

Teaching Evaluation Summary

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Had you asked me what I wanted to pursue as a career ten years ago, teaching (in any capacity) wouldn't have been at the top of my list. Given my educational path, from community college through graduate school, I know firsthand the effect and necessity of inspirational and passionate college educators. It is this level of excellence that I aim for in my own classroom. I don't just want to teach, I hope to help students develop the skills to critically assess their social world, and to pique their curiosity towards conducting their own investigations. My approach to conveying this to students is to be excited about teaching the material myself. I have been fortunate in the time that I have been teaching, to have had students who actively participate in my classes, which has made for an enjoyable experience on my end. Because of this, I am always excited to see the results from the student evaluations at the end of the semester, in order to see how the courses, and my teaching abilities, were perceived from their perspective.

As a social researcher, I approach the evaluation process with great interest. I spend time with each class discussing the purpose of the evaluations, and the importance of getting feedback from everyone in the class (I stress that whether they loved the course or hated it, I need to hear their opinion). I use the results from the evaluations to improve my courses, and find those reviews which are less positive to be more useful in this regard.

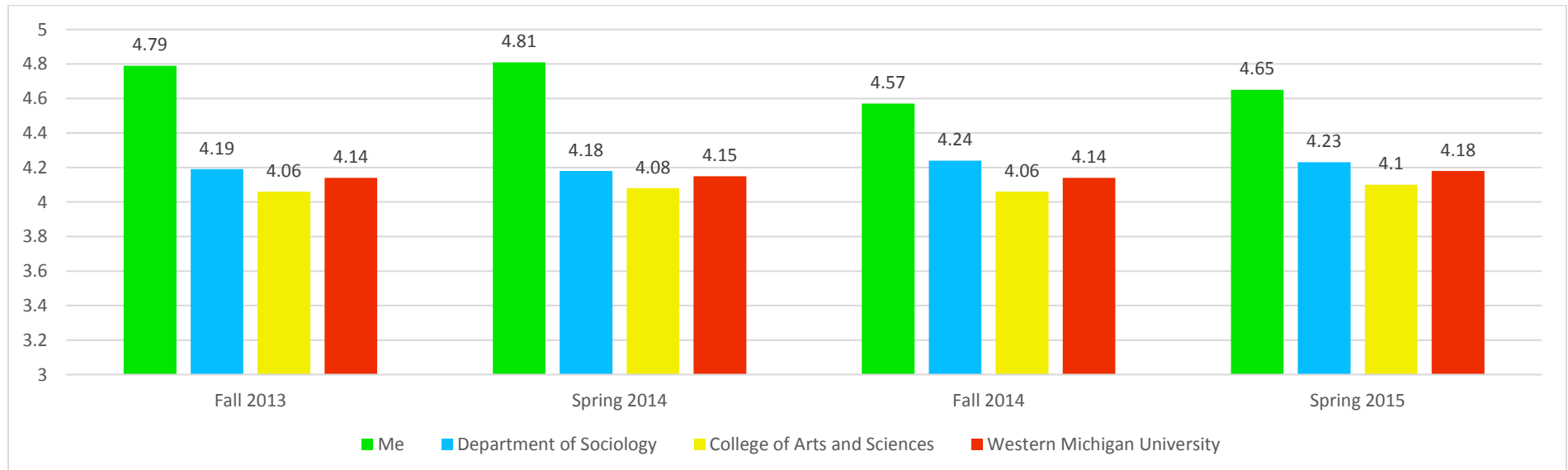
In Table 1 below, I have summarized the quantitative portion of the course evaluations from the past three years of teaching at Western Michigan University. While there is some variation in the responses for each of the questions included in the student evaluations, both within courses and across semesters, my students have consistently rated me fairly high (between 4 and 5 on a five-point scale) in all categories. I am particularly proud of the high ratings which I received when it comes to being fair to students, being well prepared for class, and being a good classroom leader. The lowest ratings which I received were from the first session of Methods of Data Collection courses, fall 2014, which was definitely a more difficult course in terms of the amount and type of materials covered. However, building on these evaluations, with improvements to the order of materials covered and the final research project, I was able to achieve higher responses for the same course in the fall of 2015. These results also indicate a positive trend in my teaching abilities in all of the courses I have taught, a pattern which I hope to build on in the years to come.

Compared to the average of student evaluation responses in the Sociology Department (as well as the College of Arts and Sciences and WMU as a whole), the feedback I have received in the past three years is higher across the board. As is illustrated in Figure 1 below, my evaluation scores are significantly greater than the averages for the rest of the university over all semesters ($t=-12.85$, $df=14$, $p<.01$). Even my lowest ratings for the fall of 2014, as discussed above, were higher than the other levels of the university. Despite a lack of data from the university for the most recent semesters, it appears that my improvement in scores over the past year has outpaced the improvements of the Sociology department and the fairly level trend in scores for the university as a whole.

Table 1. Summary of WMU Course Evaluation Results: Means and (Standard Deviations).

Evaluation Items	Fall 2013, Social Problems	Spring 2014, Social Problems	Fall 2014, Research Methods	Fall 2015, Research Methods	Spring 2015, Principles of Sociology	Spring 2016, Principles of Sociology	Item Average, All Terms
Overall Teaching Effectiveness.	4.80 (0.52)	4.79 (0.62)	4.38 (0.70)	4.80 (0.52)	4.44 (0.70)	4.69 (0.54)	4.66 (0.63)
Overall Course Quality.	4.75 (0.55)	4.75 (0.60)	4.15 (0.73)	4.60 (0.68)	4.37 (0.79)	4.52 (0.63)	4.54 (0.69)
How much have you learned this semester?	4.75 (0.57)	4.62 (0.65)	4.15 (0.88)	4.50 (0.76)	4.41 (0.75)	4.66 (0.61)	4.51 (0.72)
Was the grading system explained?	4.85 (0.37)	4.79 (0.50)	4.81 (0.40)	4.85 (0.49)	4.60 (0.64)	4.79 (0.41)	4.78 (0.48)
Instructor was well prepared for class.	4.85 (0.37)	4.94 (0.25)	4.85 (0.37)	4.80 (0.62)	4.82 (0.40)	4.93 (0.26)	4.88 (0.36)
Promoted atmosphere conducive to learning.	4.75 (0.44)	4.88 (0.44)	4.76 (0.51)	4.80 (0.52)	4.78 (0.51)	4.83 (0.38)	4.81 (0.46)
Course objectives were accomplished.	4.85 (0.37)	4.90 (0.31)	4.69 (0.55)	4.80 (0.52)	4.78 (0.42)	4.79 (0.41)	4.81 (0.42)
Instructor was a good classroom leader.	4.80 (0.52)	4.92 (0.45)	4.85 (0.37)	4.75 (0.64)	4.78 (0.42)	4.90 (0.31)	4.85 (0.45)
Instructor was able to explain difficult material.	4.85 (0.37)	4.75 (0.60)	4.65 (0.69)	4.65 (0.81)	4.70 (0.54)	4.76 (0.51)	4.73 (0.59)
Instructor was accessible for student conferences.	4.85 (0.37)	4.77 (0.47)	4.50 (0.65)	4.80 (0.52)	4.85 (0.36)	4.59 (0.63)	4.72 (0.52)
Instructor clearly stated what was expected.	4.80 (0.41)	4.90 (0.37)	4.65 (0.56)	4.75 (0.79)	4.78 (0.42)	4.83 (0.38)	4.80 (0.48)
Instructor motivated me to do my best work.	4.45 (0.76)	4.52 (0.71)	4.38 (0.64)	4.55 (0.83)	4.19 (0.96)	4.45 (0.69)	4.43 (0.76)
Instructor was fair to students.	4.95 (0.22)	4.96 (0.29)	4.81 (0.57)	4.90 (0.45)	4.74 (0.59)	4.86 (0.44)	4.88 (0.44)
Semester Average, All Items.	4.79 (0.38)	4.81 (0.37)	4.57 (0.35)	4.74 (0.55)	4.65 (0.36)	4.74 (0.32)	4.72 (0.39)

Figure 1. Comparison of Average Student Evaluation Results, All Items.



Note: Departmental and University data only available through spring 2015.

These quantitative results don't tell the whole story in terms of how my students feel about the courses I have taught. An examination of the open ended evaluation questions indicates that students feel I bring a high level of energy to the classroom, I am relatable to them in and out of the classroom, I use pertinent examples, and that I am passionate about what I am teaching. It is also evident that my teaching has had a positive effect on my students, even to the extent of inspiring a pursuit of a sociology major or minor in several cases. My students have also given feedback which suggests that I am able to make complex materials relatable (especially through my use of media, such as music videos, to highlight sociological concepts), and that I do a good job at encouraging discussion of differing viewpoints and backgrounds (including "non-traditional" students). Despite the fact that I haven't received a perfect 5.0 rating across the board, I feel that I have provided my students with a style of teaching that conveys how much I enjoy being in the classroom, which is, in my opinion, a big success. This success doesn't just apply to the traditional classroom environment however.

Teaching online has its own array of challenges, both for students and for me as an instructor. My approach to these classes has been one of adaptation, perhaps even more so than in the classroom. I design online courses with a lecture component, weekly assignments to process and apply the material (such as getting students to code the behaviors of white males in their favorite movies to demonstrate the "invisibility" of race and gender for majority groups), and discussions among class members in order to further explore the course topics. Overall, evaluation results from my online courses indicate mainly positive experiences among students. I consistently receive feedback suggesting that the courses are challenging (involving critical thinking), and that students were able to express their opinions in a non-intimidating environment. I am also happy that, even without meeting me face-to-face, my students feel I have a great passion for teaching the subject.

Overall, the results and feedback from these course evaluations suggests that my approach to teaching has been successful across different courses and settings. In the spring of 2015, due in part to these evaluation results, I received the Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award from Western Michigan University, which recognizes excellence in teaching among graduate students. It is my hope that I will be able to translate my success thus far into the development of greater teaching excellence in the future.