

General Education Program

Some urban legends about teaching evaluations



- **Students dislike difficult courses and therefore retaliate with lower SET's.**

Often, in reading SETs, one finds the results of question 12 (“Demanding course...”) correlated to those of 14 (“Overall course is...”) and 21 (“Overall instructor is...”). This can mean two things. In high evaluations, students respect and treasure rigor and conversely find weak courses less rigorous, or there is an effect linking the high or low ratings on particular summative questions to all such questions. But it is true that we find excellent rated teachers as those with the highest class standards as well.

- **Students at AU are afraid of science and math and these courses therefore suffer in evaluation.**

Not at all true. Since fall semester 2001, the aggregate results of General Education area 5, the Natural Sciences, fared at or above the average of all General Education areas. Consider this. In spring 2005, students told us the sciences were better than the mean of all General Education, in each of the following questions:

Question	Area 5 – Nat Sciences	All General Education
8 (“Course well prepared”)	4.30/5	4.16/5
12 (“Demanding course”)	4.13/5	4.01/5
13 (“Satisfied with what I learned”)	4.03/5	4.02/5
14 (“Overall, course is”)	4.66/6	4.65/6
17 (“Clear presentation”)	4.21/5	4.13/5
19 (“Knowledgeable instructor”)	4.63/5	4.58/5
20 (“Instructor evaluation fair”)	4.30/5	4.17/5
21 (“Overall instructor is”)	4.94/6	4.90/6

- **Faculty members are penalized for teaching General Education courses as compared to major and graduate courses.**

Again, not true. Anecdotally, in looking at individual results, there are examples of instructors better suited and better evaluated for General Education teaching than upper level teaching, but in terms of averages, a comparison for the past five years has indicated that General Education results match fairly closely with overall undergraduate results. When breaking it down more specifically by comparing foundation level General Education teach to all 100-level courses and second level to all 200-level, again the program is at, or a hair below, the mean.

- **Students tend to reward grade inflated courses and look for enrichment and recreational opportunities in course choice to reward.**

Using General Education Area 1, the arts as an enrichment model, this area as a whole, in fall 2004, received the lowest mean scores in nearly all questions when compared to the other four areas. Area 2, Traditions that Shaped the Western World received the highest. In recent studies of grade inflation, Area 1 disciplines were cited as having the awarding the highest proportion of honors grades (B+, A- , or A) too. In individual scans of extremely high course evaluations, grade distributions seemed generally in keeping with discipline-specific norms (i.e. Physics professor to physics courses, economics to economics).

- **SET's are inaccurate assessment tools for faculty performance.**

In instances where faculty have volunteered for other assessment measures like peer evaluations, classroom visits, etc., results have been consistent with SET returns. SET's, for any flaws, are consistent measures.

