

Book Review

Thirteen Strategies to Measure College Teaching

Ron Berk (Stylus, 2006)

Review by

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The evaluation of teaching is something that is done virtually wherever teaching itself is done. At the college level, it factors into annual evaluations, merit raises and promotion and tenure decisions. At too many places, though, it is done in a shallow, haphazard fashion. Why is this, when there is a large body of research about and standards for the measurement of effective teaching? Very possibly, the existence of those methods have not gotten to the people making decisions on how teaching is evaluated at individual colleges – i.e. faculty in disciplines other than that of educational measurement. Ron Berk's book, *Thirteen Strategies to Measure College Teaching*, aims at evangelizing the rest of academia with the good news of how to do it right.

This is ground that other well respected academics have covered, but perhaps none aimed quite as much at the average faculty member. Berk does an excellent job at directing the reader to the relevant work that has been done in the field. While reading this book, I made more than one (electronic) trip to our campus library to retrieve an interesting article that was cited in this book.

The book is laid out in a logical fashion, with an introduction that describes the motivation for the book, followed by a chapter summarizing the thirteen strategies (i.e. sources of evidence used for evaluating teaching). This chapter gives an excellent overview of what Berk calls 360° Multisource Assessment, which is another way of saying that you should take many sources of evidence into consideration when assessing college teaching. This chapter is a good overview of building a teaching evaluation *system*, and can be read as a stand-alone topic. (It is, in fact, adapted from a previous paper by Berk.)

Briefly, the thirteen sources of evidence are:

- student ratings,
- peer ratings,
- external expert ratings,
- self ratings,
- videos,
- student interviews,
- alumni ratings,
- employer ratings,
- administrator ratings,
- teaching scholarship,
- teaching awards,
- learning outcome measures and
- teaching portfolios

The first nine sources of information make use of rating scales, the development and

refinement of which take up the final three-quarters of the book. The book's subtitle, "A Consumer's Guide to Rating Scale Construction, Assessment, and Decision Making for Faculty, Administrators, and Clinicians," is actually a much better description of the main point of the book. For those faculty members or administrators who have been tasked with the development or overhaul of such a system at their college, the overview chapter may be the only one that is needed. For those who must develop student evaluation forms and other ratings instruments, the rest of the book contains invaluable information.

Berk provides a step-by-step procedure for determining how the rating scales should be constructed, what questions (items) should be asked, and what type of anchors (response choices) are appropriate. He provides examples of rating scales and items, both good and bad. Very importantly, he also provides clear instructions on how to field test the rating scale and how to determine its validity and reliability. It is this last part which is absent from so many 'home grown' teaching evaluation systems, and Berk's explanations here are very welcome as a help to anyone creating a teaching evaluation system.

Outside of his native field of Statistics, Berk is best known for his books and articles about faculty evaluation and the use of humor in instruction. I personally enjoy his style of humor; however, it is laid on so thick throughout the entire book that it becomes distracting. When every third sentence is not to be taken seriously, it detracts from the book's usefulness as a reference. Berk places a disclaimer at the front: "If you have the humor of a grapefruit, this book may not be for you..." This book may therefore be inappropriate for a large percentage of its intended audience.

In summary, Ron Berk has written a comprehensive book on teaching evaluation, focusing mainly on the development of rating scales for various sources of evidence. It would be a valuable resource for any faculty member tasked with developing such a teaching evaluation system, even though Berk's humor may not appeal to all.