



STUDENT EVALUATION OF FACULTY: A MIRROR FOR SELF ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Many institutions around the world greatly rely on this technique for curricular and academic enhancement. King Fahd University in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia should not be an exception. It has been argued that students are not valid sources of evaluation information, that their responses are based on superficial liking or disliking of faculty; however, this assumption has not been empirically supported. One can safely say that students' evaluations of faculty (SEF) are a valid index of instructional effectiveness. Students' ratings add a valuable component to the range of input for the evaluation of teachers. Although many question the validity of such ratings, under certain conditions, results can and should be useful. Students can distinguish among teachers on the basis of how much they have learned. The present paper lends support to the use of student evaluation as one component in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness. The faculty should feel convinced that to some extent ratings reflect an instructor's impact on students. The author is convinced that there is much to be discovered in the hidden meanings of evaluation by students, only if an un-biased and objective approach is accorded to it. It throws light upon issues that address a wider concern such as curricular dynamics or social and administrative influences. In more than one way the students' evaluation of faculty (SEF) can mirror the hidden images that are otherwise may go unnoticed by one. Objectively seen and carefully analyzed, SEF can act as course correction in the domain of academic self-development. The author has just attempted one such endeavor. It is hoped that the presented material will inculcate and initiate a practical, creative and healthy debate on the issue of students' evaluation of faculty

Keywords: *Students' Evaluation of Faculty (SEF), Students' Evaluation of Faculty Performance (SEFP), Students' Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE), Architectural Education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' evaluation of faculty (SEF) is widely used as a basis for administrative decisions and faculty development recommendations in higher education today. This paper addresses its effectiveness and presents a case for the use of student ratings in self-evaluation. In this discussion, student ratings refer to those in which students are asked to complete a form or write a short free-form evaluation anonymously, either during or immediately after a class period. Research in the area of student evaluation of instruction has resulted in the publication of more than numerous studies. Proper questionnaire design has been cited as one of the key factors to qualitative outcome of the exercise. One study relates the evaluation format and kinds of questions included. Although the whole exercise of SEF revolves around numeration, much of it remains qualitative and deals with intangible but subjective issues. Moreover, heavy reliance upon SEF scores in faculty evaluation by administrators can be unduly hurting, especially in isolated cases. A case is being made in this paper concerning issues that are either irrelevant or simply non-issues, at least from specific points of view. The study presents a dilemma between qualitative and quantitative aspects of SEF and attempts to highlight need of qualitative objectivity over quantitative subjectivity. Although the data presented is of limited value, it is the abstract nature of conclusions drawn and recommendations made that provides a creative and constructive forum for a healthy debate on the issue of Students' Evaluation of Faculty. Although the present study is based upon data limited to one faculty member (the author) and spanning over a limited period, the discussion and sharing of experiences by others reinforce the conclusions drawn.

2. RATIONALE FOR STUDENT EVALUATION OF FACULTY (SEF)

Away from the criticism that has often been accorded to students' evaluation of faculty, this exercise can be justified on more than one count some of which are listed below:

1. Only students are uniquely qualified in rating their own increased knowledge and comprehension.
2. The students are in a better position in rating their motivation toward the subject taught; toward a career associated with that subject; and with respect to a changed general attitude toward further learning in the subject area.
3. The students can also report on matters of fact for dexterous teaching, such as the punctuality of the instructor, his vocal delivery and the legibility of writing.
4. They can also help in identifying teaching style indicators such as; Is the teacher enthusiastic; does he ask many questions, encourage questions from students, etc.?
5. Students are in a good position to judge such matters as coverage of the course material and related issues.

6. Students are likely to be able to report quite reliably to their peers on such matters of interest to them as the relevance of the text books, the extent to which attendance is taken and weighted, and whether a great deal of homework is required.
7. Student ratings offer a sense of participation in the process of education o an institution.

There is little doubt, then, that more and more institutions are engaged in using this technique to enhance standard of teaching. In a study that tracked the use of students valuation of faculty performance (SEFP) in 600 (US) colleges between 1973 and 1993 found that the use of SEFP/SETE increased from 29% to 86 % during that period [Seldin, 1993]. Another survey found that most business schools now use SEF for decision making, with 95% of the deans at 220 accredited undergraduate schools always making use of them as a source of information [Crumbley, 1995]. Two more studies of accounting department Chairpersons, indicated that reliance upon SEF was second only to research publications in professional journals [Yunker and Sterner, 1988]. Department chairs and Deans often weigh student ratings heavily in the faculty evaluation process. Perhaps no other method of evaluation has become so sacrosanct. SEF are used not only in the U.S. but in Australian, Canada, Europe and Great Britain. Unlike in the U.S. however, in Great Britain SEF by formal questionnaire, despite apparently no formal mandate, are increasingly used, though not weighed as heavily as is information gathered by other means. [Husbands and Fosh, 1993].

Today many colleges and universities in the United States demand their faculty members to treat the students as customers in their teaching practice. This is particularly true for the business schools across the country. It (SEF) is generally used as a tool for increasing student enrollments, to satisfy the students' desires for higher grades and has become increasingly common on college campuses across the globe. But many SEF exercises tend to ignore peculiarities of time an space and simply follow an extremely common pattern of evaluation questionnaire whereas, evaluation questionnaires designed should contain questions on global items ("Overall, how would you rate the quality of the instructor's teaching?") and use evaluative scales (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor-or Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree) rather than frequency scales (Frequently, Somewhat Frequently, Rarely, Never). Some researchers have criticized this practice for its adverse effect upon academic achievement of students. However, these aspects of the study have not been dealt with in details here.

2.1. Teaching has changed: "for better or for worse?"

Teaching, apart from being identified as a profession, a noble one, has also turned into some sort of art. And as all art undergo dynamic change, teaching has taken its own toll: for better or for worse. A teacher's perception in society has changed from being a "role model" to some sort of a "consultant" or a simple "professional" who is always willing to offer his/her services to a client (the student). Just reading the two paragraphs below shall portray the

vision of students by their teachers separated by a period of three decades. Once upon a time teachers used to say:

“I am a teacher. The life I lead is the most agreeable I can imagine. [In the] classroom ... there await me a group of intelligent and curious young [people] who read the books assigned to them with a sense of adventure and discovery, discuss them with zest, and listen appreciatively to explications I may offer. What makes the process most satisfying is the conviction that education is mankind’s most important enterprise — An American college teacher, (Moses Hadas (1) 1962).

And now, most complain that:

“We lead students to the fountain of knowledge. Some will drink deeply, some will take a few swallows, and some will just sip. An increasing number will, as at dentist, merely rinse before spitting out.” – An American college teacher, [Moses Hadas (2) 1995]. The above scenarios is best illustrated graphically by Table 1. One can clearly see the reversal of weightage for grades (A-E) over a period of some 25 years.

Table 1: Grades at Harvard (Graphic Illustration of above Paradox)
Source: Henry H. Bauer 1997.

GRADES	1966	1991
A	8%	20%
A-	14%	23%
B+	16%	22%
B	19%	17%
B-	15%	9%
C+	10%	3%
C-E	18%	6%

3. THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The author has been active in attempting to bring interactivity and a sense of participation to class room environment. As diverse a field as architectural education is, it offers potentials for experimentations at various levels. Architectural education is distinct due to its heavy emphasis on studio-based teaching. The issue related to studio design project evaluation based upon students’ participation has been dealt elsewhere (Siddiqi, A. A. 2002). The present study highlights the impact of the other dimension, that of the student evaluation of faculty. Data pertaining to several years has been analyzed to review the validity and usefulness of the method (SEF). The author has been involved in architectural education for more than three decades at various institutions and has acclaimed numerous laurels and appreciations in teaching. But this experience has not been a smooth sailing process. There has been ups and

owns and sometimes the road has been rather bumpy indeed. It is this variation and a sense of realism that prompted the author to undertake self-academic evaluation and find validity and usefulness of SEF to improve teaching.

3.1. Analysis and Discussion

Data analyzed and presented here was made available by King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where student evaluation of faculty is one of the three tiers of faculty annual evaluation criteria. During the last decade or so, KFUPM has revised its questionnaire. For the present research the author has selected the most recent format for evaluation and analysis. The present study has been an ongoing effort on the part of the author to improve generalities of architectural education as well as to monitor personal performance. Though the author's SEF ranking has rarely gone below a benchmark, isolated incidences should not stay unattended. At the same time, the author has observed other academic and administrative variables, which, though not included in the SEF questionnaire, have strong bearing on students' response including their reaction to individual faculty members. The main aim of the present study is not only to use it as personal barometer, but also to identify the hidden and cumulative dimensions of administrative decision making process that relate to broad academic environment of an institution, especially over a long period of time.

Table 1 and Table 2 list data that was available for analysis. It covers a period of nine years (17 semesters) in all. Number of courses undertaken during this period was 46 (approx. 3 courses/semesters OR 9.2 C.H./semester). Student evaluation rating varies between 10 (highest) and 3.91 (lowest) on a scale of 0-10 with 8.7 as the average for all the courses through all the semesters. It may be noted that the lowest rating (3.91) seems to be extremely odd in view of a healthy average of 8.7, and indeed it is this particular incidence that has prompted a thorough analysis of entire record and hence the present paper. The issue related to this exceptionally low rating (3.91) will be taken up later, though not in detail as this is not the main focus of the present study. One may, though, be referred to studies that deal with such anomalies and shortcomings of any student evaluation of faculty (SEF) e.g. [Crumbley, D. L. ,1995], [Seldin, ,1993, July 21], [Damron, ,1996], [Abrami, ,1989], [Abrami, d'Apollonia, S., & Cohen ,1990] and [Charles Emery et al,2001].

3.2. Some Observations

Data analysis has been performed keeping in view the special nature of architectural education i.e. studio based instructions being central to the overall teaching. This has allowed the author to look into SEF pattern for two categories of courses – Design studios and theory courses (see Figs. 1-3). The author has generally been involved in a teaching Design Studios that usually engages him in the middle order Design Studio IV (ARC 304) in the Fall semester followed by the Senior Project (ARC408). There is generally a lower rating in the junior Design Studios compared to the Senior one. Many reasons can be cited for this anomaly. The most important is the one, which encouraged the author to propose structural changes and

revision of curriculum of architecture department of College of Environmental Design, KFUPM, Dhahran. In the previous curriculum, Design Studio ARC304 was followed by ARC203, which dealt with “Working Drawings” rather than “Architectural Design.” As the students entering ARC304 had no real “design” experience, they usually struggled in this studio (ARC304). Most of the time, the academic pressure was beyond them at this stage. Frustrations were common and only SEF could provide a ventilating ground for them. Indeed this studio has always been the most problematic and least productive among all in the old curriculum. It is hoped that the new structural re-adjustment of this anomaly will have a healthy impact on “Design Studio” efficiency.

Table 2: Students' evaluation for (Fall (F) 1992 - Spring (S) 2002)

No.	Semester	F 93	S 93	F 94	S 94	F 95	S 95	F 96	S 96	F 97	S 97	F 98	S 98	F 99	S 99	F 2000	S 2000	F 2001	Av.	
	Course																			
1	ARC203				8.78															8.78
2	ARC304									8.16		7.46				6.19		3.91		6.43
3	ARC305						8.61		9.41											9.01
4	ARC408		8.61										9.25	6.92	9.79		9.35			8.78
5	ARC313					8.72		9.20		9.38		7.55				5.63		6.91		7.90
6	ARC400											7.06	5.38	8.88		6.25		7.33		6.98
7	ARC414										9.09		6.20		8.13					7.81
8	ARC433	8.48				8.65		9.10												8.74
9	ARC443					9.99														9.99
10	ARE303			9.99																9.99
11	ARE211	9.41		9.08		8.64		8.70			8.60			8.85						8.88
12	ARE212				9.38		8.36													8.87
13	ARE328																8.94			8.94
14	ARE441		9.44																	9.44
15	ARE510	9.36		8.56																8.96
16	ARE510		9.93																	9.93
17	ARE530		8.79																	8.79
18	CE101					8.22														8.22
	Average	9.08	9.19	9.21	9.08	8.84	8.49	9.00	9.41	8.77	8.85	7.36	6.94	8.22	8.96	6.02	9.15	6.05		8.69

Another important observation is on the University wide decision that compels students securing C or lower grade in MATH courses in their Orientation (Prep) year to enroll only in limited departments in the University, namely CIM (College of Industrial Management) or Architecture only. This has resulted in general increase in student intake in ARC department on one hand, while has negatively affected the overall academic environment in the department on the other. As they say, “you can take a horse to the water but you can not make him drink”, many of our new students are those who never wanted to be an architect in the first place and hence the frustration and hence the current consequences. This issue requires a separate debate altogether and is beyond the scope of the present paper, however. A limited analysis and resulting correlation between SEF and the average Cumulative GPA of students of a relevant course suggests a linear link. It is understandable that academically good students (high GPA) will exercise rationality in assessing faculty while the poorer ones (low GPA) are expected to take refuge behind their emotional bias.

Table 3: Student evaluation for all courses for all questions in the questionnaire

Semester	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Average							
	Q.	Courses	ARC305	ARC304	ARC313	ARC414	ARE211	ARC304	ARC400	ARC313	ARC408	ARC414	ARC400	ARC400	ARE211	ARC408	ARC400	ARC313	ARC304	ARC408	ARE328	ARC400	ARC313	ARC304	Averages	Studios Av:
1	9.8	8.3	9.7	9.5	9.4	8.9	8.3	8	8	7.2	6	9.1	9.4	6.7	6.7	6	7.6	9.3	9.4	7.8	6.4	4.8	8.0	7.9	8.1	
2	10	9.3	10	10	8.4	8.6	6.7	8.3	10	6.8	5	9.6	9.3	8.7	6	8	7.8	9.3	9.4	8	6.6	4.8	8.2	8.5	8.0	
3	9.8	8	10	10	9.3	6.9	6.3	8.7	8	6.6	5	9.3	9.3	7.3	6	7	7.1	9.3	8.5	7	7.8	3.5	7.8	7.5	7.9	
4	9.5	8.8	9.7	9.5	8.9	8.3	7.7	7.7	10	6.4	7	8.9	9.1	7.3	7.3	6	6.7	9	9.1	7.6	7.1	3.5	8.0	7.9	8.0	
5	9.3	8.3	8.6	9	8.7	7.7	7.7	7.7	8	6.2	6	9.1	9.3	7.3	6.7	7	6.2	9.3	8.6	7.3	6.7	3.8	7.7	7.5	7.8	
6	9.8	7.8	8.9	9.5	8.4	6.9	7	7.3	10	5.2	5	9.3	8.4	6.7	6	4	5.3	9.3	9.2	7.4	6.6	3.8	7.3	7.4	7.3	
7	9.8	9	9.1	10	9.2	7.1	6.3	8.2	10	7.4	6	8.9	9.4	7.3	6.7	5	7.3	10	8.3	7	7.5	4.3	7.9	8.1	7.8	
8	9.5	8	9.4	9.5	8.8	8	6.7	7.8	10	6.6	5	9.8	9.4	6.7	6	7	6.4	10	8.9	7.6	7.5	4	7.8	7.8	7.9	
9	8.8	6.5	8.6	7	7.5	5.4	6.7	5.8	10	6.6	5	8.4	8.1	5.3	6	3	5.3	10	9.2	7.2	6.4	3.8	6.9	6.9	6.8	
10	10	9.3	9.1	9	8.9	6.9	8	7	10	6	6	9.1	8.9	6.7	6.7	4	6.7	9.3	9.2	7.6	6.9	4	7.7	7.8	7.6	
11	10	9	9.1	9.5	9.1	7.7	7.3	8	10	6	5	8.9	9.4	7.3	6.7	7	7.6	8.7	9.2	7.2	6.6	4.3	7.9	8.1	7.8	
12	10	8.5	9.7	9	9.3	9.4	7	8.3	10	7.6	5	9.1	9.3	8.7	6.7	8	4.9	9.3	9.7	8	8	4.8	8.2	8.2	8.2	
13	7.8	7.5	8.9	8.5	7.8	7.7	6.7	7.8	10	5.4	5	8.2	7.9	6	6	4	4.8	8.7	8.5	6.6	7.8	3.8	7.1	7.0	7.2	
14	8.5	7.3	9.4	8	7.4	7	6.7	7	8	5.8	5	8	7.7	6	6	5	5.8	8.7	8.5	7.2	6.6	3.5	7.0	6.8	7.0	
15	9.3	7.5	9.7	8.5	8.4	6.6	7.3	6.8	8	5.6	5	8.4	8.5	6.7	5.3	4	5.6	9.3	8.5	6.8	6.6	3.3	7.1	7.0	7.1	
16	9	7.8	10	9	8.1	6.3	6.7	6.3	8	3.8	5	7.8	8.2	6	5.3	5	4	10	8.8	7	5.8	3	6.9	6.8	6.9	
Av	9.4	8.2	9.4	9.1	8.6	7.5	7.1	7.6	9.3	6.2	5.4	8.9	8.9	6.9	6.3	5.6	6.2	9.4	8.9	7.3	6.9	3.9	7.6	7.6	7.6	

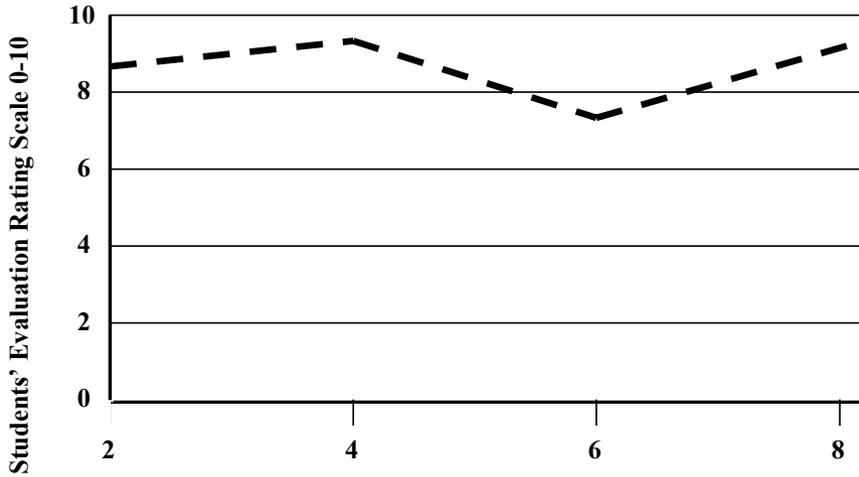


Fig. 1. Academic Semesters as mentioned in table 3 above.
(Note: Senior Project is offered every alternate semester).

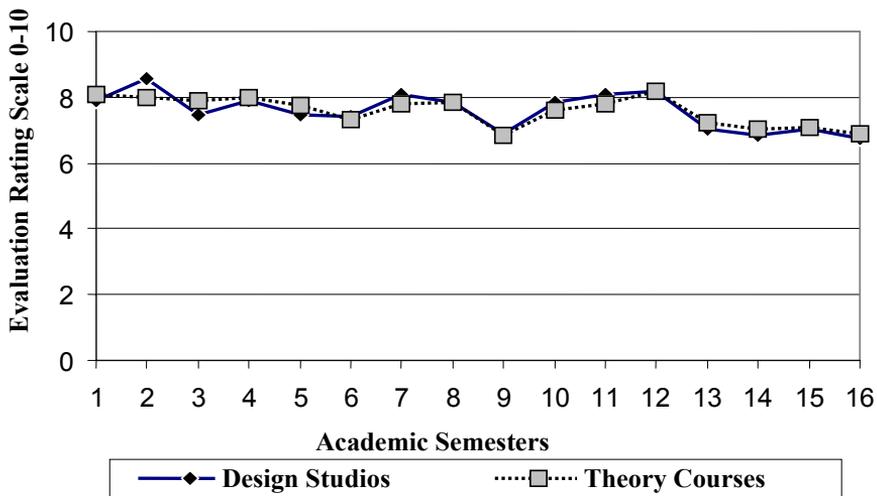


Fig. 2. Average SEF Rating for “Theory” and “Studio” courses

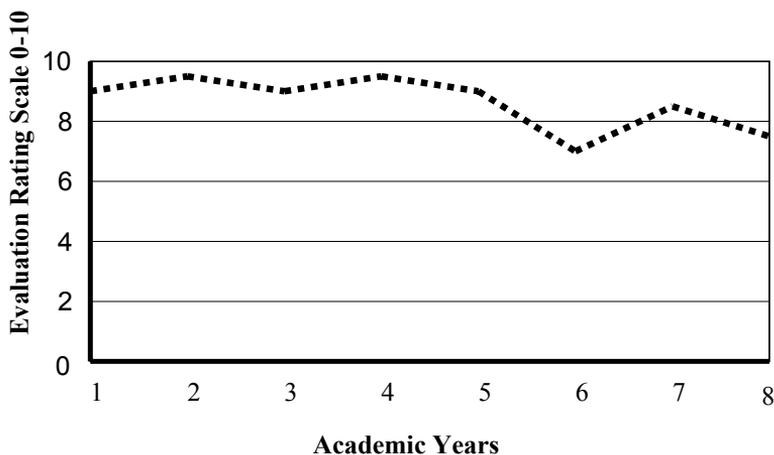


Fig. 3. Yearly Average SEF Rating over the entire period of study

4. CONCLUSIONS

The author started the present study in all its earnestness and with a view to deriving benefit from it. However, the “mirror” that was envisaged to provide a clear reflection of state of affairs appear to have substantial aberrations. These aberrations have indeed distorted the otherwise true reflection and hence no real benefit could be derived as such. It is, therefore, important to identify the forces that induce these unwarranted “aberrations” in the “mirror”. Observations made on SEF in the foregoing paragraphs have necessitated needs for a fresh look at the SEF exercise. There are numerous areas where students’ evaluation of faculty (SEF) can potentially be questioned for its susceptibility and tribulations. This can be a debate by itself. However, some pertinent suggestions are provided below which are directly related to the present study.

- **SEF is unilateral and one-way – lack cross-examination:** Whereas most institutions require faculty to designate office hours for off-the-class consultation and teaching input as well as constructive dialogue between student and teacher, SEF is largely a one-way traffic. Students evaluate their course faculty once in a semester and that’s all. There is no interaction between the two on this matter. While students take opportunity to discuss their grade in each and every assignment and demand a higher reward, even without a solid reason, faculty can hardly discuss how and why they are being evaluated. This poses, perhaps the most serious threat to the usefulness and effectiveness of students evaluation of faculty.

- **Mixing of numerical vs. abstract data yields controversial result:** In terms of a faculty's overall annual (contractual) evaluation, a strict numerical format of students' evaluation complicates the process by mixing 'apples' with 'oranges,' where a more abstract and humane evaluation by administrators follows somewhat different criteria as compared to SEF.
- **Literal interpretation is a problem:** In most circumstances, students' evaluation is 'spontaneous' and sudden outlet of their reaction and thus incorporates the danger of 'too literal' interpretation of a faculty's overall academic performance. Literature is rife with challenges to the very idea of SEF [Abrami, et al. 1989], [Abrami, P.C et al, 1990], [Emery C. et al. 2001], [Damron, J. C. 1996], [Seldin, P. 1993,] [Sproule, R. 2000], [DeBerg, C. L. and J. R. Wilson 1990]
- **SEF is too specific to some field but not to others:** Commonly, most institutions rely on standardized forms for faculty evaluation by the students, which are usually biased in favor of certain quarters than others.
- **Based upon 'dry' emotion rather than rationale:** There is always a danger of a sudden outburst of emotional discharge by students than use of a rationale approach in their attempts to evaluate faculty. As the process is usually secretive and does not bear any feedback mechanism, it has the potential of harming the victim.
- **Field of Specialization against one's choice** contributes to subjective evaluation by students as academically good students (with high GPA) tend to exercise rationality in assessing faculty while the poorer ones (with low GPA) are expected to take refuge behind their emotional bias.
- **An academic and intellectual challenge for most students:** Prevailing campus academic standing of most students shows that a sophisticated questionnaire can be a daunting task for most, both in terms of interpretation and illustration.
- **SEF is usually arranged injudiciously:** Most often than not, students' evaluation is time tabled on a short notice and has administrative and implementive hiccups.
- **Runs risk of irrelevance:** Many students do not take the exercise seriously thus making the exercise largely irrelevant.
- **Gets too much weight for contractual/job evaluation:** Despite the issues of '*a level of irrelevance, being too specific, based on emotion rather than rationale,*' and having no possibility of being '*cross examined,*' many institutions give a considerably higher weight

to students' evaluation of faculty in their overall assessment of faculty's academic performance.

- **SEF is usually 'biased'**: Absence of 'interaction between faculty and students regarding SEF' and 'injudicious arrangement of evaluation' usually gives rise to personal 'bias' in the process.
- **Transient**: As students' evaluation of faculty occurs only once a semester, it does not have a crystallizing effect. It never reaches the level of a course-correction exercise.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- If SEF has to serve as a model for faculty evaluation and academic self-development, it needs to be made more relevant to the context of academic specialties, i.e. it must follow the needs of a given field rather than remaining highly generalized.
- SEF must be made more dynamic by introducing it more than once a semester at appropriate intervals e.g. one quarter into the semester, after mid-term exam, some two weeks before final and the time of final exam. Logistics and timing needs to be worked out well in advance.
- In case above scenario is put in place, results of at least two early events be made available to faculty in time for possible academic improvement.
- Each stage of SEF should address relevant questions and issues pertinent to particular stage of a course.
- Possibility of cross-examination of results of SEF should be looked into in order to make it more effective and useful.
- Further research and study of SEF related to many aspects is need of the hour, especially for the following:
 - Context of individual fields
 - Design of specific questionnaire
 - Institutional goals and objectives
 - Society's social and cultural pedestals
 - Administrative and academic constraints
 - National and regional developmental plans

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APPENDIX

Questions in the Forms for “Student Evaluation of Faculty” as used in KFUPM, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

1. Encourages student participation and responds to questions in the class
2. Is available and helpful during scheduled office hours
3. Is prepared for class
4. Place a mark in column B for this question
5. Speaks clearly
6. Has clear presentation
7. Motivates students
8. Seems knowledgeable in the subject of course
9. Uses educational aids and/or shows demonstrations
10. Is fair in grading
11. Is concerned about students the student’s understanding and progress
12. Explains concepts clearly with examples
13. Is prompt in attending and leaving classes
14. Gives tests that show understanding of students
15. Place a mark in column D for this question
16. Assigns homework and/or gives quizzes regularly
17. States objectives of each class session
18. Grades and returns tests and assignments promptly