

College Students' Evaluation of Instructors and Courses

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Many educational institutions now use client-centered evaluation of instructor and course as one of the criteria to assess an instructor's ability to teach. Reasons for the popularity of students' ratings of instruction are first, the desire of students to participate in the evaluation of courses and because of the view that students, as consumers of the educational service, are in the best position to evaluate its worth (Costin, 1971; Gessner, 1973; Rodin and Rodin, 1972). Secondly, because it is probably the most convenient and accessible method of gathering information on instructional effectiveness (Rosenshine, 1970); and thirdly, college administrators use student ratings of faculty for promotion, tenure, and salary purposes.

The three objectives of the project discussed here were 1) to study relationships among the different variables of teaching methods, instructor's characteristics, and instructor rank as rated by college students; 2) to study these same variables in relation to **course ranking**; and 3) to study the relationships of student ratings of instructor and course to student all-university grade point average. The dependent variable for Objective 1 was instructor's rank in relation to other instructors in the college (Item 11 on the evaluation form that appears later in this manuscript, Illustration 1). For Objective 2, the dependent variable was course rank (Item 13); and for Objective 3, all university grade point average (Item 14).

Literature on instructor/course ratings and evaluations has identified four areas for examination: instructor characteristics, student characteristics, course characteristics, and situational factors. This study examined only the first three factors.

1. Instructor characteristics have tended to cluster into three areas: instructor empathy behavior toward the student, communication behavior, and personal characteristics of the instructor (Mueller, et. al, 1971; Gigliotti and Fitzpatrick, 1977).

2. The second area thought to affect evaluation was student characteristics, which include individual student personality and its interaction with particular instructors and classroom situations (Doty, 1976). However, some student variables appear to be basic enough to measure consistently regardless of the individual's background and psychological make-up. Granzin and Painter (1975) demonstrated that a strong predictor of course evaluation was the degree of student belief in the contribution of the course to vocation. Moreover, since an instructor can often explicate the course's applicability via presentation, this predictor operates as an interactive factor.

Canter and Meisels (1971) found that rewarding the student for his performance in a course increased the rated value of the course, but the change was not dramatic. In 1972, Painter and Granzin showed that student opinion toward a course changed in a positive fashion as it became clearer to the student that the course contributed to vocational goals or general explanations of the world.

3. Except for the Granzin and Painter (1975) study, little empirical information was found that course rating was affected by course characteristics.

Methods

In 1976-77, five 400-level courses (open to upper division and graduate students) offered by the Department of Agricultural Education, The Pennsylvania State University, were selected for the study. The enrollment in these courses consisted of 135 graduate and undergraduate students from nine agriculturally related majors. One instructor taught two of the courses. After the final examination, an instructor and course evaluation form (Illustration 1), then used by the College of Agriculture,

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients Among 14 Different Variables (N = 135)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | .47* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | .03 | .15 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | .28* | .22 | .27* | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | .12 | .02 | .18 | .37* | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | .19 | .07 | .20 | .02 | .38* | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | .35* | .10 | .17 | .39* | .01 | .11 | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | .36* | .13 | .04 | .16 | .15 | .18 | .56* | | | | | | | |
| 9 | .23* | .29* | .11 | .37* | .22 | .19 | .38* | .47* | | | | | | |
| 10 | .05 | .15 | .24* | .13 | .20 | -.02 | .28* | .22 | .34* | | | | | |
| 11 | .38* | .30* | .24* | .34* | .51* | .29* | .03 | .17 | .21 | .23* | | | | |
| 12 | .28* | .11 | -.09 | .17 | .12 | .41* | .17 | .13 | .22 | -.04 | .19 | | | |
| 13 | .28* | .19 | .03 | .14 | .14 | .41* | .22 | .20 | .15 | .02 | .24* | .67* | | |
| 14 | .06 | .05 | .03 | .01 | -.06 | -.14 | .12 | -.01 | -.19 | .01 | .06 | -.10 | -.02 | |

*Significant at the .01 level

Variables:

1. Presentation of course objectives
2. Clarity of assignments
3. Organization of lecture
4. Familiarity with subject matter
5. Ability to interpret and clarify ideas
6. Thinking encouraged
7. Testing
8. Grading of questions on examinations
9. Willingness to help
10. Fluency and enunciation
11. Instructor's rank with other instructors
12. The value of the course
13. The course rank with other agricultural courses
14. Student's All University GPA

Graduate student and Professor of Agricultural Education, The Pennsylvania State University, respectively.

Illustration 1. Course Evaluation Form.

Please complete the following critique objectively and with thought. Do not sign the form unless you wish to do so.

Circle rating from one to five for each item (5 — highest, and 1 — lowest rating).

| | | | | |
|---|--|--------|-----|--|
| 1. Presentation of objectives of course: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Objectives clearly presented and related to subject matter taught | Objectives only fairly well related to subject matter taught | | | Objectives vaguely presented and unrelated to subject matter taught |
| 2. Assignments: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Assignments clear, reasonable and carefully given | Rather indefinite and often hurriedly given | | | Objectives vaguely presented and unrelated to subject matter taught |
| 3. Organization of lecture: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Very well organized | Moderately organized | | | Very poorly organized |
| 4. Apparent familiarity with subject matter: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Lectures show a high degree of familiarity with subject matter taught | Lectures show a moderate degree of familiarity with subject matter taught and clarity ideas: | | | Lectures show a lack of familiarity with subject matter taught |
| 5. Ability to interpret and clarify ideas: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Expressed ideas clearly with well chosen words and illustrations | Meaning not always clear | | | Explanations frequently vague and rambling; meaning not always clear |
| 6. Thinking encouraged: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Work arranged to encourage correlation of subject matter | Independent thinking not required; chief reliance on memorization | | | Correlation of subject matter not stressed |
| 7. Testing: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Tests accurately, samples course content and object | Tests sometimes cover nonrelated material | | | Tests are not representative of course content |
| 8. Grading of questions on examinations: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Grades fair and impartial | Instructor partial at times | | | Instructor frequently partial |
| 9. Willingness to help: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Instructor always willing to help | Usually willing to help | | | Unwilling to help |
| 10. Fluency and enunciation: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Speaks clearly and distinctly; words come easily | Words sometimes indistinct or hesitant | | | Frequently impossible to hear; inadequate in expressing one's self |
| 11. Instructor's rank with other instructors (in all colleges) whom you have had in previous terms: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Very high | High | Medium | Low | Very low |
| 12. How would you rate the value of the course: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Very high | High | Medium | Low | Very low |
| 13. How would this course rank with other agriculture courses that you have taken: | | | | |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Very high | High | Medium | Low | Very low |
| 14. My all university grade point average is _____ | | | | |

was given to the students in all five courses. Students were asked not to write their names on the evaluation form in order to eliminate possible bias. Evaluation forms were collected by a graduate student who gave them to the researchers after grades had been turned in. Students were informed of this procedure in advance.

The 14 items of the evaluation form were used as variables to assess the interrelationships among the variables. A .01 level of significance was selected for analysis of data and interpretation. Also, 28 randomly selected students agreed to be interviewed to obtain descriptive information about instructors and courses.

Results

The instructor's rank with other instructors was found to be significantly correlated with organization of lectures (.24), knowledge (.34), and ability to interpret and clarify ideas (.51). It was found that an equally important variable in this study was the presentation of the course objectives (.38). More than half the variables in the study were found to be statistically correlated with presentation of course objectives. The correlation matrix for different variables is in Table 1.

In this study all university grade point average was not statistically correlated with any of the other variables under study. Apparently, grade point average was not associated with student ratings.

Discussion

Since correlation explains only the relationships among variables, this study did not discuss which variable caused an effect on another variable; e.g., the presentation of course objectives and an ability to interpret and clarify ideas were found to be significantly correlated with each other.

Instructor Rating

One objective of this study was to examine the variables that caused one college instructor to be ranked higher than another. Significant correlations were found between the instructor's rank with other instructors and presentation of course objectives, clarity of assignments, organization of lectures, familiarity with subject matter, ability to interpret and clarify ideas, fluency and enunciation, and the course itself. The correlation coefficients are repeated in Table 2.

Table 2. Variables Related to the Dependent Variable, Instructor Ranking

| Item No. | r* |
|--|-----|
| (5) Ability to interpret and clarify ideas | .51 |
| (1) Presentation of course objectives | .38 |
| (4) Familiarity with subject matter | .34 |
| (2) Clarity of assignments | .30 |
| (3) Organization of lectures | .24 |
| (13) Course rating | .24 |
| (10) Fluency and enunciation | .23 |

*significant at the .01 level

From the data (Items 1, 5, and 10 in Table 2), and substantiated by the interviews, an important variable involved in the evaluation of an instructor appears to be that of instructor communication. The student interviews revealed several points supporting the premise that the speaking ability of the instructor is important. These points were clarity and audibility of speech; avoidance of verbal hesitation and stuttering, as well as the belaboring of points; instructor's enthusiasm; and the confidence in a familiarity with the subject matter. All 28 students interviewed expressed appreciation for instructors who shared personal experiences during instruction.

Course Ranking

The second objective was to examine the variables which related to course ranking. Course ranking was found to be correlated with presentation of course objectives, classwork arranged to encourage thinking about subject matter, and the student perception of the course value to his or her vocation (Table 3). The interviews revealed that Item 12, value of course, pertained directly to students' perception of the usefulness of the course to their chosen vocation. Relating the course to vocation supports research reported by Granzin and Painter (1972).

Table 3. Variables Related to the Dependent Variable Course Ranking

| Item No. | r* |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| (12) The value of the course | .67 |
| (6) Thinking encouraged | .41 |
| (1) Presentation of course objectives | .28 |
| (11) Instructor rank | .24 |

*Significant at the .01 level

Relationship of Rating to Grade Point Average

The third objective of the study was to examine the students' All University Grade Point Average and other variables. It seems obvious that student characteristics have some effect on a student's evaluation of an instructor and a course. However, this study found no significant relationship between a student's GPA and the other variables in the study.

The findings presented do not deny the obvious fact that some courses may be inherently more interesting to some students than others; and, therefore, an instructor in such a course has a head start in producing interest. On the other hand, the instructor's communication and the course applicability to vocation transcend the specific content of the course. Indeed, communication is most important. Even the driest material, which is applicable to vocation, can be made meaningful if the instructor communicates well.

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