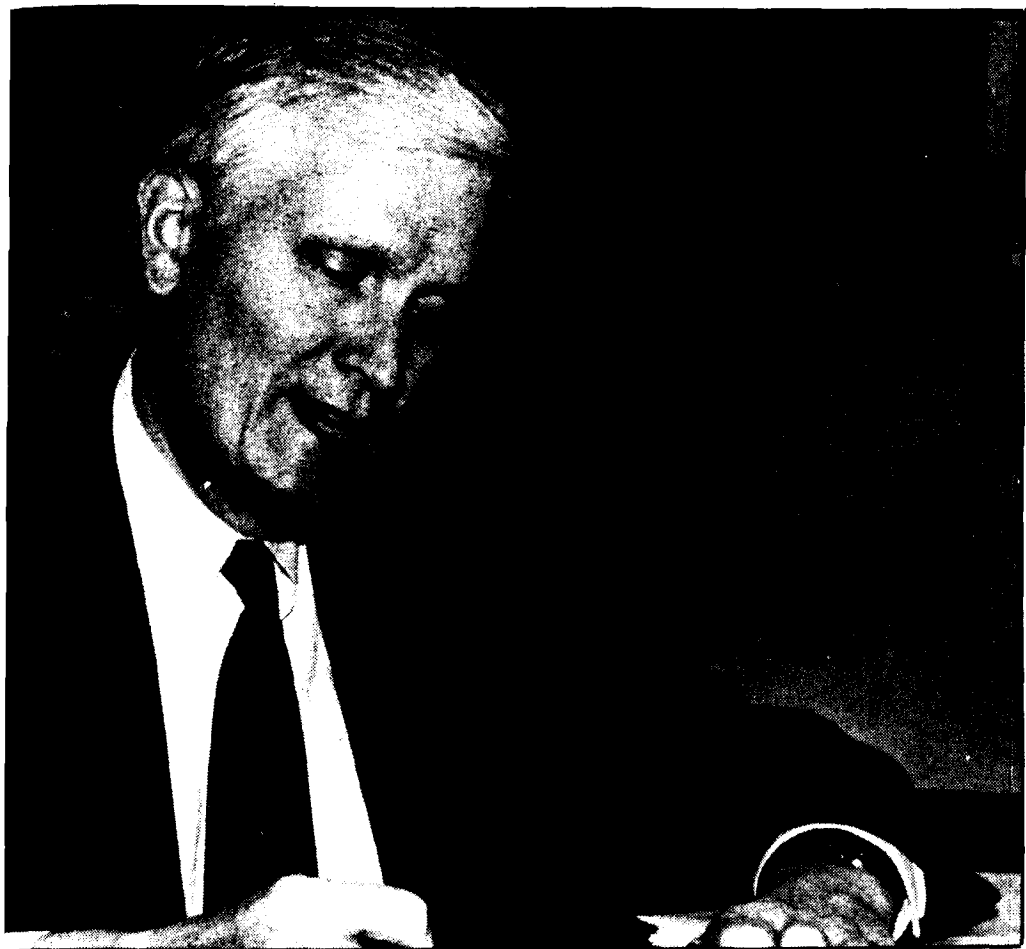


Photo by Jennifer Colvin/Photo Coordinator

Dean John Lilley has the final say at Behrend for promotion and the University-wide committee and the Office of the President.

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

He said certain factors must also be taken into account. He said these factors include the time of day the class is, how many students are in 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 after 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."

...adequately separate teaching evaluation."  
Dr. Mike Simmons

...the line.  
...the line..."  
Dr. John Fizel

definitely have a role in the evaluation process but that there is too much reliance on SRTEs.

"When you rely too much on numbers you lose the big picture."

Students also have concerns about the SRTEs.

President of the Student Government Association (SGA) Sam Epps said that tenure is unclear to students.

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

- Dr. Roger Knacke

"I think students need to be more involved in the process and understand the process. When the question comes up about tenure we don't understand how teachers are evaluated. The students need to be more informed."

Vice President of SGA Betsy Sauer said, "It just seems to me that in the five years that I've been here, four of my five favorite teachers had to leave because they didn't get tenured. They were liked by staff and students and that doesn't make sense."

— by Alicia Hartman —

Sauer continued, "It just doesn't make sense that it all comes down to Dean Lilley. How can one man decide if someone's a good teacher and especially when he's not in the field?"

According to some, the students' views are the most important.

"I just really believe that student input should be weighed more than any other input," said Dia Harris, student representative to University Faculty Senate and president of the Association of Black Collegians.

Yuri Uno, president of Omicron Delta Kappa (the junior/senior national leadership honor society) supported this.

"I don't think the evaluations are accurate because a student who performs poorly evaluates the teacher badly even if the person is good," said Uno.

When a faculty member is being considered for tenure she or he is first reviewed by the respective division committee, the division head, the College committee and finally Lilley.

"I can block it (tenure) but I can't give it," said Lilley.

If the faculty member receives Lilley's approval, she or he is then reviewed by a University-wide committee and then by the Office of the President.

Whether working full-time or part-time, all teachers are evaluated with SRTEs.

"We really take the evaluation of faculty seriously," said Lilley. "Teaching is the trump card as we evaluate faculty. Really great teaching...is central to our mission."

## CITE examines evaluation

The CITE committee, the Committee to Improve Teaching and Its Evaluation, started as an informal group in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences in the fall of 1993.

In the spring of 1994 it became a college wide committee and was charged by Faculty Council to examine the issue of teacher evaluation.

The CITE committee is comprised of representatives from each of the four academic units, both tenured and untenured.

The committee has four objectives:

- 1) to attain teaching excellence across the College by providing faculty members with help to improve their teaching
- 2) to improve the teaching climate at Behrend by providing support for high academic standards, clear criteria and creative teaching
- 3) to provide clear guidelines and direction for new faculty members as regards teaching expectations and ways to meet those expectations
- 4) to provide a professional, credible way to evaluate teaching.

Dr. James Kurre, associate professor of economics and chairperson of the committee, said the committee is to help

evaluation of teaching at Behrend.

"We're trying to improve teaching and its evaluation here on campus.

"Some (faculty members) are afraid to experiment because they may be killed on the SRTEs," he said. "As a result they'll take a safer approach and we want to encourage experimentation."

Kurre also said, "Some teachers have the mistaken impression that if they are easy on students they will get better SRTEs and if they are tough on students they will necessarily get bad SRTEs. This approach inevitably leads to lower standards and worse education...and none of us wants to see that."

The goal, he said, is to "make sure that our students can compete with students coming out of other quality universities."

"The problem with SRTEs," Kurre said, "is that even the best well-intentioned students cannot evaluate some aspects of teaching" such as if the appropriate material is being covered or if the level of rigor is adequate.

Kurre therefore suggests also using peer reviews to evaluate teachers.

"The peer reviews do not carry a whole lot of weight in the review process. It's my opinion that the SRTEs are the predominant way that we judge teaching here at Behrend and there's an aspect of teaching missed in the evaluation process.

"We'd (the committee) like to see peer reviews play a bigger role in the process."

Kurre hopes that SRTEs and peer evaluations will confirm each other.

"The peer reviews will help interpret SRTEs."

He said that high scores should reflect a good teacher, but that low scores "might be because of the nature of the course. If so, hopefully peer reviews will give a more accurate picture of the instructor's teaching."

Kurre said, "Some people think that it is possible to buy high SRTE scores by not demanding much from their students" and might do such things as "pizza parties" to influence their students.

"If that's going on we need to know about it; that's totally inappropriate.

"The peer reviews hopefully will catch a situation like that where the faculty member isn't doing as much as they should be doing yet is getting good SRTEs."

The peer reviews, according to Kurre, will include such things as syllabi, exams and a statement of the teacher's philosophy.

"What our committee is suggesting is that we base our reviews on a portfolio of information--a teaching portfolio approach," said Kurre.

As a liaison between the CITE committee and the administration, Dr. Roberta Salper, head of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, said "We are trying to assess the success or lack of success SRTEs have evaluation teaching accurately."