

## Leadership Seminar 2009-2010

Co-Sponsors: The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs & the Office of the Special Assistant to the Provost for Diversity

# Bias, the Brain, and Student Evaluations of Teaching



### *Professor Deborah Jones Merritt*

**John Deaver Drinko/Baker & Hostetler Chair in Law  
Moritz College of Law  
The Ohio State University**

**Friday, November 6, 2009, SCE 713**

**Student Center East, 750 S. Halsted, Room 713 (Tower), Chicago, IL 60607**

**Seminar, 1:00 – 2:30 PM**

**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED by 11/02/09 to [jganc2@uic.edu](mailto:jganc2@uic.edu) or 312.413.7721**

Student evaluations of teaching are ubiquitous in higher education, but they harbor surprising biases. Extensive psychology research demonstrates that these assessments respond overwhelmingly to a professor's appearance and nonverbal behavior; ratings based on just thirty seconds of silent videotape correlate strongly with end-of-semester evaluations. The nonverbal behaviors that influence teaching evaluations are rooted in physiology, culture, and habit, allowing characteristics like race and gender to affect evaluations. The current process of gathering evaluations, furthermore, allows social stereotypes to filter students' perceptions, increasing risks of bias. These distortions are inevitable products of the intuitive, "system one" cognitive processes that the present process taps. The cure for these biases requires schools to design new student evaluation systems, such as ones based on facilitated group discussion, that enable more reflective, deliberative judgments. Research in cognitive decision making can help schools develop new evaluation systems that gather student feedback while reducing the biases inherent in current approaches.

**Panel Discussion, 2:30 – 3:30 PM**

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**Moderator: Professor Barbara Risman** (Head and Professor of Sociology)

**Professor William Bielby** (Professor of Sociology) will address the challenges of using teaching evaluations in decisions about faculty hiring and promotion. Even evaluations that are carefully designed to be free of bias can contribute to discriminatory barriers when they are relied upon in a larger decision-making context of faculty assessment that is arbitrary, discretionary, and lacks adequate accountability.

**Professor Maria Varelas** (Professor of Curriculum and Instruction) will address, "What is the purpose of our teaching? What are student evaluations for? How do we grow as teachers? How do we capture this growth?" Professor Varelas will answer these questions as a science teacher, a teacher educator, an educational researcher, a colleague, a parent.

**This is Part II of the three-part seminar series on *GENDERED EXPECTATIONS & STUDENT FACULTY INTERACTIONS***

**Part III: Interactive Town Hall Meeting, Spring date to be announced**

**Part I: October 2, 2009 Joey Sprague**, Professor of Sociology, University of Kansas, *The Impact of Gender on the Evaluation of Teaching: What We Know and What We Can Do*

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