DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 632 CG 026 440

AUTHOR Freidman-Erickson, Sharon; Waller, Michelle P.
TITLE Enhancing the Usefulness of Students' Evaluations of Instruction.
PUB DATE Jun 95
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the APS Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (2nd, New York, NY, June 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Instruction; *Course Evaluation; *Instructional Effectiveness; Instructional Improvement; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; Teacher Effectiveness; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

A procedure for soliciting student evaluation feedback which is useful for improving college instruction is described. In four psychology courses, an end-of-course evaluation survey asked for community college students' opinions on five open-ended questions (N=1 instructor, 19 classes, 498 students). Responses were classified into 17 categories, and the percentage of responses falling into each category was calculated. The results allowed the instructor to determine the components of the courses that the students thought were most or least important to their learning and motivation, and gave the instructor some direction for possible instructional changes. This evaluation procedure provided insight into student's perspective which is not captured by formal, institutionally-based, student evaluation programs. (Four tables presenting results are appended.) (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 632

Enhancing the Usefulness of Students' Evaluations of Instruction

Sharon Friedman-Erickson and Michelle P. Waller

Department of Educational Psychology

University of Houston

Houston, Texas 77204

Presented at the 2nd Annual APS Institute on the Teaching of Psychology,

New York, NY, June 1995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. FRIEDMAN-
ERICKSON

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

026440

Abstract

We describe a procedure for soliciting student evaluation feedback which is useful for improving college instruction. In four psychology courses, an end-of-course evaluation survey asked for community college students' opinions on 5 open-ended questions (N = 1 instructor, 19 classes, 298 students). Responses were classified into 17 categories, and the percentage of responses falling into each category was calculated. The results allowed the instructor to determine the components of the courses that the students thought were most or least important to their learning and motivation, and gave the instructor some direction for possible instructional changes. This evaluation procedure provided insight into the students' perspective which is not captured by formal, institutionally-based, student evaluation programs.

Enhancing the Usefulness of Students' Evaluations of Instruction

The use of student evaluations of instruction is common practice in colleges and universities in this country. One function of student evaluations is to provide feedback to faculty for the purpose of improving instruction (Cohen, 1980; Marsh, 1984). According to Kulik and Kulik (1974), however, there is no convincing evidence that instructors use this feedback effectively to improve their courses or their teaching abilities.

Formal student evaluation surveys may include groups of items derived from logical analyses of the content of effective teaching or from theories of teaching and learning (Marsh, 1984). Students' ratings of such items are generally believed to provide reliable, valid, and useful information on the quality of courses and instruction (see Costin, Greenough, & Menges, 1971). Studies of the effectiveness of student feedback, however, show only a modest relationship between student ratings of instruction and improved ratings of instruction (see Cohen, 1980; Marsh, 1984). Perhaps the information given back to faculty is too impersonal or too global to give direction to possible instructional changes. Instructors may need information that is more personal or more specific to stimulate course redesign (Kulik & Kulik, 1974).

This paper describes a procedure for soliciting student evaluation feedback which is useful for improving college instruction. The procedure differs from the logical and theoretical approaches characteristic of formal, institutionally-based, student evaluation surveys in that it is an inductive or "student-driven" approach, and it provides an appraisal of specific instructional

techniques.

Format of the Evaluation

Student proctors administered an end-of-course evaluation survey to community college students enrolled in four psychology courses over several semesters (N = 1 instructor, 19 classes, 298 students). The survey asked for the individual student's opinion on five open-ended questions: (1) What were the major strengths of this course? (2) What were the major weaknesses of this course? (3) Which portion of this course did you benefit from the most? (4) Which portion of this course did you benefit from the least? (5) What changes would you recommend for this course?

Students were told that the results of the survey would be used by the instructor to modify instruction in subsequent semesters. Completion of the survey was voluntary, and participants responded anonymously. The student proctors collected the completed surveys and returned them to the instructor after the end of each semester.

Outcomes of the Evaluation

The instructor classified the array of responses to questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 into a smaller number of categories (interpretation of the fifth question is discussed below). Seventeen categories were developed by reading through the surveys, identifying the most frequent responses, and regrouping them until a meaningful set of categories was derived. Proceeding through the surveys from the four courses, the instructor coded each discrete response into one of the categories, and then calculated the percentage of responses for each category. The categories used in the present

analysis, along with the percentage of responses associated with each category, are shown in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Insert Tables 1-4 here

Examination of the tables allowed the instructor to readily determine the components of the courses that the students thought were most or least important to their learning and motivation. This information helped the instructor identify elements of the instruction which were effective (in the students' opinions) and, perhaps, should not be changed. It also stimulated the instructor to reevaluate, for example, the selection of textbooks, the amount of material covered in a semester, the chapters or topics assigned to the exclusion of others, and the emphasis placed on applications of the material.

Reading through students' responses to the fifth question gave the instructor some direction for possible instructional changes. The students' recommendations for changes, on one level, suggested how to modify the courses--either by reiterating their opinions about existing instructional techniques (e.g., "use a different textbook") or by introducing fresh ideas which had not previously been considered (e.g., "this course should have a laboratory section"). On another level, however, these recommendations prompted the instructor to reflect on broader issues, such as administrative constraints on course curricula (e.g., "eliminate the departmental final exam") and

the instructor's goals in teaching (e.g, "put more emphasis on abnormal behavior"), which impact instructional effectiveness.

Discussion

The "student-driven" evaluation procedure described in this paper proved to be meaningful and useful to the instructor for the purposes of course redesign and improvement of instructional effectiveness. Responses to the open-ended survey questions provided insight into the students' perspective which the instructor would not otherwise have been able to obtain. While the accuracy of students' judgments about instructional matters has been questioned (Feldman, 1976), students' opinions about courses and instructors make a unique contribution to the evaluation of teaching. Students are the consumers of the courses, and they appear to be capable of distinguishing certain qualities of instruction which increase their knowledge and motivation (Costin et al., 1971).

The student evaluation outcomes reported in this paper are closely tied to the content and design of four psychology courses taught by one instructor at a particular community college and, therefore, lack generality. On the other hand, this evaluation procedure, and its heuristic value, has applicability for instructors from a wide variety of disciplines and institutions for instructional improvement activities. It provides a within-instructor description and evaluation of the instructional process which is not captured by formal, institutionally-based, student evaluation programs (Marsh, 1984).

This student evaluation procedure is not meant to supplant formal, institutionally-based,

student evaluation programs. Rather, this procedure may be viewed as an augmentation of the feedback received from formal student ratings of instructional effectiveness. Also, empirically-derived and student-driven criteria of instructional effectiveness may be useful for developing rating scales which give back to instructors more specific information about how to modify their courses.

References

Cohen, P. (1980). Effectiveness of student-rating feedback for improving college instruction: A meta-analysis of findings. Research in Higher Education, 13, 321-341.

Costin, F., Greenough, W. T., & Menges, R. J. (1971). Student ratings of college teaching: Reliability, validity, and usefulness. Review of Educational Research, 41, 511-535.

Feldman, K. A. (1976). The superior college teacher from the students' view. Research in Higher Education, 5, 243-288.

Kulik, J. A., & Kulik, C-L. C. (1974). Student ratings of instruction. Teaching of Psychology, 1, 51-57.

Marsh, H. W. (1984). Students' evaluations of university teaching: Dimensionality, reliability, validity, potential biases, and utility. Journal of Educational Psychology, 76, 707-754.

Table 1

Percentage of Responses for "Major Strengths"

	Introductory Psychology	Child Development	Lifespan Development	Adult Development	All Classes
Instructor	11.2	10.2	4.2	14.6	10.0
Lecture	8.8	6.6	8.3	12.7	8.4
Discussion	11.2	13.2	2.8	9.1	10.3
Activities	4.0	4.2	5.6	1.8	4.1
Videos	1.6	6.6	12.5	5.5	6.0
Textbook	3.2	6.0	2.8	1.8	4.1
Objectives	9.6	6.6	2.8	3.6	6.4
Testing	0.8	6.0	0.0	1.8	2.9
Written assignment	0.0	3.6	6.9	1.8	2.9
Subject matter	22.4	16.8	27.8	18.2	20.5
Specific topics	9.6	4.8	2.8	1.8	5.5
Organization/planning	4.8	6.6	4.2	5.5	5.5
Management/interaction	2.4	3.6	4.2	7.3	3.8
Applications/personal	5.6	2.4	8.3	7.3	5.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nothing/none	0.8	0.6	1.4	0.0	0.7
No response	4.0	2.4	5.6	7.3	4.1
Total number of responses	125	167	72	55	419

Table 2

Percentage of Responses for "Major Weaknesses"

	Introductory Psychology	Child Development	Lifespan Development	Adult Development	All Classes
Instructor	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lecture	3.9	9.5	8.8	5.3	7.0
Discussion	0.0	1.7	1.8	0.0	1.0
Activities	2.9	0.9	5.3	0.0	2.2
Videos	1.0	1.7	1.8	0.0	1.3
Textbook	2.9	20.6	15.8	40.4	17.9
Objectives	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Testing	5.9	4.3	3.5	2.6	4.5
Written assignment	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.3
Subject matter	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Specific topics	14.7	6.9	5.3	5.3	9.0
Organization/planning	20.6	19.8	15.8	13.2	18.5
Management/interaction	5.9	6.0	3.5	2.6	5.1
Applications/personal	2.0	3.5	7.0	0.0	3.2
Other	6.9	7.8	0.0	2.6	5.4
Nothing/none	19.6	12.9	15.8	7.9	15.0
No response	13.7	6.9	14.0	0.0	9.6
Total number of responses	102	116	57	38	313

Table 3

Percentage of Responses for "Benefit Most"

	Introductory Psychology	Child Development	Lifespan Development	Adult Development	All Classes
Instructor	0.8	0.7	1.5	0.0	0.8
Lecture	3.3	5.6	2.9	2.2	4.0
Discussion	4.9	11.2	1.5	13.0	7.7
Activities	0.0	8.4	4.4	4.4	4.5
Videos	2.5	2.8	8.8	2.2	3.7
Textbook	1.6	1.4	2.9	0.0	1.6
Objectives	2.5	3.5	7.4	0.0	3.4
Testing	1.6	2.8	1.5	6.5	2.6
Written assignment	5.7	13.3	1.5	6.5	7.9
Subject matter	14.8	10.5	7.4	6.5	10.8
Specific topics	44.3	26.6	44.1	34.8	36.4
Organization/planning	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Management/interaction	0.0	1.4	1.5	2.2	1.1
Applications/personal	13.9	9.1	8.8	17.4	11.6
Other	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.3
Nothing/none	1.6	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.8
No response	2.5	1.4	5.9	4.4	2.9
Total number of responses	122	143	68	46	379

Table 4

Percentage of Responses for "Benefit Least"

	Introductory Psychology	Child Development	Lifespan Development	Adult Development	All Classes
Instructor	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lecture	1.0	4.3	3.9	0.0	2.6
Discussion	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	1.0
Activities	2.0	5.2	5.8	0.0	3.6
Videos	2.0	8.6	0.0	5.6	4.6
Textbook	2.0	4.3	0.0	22.2	4.9
Objectives	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Testing	7.0	4.3	0.0	2.8	4.3
Written assignment	1.0	3.5	3.9	0.0	2.3
Subject matter	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Specific topics	46.0	25.0	34.6	30.6	34.2
Organization/planning	2.0	0.0	1.9	5.6	1.7
Management/interaction	1.0	3.5	1.9	0.0	2.0
Applications/personal	0.0	5.2	0.0	2.8	2.3
Other	1.0	0.9	1.9	0.0	1.0
Nothing/none	19.0	16.4	23.1	22.2	19.1
No response	15.0	16.4	23.1	8.3	16.1
Total number of responses	100	116	52	36	304