



The UNIVERSITY of
WEST ALABAMA

Rate Your Professor: Yay or Nay?

When I was in college, there was one professor in my major that everyone loved. Even non-majors lined up to take his classes as electives. It wasn't until my junior year that I finally sat in his class, free from the stress of other classes taught by professors with worse reputations. That's when I discovered the true meaning of "to each his own."

Here was a man much beloved, considered one of the best educators on campus. Yet he made my blood boil. To me, he seemed to love the sound of his own voice and care very little about the subject I was slated to learn. I left his class, not enamored by his sparkling personality, but disappointed that I had learned little if anything of the subject at hand.

Why am I telling you this? Because if you had compared my peers' review of this professor (had such things existed so long ago), you would find me a decided outlier. The majority of his reviews would have been not just positive, but *raving*. But my perspective – and therefore my experience – was dramatically different.

So as you start working on your fall class schedule (and thinking about which professors to select), be sure to take what you hear and read with a grain of salt. After all, those professors are people just like the rest of us (no, really... they are). And so are the students who post their reviews online.

Some students enjoy the professors who offer up friendly chit-chat and personal conversation, while others prefer professors who stick to the coursework. Some students like to be challenged; others prefer professors who don't ask too much of them.

As you read online reviews and hear stories from fellow students, consider this:

Do lots of research – One or two online reviews aren't enough to create a clear picture of a professor's teaching style. After all, a single negative review could simply be the product of one disgruntled student. Keep searching until you can find five or six reviews, so you can start to build a more accurate impression. Combine that with in-person conversations and you could end up with a clear assessment.

Decide if it's worth it – One of my college professors came very poorly recommended. Everyone considered her overly harsh and difficult to please, but I was up for the challenge. She was the chair of my department, and I needed to know if I could meet her expectations. She was as difficult as promised (maybe more so), but taking her class was a great learning experience for me... and a big confidence boost when I earned that hard-fought B.

When it comes time to evaluate your own professors, consider what other prospective students might want to know. Did you learn what you expected in the class? How did the homework compare to other similar classes? Were the exams more or less difficult than you anticipated? Consider assessing the truth about yourself, too: Do you like to be challenged? Do you enjoy a more personal relationship with professors? Think about the kind of information that was helpful to *you* in making your own decisions, and try to be objective.

At the end of the day, when you have a choice about which professors to choose, go with your gut. And when you don't have a choice – because there's only one professor, because it's a required course for graduation, or because your schedule won't allow for any other options – consider it a learning

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opportunity. Once you finish school, you'll be working with a lot of different personalities, and you probably won't have any say in the matter. Trust me, it's good practice.