

The importance of making a good first impression in the classroom

December 10 2010

A study of how medical students evaluate their professors is illustrating the critical importance of making a good first impression.

Students in a physiology course at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine were asked to evaluate 16 professors who lectured during the course. Students had the option of evaluating each professor concurrently during the course, or waiting until the course ended. Students were allowed to change their minds before the evaluations were finalized at the end of the course.

The study, published in the December, 2010 issue of the journal *Advances in Physiology Education*, included 144 students. Twenty six percent filled out evaluations during the course and 65 percent waited until the course ended. Nine percent did not submit evaluations.

The scores professors received on early evaluations were markedly similar to the scores they received on evaluations made after the course ended. (In statistical terms, the correlation was .91.) And students rarely changed their minds about professors -- only 3 percent of evaluations were revised before the evaluations were finalized.

"Students tended not to change their scores and comments, regardless of the time they submitted their evaluations," researchers wrote. "Hence, first impressions appear to be important."

For decades, students in colleges and graduate schools have been

evaluating their professors. [Faculty](#) promotion and tenure decisions are based in part on these evaluations.

"The first lecture a faculty member gives to a class really sets the impression," said John A. McNulty, PhD, first author of the study. "The professor is either going to click with the student's learning style, or not."

At Loyola's Stritch School of Medicine, students are asked to rate how well professors communicate, relate course content to learning objectives and add to the student's understanding. Professors are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 the worst and 5 the best. [Students](#) also can write comments.

In the most recent evaluations, the average score for basic science faculty was 4.2, and the average score for clinical faculty (physicians) was 4.38.

"We have a really good faculty," McNulty said. "The distribution of scores is skewed toward the high end."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

Citation: The importance of making a good first impression in the classroom (2010, December 10) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-12-importance-good-classroom.html>

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