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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING BEHAVIORS

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INTRODUCTION

The most common performance appraisal device used in academia today is the student evaluation of teacher effectiveness. Typically, the student, near the completion of a course, fills out a standardized evaluation form for the teachers of the class in which he or she is enrolled. Evidence of the widespread use of teacher evaluation has been documented by a number of researchers (e.g., Lein & Merz, 1978; Peterson, Kerin & Martin, 1978). For example, in a study designed to identify the methods used for evaluation of business faculty, Lein and Merz (1978) received responses from 374 business schools. Although respondents indicated that they used various combinations of methods in evaluating business faculty, over 70 percent of the schools used some form of teacher evaluation by students. Not only are more schools using this method of assessing teacher effectiveness, many also use the results to make administrative decisions (e.g., faculty retention, promotion, salary and tenure).

As usage of student evaluations of teacher performance has increased, so has the amount of literature reporting the uses and abuse of these devices (see, for example, Miller, 1978; and Miller, Brokaw, & Shaaban, 1977). It is evident that there are both proponents and opponents of the use of student evaluations of teachers as input into personnel decisions. Most faculty members agree that these evaluations have value if used for faculty development purposes but are leery of their usage for other purposes. One reason for this concern is the many reliability and validity issues related to teacher evaluations—issues which have been investigated by a number of researchers. Researchers have discovered, for example, that many who construct such ratings are not sufficiently qualified to do so (Costin, Greenough & Menger, 1971). Furthermore, when colleague and supervisor ratings of teacher effectiveness were also obtained, low correlations were found between colleague or supervisor ratings and student ratings, other researchers (e.g., Rodin & Rodin, 1972) conclude that students are not able to judge teaching effectiveness.

Many variables have been identified which influence student perceptions of teacher effectiveness. In many cases, either the teacher cannot control the variables or the variables may be difficult to measure. Studies undertaken include those examining student attributes such as student achievement (Banziger & Smith, 1978; Costin, et al., 1971), achievement factors (Banziger & Smith, 1978); personality traits (Warren & O'Connell, 1978); and sex of student examined including leader behavior or style (Swanson, 1975; Kinicki & Schriesheim, 1978; Baba & Ace, 1978), type of course, i.e., required vs. elective (Miller, 1978; Miller, et al. 1977), course content, i.e., nonquantitative, primarily conceptual such as organizational behavior and marketing to more quantitative, less conceptual such as finance and operations management (Neely & Schaffer, 1979), teacher demands (Sullivan & Skanes, 1974), class size (Miller, 1978; Miller, et al., 1977), sex of teacher (Elmore & La Pointe, 1975; Wilson & Doyle, 1976), and teacher personality (Elmore & LaPointe, 1975; Witty, 1947). Although full discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, the interested reader is directed to see reviews such as those of Costin, Greenough, & Manges (1971) or Sullivan & Skanes (1974).

A recent study by two of the authors (Stevens & Marquette, 1979) examined differences between faculty and student

ratings of the importance of teachers' course-related traits. If differences do exist in terms of faculty and student ratings of teaching effectiveness, then the potential value of student evaluations may be severely limited. Cummings and Schwabs' (1973) findings suggest that supervisors and subordinates tend not to agree as to the dimensions of the subordinate's job and the relative importance of the job dimensions. Furthermore, Maier, Hoffman, Hoover & Read (1961) found substantial disagreement between manager-subordinate pairs on the subordinate's job duties and job requirements. One result of the Stevens and Marquette (1979) study was the finding that both students and faculty disagreed with the statement that they "used the same criteria to evaluate performance." The researchers concluded that differences do exist between student and faculty perceptions of important teacher traits. That such differences do exist would seem to imply the need for caution in using the results of ratings in making personnel decisions. Beyond such a caveat, however, the question arises, do students themselves agree on the importance of course related teacher behaviors? Are there differences on the basis of the students' sex when one examines a selected group of these teacher behaviors? What characteristics of teachers do students consider important to effective classroom instruction? In an attempt to answer these questions, the present study asked students to rate 17 traits commonly regarded as characteristics of effective teaching in courses where the teaching mode is predominantly lecture.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

A convenience sample of 257 students enrolled in a New Jersey community college was used. Responses were received from 145 female and 112 male students.

Questionnaires were administered to the students by a faculty member during regular class time. The questionnaires were accompanied by a cover letter assuring respondents of complete confidentiality.

Of the total number of students completing questionnaires 70 percent were business majors and 30 percent were non-business majors. Seventy-eight percent of the males and 63 percent of the females were business majors. (Table 1)

Seventy-seven percent of the total sample were unmarried including 84 percent of the males and 72 percent of the females. (Table 2)

Students in the sample were relatively young; 83 percent were 30 years old or less at the time of the survey, and 97 percent were 40 or less. A little more than half of the women were under 21 (55%) while nearly two-thirds (63%) of the men were in this age group. A somewhat larger percentage of the women (23%) than the men (9%) were over 30. (Table 3)

More of the students were classified as freshmen (35%) than any other category and more of the women students were first year (44%) than the men (24%). (Table 4) Although of little relevance to the present study, the fact that such a large percentage of the females were freshmen coupled with the larger percentage of women over 30 than men of the same age may be related to the

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phenomenon of women returning to school and the work force. It is also possible that these facts are a reflection of the growing upward mobility in the female work force.

Instrument

The original questionnaire was composed of two parts. For purposes of this report, however, data from only the first part "Traits will be analyzed. This part of the instrument contained 17 statements describing teacher traits. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, how important they believed each trait to be. (See Appendix A for copy of this part of instrument.)

Demographic data were also requested indicating academic major, sex, age, grade point average, marital status, class and hours worked per week.

RESULTS

Results were computed for females and males as well as for the total group. Mean scores of both student groups were calculated and compared for each of the 17 traits. Comparison of these mean scores with t-tests was done and will be reported in the final version of the paper. Table 6 shows the 17 traits listed in the order of their importance ranking by the whole sample. The last two columns indicate how each trait was ranked by females and by males respectively.

The rankings in Table 6 were arrived at by weighting each scale position by the number of students who selected that position. For example, if all females had rated the first trait--Tests related to course materials--as extremely important (number 7 on the scale) then the value for females of that trait would be 1015, (7 times 145 female students). The actual value for female rating of that trait was 961. There were 112 female students who rated this trait as 7 in importance, 21 as 6, 8 as 5, 2 as 4, 1 as 3, 0 as 2, and 1 who failed to rate it at all. Multiplying the number of students times the rate and summing the results yields the 961 score. After such scores were calculated for each trait by females, males and total, the traits were ranked in descending order or scores.

One question of interest to this study was which characteristics of teachers are considered important by students. The ranking of traits seems to yield a clue to the answer. Note the first three items in the table. Tests related to course materials, "clear expectations" and "fair tests may all be said to have a clear, direct impact on a student's grade in the course. Similarly, "requiring creative thinking, emphasizing factual knowledge and expecting students to be well prepared, (ranked 17, 14 and 13 respectively) may be considered to have a direct impact on learning. Having "high grading standards clearly impacts grades and it is ranked next to the bottom by the entire sample, by females and by males. Thus the evidence from this study would indicate that these students are placing more importance on grades than on learning.

Some of the rankings unexpectedly contradict popular wisdom. For example, one would expect students (perhaps especially community college students) to consider applications of material more important than concepts. However, both males and females ranked emphasizing concepts" higher than "stressing applications" although the difference in rankings was greater among the females (4 and 9 respectively) than among the males (6 and 8 respectively).

Another such unexpected outcome was the relatively low rank

(9) given to "exhibiting concern for students as individuals". Despite the widespread expectation on the part of instructors that students expect a "dog and pony" show, the students in this sample ranked "lecturing in an entertaining manner" nearly at the bottom of the list (number 15).

Both males and females ranked 'indicating what is important for exams' as number 5, again suggesting the importance of grades rather than learning.

Data were categorized by sex of respondent to determine whether differences exist between female and male perceptions of important teacher characteristics. It can be seen from Table 6 that some differences exist but appear to be of little practical significance. Indeed, it may be suggested that the extent of agreement between the sexes in ranking the traits is unexpectedly high. The absence of large differences in perceptions of females and males concerning important characteristics of effective teaching may argue for those who suggest that both sexes want and expect the same things from the educational process.

Table 7 shows the average rating assigned to each trait by females and by males. Two facts are immediately apparent from these ratings. First, the range of importance ratings is almost identical between the sexes, with a low of 4.7 in each case to a high of 6.4 for males and 6.6 for females. Secondly, it is worth noting that none of the trait's average rating by either sex was below the mid-point on the scale.

The average ratings by females and males are notably consistent. In only four cases does the difference between female and male ratings exceed .3 on the 7 point scale. Females rated emphasizing concepts, exhibiting concern for students and easy to outline lectures slightly higher than did the male students (a .4 difference in each case). Males rated entertaining lectures slightly higher (.5) than did the females.

The fact that so few students rated any of the traits as being of little importance is interesting. Did they assume that since the directions stated that the traits were "commonly regarded as - characteristics of effective teaching" they must all be of some importance? Or do they honestly consider all of the traits to be necessary for effective teaching? From the data it is impossible to say. However, there were no ties in weighted scores for the total sample (the closest being a 1 point difference between the eighth and ninth ranked items) which would seem to indicate that students did attempt to rank the items. On the other hand, if all students had rated an item as extremely important (7) its score would have been 1799, (7 times 257 students). If all had rated the item of no importance its score would have been 257, (1 times 257). The maximum difference then would have been 1542 points. There was actually a difference of only 472 points between the top rated item (with a score of 1678) and the lowest rated item (a score of 1206). Thus, students used only about the top one-third of the possible range of ratings. This would seem to indicate that all items were considered important.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of student ratings of the 17 teacher traits in this study indicates that male and female students tend to agree on which characteristics are important to teaching effectiveness. A possible problem is indicated by the apparent emphasis given by students to characteristics which impact directly on grades more than on learning. This analysis tends to corroborate

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the evidence found in other studies suggesting differences in perception between students and teachers (Stevens and Marquette, 1979). If teachers base their effectiveness standards on learning criteria and students base theirs on grading criteria the use of student evaluations may be inappropriate as a means of judging teacher effectiveness. In the present study differences do exist in student ratings of selected teacher traits (when examined on the basis of sex of student); however, these differences appear to be of little practical significance. (See Table 7). it should be noted that student respondents in the present study appear to have a very strong grade orientation. This orientation may influence the kinds of response generated. For example, it seems logical to ask if students with a strong learning orientation would respond similarly to those queried in the present study.

There are a number of avenues available to future researchers in this area. The present study should be replicated and extended. Researchers may wish to gather data from a random sample of students across different majors and colleges within a particular university setting. In addition, results gathered from samples at different universities might provide further insight. The importance of key teaching behaviors or traits might be explored giving consideration to a variety of student attributes other than sex of student (e.g., graduate vs. undergraduate standing, age, work experience, major).

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TABLE 1
MAJORS OF RESPONDENTS

| | Females | Males | Total |
|--------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Business | 63% | 78% | 70% |
| Non-Business | 37% | 22% | 30% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

TABLE 2
MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

| | Females | Males | Total |
|-------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Not Married | 74% | 85% | 79% |
| Married | 26% | 15% | 21% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

TABLE 3
AGE OF RESPONDENTS (PERCENT)

| | Females | Males | Total |
|--------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Less than 21 | 55% | 63% | 59% |
| 21-30 | 22% | 28% | 24% |
| 31-40 | 19% | 7% | 14% |
| Over 40 | 4% | 2% | 3% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

TABLE 4
CLASS OF RESPONDENTS (PERCENT)

| | Females | Males | Total |
|-----------|---------|-------|-------|
| Freshman | 43% | 24% | 35% |
| Sophomore | 10% | 17% | 13% |
| Junior | 14% | 12% | 13% |
| Senior | 13% | 26% | 19% |
| No Answer | 20% | 21% | 20% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

TABLE 5
HOURS WORKED PER WEEK BY RESPONDENTS

| | Females | Males | Total |
|--------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Less than 21 | 72% | 51% | 63% |
| 21-30 | 15% | 13% | 14% |
| 31-40 | 11% | 27% | 18% |
| More than 40 | 2% | 9% | 5% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

TABLE 6
TRAITS RANKED BY IMPORTANCE

| Trait (Total Sample Rank) | Dist- ance* | Female Ranking | Male Ranking |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1-Tests related to course materials | -- | 1 | 2 |
| 2-Clear expectations | 15 | 3 | 1 |
| 3-Fair tests | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| 4-Instructor is well prepared | 62 | 6 | 4 |
| 5-Emphasizes understanding concepts | 15 | 4 | 6 |
| 6-Indicates importance for exams | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| 7-Uses class time effectively | 24 | 7 | 9 |
| 8-Stresses application of subject | 22 | 9 | 8 |
| 9-Exhibits concern for students | 1 | 8 | 10 |
| 10-Course objectives reflect teaching | 17 | 11 | 8 |
| 11-Available before and after class | 11 | 10 | 11 |
| 12-Lectures are easy to outline | 42 | 12 | 15 |
| 13-Expects students to be prepared | 9 | 13 | 12 |
| 14-Emphasizes factual knowledge | 35 | 14 | 14 |
| 15-Lectures in an entertaining manner | 71 | 15 | 14 |
| 16-Has high grading standard | 123 | 16 | 16 |
| 17-Requires creative thinking on exams | 15 | 17 | 17 |

*Indicates difference in rank from previous item.

TABLE 7
AVERAGE RATING* OF TRAITS BY MALES AND FEMALES

| Traits | Females | Males |
|--|---------|-------|
| 1-Tests related to course material | 6.6 | 6.4 |
| 2-Fair tests | 6.6 | 6.3 |
| 3-Clear expectations | 6.5 | 6.4 |
| 4-Emphasizes understanding concepts | 6.3 | 5.9 |
| 5-Indicates importance for exams | 6.2 | 6.0 |
| 6-Instructor is well prepared | 6.2 | 6.2 |
| 7-Uses class time effectively | 6.2 | 5.9 |
| 8-Exhibits concern for students | 6.1 | 5.7 |
| 9-Stresses application of subject | 6.0 | 5.9 |
| 10-Available before and after class | 5.9 | 5.7 |
| 11-Course objectives reflect teaching | 5.9 | 5.9 |
| 12-Lectures are easy to outline | 5.8 | 5.4 |
| 13-Expects students to be prepared | 5.6 | 5.7 |
| 14-Emphasizes factual knowledge | 5.5 | 5.5 |
| 15-Lectures in an entertaining manner | 5.0 | 5.5 |
| 16-High grading standards | 4.8 | 4.7 |
| 17-Requires creative thinking on exams | 4.7 | 4.7 |

*Scale of 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important).