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Rethinking student evaluation of teaching: A policy analysis

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Highlights

- A policy analysis evaluates the impact of student evaluation of teaching (SET) on underrepresented faculty.

- Relying heavily on SETs may compromise underrepresented faculty academic progression.

- Evaluations that use formative and summative methods provide global unbiased feedback.

- Formative evaluation must focus on increasing performance while summative on outcomes.

Abstract

Institutions of higher education with tenure and promotion policies that rely heavily on student evaluations of teaching may create academic progression barriers for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty. The purpose of this policy analysis is to explore how current practice of utilizing Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETs) as the major source to evaluate teaching effectiveness, impacts tenure for BIPOC faculty, using Bardach and Patashnik's (2019) eight steps of policy analysis. Context provided includes cultural history, policy and evidence regarding the use of SETs. Evaluation criteria focuses on two national nursing reports and nursing accreditation standards, along with utilization of the 2020 Teaching Quality Framework for Evaluation of Teaching. The status quo utilizes SETs as the major evaluation tool for overall teaching effectiveness. SETs are shown to produce an unacceptably high error rate and fail to identify the best teachers. Teaching evaluations that utilize both formative and summative methods provide a global, less biased view of instructional pedagogy. Making a change in the way teaching is evaluated is a critical component in the retention of BIPOC Faculty and their ability to attain tenure.

Introduction

Academic progression for underrepresented faculty can be challenging, and in some cases impossible to attain (Griffin, 2011; Robles et al., 2021). Institutions of higher education with tenure and promotion policies that rely heavily on Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) create academic progression barriers for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty because of the biases students may have towards these groups. Researchers have challenged the student evaluation of effective teaching as being biased and unfair, especially for BIPOC faculty (Carpenter et al., 2020; Esarey & Valdes, 2020; Guillory et al., 2000; Iheduru-Anderson, 2020). Carpenter et al. (2020), and Esarey and Valdes (2020) argued that student evaluations are subjective opinions based on feelings, stereotypes, and biased perspectives, therefore are not a true reflection of faculty's teaching efficiency and efficacy. The overarching question on student evaluations is whether they measure student's learning or teaching quality. In their study, Esarey and Valdes (2020) found that regardless of the validity and reliability of a tool used for student evaluations for teaching, there is a high error rate in the results. There is no way to account for individual students' feelings or biases during the time that they complete the evaluations. Students may rate faculty high or low based on the grade they received in their course or a less favorable course. Student evaluations elucidate systematic biases (Esarey & Valdes, 2020). These systematic biases discredit the quality of teaching for BIPOC faculty and may have a direct impact on promotion and tenure.

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Purpose

Amid two crises of the year 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, and police brutality towards Black people, institutions of higher education are developing or revising policies for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and promoting the Inclusive Excellence (IE) model (Committee for Assessing Progress on Implementing the Recommendations of the Institute of Medicine Report The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, Institute of Medicine, and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, …

Policy

The United States (U.S.) Census Bureau (2020), reports a U.S. population more racially and ethnically diverse than measured in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The increase in diverse cultures in the U.S. means healthcare systems must be able to provide culturally appropriate care (Salsberg et al., 2021) While there seems to be more nursing professionals and faculty from different cultural backgrounds, the number of BIPOC faculty in nursing schools is still not fully representative of the …

Problem statement

The current system of utilizing SETs as the major source for faculty evaluation of teaching creates academic progression barriers for BIPOC faculty because of the biases students may have towards these groups. …

Evidence

Chief academic officers of schools of nursing within PWIs seek to understand and embrace access and inclusion challenges and opportunities for BIPOC faculty. Diversity in faculty and

students grows slowly. In Virginia alone, diverse nursing faculty are 13.1% versus students at 23.3% (*Nursing faculty: A spotlight on diversity (2017–2018 federal Policy agenda)*, 2017). Schools of nursing in PWIs are positioned to lead policy changes that support BIPOC faculty. From a faculty recruitment and …

Evaluation options

This policy analysis explores the current practice of utilizing SETs as the main source to evaluate teaching effectiveness versus an alternative model to evaluate teaching effectiveness. Evaluation of teaching in higher education was appraised, identifying the status quo versus an alternative model for evaluation of teaching and instruction using the Bardach and Patashnik's (2019) eight steps of policy analysis (Table 1). Heterogeneous characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, sexual …

Evaluation criteria

Evaluation focuses on two national nursing reports, national accreditation standards and the 2020 TQF. The 2021 National Academies *Future of Nursing 2020–2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity report* supports the 2016 report, Assessing Progress on the Institute of *Medicine Report on the Future of Nursing*, stating that the recruitment and retention of a diverse nursing workforce is a priority (Committee for Assessing Progress on Implementing the Recommendations of the Institute of …

The status quo

Using SETs as the main summation of teaching effectiveness has been the norm. First, students are guaranteed anonymity when they participate in any SET. They are normally administered online and near the end of an academic semester or period. The SET does not allow for any background information on the respondent. In general SETs combine a series of open and closed-ended questions related to course content and teaching effectiveness. Close-ended questions are scale based and the universal …

Conclusion

Student Evaluation of Teaching of BIPOC faculty can be biased. The implication for changing academic policies so that SETs are not the summative tool is pivotal. Honest and unbiased student feedback to faculty teaching allows an opportunity for self-reflection and

professional development. BIPOC faculty bring a wealth of nursing experience and perspectives that are valuable to the advancement of the schools of nursing and the institution and must be acknowledged and embraced. Relying heavily on …

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