

# Business students better equipped to evaluate peers

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Peer evaluation is a touchstone of many business school classes. But does the process of rating the work of one's classmates really shape better businesspeople? A new study from Concordia's John Molson School of Business, published in the journal of the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, answers that question with a resounding yes.

Stéphane Brutus, Professor and Chair of the Department of Management, undertook the research that led to these findings after developing a standardized online peer evaluation system, or PES, in 2004. To develop the system, Brutus, who holds a PhD in industrial and organizational psychology, used his expertise in the field of performance appraisal within organizations to create a practical tool for both students and teachers.

The tool was originally designed to restore equity in the evaluation of group work by assessing cooperation, creativity and group-related competencies. But the present study proves that the program goes far beyond that in added value.

With more than 10,000 students having taken part in the process over the years, Brutus had a solid dataset with which to produce results. His findings prove that the repeated experience of evaluating peers in undergraduate classes result in students becoming more confident and skilled in the task of evaluating others. It also helped improve the quality of the evaluations they provided: experienced students provided more specific and positive comments.

That means that students who have gone through the repeated experience of evaluating their peers emerge better equipped to act as effective managers. "These findings demonstrate the added value of incorporating standardized evaluations into [business school](#) group work. It is an efficient way to build evaluation skills, which is very relevant to managerial practice in the workplace," Brutus explains.

In addition to shedding light on how the process of evaluating peers unfolds over time, the study indicates that such systems are beneficial to more than just business schools. "Students work directly with their peers in undergraduate classes that range from engineering to English literature, so it would make sense to implement such a system university-wide. A standardized PES can contribute toward students' development of additional skills that not only have direct value in the classroom, but will also be immediately transferable and relevant to shaping more effective employees. That's something that most students want – not just those in business school."

Could the skills developed in school be incorporated into the workplace? Most probably, says Brutus. "Managers very often see employee evaluations as something unpleasant that is best avoided, or gone through as quickly as possible. I am confident that experience with the PES increases students' level of comfort with performance evaluations once they hit the workplace,"

Although no plans currently exist to develop a version of Brutus's PES for the workplace, the system is currently being moved into the university-wide "Moodle" system – a content-management platform that provides a virtual learning environment for [students](#). The plan is to eventually develop a benchmarking database across several universities so that use of the tool can one day become standard classroom practice.

Provided by Concordia University

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