Abstract

This contribution presents a methodology for the analysis of student ratings of university courses. Student ratings are an old and widely recognized instrument to evaluate university courses (Emerson, 2000). However, the statistical analysis of student ratings need special techniques which take into account: (i) the ordinal nature of the ratings, (ii) the multivariate nature of the data (the questionnaire includes several items) and (iii) the hierarchical structure of the phenomenon (ratings are nested in courses which are nested in schools). Moreover, if one wishes to use the students’ satisfaction as a measure of course quality, it should be recognized that the satisfaction of a student, as expressed by the ratings, depends not only on the course characteristics of interest (lecture hall, clarity of the teacher, readings and so on), but also on the student’s traits and expectations. Therefore a fair comparison among courses requires the calculation of net measures that adjust for individual characteristics. Such measures can be obtained, among others, by means of multilevel models (Goldstein, 2003).

The aim of the presentation is to illustrate the usefulness and the drawbacks the multilevel ordinal model for courses and school comparison. Particularly, the results of some papers will be presented, where the ordinal two-level model and its stratified and multivariate extension are used to analyze data gathered in a survey on course evaluation carried out by the University of Florence (Rampichini et al., 2004; Grilli and Rampichini, 2002; Grilli and Rampichini, 2003).

References