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An analysis of the relationships between management faculty teaching ratings and characteristics of the classes they teach



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ABSTRACT

This study uses ratings from Ratemyprofessors.com to examine how ratings differ across different types of management classes. A sample of 3570 undergraduate class ratings taught by 274 professors at nine Florida universities are examined. T-test results show significant ratings differences between core, capstone, and major classes. For example, professors teaching core classes earn lower ratings than professors teaching major or capstone classes and professors teaching major classes earn lower ratings than those teaching capstone classes. For professors teaching major classes, however, there are no significant differences in ratings between required and elective classes or between quantitative and non-quantitative classes, even though students consider quantitative classes and to be less easy and they report less interest in those classes. A series of regressions also reveal how professors' characteristics, academic ranks, and the use of humor in the classroom are related to teaching ratings for different classes. These results provide evidence that teaching ratings are related to both the different types of classes taught and to some professor characteristics. The results should be of interest to both faculty who are rated by students and to administrators who use ratings data when evaluating professors for performance review purposes and tenure and promotion decisions.

1. Introduction

Student evaluations of teaching (SET) are an important tool used to provide both professors and administrators with feedback on perceived teaching effectiveness. Because such evaluations are used for performance reviews and promotion and tenure decisions, professors and administrators should be aware of the inherent shortcomings of ratings. The web based faculty evaluation platform known as [RatemyProfessors.com](https://www.ratemyprofessors.com) (RMP) allows students to rate their college professors and classes on many different variables. This current study uses class level data from RMP to examine the relationships between management professor ratings and many professor and class characteristics not previously examined.

This paper is structured as follows. In Section II, the existing literature is discussed focusing on the importance of teaching ratings, the validity of using RMP data as a proxy for SET data, and the various factors that may be related to teaching ratings. In Section III, the data used in this study is described and in Section IV the methodology is described. In Section V the results are presented and in Section VI, a summary and conclusions are presented.

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2. Literature review

The following review discusses the importance and shortcomings of teaching ratings and the validity of using data from RMP as a proxy for SET data. It also presents an overview of the past studies that identify many of the factors that are related to teaching ratings.

2.1. The importance of SET data and some limitations

Student evaluations of teaching have long been a significant factor in performance reviews and promotion and tenure (P&T) decisions. Millions of students take part in providing feedback through these SET surveys (Kember, Leung, and Kwan, 2002) and there is evidence that SET's are used extensively by colleges and universities (Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Seldin, 1993; Wagenaar, 1995). Because such teaching ratings have become a standard means of evaluation and their use is so extensive, professor and administrator comprehension of the inherent shortcomings of ratings data is imperative. Some argue that the effectiveness of university-level instruction is so complex that a single rating score for instructor quality ignores its multifaceted nature, concluding that comparisons of ratings across academic disciplines and schools are suspect because of variations in the design and execution of SET surveys (Marsh & Roche, 1997). Empirical evidence supports this existence of differences across disciplines and underscore the importance of understanding the many factors that are related to teaching ratings (Constand & Pace, 2014a,b; Dunegan & Hrivnak, 2003; McKone, 1999). Since differences in ratings across disciplines are so well documented, the question of whether differences in class types within the same discipline needs to be addressed. This current study focuses on differences in ratings across different types of classes taught within the management discipline using ratings data from RMP.

2.2. RMP ratings data

On the RMP website, students rate their professors on Helpfulness, Clarity, and Easiness using a 5-point Likert-type scale. RMP then calculates average ratings across all classes rated and an overall Quality rating that is an average of Helpfulness and Clarity. Students also can indicate their perception of the professor's physical attractiveness by awarding him or her a "Hot Chile Pepper" and they can provide comments about the class and professor. In the past, RMP also allowed students to indicate their level of Interest in the class, but RMP stopped collecting that information and reporting that data sometime in 2015. In the fall of 2014, RMP indicated they provided over 14,000,000 class level ratings from more than 1,300,000 professors from over 7000 schools. Because of the size and accessibility of the RMP ratings dataset, it is a desirable choice to use as an alternative to traditional SET data for research into the factors that are related to professional teaching ratings.

The validity of using RMP data as a substitute for SET data is well-documented from both the student's point of view and the views of those who compare RMP ratings to SET ratings. Students believe RMP ratings are both honest representations of instructors' abilities and that they serve as a valid alternative to SET ratings (Brown, Baille and Fraser, 2009). Students also use RMP ratings in making decisions about course selection (Johnson, Hoover, Beck, and Toma, 2014) and student responses on RMP closely match their concerns about instructor quality in the classroom (Kindred and Mohammed, 2005). Many authors compare various aspects of RMP data with SET data for various disciplines and they all generally conclude that there is no significant difference between either the students who do the ratings or the results provided by the two ratings platforms (Albrecht & Hoopes, 2009; Bleske-Rechek & Michels, 2010; Bleske-Rechek & Fritsch, 2011; Coladarci & Kornfield, 2007; Timmerman, 2008; Villalta-Cerdas, McKeny, Gatlin, and Sandi-Urena, 2014). Many of these researchers also report a strong positive correlation between the RMP "Quality" rating and SET-based ratings for teacher effectiveness. Given this evidence, RMP can reasonably be used as a valid and suitable proxy for SETs.

2.3. Factors related to teaching ratings

There is an extensive literature that examines the many factors that are related to teaching ratings. Much of the early literature focuses on the validity of teaching ratings and the relationship between ratings and student achievement or student learning. A meta-analysis of 41 of these early individual multi-section validity studies report that the average correlation between student achievement and overall course ratings was .47 while the average correlation between student achievement and overall instructor ratings was .42. These correlation results reflect moderately large to large size effects for these relationships (Cohen, 1981). Unfortunately, while student achievement is strongly related to teaching ratings, the data available from RMP and used in this current study does not allow for the examination of this relationship.

Factors other than the teaching effectiveness are also known to be related to teaching ratings, with much of this research focused on students' perceptions of class easiness. Research shows that professors and classes in more challenging, quantitatively-oriented disciplines generally earn lower teaching ratings (Cashin, 1995; Feldman, 1978; McKeachie, 1997) while professors and classes in the humanities typically generate higher teaching ratings than classes in math, science, and engineering (Franklin & Theall, 1992). Many empirical studies have provided evidence of a strong positive relationship between student perceptions of professor/class easiness and the level of ratings (Bleske-Rechek & Michels, 2010; Centra, 2003; Constand & Pace, 2014a,b; Felton, Koper, Mitchell, and Stinson, 2008; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997). Of course, harder classes are not always associated with lower ratings, especially in the hard sciences (Bleske-Rechek & Michels, 2010). This may be because students who choose to take more demanding classes may focus more on the content and they expect the classes to be harder. There is also evidence of a non-linear relationship between easiness and ratings where students in more difficult courses who have a greater interest in the topic will often provide higher ratings despite the

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