

Know Your Professor
January 24, 2012 - 3:00am

By
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Until now, college students mostly have relied on word of mouth, professors' reputations, previous student evaluations and the often rude and anonymous comments (complete with a "hotness" ranking) on RateMyProfessors.com before choosing a professor for a particular class.

A 20-year-old sophomore at Northeastern University has hopes of changing all that with a new website called [KnowThyProf.com](#), a platform where individual professors can share information with prospective students by answering a few questions in a limited number of characters.

Daniel Abram, the student who started the website, said students often have an incomplete picture of professors before they decide on a class. He called it an "imperfect information" situation, where the information available may not be very relevant or polarized and anonymous (as in the case of a site like Rate My Professors).

"Professors are not commodities. You are not choosing a refrigerator after reading *Consumer Reports*," Abram said. One student might prefer straight-up lectures, another might prefer a more discussion-based class. "There are no ratings or rankings. It simply tells you what kind of person the professor is," Abram said.

But couldn't a student find out information about the professor just by going to a faculty member's profile on a university's website? Not really, Abram said. "There are usually lists and lists of publications. As a student, I don't want that. It is counterproductive," he said.

What his website does, he said, is condense the information by asking a professor to sign up and ask them questions like "What is your style of teaching?" and "What is the most engaging assignment you give?" The answers to these questions have a 160-character limit.

"I am focused on building content now, with the hope that it will become the go-to website for students and professors," Abram said. Currently more than 15 professors from five different institutions -- Boston University, Brown University, Johnson and Wales University, Northeastern University and Simmons College -- have registered on the website and answered the questions.

Erik Ehn, a professor of theater arts and performance studies at Brown, answered a question about what he looks for when grading a student by saying: "Have they written their brains out?" Richard Hanna, a professor of marketing at Northeastern, said his students should approach his class like a job in response to a question about what advice he has for them. "Show up to work ready to go and put in a strong effort. You'll get out of the class what you are willing to put in," he said.

Of course, the site will compete with the popular and MTV Networks-owned Rate My Professors. Jake Urbanski, a spokesman for MTV, noted that Rate My Professors now has 13 million professor ratings for the 1.6 million professors listed on the site.

Jenna Duncan, a senior at Northeastern, said she found Know Thy Prof's concept interesting but wondered how students would interpret the answers from the professors. "The professors would like to show themselves in a certain light," Duncan said, meaning that they are not going to say anything that may make them unpopular. She said word of mouth remains important, and so does academic advising.

Read more: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/24/website-gives-professors-way-reaching-out-prospective-students#ixzz1kNiBUd6q>
Inside Higher Ed