

EDITORIAL NOTE

With this issue, Number 7, the editor turns over the task of editorship to the founder of the *Oakland Journal*, Sherman Folland. Having established the viability of our baby, as reflected in an increasing number of unsolicited submissions, we look forward to a long and interesting life for the Journal.

We include in this issue a special forum on student evaluations of teaching (SETs). The editor has given this topic some considerable attention over his 40 years at Oakland, both in the Department as well as a member of CAP and FRPC.

While not wishing to contribute a complete essay on the matter, I have some comments to make, however brief. University teachers by and large are in a unique position of not having been trained in any systematic way for the act of teaching, with the exception of the members of the School of Education. It comes as no surprise then that there are widely divergent views of what good teaching is, even among faculty. This problem is compounded when students are asked to evaluate teachers. In order to evaluate, there must be a standard, something to measure teaching against. I dare say that there are no students who have such standards in mind. Nevertheless, like all consumers badgered by surveys, they do have opinions, and strong ones at that. That they are mostly personal in nature is not surprising. Of course students are entitled in some way to express these opinions; it may provide relief for them, and perhaps instruction for teachers willing to listen. However the quantification and statistical analyses of such observations/opinions seem sadly misguided absent generally accepted standards.

Equally obvious is the need to bring to the attention of higher administrators gross negligence in class attendance, delivery, grading, and other established mechanics for a college course. It is not clear whether SETs accomplish such needed feedback, as the student responses are voluntary and often non-representative. Nevertheless, a rather more complete and systematic collection of student opinions seems desirable, as long as it is not viewed as an evaluation of teaching, but rather as a guide to the overall classroom performance of the instructor. The primary use of such surveys should be for the benefit of the instructor. Only secondarily should it influence decisions on promotion and tenure, until such time as reliable criteria are established for each discipline. It is the obligation of the peers to determine what good teaching is and whether those standards have been met.

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