ED 453 561   CS 510 574

AUTHOR   Jaasma, Marjorie A.; Koper, Randall J.
TITLE   Talk to Me: An Examination of the Content of Out-of-Class
                Interaction between Students and Faculty.
PUB DATE   2001-05-00
NOTE   27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
                International Communication Association (51st, Washington,
                DC, May 24-28, 2001).
PUB TYPE   Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   *College Faculty; *College Students; Communication Research;
                Content Analysis; Higher Education; *Interpersonal
                Communication; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS   *Communication Behavior

ABSTRACT

        Despite accumulating evidence of the importance of college
student-faculty interaction to student retention and satisfaction, little
work has focused on out-of-class (OCC) communication. The present study
examines 93 student descriptions of OCC with a faculty member, content
analyzed to categorize the nature, length, location, and initiator of the
conversations. Qualitative analysis resulted in six categories of
interaction: course-related, self-disclosure, small talk, advice,
intellectual ideas, and favor requests, which were then interpreted as a
functional typology of OCC. Contains 16 references. (Author/RS)

Talk to me: An examination of the content of out-of-class interaction
between students and faculty

Marjorie A. Jaasma

Associate Professor of Communication Studies
Department of Communication Studies
California State University, Stanislaus
801 West Monte Vista Ave.
Turlock, CA 95382
Phone: (209) 667-3862
Fax: (209) 667-3525
E-mail: jaasma@toto.csustan.edu

and

Randall J. Koper

Professor of Communication
Department of Communication
University of the Pacific
Stockton, California 95211
(209) 946-2505

2

Abstract

Despite accumulating evidence of the importance of college student-faculty interaction to student retention and satisfaction, little work has focused on out-of-class (OCC) communication. The present study examined 93 student descriptions of OCC with a faculty member, content analyzed to categorize the nature, length, location, and initiator of the conversations. Qualitative analysis resulted in six categories of interaction: course-related, self-disclosure, small talk, advice, intellectual ideas, and favor requests, which were then interpreted as a functional typology of OCC.

Talk to me: An examination of the content of out-of-class interaction

between students and faculty

Universities are currently faced with increasing competition for students and for limited

funds, making student retention an important issue. However, 41% of the students who begin

higher education will depart without receiving a degree (Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto's

(1987) model of student persistence, students are more likely to continue in college if they are

integrated into the academic and social life of the institution. This integration includes

relationships with faculty, both in class and through informal interactions (Higbee & Dwinell,

1992). In fact, informal student-faculty interactions have consistently been shown to promote

integration of students into the academic and social life of the university and to improve student

persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977, 1980).

Not only do students and universities benefit from student-faculty out-of-class

communication (OCC) in terms of overall retention, but students realize benefits in the improved

nature of their college experience. For example, students who engage in OCC with faculty

showed improved academic performance and achievement (Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 1978; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibel, 1978), higher educational aspirations (Pascarella,

1980), better attitudes towards college (Pascarella, 1980), and greater intellectual and personal

development (Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibel,

1978).

Finally, faculty also benefit from OCC with students in that increased student-faculty

OCC is linked to higher teaching evaluations (Theophilides & Terenzini, 1981). Students rated

high contact instructors as effective teachers, nominated them for more outstanding teacher

awards, and reported that they taught the most stimulating courses (Wilson, Woods, & Gaff,

1974). Therefore, understanding student-faculty OCC is valuable because of the widespread

benefits to students, faculty, and the university as a whole.

<div align="center">Rationale</div>

OCC

The few studies that have been conducted on student-faculty OCC have indicated that

student-faculty contact outside of the classroom is fairly infrequent and superficial (Feldman &

Newcomb, 1969; Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Nadler & Nadler, 1995). For example,

Goldsmith and Albrecht (1993) found only 2.8% of 143 students had talked to an instructor

outside of class about an exam. Although many studies limit OCC to visits to the instructor's

office, Fusani (1994) extended the concept of OCC to include incidental interactions (e.g., chats

before and after class). He found that 23% of the students surveyed had never visited or

informally chatted with the instructor, and 50% had two or less contacts. Jaasma and Koper

(1999) asked students to distinguish between OCC in the instructor's office from more informal

contact before or after class or on campus. They found that 50% of the students reported never

having visited an instructor's office and 32% reported never having spoken to an instructor

informally before or after class or on campus.

The length of OCC has also received little attention. Early studies only included

interactions that were a "fairly extended talk," that is, a minimum of 10-15 minutes in length

(Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Theophilides & Terenzini, 1981; Wilson et al., 1974). Dallimore

(1995), however, reported that actual time spent with the faculty member was not as important to

students as what they accomplished: "students were concerned about whether or not a problem

was resolved; whether it took two minutes or 20 seemed inconsequential" (p. 26). Since no

<div align="center">5</div>

study has addressed interactions less than 10 minutes, shorter interactions might also be examined

to see if they are related to student satisfaction with OCC. Jaasma and Koper (1999) asked

students to rate the average length of office visits and informal interactions with instructors (1-5

minutes; 6-10 minutes; 11-15 minutes; 15-30 minutes; over 30 minutes). The mode for length of

office visits was 6-10 minutes and the mode for length of informal contact was 1-5 minutes.

According to the scant research, the content of OCC has predominantly been course-

related. Fusani (1994) found that for 282 students, 84.90% of interactions were course-related,

while only 7.49% were about personal problems and 8.57% were about social topics. Jaasma and

Koper (1999) found students reported that 91.9% of office visits and 66.7% of informal contacts

concerned course work; during 4.4% of office visits and 4.6% of informal contacts students and

faculty discussed personal problems; and students and faculty socialized during 3.6% of office

visits and 28.4% of informal contacts. Furthermore, course-related discussions also appear to

have the most impact on persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979) and on student academic

performance and intellectual development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Pascarella et al., 1978).

Only two studies (Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999) investigated the content of OCC.

These were both quantitative studies in which students were asked to rate the percentage of OCC

interactions spend discussing course work, personal problems, and socializing. No studies have

investigated the actual discussions in which students and faculty are engaged. The present study

is a pilot study which begins to address this deficiency. It explores the content of OCC from the

students' perspectives: What is the nature of OCC and does OCC, according to student

descriptions of OCC encounters, involve the three categories (course work, personal problems,

and socializing) used in previous research?

Method

Participants were 93 students at two mid-sized Western universities, one public and one private. Participants included 30% males and 70% females, and represented 28% first-year students, 16% sophomores, 43% juniors, and 12% seniors. The instructors with whom they described OCC encounters included 65% males and 35% females.

Students were asked to think of an instructor they had this semester and select one time when they spoke with that instructor outside of class, either in his/her office, on campus, or before or after actual class time. They were asked to provide data on location and length of the interaction, who initiated the interaction, the size of the class in which they had this instructor, and demographic data on themselves and their instructor. Finally, they were asked to describe in as much detail as possible the conversation they had with this instructor.

Student responses were content analyzed for the content of the OCC. Six categories of content emerged from the initial sort by one of the researchers: course-related; self-disclosure; small talk; advice; intellectual ideas, and favor requests. These categories were provided to a second communication professional who sorted the responses into the six categories. The inter-coder reliability for each category were as follows: Course-Related, 88%; Self-Disclosure, 71%; Small Talk, 77%; Advice, 67%; Intellectual Ideas, 50%; Favors, 67%.

To assist in analysis of the categories, the QSR NUD-IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) software (Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd., 1997) was used. All responses were typed in a word processor, imported into QSR NUD-IST, and coded into the 6 categories as was determined by the sort. Reports were made of each category which listed all responses coded into that category. A report in QSR NUD-IST is a

plain text document which displays all data requested.

Discussion

Students were asked to describe an OCC encounter they had with one of their instructors. In an analysis of these descriptions, six categories of interactions emerged: Course-Related, Self-Disclosure, Small Talk, Advice, Intellectual Ideas, and Favors. Below is a description of each of these categories. All student comments are provided exactly as written in the original.

Course-Related

Course-Related responses made up the largest category of responses. Students reported course-related discussions in 65% of the responses. The types of topics students and faculty discussed with regard to course-related issues included: class content; attendance; testing and grading; papers, projects, and presentations; and class process.

Class content. When students discussed class content with instructors, they were looking for clarification of things they did not understand in class or help with assignments. The following student recalled this type of discussion but also expressed the anxiety which may accompany such a request:

> I asked her my questions and she seemed interested in hearing what I had to say right
> away. I feared she would pull that "You should have been paying attention in class"
> attitude that most instructors give but she quickly and nicely answered both questions and
> left me feeling good about talking with her again about anything I needed to talk about.

Similarly, students often reported getting the help they needed on assignments, as this student explained: "I needed some help in the assignment she give. I understood a lot after the conversation."

Attendance. Attendance issues were a second topic of student-faculty OCC. Students came to their instructors to explain absences or reasons for leaving class early. Students were concerned how their behavior was affecting the instructor and the class:

Out of respect for my instructor, there were several class meetings, were [where] I had to leave early. I wanted to talk to him about it first to make sure he did not have a problem with it. He was very understanding and did not have a problem with it. I know how disruptive it can be when a student comes in late or leaves class early. I did not want to create this problem.

Another type of attendance concern is dropping classes. Students were required to go to instructors to receive signatures on drop forms. This did present a problem for one student when the instructor did not understand:

We were 8 weeks into the semester and I received a great promotion at work. I ask the instructer to sign my drop slip so that I could accept my new duty at work...The teacher refuse to sign the drop slip. So I contacted the chairman and the dean, who both signed the drop slip.

Testing and Grading. Students came to instructors with specific questions about tests and how to study for tests, how to raise their grade in the class, and to question grading they perceived to be unfair. Student responses about tests were similar to this: "I...asked her about what she is looking for on her essay questions. She discussed how she is mainly looking for thought and content." Students appreciated being told how to study and raise their grades, for example, "I asked my instructor how I could do well on the exams and whether or not she had any suggestions. She was very helpful in answering my question. She is a very nice person. She

even wrote down notes for me to use on how to study."

A few students had problems with grading, particularly when they perceived the instructor's grading to be unfair. These encounters ended with the student perceiving that the instructor was defensive, as this student illustrated: "I just asked why I got a grade. He got defensive and ended the conversation. THE END." Another student believed it was the instructor's mistake that had caused her low grade: "I informed the instructor that the 'mistake' I made in a paper was a result of a mistake he made on a graph in my notes. He basically told me that he has been in the field too long to make such a mistake, even though I had proof (his writing on my notes). After using a few choice words, that were quite harsh, he pretty much left it with a 'tough luck' attitude."

Papers, project, and presentations. Students approached instructors for assistance on papers, projects, and presentations. They mentioned getting help with topics and outlines, for example, "The conversation began with an indepth description of the project paper. It included organization, section sizes, and other logistics. We then brainstormed potential topics and discussed how each could be done." Students also appreciated the resources instructors could provide on their paper topics: "Came to discuss Social Darwinism as a topic for senior thesis...He began naming seminal works. I felt good because I had prepared a 40 entry bibliography and was able to answer affirmatively and circle the critical texts. He had most answers to my questions on the tip of his tongue. He took time to double check a reference on the computer."

Class processes. Whereas most students reported discussing course content and paper assignments, some did mention the process issues in the classroom. Several mentioned struggling with group assignments, as this student explained, "One of the students in my group had mono

and myself and another girl in my group discussed our options w/ him because the sick person

was not in class." Scheduling of presentations was another process issue: "I had to tell her that I

didn't think I can do my speech on my assigned day b/c I had to go to L.A. for an emergency. She

said it was fine as long as I let her know."

One student did talk about process in more detail with regards to his participation in the

class:

> I have a class where my instructor has a very good knowledge of theory pertaining to the
>
> class' subject matter. In that class, I feel I have a fairly good working knowledge, or
>
> application of the theories, of the information pertaining to that class. During classes I had
>
> a habit of interjecting my opinion based on my work experiences. My goal was to
>
> supplement the information given by the instructor and not to undermine her
>
> competence...One day, I stayed after class to speak with the instructor about the
>
> matter...The instructor and I talked for about 20-25 minutes. She validated some of the
>
> feelings I was having and we came to an agreement on how I could add to the classroom
>
> discussions without undermining her authority or creating confusion.

As these student comments illustrate, students generally left these encounters with their questions

answered and with positive feelings. One student summarized it in this way: "The professor gave

me good advice and made me feel very comfortable and capable. The conversation helped me in

my research and I left feeling as though I had accomplished something by visiting him." Only five

students left the encounter with negative reactions because they perceived the instructor's

behavior to be unfair.

In the Course-Related responses, students reported initiating the encounter 90% of the

time. One student indicated that the encounter was mutually initiated by both the student and the instructor. In the five instances in which instructors initiated the encounter, two were begun with small talk on the part of the instructor, and the student followed up with a course-related question. One reported that an instructor had approached her about understanding course material but only after she had approached him the previous session: "I was leaving class & the instructor asked me if I understood the assignment that we had had assigned the previous class. The previous class I had approached the instructor after class and asked for clarification on an assignment." In these three cases, students were still responsible for initiating the questions about course-related material. Only two students reported that instructors had full responsibility for the initiation. One instructor wanted feedback on his testing:

> He asked what I thought about the last midterm that he gave my class. I told him that I thought a couple of the questions were ambiguous and that I felt as if they may be trick questions. I told him that I really wasn't sure exactly what answer he was looking for. He seemed very interested in my input and even asked me if the question would be better if he rephrased it a certain way.

Only one student reported that an instructor had approached her because she was not doing well in the class:

> She noticed my low test score and knows I am a lot smarter than the grade I received. On the next exam she asked me to justify why I thought the answer to be what I chose. So I did! Threw [through] this task she was able to pin-point my reasoning for the question. In the next class period with her she pulled me aside and explained her theory on my tests in her class...Thanks to her I am able to focus and analyze test better now and have higher

results in return!

It appears that in Course-Related responses, students accept the initiative in getting the assistance they need. Very few report that instructors take this initiative. Students might be nervous in approaching instructors, but most report positive results. The students who report negative reactions to their OCC, frame it in terms of the instructor behaving unfairly.

<u>Self-Disclosure</u>

Self-Disclosure appeared in 24% of the responses. When students and instructors self-disclose, they provide personal information about themselves or provide feedback to the other person, statements which carry risk for the discloser. The responses indicated disclosure on the part of students, disclosure on the part of instructors, and mutual self-disclosure.

Student's self-disclosures were often prompted because they were having difficulties attending all of the class sessions. One type of difficulty was personal crises, for example, "My best friend lost his mother and he was needing a lot of support." Other difficulties involved family problems, health issues, and even how to raise children. One mother self-disclosed the problems she was having in motivating her children when she asked her instructor, "how do I get my children to do their homework instead of just coming to me and saying I don't know expecting me to tell them what to do."

Although most student self-disclosures involved personal or family difficulties, one student shared his wekend plans: "I told him that I was going to Lake Tahoe for the weekend to place a bet on a boxing match...He wasn't too familiar with the betting aspect of my trip, but he was very knowledgeable about the sport of boxing and the opponents of the fight."

The self-disclosures of instructors involved their past experiences, their future plans, and

information about their own children. When students and instructors were discussing possible

career options or graduate school, instructors would share their past experiences as students, for

example: "During the course of the conversation regarding graduate school, the instructor

reflected on her own experience as a graduate student and was open to any questions I had with

regard to the topic." Another student was impressed with the instructor's self-disclosure about his

up-bringing:

> I was giving a speech on how spanking is an inapproriate form of discipline. My
>
> instructor took the time to self-disclose about how spanking was used when he was a
>
> child. I was very impressed that he took the time to help me realize that because of the
>
> family structure & upbringing 20+ years ago, spanking was looked on as differently then
>
> he does in society today. This was very inspirational to me that this instructor thought I
>
> was important enough to disclose personal information too.

In addition to sharing past experiences, instructors also shared future plans, particularly

about teaching. The following student asked specifically about the instructor's plans: "I

approached him and asked him if the rumor I heard was true--did he not plan on

attending/teaching at _____ next semester. He said that he wasn't and explained to me that he

was not and the reasons why."

Sharing information about their children was also a self-disclosure engaged in by

instructors. One student found the conversation included "his daughter's traffic ticket in N.J. and

her problems w/ the N.J.P.D. and licensing of her CA bought vehicle." Another student was

trying to establish a personal rapport with his instructor and asked personal question about

coping as a graduate student with children: "I had thought up a question earlier that might give us

some common ground, to end the conversation casually. I had learned he had children (many) during his graduate studies. I have one child (less than many) and asked him for some tips on succeeding academically and as a father. I noticed a hint of surprise in his face. He hesitantly gave me some tips."

The reciprocal nature of self-disclosure was also seen in the student-faculty exchanges. Health issues provided such a bridge, as one student said, "We had discussed my allergies and he asked what medication I was on. He told me that his children had bad allergies as well." Another exchange involved both student and instructor having relatives at the same hospital:

I told the professor my sister-in-law was in labor and I was going to the hostpital. She asked me what hospital I was going to and I told her St. Joseph's. She told me she might be in there because her husband was in the same hospital and she told me what room her husband was in. I told her I was sorry and I wished her my best and she wished me the best in my family.

Self-disclosure can also occur in the form of feedback to another person as to how that person's behavior is being perceived. One instructor provided a positive boost to this student: "He was very encouraging and expressed that he felt I was going to be a fine teacher. This made me feel very excited to get into my career."

Whereas most students reported positive instances of self-disclosure, the following student reported feeling forced to self-disclose negative feedback:

We were 8 weeks into the semester and I received a great promotion at work. I ask the instructer to sign my drop slip so that I could accept my new duty at work...The teacher refuse to sign the drop slip. So I contacted the chairman and the dean, who both signed

the drop slip...I returned to the instructor a few days later and she blankly said, "Well if

you don't want to be in my class just say so." So I said, "I don't want to be in your class."

She signed my drop slip and we haven't spoken to each other since. I was so

uncomfortable with our last discussion that I was unable to take the same class the

following semester. So I had to wait 2 years for when she went on subatical, so I could

take the class with another teacher.

This last student's response indicates the alienation that can occur with the risk of self-

disclosure. Students were very aware of the risk of self-disclosure to instructors, as one said, "I

was very honest w/ him about things going on in my life so he can understand if I miss a day here

and there, or my writing is not normal...This instructor holds the cards to 9 of my units this

semester." Nevertheless, successful exchanges of self-disclosure made student feel important and

established common bonds between students and faculty.

Small Talk

Small Talk was included in 12% of the student responses. Topics of Small Talk covered a

wide span. One popular topic was discussion of college in general, how the semester was going,

and other classes. Other topics included the weather, health, sports, movies, relationships, and the

Internet. Student responses indicated that small talk served several functions in student-faculty

interactions. Students and instructors engaged in small talk either as part of a longer discussion or

as a way of acknowledging the other person in situations where they found themselves alone

before or after class or when passing on campus.

The first function of Small Talk was to fill the conversation void when faculty and

students found themselves alone together. This was articulated by the following student who

consciously used it to make her time with her instructor more comfortable:

> It was about ten minutes before class with my instructor and I went to her office to drop
>
> off my notebook. I was headed to class when she asked me to help her carry some things
>
> to class for her. I helped her get her stuff together and as we were headed out we started
>
> talking about how fast this semester was and school was coming to an end soon...When
>
> we were outside, we kind of came to a halt where we weren't talking. I feel
>
> uncomfortable with silence and didn't want to walk to class with my teaching feeling
>
> uncomfortable, so I immediately started talking about how much I can't stand the wind. It
>
> was very windy that day, and I could tell that her allergies were acting up. She
>
> immediately agreed with me and told me that she was from this area and can't stand the
>
> fact that she has always had these valley allergies. I told her that I was glad that I didn't
>
> have them (allergies) that bad. Then we got into the conversation of fog...She was very
>
> casual and down to earth, just the same as in the classroom. I am glad that I did have an
>
> interaction with her OUTSIDE the classroom. It made me feel more important while I
>
> was INSIDE the classroom.

As this student's description indicated, small talk meandered from one topic to the next, but the

purpose of the small talk was far more important to the student than the topic--it made her feel

more comfortable during the interaction and more important once she was inside the classroom.

It appears that the initial function of small talk is to make students and instructors feel

comfortable during encounters, but the added benefit for the student and the instructor is the

increased confidence of the student once inside the classroom. Another student remarked on this

when he followed up a discussion about career advice with small talk: "After that my professor

and I talked about some non-school issues, like sports and life in general, and I like they because

it shows me that the faculty cares about me not just my school career."

Another function of Small Talk was to break the ice before asking for a favor, such as this

student reported: "I first talked to my instructor after class while he walked to his office. I asked

how he was and how the semester was going for him. He said it was well and then asked me how

I was doing in my other classes. After that I asked him for a favor."

A third function of Small Talk is to acknowledge the other person in passing when neither

party has time to stop and talk. Such an encounter was described in this way:

I was going downstairs from the Summit after I had lunch. My professor was walking up

the stairs. He said 'hey, Jennifer" and I said hello. Then I said "I was able to switch mentor

time slots, so now I'm in your 8:00 class." He said "great." And we both waved goodbye

with a "see ya then."

It appears that Small Talk serves several functions in student-faculty OCC, but students

remark on the added benefits of OCC with faculty in that such interactions make them feel more

important inside the classroom and more valued as individuals.

Advice

Students reported seeking advice from instructors in 18% of the responses. Advice

centered around four topics: scheduling, selecting courses, and transferring; internships and

fieldwork; careers and graduate school; and personal issues.

Scheduling, selecting courses, and transferring. Scheduling, selecting courses, and

information about transferring are things about which students usually consult their advisors.

Students were aware of this but went to instructors when they thought the instructors could

provide specific information:

> I asked my instructor some advice about a particular course in relation to the other courses I have planned. I wanted to take a night course that is four units. This is intimidating. He was extremely helpful and straightforward. He has taught the course before and was able to give me some helpful and important information.

When students did receive information that their advisor could give them, they realized they were breaking a norm: "He was really nice and helpful. I felt odd about asking him about it because he's not my advisor. I had been planning to ask my advisor about this but since I had to go to this professor's office to pick something up for class, I decided I may as well ask him instead of waiting to ask my advisor." Another student also made the comparison of instructor and advisor: "In the twenty minutes that I met with him, I received more help and guidance than I did when I met with my actual counselor last semester. My instructor went through Fall semester's class schedule with me to find classes that he thought would be good for me to take." Only one student did report that his instructor was his advisor and then reported an unsatisfactory advising situation.

Internships and fieldwork. Requests for advice about internships and fieldwork were directed to the instructor because he/she was the person in change of the internship or had personal knowledge about the fieldwork. The direct request for information is seen in the following student: "I went to talk to him about the availability of internships. I asked him if he would be in charge of my getting units for it, and he said yes. We talked about the different internships available in psychology."

Careers and graduate school. Students who were considering graduate school or who

were considering careers in the field of the instructor's expertise, turned to these instructors for ideas on jobs, methods of getting into graduate school ("for the next 15 min. we talked about graduate school, the Graduate Record Exam, and the cost of tuition."), and questions about coping with graduate school. The kind of searching students were doing with regard to careers and graduate school is summarized well by the following student:

> I am currently trying to decide whether to go to law school or to graduate school in philosophy. I pursued this conversation to try and understand the likelihood of finding a job teaching. This professor explained that he was one of approximately five hundred applicants for this tenure track position...I have spent considerable time thinking about this conversation because the idea of completing ten years of college and then being unable to earn enough to support myself frightens me.

Personal issues. Several students did approach instructors for information to help them with out-of-school problems. For examples, one used her instructor, who was a CPA, for information about her taxes:

> I...asked him about my personal exemptions and what I could deduct as business expenses for my part time child care business. I had told him that I had always wanted to ask him about my business expenses but that I hesitated to ask because I thought that he may consider it inappropriate for me to ask him for free advice. He told me that he would be happy to answer any questions and that I should take advantage of the fact that my instructor is a CPA.

As students approached instructors for advice on these various topics, they were looking for specific information. This purposeful nature of the encounter drove the interaction. Many

students approached instructors directly with the request. Others led into it after beginning with course-related issues. Still others, after asking for advice, moved the conversation to small talk or course-related issues. However, the effectiveness of the encounter hinged on whether students got the answers they needed. When they received a helpful answer, they made comments such as it "satisfied my curiosity," and "eased my mind." When they did not accomplish the goal, the result was frustration.

The climate of the interaction was particularly important to students when they were seeking advice. They appreciated instructors who made them feel comfortable, as this student indicated: "He made it very comfortable to ask him for his help. He did not come across in a condescending manner like some instructors do...He made me feel that I could come back to him for more help at any time in the future. He never made me feel as though I was wasting his time." Even when students were not made to feel totally at ease they had their fears eased: "I would feel slightly less uncomfortable at a next meeting, but not casual...I did learn from the meeting how I would try to be more welcoming to my students if I'm ever in a like position."

Another aspect of climate was that instructors validated students. Students were interested in instructors who cared about them as individuals: "This professor is available by phone--gives out home phone number. Conveys an interest and concern in the individual as a person, not only a student." Students also felt validated when instructors took time to meet with them: "At no time did I feel rushed by the instructor."

I appears that OCC encounters which center on advice, are purposeful interactions initiated by students. These encounters are effective when goals are met but especially when this is done in an appropriate manner by making students feel comfortable and validating them as

individuals.

Intellectual Ideas

Intellectual Ideas was a category which 5% of the students mentioned. The intellectual

discussions which the students reported may have been related to the courses they were enrolled

in, but the students did not link the discussions to the courses. Ideas discussed included

philosophy, history, world issues, and economics. In the following is an example of a

philosophical discussion:

> We basically talked briefly in the parking lot about how Utilitarianism seems to be an
>
> inverted version of the "Golden Rule" philosophy of the counter culture of the 60s. It was
>
> all pretty light in nature.

Another student described a discussion of art history with these words: "Discussed political

ramifications of Renaissance art commissioned by the Medici family."

In the above examples, students mentioned specific intellectual ideas which were

discussed. The descriptions of these specific intellectual discussions only included the intellectual

discussion. However, shen students mentioned more general topics, such as "world issues," these

descriptions of the encounter included other categories such as small talk. The specificity of the

intellectual discussion appeared to shape the nature of the encounter.

Favors

Favors were mentioned by 2% of the students. One student specifically described asking

the instructor for a letter of recommendation and one additional student referred to getting

assistance from the instructor in finding a job. In the direct request for a letter of recommendation

was initiated by small talk and then led into the request:

I first talked to my instructor after class while he walked to his office. I asked how he was

and how the semester was going for him. He said it was well and then asked me how I

was doing in my other classes. After that I asked him for a favor. I asked if he could write

a recommendation letter for me for a scholarship I was applying for. He asked what kind

of scholarship it was and I told him it was for the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of

Commerce and I told him how two years ago I had been a recipeint but had not applied

since then. He said he'd be happy to write me the letter and told me to write down what I

needed on the letter and give him the or a copy of the cover letter from the organization

and he'd have it ready as soon as possible. So I thanked him and told him I'd have that for

him next class time.

As this exchange highlights, both parties play a part in smoothly accomplishing a request for a

favor. The request includes several aspects: breaking of the ice with small talk, the request on the

part of the student, a request for information by the instructor, the student's response, and finally

an expression of appreciation on the part of the student.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This is an exploratory study of the content of OCC as seen from the perspective of the

students. Only 93 students were asked to think of <u>one</u> OCC encounter with an instructor and

describe it. Since the responses are from a small sample and include only one encounter in an

entire semester, these responses cannot be seen as representative of all student-faculty OCC.

However, these responses are ones which students recall and which are important to them in their

perception of the student-faculty out-of-class interaction. As such, they provide valuable

information as a starting place to identify the content of OCC.

In the two previous research studies that addressed the content of OCC, both were quantitative studies which asked students to estimate the percentage of time they spend discussing course content, personal problems, and socializing in OCC (Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999). This study shows that those three categories are insufficient to describe the content of OCC. OCC is much more complex than that. The current study found that six categories emerged from the student responses: Course-Related, Self-Disclosure, Small Talk, Advice, Intellectual Ideas, and Favors. Additional categories may well emerge in future, more-extensive research.

Earlier studies of OCC have found that student-faculty contact outside of the classroom is fairly infrequent and superficial (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Nadler & Nadler, 1995). For example, Fusani (1994) found that 23% of the students surveyed had never visited or informally chatted with the instructor. In the current study, only one student out of the 93 left the request for information about an OCC encounter blank. This student did not indicate that he had not had such an encounter, he simply did not complete that part of the questionnaire. All of the other students could recall an OCC encounter with at least one instructor during the semester. Perhaps the specificity of the prompt enabled them to recall an encounter which might not have come to mind with a more general questionnaire.

Since students initiated most of the interactions, it can be argued that what emerges from the categories that resulted are the reasons students engage in OCC. These categories, therefore, provide a functional description of OCC, at least from the perspective of students. For example, one function of OCC is to acquire information necessary to successfully complete the course. They achieve this by having course-related content and assignments clarified, as well as getting

assistance with papers and grading. A second function is relational development, i.e., the opportunity to get to know the instructor and have the instructor get to know the student. This is accomplished primarily through self-disclosure. A third function of OCC is to acknowledge others in passing and to fill uncomfortable silences when they are together. This is accomplished through small talk. A fourth function of OCC is to seek the advice of a respected and/or knowledgeable individual. Students ask for advice on careers and graduate school, as well as on personal issues. A fifth function is intellectual stimulation. Students and instructors do this by having intellectual discussion which may or may not be related to the specific course content. Finally, a sixth function of OCC is to secure favors. Students need favors from instructors, such as letters of recommendation, and instructors may need favors from students as well, such as the instructor who asked a student to help carry supplies to class. These functions, suggested by the content of the interactions studied, describe the most prominent features on the conceptual terrain of student-faculty OCC.

This exploratory study approaches OCC content in a new way--from the perspectives of the students describing OCC encounters. It highlights the complexity of OCC and provides six initial functions of OCC. Because of the limited scope of this study, further research is needed to refine and possible add to the categories of OCC and to expand on the functions of OCC.

References

Dallimore, E. J. (1995). Defining "quality" student-faculty interaction: A necessary step in understanding the student attrition equation. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, San Antonio, TX.

Feldman, K. A., & Newcomb, T. M. (1969). In the impact of college on students. Vol 2.. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fusani, D. S. (1994). "Extra-class" communication: Frequency, immediacy, self-disclosure, and satisfaction in student-faculty interaction outside the classroom. Journal of Applied communication Research, 22, 232-255.

Goldsmith, D., & Albrecht, T. (1993). In the impact of supportive communication networks on test anxiety and performance. Communication Education, 42, 142-158.

Higbee, J. L., & Dwinell, P. L. (1992). In the development of underprepared freshmen enrolled in a self-awareness course. Journal of College Student Development, 33, 26-33.

Jaasma, M. A., & Koper, R. J. (1999). In the relationship of student-faculty out-of-class communication to instructor immediacy and trust and to student motivation. Communication Education, 48, 41-47.

Nadler, M. K., & Nadler, L. B. (1995). In the roles of empathy, credibility, and sex in out of class communication between faculty and students. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, San Antonio, TX.

Pascarella, E. T. (1980). Student-faculty informal contact and college outcomes. Review of Educational Research, 50, 545-595.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P T. (1978). Student-faculty informal relationships and

freshman year educational outcomes. In the Journal of Educational Research, 71, 183-189.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1979). Student-faculty informal contact and college persistence: A further investigation. In the Journal of Educational Research, 72, 214-218.

Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T., & Hibel, J. (1978). Student-faculty interactional settings and their relationship to predicted academic performance. Journal of Higher Education, 49, 450-463.

Qualitative solutions & Research Pty Ltd. (1997). QSR NUD-IST 4: User guide. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Terenzini, P. T., & Pascarella, E. T. (1977). Voluntary freshman attrition and patterns of social and academic integration in a university: A test of a conceptual model. Research in Higher Education, 6, 25-43.

Theophilides, C., & Terenzini, P. T. (1981). In the relation between nonclassroom contact with faculty and students' perceptions of instructional quality. Research in Higher Education, 15, 255-269.

Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. Chicago: In the University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, R. C., Woods, L., & Gaff, J. G. (1974). Social-psychological accessibility and faculty-student interaction beyond the classroom. Sociology of Education, 47, 74-92.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
(OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC®

Reproduction Release

(Specific Document)

CS 510 574

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Talk to me: An examination of the content of out-of-class interaction between students and faculty	
Author(s): Marjorie A. Jaasma & Randall J. Koper	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: *International Comm. Conf.*

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

Conference Date: May, 2001

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE _____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE _____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE _____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
↑ [X]	↑ [ ]	↑ [ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only
Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.		

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: *Marjorie A. Jaasma*	Printed Name/Position/Title: *Marjorie A. Jaasma, Assoc. Professor*	
Organization/Address: *Communication Studies CSU Stanislaus, Turlock CA 95382*	Telephone: *209-667-3862*	Fax: *209-667-3525*
	E-mail Address: *jaasma @ athena.csustan.edu*	Date: *7/5/01*

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication (ERIC/REC).

ERIC/REC Clearinghouse
2805 E 10th St Suite 140
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
Telephone: 812-855-5847
Toll Free: 800-759-4723
FAX: 812-856-5512
e-mail: ericcs@indiana.edu
WWW: http://eric.indiana.edu

EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)