



## WHY RATE MY PROFESSORS AND OTHER SITES DO NOT BENEFIT STUDENTS' REGISTRATION DECISIONS

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### WHY NOT USE RATE MY PROFESSORS?

Scheduling of classes and deciding on professors can be a stressful time for students, as they want to ensure they are selecting the right classes for them. Temptation to turn to Rate My Professors and similar sites can be strong because of the convenience. But, typically only the most positive and negative reviews get posted, and the ratings have been found to be biased by instructor's age, gender, race, perceived sexual orientation, experience, perceived political views, and more.<sup>1</sup> *The existence of and perpetuation of these biases run counter to the Clemson University mission and standards of equity.*

Additionally, the anonymity of the site and lack of validation of reviewers means that anyone can post a review at any time.<sup>2</sup> Angry students can post as many negative reviews as they want, whenever they want, and the reader will not know anything about the situation other than the comments portrayed in the review. Students and parents that choose to use Rate My Professors should be critical of reviews. Many reviews may appear sarcastic, scathing, or as outliers, which is a good indicator that those reviews are not a good reflection of the professor overall.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of reviews on Rate My Professors – and other sites, such as grade distributions - do not take into account the most important question one should be asking when making enrollment decisions: "Will I learn from them?"<sup>1</sup> Studies show that high ratings are directly correlated with high easiness scores – i.e.: the student was more likely to put in minimal work to earn a high grade.<sup>3</sup> Though high grades are often commendable, an easy class does not always indicate that the student learned from or benefitted from a course.<sup>4</sup> Some courses are inherently more difficult, and that does not mean that students do not benefit from those courses. In fact, sometimes the hardest courses are the ones that students benefit from the most in the short-term and in the long-term.

### WHAT SHOULD STUDENTS USE INSTEAD?

When searching for the right course to take, students should consult both the semester's course list and the undergraduate catalog, along with their academic advisors. To help decide which professors to take, checking the syllabus repository<sup>5</sup> can help students see what kind of content and assignments are commonly used by professors in course sections. Talking to others with direct experience with the course can be beneficial. Try to focus the conversation on topics such as what methods are used in the classroom, rather than just the overall difficulty of the course. Non-anonymous social media groups can also be helpful, as removing the anonymity makes posters less likely to post irrelevant reviews.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the course, the section, or the instructor, good academic strategies<sup>7</sup> and communication are key for student academic success.

### REFERENCES

If you would like more information about Rate My Professors and other sites, the references below are all accessible through Clemson Libraries and represent appropriate research and evaluation on the topic.

- (1) Davison, E.; Price, J. How Do We Rate? An Evaluation of Online Student Evaluations. *Assess. Eval. High. Educ.* **2009**, *34* (1), 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930801895695>.
- (2) Kindred, J.; Mohammed, S. N. “He Will Crush You like an Academic Ninja!”: Exploring Teacher Ratings on Ratemyprofessors.Com. *J. Comput.-Mediat. Commun.* **2005**, *10* (3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00257.x>.
- (3) Felton, J.; Koper, P. T.; Mitchell, J.; Stinson, M. Attractiveness, Easiness and Other Issues: Student Evaluations of Professors on Ratemyprofessors.Com. *Assess. Eval. High. Educ.* **2008**, *33* (1), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930601122803>.
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- (5) Clemson University Syllabus Repository. <https://syllabus.app.clemson.edu/repository/> (accessed Jan 4, 2021).
- (6) Wesley, N. Helpful or problematic?: Whether or not you should use Rate My Professors. *The Daily Tar Heel*. Oct 14, 2019. <https://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2019/10/rate-my-professor-1015> (accessed Jan 4, 2021).
- (7) Clemson University Academic Success Center. <https://www.clemson.edu/asc/index.html> (accessed Jan 4, 2021)

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