Meeting w Drew Paulin

Berkeley Data Science academic director

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Is the data science academic director

Don’t have any in-person data science students. Not at the i School - under the mids program. The MIMS program isn’t a data science program, but they're getting that influence. His job is very separate to MIMS. He’s just MIDS.

Just spent most of his day yesterday reviewing midterm evals, which were just released.

Numbers aren’t disregarded, but less actionable. The comments are much more actionable and valuable. It can be confusing because student evals on teaching isn’t just about the structure and the course. It’s a strong reflection on ehs student and the student's state of knowledge. And a lot of other things that are not related to much. SETs - student evaluations of teaching.

Controversial paper came out last year, that was a meta analysis of SETs and it was pretty damning, for the most part, SETs are not particularly accurate in measuring teaching effectiveness. Students who learn from instructors who have high ratings from SETs are not likely to learn more than from classes who have low ratings. It’s often correlated to unrelated variables, which is damining - like gender, or a minority. If it’s a rainy day out. That’s not what we want to base decisions on.

But if you dig into the literature more, the literature doesn’t show clear cut improvement methods.

How come we haven’t moved on? Because there’s not many improvements.

The best thing to do is in most cases, try to triangulate - get different sources of data. SETs should be thrown away, buwe need to get a more nuanced view of the data. For me, it’s a lot of promise in pure observation and having committees include not just valued and respected instructors but also folks from students who have a background in this. To get a diverse group to weigh in on this. New thing called - teaching practices inventory, not about evaluating teaching as it’s more about what goes into a learning experience.

The reason why we’re sticking with student evaluations of teaching is because that’s what we’ve always done and it’s convenient. A light lift and inexpensive. It’s valuable and no alternative. Focus on peer observation - there’s also problems there. Expensive.

His job is to hire, coach instructors and make decisions around curriculum. So he needs to do this. It’s very time consuming but it has to be done and he doesn't have that many other data points

He gets feedback from 2U success advisors. Like Maggie, Ben, and all of them. I only get the anonymized feedback - generalized. Some of the conversations are how is it going this week - what’s are you up to in your life? Not targeted questions about courses. If problems arise and things come up, I get alerted for that for intervention stuff with professors or trending issues with courses.

Answer long term is finding multiple sources of data to triangulate. Going back to the notion of what is in course evals - trends are important. One bad section isn’t bad, but if you see a trend time overtime, it’s pretty clear that issues need to be addressed. A bad risk is having knee jerk reactions. But it’s tough because the program is only two years. They want to see immediate change. It’s not always the best course of action , and possible. It’s also pretty ok that how much we value and act on the stuff we hear, because it isn’t all immediate.

Looking at course and instructors form a1.5 years ago, things do change. Qualitative can be very muddy - there’s a large variance - one person will say they love it, one person says they hate it.

Do you see much difference in the way MIDS (online) students fill out the course surveys, vs in-person students?

You wrote about building community.

The sense of community (and being part of the in-group wrt norms and mores) is usually a stronger driver of behaviour than anonymity and the disinhibited behaviours that are associated w anonymity, but only if members (anon or not) have had a chance to develop communicative ties and mutual trust with a group - they feel membership. So context is very important.

How long would that sort of thing take? Is one term feasible, or would that be a program-long thing?

Any ways you've found to emphasize this sense of membership?

We are building a bot to try to seem more personal, to emphasize the “human-ness” of the program and hopefully elicit more reasonable, empathetic responses from students. Any thoughts on building relationship through this sort of digital (fake) persona?

A lot of it has to due with reflection - using it as a process. Understanding why you feel or think about believe the things that you do. Initial knee-jerk is a good place to start. But then expecting people to dig into that deeper - examples. How did they get to that statement. How to understand their metacognitive process.

Developing a process that has a reflective component yield higher retention. So maybe something there, using that logic applied to the problem space. Dig into Examples!!!!

End of term, final course evals are deeply flawed. Even if things are frustrating, and people are upset, then later on in their career, they may really appreciate it.

Feedback needs to be tempered - needs triangulation. Digging into it and having people understand how they got to that - don’t need to challenge legitimacy of the feelings, but understand how they arrived there is very important. It's one thing to say this course is frustrating, versus this course is terrible.

Always should answer to questions why - why are we wlearning we’re learning it, and why are we learning the way we are learning it. In students evals, it’s not ever brought up. How many students realize that myself inessa, they are all reviewing all the course evaluations and the purpose of previewing is to not only understand how students are feeling, but to inform decision made around faculty. This course is impossible- that has no value.

Maybe an important purpose is to help them understand how this is being used and what is its purpose.

This is a tricky unknown - You have to train people to be good at giving the feedback. You have to model something for them, and why we’re collecting the information and what benefit it offers.

Some of the feedback we got from students - a curriculum newsletter was started about a year ago. He’d write up some of the changes taking place in the core courses and the changes coming up. But got further feedback the information you go and how it translates to the changes. We’re trying to do that too, so students really understand that the feedback they give is valuable. I hear that the students feel like feedback goes into a black hole.

Never been in at a place that collects as much information form students.

Been pushing for paired down course evaluations to the survey. What courses have been really valuable to you.

Sometimes it’s hard because two students have an issue, but not take a nuclear option because it’s out of 125 students. Don’t jump on the instructor with the problem, because it might not be that. Who has the hand on the rudder and where the information is coming from.

Have an interesting experience when he was teaching, he developed a design thinking course for first year students and a student came up to him, but he felt that it was pretty useless. Thanks for that… but actually I developed this course after talking with and being really familiar with what you’re doing in the third and fourth year. It’s It’s things that going to get you an A+ in those courses. It’s that - it's’ being tethered to the here and now is important but having the input from people who see a bigger vision and an industry experience and a domain is very valuable. With respect to informing curriculum, have to take everything with a grain of salt, but there’s a reason why we have experts develop the courses. I’ll be honest.

Haven’t always had the greatest instructors, we’ve been really successful for the most part of this, but not always home runs and we address that. Student feedback can be black and white on teachers but on curriculum it can be more nuanced.

Typically an issue of the type of learning that we want to promote. Lack of engagement on the instructor side is easy to tease out. To tease out form student feedback, but about the curriculum, there are so many things to go into it, so it’s difficult to pick things out and dealing with students issues themselves. And also a matter of different perspectives.

If we had to keep anonymity of name, is there some other thing that might take responses?

(Ex. Having students see their own name in the Slackbot chat, and then anonymizing later. Does that help reduce the uninhibitedness?)