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## **On Student Evaluation of Teaching and Improvement of the Teaching Quality Assurance System at Higher Education Institutions**

*Abstract: Student evaluation of teaching is a fundamental system for assuring teaching quality at higher education institutions (HEIs). Its establishment has provided students with a routine channel for voicing their wishes with regard to teaching and is helpful for HEIs to establish “serve the students” as the aim of their operations. Student evaluation of teaching is a recent phenomenon at China’s HEIs, and a number of problems exist in practice, such as students substituting for others in making an evaluation, placing more importance on form than substance, misuse of evaluation results, and loopholes in the design of the evaluation system. We should establish a correct view of student evaluation of teaching, build up a scientific system of student evaluation of teaching, and draw on advanced experiences from abroad so as to improve the system of student evaluation of teaching and perfect the teaching quality assurance system at China’s HEIs.*

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, paying more attention to quality has become a common trend in the development of higher education worldwide. Correspondingly, teaching quality assurance at higher education institutions (HEIs)

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has become an important theme in the renovation of HEI systems in all countries. Since the late 1980s, China's higher education circles have consistently attached great importance to teaching quality of HEIs, and while the HEI teaching standards evaluation organized by the government has been given ample development, a teaching quality assurance system has also been gradually set up within the HEIs. These have played a positive role in such respects as promoting HEIs' education and teaching reforms and assuring and improving teaching quality. This article focuses on the issue of student evaluation of teaching at HEIs and explores strategies for further perfecting the teaching quality assurance system at HEIs from both the theoretical and practical aspects.

### **Student Evaluation of Teaching: A Fundamental System for Assuring HEI Teaching Quality**

Teaching quality assurance at HEIs is a function of institutional operation, an indispensable link in the internal teaching operations of education institutions and also an important component of the state's higher education evaluation system; it is an important means the state relies on to assure the quality of higher education. A large number of related systems are included in the teaching quality assurance system at many HEIs. Examples are the teaching supervision and guidance system, whereby retired veteran teachers and senior in-service teachers form teaching supervision and guidance committees (or teams) to conduct supervision and guidance over the teaching work of all teachers at the institution; or the leadership-attend-classes system whereby the institutional and departmental leaderships listen in on classes at regular or irregular intervals to keep abreast of teachers' teaching circumstances, discover problems in teaching work, and take corresponding improvement measures. Compared to the systems of teaching supervision and guidance and leadership class attendance, student evaluation of teaching is a teaching evaluation system that provides wider coverage and is conducted by students—the recipients of teaching. As student teaching evaluation becomes increasingly routine, its effects on the teachers' teaching have become more evident.

In American and European HEIs, the student teaching evaluation system has been developing for several decades to become a highly standardized and perfected teaching quality assurance system. Some academics believe that the student teaching evaluation system began in American universities in 1927 when Purdue University officially used the Teaching Evaluation Rating Scale to have its students evaluate their teachers' teaching work (He 1984). HEIs in China first began to experiment with student teaching evaluation activities in the 1980s, after which student teaching evaluation gradually became systematized and standardized in the wake of the universal initiation of HEI teaching standards evaluation and as importance was attached to quality controls in HEI teaching administration.

Although student teaching evaluation does not have a long history at China's HEIs, it has drawn widespread attention for its rapid advances and profound effects.

Some HEIs have set up student teaching evaluation systems for each discipline, and the teaching of every teacher has been brought within the scope of these evaluations. A great many HEIs have started up online teaching evaluation systems for students so as to make evaluation easier and to facilitate comprehensive computation and analysis of evaluation results. Some HEIs have set up public notification systems for student evaluation of teaching and are publicizing the evaluation results in the form of institutional documents. Other HEIs have set up teacher stimulation systems or have linked teachers' professional promotions, specialized training, and teaching bonuses and stipends to student teaching evaluation and are issuing rewards, sanctions, and warnings to teachers on the basis of student evaluation results. Targeting problems discovered during student teaching evaluation, a few HEIs have organized teaching seminars, increased teaching investment, improved teaching conditions, and worked to create better teaching environments. For example, after a certain university made public the results of a student questionnaire investigation and evaluation of classroom teaching quality of undergraduate courses in the autumn semester of the 2006–7 academic year, the said university's school of information transmitted and made public the names, courses taught, and division's circumstances of teachers of that school who had been placed in the first 5 percent of teachers university-wide (*Xinxi xueyuan jianbao* 2007). Quite evidently, the aim of that school in transmitting and publicizing that information was to commend the top-ranking teachers and encourage all other teachers in the school. Again, for example, another university pointed out in its Circular on Issuing the Results of Student Evaluation of Teaching During the Second Semester of the 2006–7 Academic Year that the evaluation of teachers' classroom teaching was a fundamental part of the university's work of monitoring undergraduate teaching quality, and its objective was to objectively evaluate the quality of teachers' classroom teaching and help teachers acquire all-around and prompt information regarding student reactions to their classroom teaching so that the teachers might continuously sum up teaching experiences, pinpoint improvements in their teaching, and improve all-around teaching quality. The results of student teaching evaluation are one of the criteria for evaluating the quality of teachers' classroom teaching, and each school and department combines these results with the results of cadre and teacher class sit-ins and supervision for conducting comprehensive evaluation of the teachers' classroom teaching quality ("Notice on Issuing the Results" 2007). All of these examples show that the student evaluation of teaching is not a quality assurance measure of an auxiliary nature but has become a basic system in the institution's entire system of quality assurance and is playing an important positive role in HEI teaching work.

### **The Meanings of Student Evaluation of Teaching**

HEI teaching is an activity dominated by teachers, and for a long time the teaching process has operated under the sway of teacher centrism and authoritarianism. Under the guidance of such a teaching concept, HEI teaching was the "stomping grounds"

of teachers, where teachers had the “final say” with regard to the entire teaching process, including the determination of teaching plans, the selection of teaching content, the designing of teaching activities, the organization of course teaching, the adoption of teaching methods, and the evaluation of teaching results. The teachers’ standards, abilities, and preferences were often the decisive factors affecting teaching quality. As participants in teaching activities, students could only obey their teachers’ dispositions and submit to their teachers’ will and played no substantial role on the operations of the teaching process. Clearly, under such circumstances student evaluation of teaching could not have any promotional effect on teaching work at HEIs.

There might have been a certain degree of rationality to teacher centrism and teacher authoritarianism in a given period of history. However, today, in the twenty-first century, the democratic nature of HEI teaching has been significantly enhanced, especially with the gradual popularization of the Internet. Revolutionary changes are taking place in the ways of generating, expressing, and acquiring knowledge, and important changes have occurred in teacher–student relationships in HEI teaching. The positions of traditional teacher centrism and authoritarianism are constantly being challenged, the position of students is gradually rising, and the role and effect of students in the teaching process are undergoing profound changes. Students are no longer merely the recipients of knowledge and are no longer content with being given knowledge already known to mankind during the teaching process. The constant deepening reform of the credit system during the HEI teaching reform and the promotion of research-type teaching and of inquiry-tape learning are important manifestations of the rising position of students and the increased attention being paid to their role.

The emergence of student evaluation of teaching highlights the position of students in HEI teaching. In traditional HEI teaching activities, students could only participate passively in the teaching process and accept whatever knowledge teachers passed on to them; they had no channels for expressing their opinions about their teachers’ teaching or about the institutions’ teaching work. In fact, no one admitted that students had any right to express opinions about teaching. The setting up of the system of student evaluation of teaching has broken through the traditional teaching model, conferred an unprecedented role on students, and thereby done away with the traditional teaching model in which teachers dominated everything. This is undoubtedly a product of the modernization of HEI teaching, a result of people’s recognizing that students should play a new role in HEI teaching. [The transition] from students not having any voice in teaching to the setting up of a routine student teaching evaluation system shows, to a certain extent, that students are already fully participating in the process of HEI teaching and exerting an important influence on HEI teaching.

Student evaluation of teaching has given students a routine channel for expressing their wishes about teaching. In HEI teaching, students are the subjectivity of development, and the aim of teaching is to promote better student development. In Marx’s words, that means “all-around and free development” (1867/2004: 683).

However, students had no freedom of development in the traditional model of HEI teaching, and they did not figure among the many factors that influenced HEI teaching. Establishing the system of student evaluation of teaching has opened up a channel for students to express their relevant opinions and suggestions and provided them with a systemic guarantee for voicing their wishes. A good many HEIs have included the entirety of their teaching courses, all of their teachers' teaching activities, and all related institutional works within the orbit of student evaluation, thus giving students an opportunity to give full expression to their views about HEI teaching—teaching that affects their development.

Student evaluation of teaching causes HEIs and their teachers to respect the students' wishes with regard to teaching and provides an assurance for the students' position as principals. In traditional HEI teaching, the important influencing factors on teaching were such things as disciplinary knowledge, teacher attributes, and the needs of society. Such matters as the formulation of teaching plans; the designing of curriculum systems; the compiling, choice, and use of teaching materials; and the organizing of teaching activities were often the outcomes of taking these influencing factors into consideration. As for students, people merely gave a certain amount of consideration to their physical and mental characteristics, and such considerations were not expressed by the students' themselves but by other persons on their behalf. Thus HEIs frequently relegated students to a passive position, and the students' wishes with regard to teaching found no expression, nor were they respected. Setting up the system of student evaluation of teaching has reversed the students' passive position and enables them to take an active part in the teaching process and play a principal part in teaching. Here, students find a rational channel for expressing their wishes as principals. Individual students are able to express not only their views about their teachers' teaching but also their views and their desires with regard to their institution's teaching work. The students' desires about teaching not only affect their teachers' teaching activities but have a direct effect on their institutions' teaching work. Thus students, as dynamic principals in the HEI teaching process, not only enjoy opportunities to obtain an education, but their wishes with regard to teaching may also have a direct impact on the education set up for them by their teachers and institutions.

Student evaluation of teaching enables HEIs to adjust the orientation of their operations and establish the aim of "serving the students" for their operations. Serving the students is a concept of operations that HEIs have all along advocated, but no system has been set up in traditional HEI teaching that relates to the implementation of that concept. The result has been a dislocation between the concept and reality. Setting up the system of student evaluation of teaching has objectively provided the conditions for HEIs to adjust the orientation of their operations and has made it possible for institutions to implement the operating concept of serving the students. In the traditional HEI teaching, people planned and made arrangements for a great number of teaching activities, despite their lack of understanding of the students' wishes, and put these activities into practice. The students, willingly or

not, had no choice but to passively accept the arrangements made by their teachers and institutions. Clearly, institutions run in this way were not oriented toward the students and could not fulfill the educational and teaching objective of serving students, either as a collective or individually. Setting up the system of student evaluation of teaching shows that the institutions have begun to attach importance to the students' relevant rights and to their rightful position in HEI teaching and at the same time provides the institutions with a proper channel for finding out about the students' wishes and listening to their calls and proposals. It also makes it possible for institutions to adjust the orientation of their operations and consolidate their purpose of serving the students.

Although the system of student evaluation of teaching has a positive and important effect, having it truly play such a role is no simple matter and requires that we take appropriate complementary measures. The most important of these is that students should evaluate teaching by looking at it "with their own eyes" instead of looking at it "with other people's eyes." Student evaluation of teaching is not merely a new form of assurance for HEI teaching quality but also has substantial significance and should combine form and substance. In terms of form, student evaluation of teaching is evaluation of HEI teaching by the students, not by anyone else substituting for the students. In terms of substance, student evaluation of teaching should require that the students proceed from their own perspective and their individual and collective interests when expressing opinions and making suggestions about teaching and related work, rather from other people's perspectives and for other people's benefit. In this connection, form is of course important, but what we expect from the students is substantial evaluation of teaching.

### **The Main Problems in HEI Student Evaluation of Teaching**

As a fundamental system of the HEI teaching quality assurance system, student evaluation of teaching ought to have an important effect on improving teaching by HEI teachers and ameliorating related work at the institutions. But in reality, circumstances are not entirely the same and may be quite different at each HEI. Student evaluation of teaching at some HEIs is organized in a fairly rigorous and standard manner and has had a good effect. However, many HEIs lack proper understanding of the significance of student evaluation of teaching, and systemic constructions are poorly thought out, with the result that student evaluation have failed to perform effectively. According to our investigations and relevant surveys, the problems in student evaluation of teaching are manifested mainly in four aspects.

#### ***Student Evaluation of Teaching Often Becomes Student Evaluation on Behalf of Others***

Student evaluation of teaching should consist of students using their own eyes to evaluate their teachers' teaching and their institutions' teaching work and of students

standing on their own perspectives and expressing their own views. In actual operations, however, although the students take part in evaluation, they often become spokespersons for others. Use of questionnaire survey forms or rating scales is fairly common during student evaluation of teaching at all HEIs. When designing these forms and scales, however, many HEIs do not include the students in either form or content and fail to think from the students' perspective. At many HEIs, the contents designed for student survey forms and rating scales frequently consist of such aspects as teaching attitude, content, methods, and results, and there is no question but that these aspects are raised from the teachers' standpoint and take the teachers as the principals. Moreover, in the choice of specific contents, the evaluations are even more oriented toward regarding the teachers as the principals.

For example, the indicator system used at a certain medical college for student evaluation of teaching includes, under teaching content (grade 1 indicator), three grade 2 indicators: (a) Lecture contents conform to the requirements of the syllabus, with appropriate attention to detail, clear explanation of difficult points, and highlighting of key points; (b) conscientious and ample preparation of lectures, orderly presentation, accurate conceptualization; and (c) close integration with practice and interspersion of explanations of the newest disciplinary developments (Wang 2004). These evaluation aspects are designed mainly from the perspective of the teachers and the disciplines, and although the students may produce evaluations of certain of these aspects, a question mark should indeed be put to the significance of such evaluations *per se*. Regarding "conscientious preparation of lectures," for example, it would probably be much too difficult for the students to judge from the teachers' teaching whether the teachers conscientiously prepare their lectures, and this falls beyond the scope that students can grasp. Even if the students do reply to the question, the reliability of the replies is open to doubt.

Again, for example, a certain university lists eleven items regarding teachers' lecturing in its Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire (for Students). These are (a) enthusiasm for teaching; conscientiousness and dedication when lecturing; (b) clear lines of thinking and accurate expositions in lectures; (c) linking theory with practice when lecturing and attention to content renewal; (d) ability to highlight key points and elucidate difficult issues; (e) teacher-student interaction during lectures; students encouraged to raise queries; guidance given to lines of thinking; (f) ability to adapt teaching to the content; attention given to cultivating students' innovative awareness and ability; (g) course assignments conducive to independent studies on the part of students; (h) informing students at outset of course about reforms of examination and evaluation methods; (i) harmonious teacher-student relations; after-class contacts; good guidance; (j) teachers' explanations capable of exciting student thirst for knowledge; and (k) placing strict requirements on students. Among these eleven items, apart from item (j), which requires that students stand on their own perspective when evaluating their teachers' teaching, all require that students stand on the teachers' perspective when evaluating their teachers' teaching, and the students, as evaluators, are in a certain sense kept outside the matter.

Because that is so, they are not required to describe their personal experiences, in which case the students' evaluations can hardly reflect their real feelings truthfully. That is beside the fact that requesting students to stand on their teachers' perspective when expressing their views about teaching in itself goes beyond the scope of student ability to produce accurate evaluations. Hence the evaluation per se is not true student evaluation; it is evaluation performed by students on other people's behalf. Such evaluation, no matter how perfect in form, can hardly be of any conspicuous significance.

***The Formal Significance of the Student Evaluation of Teaching Are Greater Than Their Significance in Terms of Substance***

The student evaluation of teaching should place more emphasis on substance and not merely on form. Whether they relate to teachers, classes, or students, the relevant evaluation contents should involve the substance of the issues and not emphasize investigation of superficial phenomena. In practice, however, not a few HEIs give more attention—in terms of the contents of student evaluation of teaching—to the formal significances of teaching but are more feeble and colorless when it comes to the substantial significances of teaching and have not found suitable ways of reflecting such aspects.

For example, the evaluation indicators regarding teachers, listed by a certain HEI in its student evaluation of teaching, consist of (a) punctual commencement and termination of classes, high spirits, attention to deportment, manifestation of a serious and enthusiastic attitude; (b) respect and care for students, no sarcasm, willingness to criticize and deal with speaking during class and copying of assignments; (c) thorough grasp of teaching materials, frequent natural digressions from prepared teaching scripts, ability to provide conclusions and examples not in the textbooks; (d) careful designing of each lecture; has researched difficult areas in student studies; clear organization, ordering, and focusing of lectures; (e) ability to control the classroom; no confusion, loss of control, or stagnancy; (f) versatile use of such methods as providing expositions, raising examples, and devising questions; inspires thinking; guides self-studies; (g) rational use of blackboard, multimedia, and teaching instruments for different content to make for better understanding and memorizing; (h) clear and fluent expression and good logic; vivid and concise language, draws attention; uses standard *putonghua*; and (i) blackboard writing (*banshu*) features neatly drawn tables and graphs, rational layouts, and standardized writing (“Criteria for Student Evaluation” 2005). Although these items are specific and explicit, most of them merely involve the teachers' classroom conduct. Classroom teaching is both an art and a science. “Art” means that teachers may make full use of their performing talents to control and organize classroom teaching. “Science” means that the teachers' performance must be closely integrated with the students' autonomous learning; the teachers' performance possesses no teaching significance whatsoever if it is divorced from active and proactive learning on the part of the students.

Again, for example, for student evaluation of teaching, a certain university employs eleven criteria in four aspects—the teachers' teaching attitude, teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching results. These are (a) observance of discipline and punctuality; providing a good example for students; (b) making strict demands and showing respect for [others'] opinions; (c) clarity of views and lucidity of concepts; (d) careful selection of contents and renewal of knowledge; (e) integration with practice and appropriate provision of examples; (f) highlighting of key points and orderly presentation; (g) ability to adapt teaching to content and attention to elicitation (*qifa*); (h) vivid language and explanation of difficult matters in simple terms; (i) multiplicity of methods and orderly blackboard techniques; and (j) emphasis on students' grasp of knowledge and training of abilities; and (k) emphasis on students' pioneering-type thinking and stimulation of interests ("Student Evaluation of Teaching" 2007). Although all eleven aspects are related to the teachers' teaching, it is no easy matter to have the students evaluate teachers' teaching on the basis of these requirements. Most of these requirements are of a highly generalized nature, and each phrase may be understood in many different ways. For example, the phrases "providing a good example for students," "orderly presentation," "ability to adapt teaching to content," and "explanation of difficult matters in simple terms" have highly abundant connotations. The expected results will probably not be attained if these criteria are used to evaluate teachers' teaching.

### ***Frequent Misuse of Student Evaluation of Teaching as Means for Teacher Administration***

Student evaluation of teaching is a system whereby students express their opinions and suggestions about HEI teaching. In a strict sense, students' opinions should be used by teachers and institutions as materials for reflecting on teaching work and as a basis for exploring ways of providing students with more effective teaching. Students' opinions do not possess the functions of conducting horizontal comparisons with teachers of different disciplines or of grading the teachers. That is to say, the students' evaluative opinions may only be used as a basis for research in teaching but may not be used as grounds for applying any administrative measures to teachers. In reality, however, many HEIs, when implementing the system of student evaluation of teaching, inject a few elements of administration so that the students' evaluations acquire certain regulatory functions with regard to teaching.

For example, a certain HEI, when conducting publicity among newly enrolled students about student evaluation of teaching, explicitly states: "Evaluation of classroom teaching quality is a very important item of work, and the results of such evaluation have an extremely important effect, whether on monitoring the school's quality of teaching and adjusting its teaching policy or on the teachers' own year-end evaluation, post appointments, professional title determinations, and personal development" ("New Student Study Guide" 2007). Again, for example, a certain HEI, when expounding the effects of student evaluation of teaching, main-

tains that “doing a good job of student evaluation of teaching has an extremely important effect on improving the quality of personnel training at this university,” but as regards how this effect takes place, it states: “The work of student evaluation of teachings will be gradually linked with the university’s personnel deployment system, and student evaluation of teaching will exercise their due effect on the ‘teaching quality one-vote veto (support) system’” (“Implementation Regulations for ‘Student Evaluation of Teaching’” 2006). The regulations at a certain university are even blunter:

The student appraisal of teaching will affect the evaluation of excellence and the professional title appraisal of those who are placed among the last fifty by the said evaluation. All teachers placed in the last twenty positions by student evaluation of teaching may not receive promotion in the year in problem, and those placed in the last twenty-first to fiftieth positions may apply [for promotion] only upon the production of departmental certification of highly outstanding research results and upon examination and approval by the university.

Students who are aware of the effects of their evaluations on their teachers’ personal interests—their year-end evaluation, post assignment, and professional title determination—will certainly not find it easy to commit these to writing!

Hence, establishing direct links between student evaluation of teaching with teacher administration, and turning the evaluation into ground for applying administrative measures to the teachers, will alienate the function of this evaluation. As the function of student evaluation becomes alienated, this evaluation can hardly be performed normally and in an appropriate atmosphere or frame of mind.

### ***Loopholes in the Design of the System of Student Evaluation of Teaching***

To effectively carry out the work of student evaluation of teaching, many HEIs issue relevant documents in which they prescribe the objectives, principles, procedures, methods, and requirements for this evaluation. This is quite necessary for ensuring the smooth implementation of the evaluation. However, we have also found that the systemic designs for the evaluation at many HEIs contain significant loopholes that adversely affect the results of the evaluation.

First, they evaluate all courses simultaneously. Some HEIs, for the sake of ensuring the rate of student participation in the evaluation as well as for convenience in compiling statistics, require that their students evaluate, within a single week, the teaching circumstances of all the courses they attend. A certain university stipulates:

The online evaluation of teaching for the present semester are temporarily set to be conducted in the week preceding course selection for next semester (approximately in the sixteenth week). Students may conduct course selection only after completing the teaching evaluation. So it is hoped that all will notify one another that the evaluation should be completed before the teaching evaluation

system shuts down, so as to prevent anyone's course selection work from being affected. ("Implementation Regulations for Yunnan University" 2006)

True, such centralized teaching evaluation may raise the rate of evaluation participation, but after the students leave their classrooms and are dissociated from the teaching environment, and are then asked to evaluate all the courses they attend, the effectiveness of such evaluations is bound to decline.

Second, teachers are excluded from the organizers of the student evaluation of teaching. Not a few HEIs regard student evaluation of teaching as an item of routine work, exclude the teachers from the organizers, and put school and departmental administrative personnel in charge of organizing [this activity]. Some universities stipulate that the evaluations be done by school-level (departmental) units, that associate deans of schools (directors of departments) in charge of teaching take responsibility for them, that secretaries of teaching affairs and administrators of school (departmental) teaching and student work participate in them, and that centralized evaluation takes precedence over dispersed evaluation. All schools (departments) are required to do a good job of publicity, mobilization, and organization to ensure high-quality participation by the entire student body ("Implementation Regulations for Wuhan University" 2007). Another university puts forward the following demands for the organization of student evaluation of teaching: (a) The university shall set up a teaching evaluation work group led by the director of the teaching affairs office. The teaching affairs office shall be in charge of specific implementation. The school supervisory team shall be in charge of supervision and inspection. (b) All schools shall set up school teaching evaluation work teams. The teams shall be headed by the school dean in charge of teaching and the vice-secretary of the school Party committee. The groups' membership shall consist of directors of teaching, secretaries of teaching, class supervisors (*ban zhuren*), and teaching informant, who shall be in charge of organizing and implementing teaching evaluation work in their own schools ("Notice on Doing a Good Job of Student Evaluation of Teaching" 2006). In none of the regulations for organizing student evaluation of teaching at these two universities has any disposition been made for teacher participation. This practice artificially severs the natural links between student evaluation of teaching and teaching teachers and artificially creates an atmosphere of antagonism between student evaluation and the teachers.

Third, excessive use of quantification for the evaluation results makes it hard for these to accurately reflect the true circumstances of teaching. Higher education evaluation commonly employs the method of secondary quantification (*erci lianghua*) to obtain a clearer understanding of some items that are hard to quantify, but there are strict limits to the interpretation and effects of the results of secondary quantification. During student evaluation of teaching, some HEIs use the results of the evaluation as a ground for grading the teachers. This is inappropriate. One HEI stipulates that classroom teaching quality evaluation be conducted by combining students' evaluations with experts' evaluations. At the end of each semester, the institution's teaching affairs office has students fill in forms for evaluating the quality

of teacher classroom teaching. The institute then organizes expert groups to evaluate performances evaluated to be excellent or poor and to synthesize the two sets of evaluation results to determine the evaluation scores. With regard to scores, the institution defines 100 to 85 points as “excellent,” 84 to 75 points as “good,” 74 to 61 as “average,” and below 60 as “bad” (“Regulations for Yanbian University” 2006). After secondary quantification, the students’ evaluation of teaching becomes a string of dry numbers devoid of any substantive meaning. On the surface, comparing the evaluation points obtained by different teachers and then using the results of such comparisons to take corresponding measures to reward or sanction the teachers would appear to be objective and fair but is, in reality, irrational.

### **Strategies for Perfecting the HEI Teaching Quality Assurance System Centered on Student Evaluation of Teaching**

Not much time has elapsed since China has established the perception of teaching quality assurance and set up related systems, and problems of one kind or another are unavoidable. Since entering the developmental stage of mass higher education, large numbers of new HEIs have emerged, and student enrollments have increased by leaps and bounds. Thus, enhancing the HEI teaching quality assurance system and guaranteeing the constant improvement of the quality of higher education are important topics in the development of higher education in this new period. Student evaluation of teaching is a fundamental system for HEI teaching quality assurance. Improving that system, giving full play to its function, and perfecting the HEI teaching quality assurance are important tasks—tasks that China’s HEIs cannot evade. The following are some suggestions.

#### ***Form a Correct Perception of Student Evaluation of Teaching and Return Student Evaluation of Teaching to Its True Beginnings***

As a system, student evaluation of teaching may have many different forms that need to be set up to suit the realities of each HEI and may possess the special characteristics of each institution. However, all HEIs should agree among themselves about the concept of student evaluation of teaching. The main purpose of student evaluation of teaching consists of learning about the state of HEI teaching through the students and providing the teachers and the institutions with the grounds for improving teaching and related work. Hence, when setting up student evaluation of teaching systems and conducting student evaluation work, the students’ eyes must not be obstructed; students must not be turned into spokespersons for others; they should not be placed in opposition to their teachers; the results of student evaluation of teaching must not be capitalized to become grounds for administration; and teachers must not be excluded from the students’ evaluation of teaching, to become “outsiders” to that evaluation work. We should focus on creating a harmonious evaluation atmosphere, closely integrate the students’ evaluations with research in

teaching, turn student evaluation into an important link in HEI teaching research, turn teaching evaluation results into contents and grounds for teaching research, return student evaluation of teaching to its true beginnings, and give genuine play to the role of student evaluation of teaching in the promotion of teaching reform.

A harmonious evaluation atmosphere is an important premise for ensuring the function of student evaluation of teaching. Some HEI students see the evaluation as a sharp sword, extend evaluation results beyond [the level of] teaching research to the level of administration, and have these results play a role in commending or punishing teachers, and even in the “elimination of the last” and the “one-vote veto.” This clearly runs counter to the main purpose of student evaluation of teaching and can only result in artificially creating an atmosphere of disharmony, cause tension in teacher-student relationships, and lead to various “strange” phenomena in the teaching process. Setting up a correct view of student evaluation of teaching, correctly understanding the essence of student evaluation of teaching, and returning this evaluation to its original status are requisite for both respecting the students’ right to education and protecting their right to participate in the teaching process, as well as giving better play to the effect of student evaluation of teaching. Any attempt to misuse student evaluation of teaching may turn it into the opposite of what is intended, not only preventing it from playing a positive role but possibly even producing a negative effect on HEI teaching.

***Devise a Scientific System for Student Evaluation of Teaching and Strive to Give Play to Its Core Role in Assuring HEI Teaching Quality***

Although many HEIs have conducted positive explorations in terms of student evaluation of teaching and have formulated their own systems in this respect, problems that deserve attention are still to be found in the scientific nature of these systems and require attention from the HEIs.

Having teaching teachers participate in the organization work of student evaluation of teaching is helpful toward perfecting that evaluation system. Student evaluation of teaching is, in itself, a channel for contact between students and teachers. Only through mutual contact can teachers and students obtain a common understanding about HEI teaching and teachers truly accept and adopt students’ opinions and suggestions. When teachers are excluded from the process of student evaluation of teaching, when teachers are relegated to the passive role as audiences, and when information about the evaluation are transmitted to them by a third party (i.e., administrative personnel) it is quite likely—speaking from the psychological angle—that teachers will tend to resist and repel such information, no matter how reasonable or accurate it is. Teachers and students were co-builders of the HEI teaching process to begin with, and mutual understanding between the co-building parties is the precondition to developing harmonious teacher-student relations and conducting effective teaching.

Formulating scientific and rational student evaluation rating scales and developing corresponding auxiliary means of student evaluation of teaching are of important significance for perfecting the system of student evaluation of teaching and ensuring the quality of such evaluation. However, the students' teaching evaluation rating scales at many HEIs tend to focus, to a greater or lesser extent, on the teachers and on disciplines or knowledge. Students are positioned as teachers' colleagues or, in other words, are positioned as academics in the evaluation of teachers' attitudes and teaching contents, methods, and results. Moreover, the items in some questionnaires and rating scales are too much about abstractions and principles, making it difficult to produce accurate judgments. Scientific and rational student teaching evaluation rating scales should enable students to voice their feelings about teaching, and the students' views should express their true feelings and sentiments. For example, such items as "from the teachers' teaching I obtain professional knowledge beyond that in the teaching materials," "in the classroom I have the opportunity to exchange ideas with my teacher and classmates," and "the after-class assignments given me by the teachers expand my range of learning" may enable the students to express their views based on personal experience. Again, for example, such items as "the said course requires a suitable amount of study time" and "the said course's study-time arrangements are quite appropriate as compared to other courses with the same number of credits" may enable the students to make judgments about the appropriateness of course credits and prescribed study times. While perfecting teaching evaluation rating scales or questionnaires, HEIs should work out auxiliary tools for student evaluation of teaching, for example student forums and teacher-student seminars for more extensive collection of student opinions and suggestions, thereby to obtain relevant information that is more comprehensive and in-depth as well as to lay a solid and reliable foundation for exploring ways and means of conducting teaching reforms.

The results of student evaluation of teaching should be used in a scientific way, so that the student evaluation's important role of promoting teaching reform and perfecting teaching services is truly brought into play. Student evaluation of teaching is not aimed at providing grounds for adopting administrative measures against teachers. But in reality, this has become a habitual practice at a great many HEIs. In fact, if, after teachers are rewarded or punished, one carefully examines the effects of the student evaluation on improving teachers' teaching and upgrading the institutions' teaching services, one will in all probability hardly find any positive results. When perfecting the system of student evaluation of teaching, we must adopt a scientific attitude toward the results of such evaluations, clearly define the range of applicability of the results, place strict limits on the "uses" of the evaluation results, stop linking student evaluation of teaching with administrative handling of teachers, build up a relaxed and harmonious atmosphere for the work of student evaluation of teaching, and ensure the healthy and effective exercise of these evaluations.

***Draw on the Experiences of Student Evaluation of Teaching at HEIs Abroad and Constantly Improve the System of Student Evaluation of Teaching at China's HEIs***

China's HEIs have not conducted student evaluation of teaching for any length of time and lack mature experience in this respect. Some HEIs abroad have persisted in such student evaluation for many years and have set up routine systems of student evaluation of teaching that have had a positive effect on teaching work. We should draw on their experiences. For example, at American HEIs, student evaluation of teaching has become an organic component of teaching work. Students and teachers view teaching evaluation as a normal occurrence. Students regard these as being within their duties, teachers maintain it is right and proper for students to have a voice in these, and teachers and students exchange views on teaching matters in an amicable manner. When designing questionnaires and rating scales, American HEIs attach importance to devising entries and questions from the students' perspective, so that students may make accurate judgments on teaching. For example, Boston College's form for student evaluation of teaching contains the following questions: "Are the contents studied in every class necessary? Does this course help you obtain real information, grasp relevant principles and concepts, acquire academic skills, obtain practical skills, and develop your personality? Do the teachers provide assistance after class hours? Is the time allocated for this course appropriate, as compared to other courses with the same number of credits and hours?" (Bie 2002). In addition, American colleges and universities put in a great deal of thought and effort into the different varieties of grading scales and questionnaires for student evaluation of teaching. For example, Washington University has designed no less than eleven different forms for student evaluation of teaching in line with the different way teaching is organized, such as small-class, large-class, discussion-type, problem-solving, internship, experimental, and distance teaching. These teaching evaluation forms contain common criteria as well as individual criteria (Zhong and Zhang 2007). Regarding the use of the results of student evaluation of teaching, in the interests of upholding the serious nature of student evaluation of teaching and protecting the dignity and privacy of their teachers, some colleges and universities in the United States have prescribed strict limits, restricted uses and scopes of application, and even established specific limits on the persons who are to know the results of student evaluations. There is no question but that these experiences and practices provide important inspiration for reforming the system of student evaluation of teaching in China's HEIs. Learning from and drawing on the experiences of student evaluation of teaching at HEIs in other countries to improve the student evaluation system in our country's HEIs is a must for perfecting the teaching quality assurance system of China's HEIs. It is also a must for deepening the teaching reform at China's HEIs, for the constant improvement of HEI teaching quality, and for training high-quality internationalized personnel.

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