

Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) in Swiss Higher Education: An Exploratory Study of Institutional Practices

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Abstract

Student evaluations of teaching (SET) are a widely used management control tool for evaluating teaching performance in higher education. This study explores how SET is embedded and practiced within Swiss universities. In a first stage, 21 interviews with representatives from 17 institutions were conducted, based on an adapted version of Eckert and Huber's (2020) questionnaire. The findings highlight considerable variation in the design of SET, tensions between formative and summative purposes, and a widespread awareness of bias in SET results - although few institutions actively address it. In a second, ongoing stage, the project turns to a case study of one university that made the unusual decision to discontinue SET surveys by replacing them with other evaluation techniques. This case provides an opportunity to analyze the processes surrounding the potential deinstitutionalization of a well-established control tool. By applying an institutional theory lens, the study aims to offer insights into how established practices in higher education are questioned, contested, and potentially abandoned.

Keywords: performance evaluation; management control; teaching; higher education