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A SURVEY OF COLLEGE STUDENT PREFERENCES FOR FACULTY TEACHING STYLES

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Abstract

The results of the application of idiosyncratic goal evaluation to college professorial styles was measured using the ratings of 75 education and engineering students. Four styles--teacher, researcher, socialite, and administrator--were operationally defined and ratings correlated with student demographic data (sex, college class level, preferences for structured class organication, size of hometown, G.P.A., and self-rated personality). The data analysis showed the most preferred professorial style ($p < .01$) was that of teacher. Engineering students showed no preference for any one style after that of teacher, whereas education students significantly preferred ($p < .05$) the professorial style of researcher. The style of researcher also revealed significant differences using G.P.A. ($p < .025$), college major ($p < .05$), and population of the students' hometowns ($p < .025$) as independent variables. The findings have implications for the evaluation of professors in the college setting by students, colleagues, and administrators.

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Goal diffusion is defined as a phenomenon by which a particular goal, aim, or activity is perceived differently by multiple groups engaged in evaluation or performance rating. The activity being evaluated in this case is college professorial style, usually evaluated by college students, colleagues, and administrators. All of these persons judge college professorial style by their own criteria of effectiveness. Oftentimes, according to these differing criteria, the individual professor has not been equally successful. Thus, goal diffusion can lead to professional and psychological vulnerability in that a professor cannot satisfy multiple criteria simultaneously.

This paper deals mainly with the preferences of college students since, in the final analysis, they are the consumers of professorial activity and are directly affected by professorial style. French (1957) measured the characteristics of good college teaching as perceived by the students. The three highest ranked characteristics reported were: (a) interprets abstract ideas and theories clearly, (b) gets students interested in the subject, and (c) increases skills in thinking. A more recent measure of effective college teaching vis-á-vis the students' criteria was completed by Crawford and Bradshaw (1968) in which the three characteristics rated were: (a) thorough knowledge of subject matter, (b) planned and well organized lecture, and (c) enthusiastic,

energetic, lively interest in teaching. In an early study (Drucker & Remmers, 1951), the alumni 10 years out of college were asked to state the highest qualities of college teaching. Although phrased somewhat differently, their interpretations and preferences did not vary from the preferences of students currently enrolled. These studies suggest that preferred college teaching depends on characteristics of personality, interpersonal relations, and knowledge of subject matter.

The effects of research publication on effective teaching, as perceived by students, is still an open question since some studies have shown a positive correlation between the two (Bresler, 1968; Stallings & Singhal, 1969), while others have shown no relationship (Voeks, 1962; Hayes, 1971). College professorial style as perceived by administrators and colleagues, however, may suggest a different rating system since their perception of the goal is different from that of the student. The administrator oftentimes sees the college professor making contributions to the college, i.e., in a service role. Colleagues, on the other hand, might perceive the effectiveness of their colleagues as the quality of contributions to the profession, i.e., research. The "publish or perish" syndrome is an important factor when evaluating forces at work within the academic community. Maslow and Zimmerman (1956) indicated that colleagues equate good teaching with creativeness.

This wide array of constituencies which the college teacher must attempt to satisfy in terms of effectiveness and style preference has led to a lack of clarity and focus in goal definition. Although some studies report a positive correlation between school administrators' and students' ratings (Maslow & Zimmerman, 1956; Costin, 1966), it is

still essential that college professors consider the demands of each of the academic groups which in one way or another state their preference when rating style effectiveness.

This multiple perception of goals has been shown to exist within the educational setting at precollege levels (Sieber & Wilder, 1967). Assuming that goal diffusion also exists at the macro college level, i.e., between administrators, students, alumni, and colleagues, then the question should be asked: Does the phenomenon also exist on the micro level? That is, does diffusion exist between different types of students who are the ultimate consumers? Yamamoto and Dizney (1966, 1968) and Dizney and Yamamoto (1967) divided different types of students into groups to determine how each group would rate the effectiveness of college training. They have investigated student preference for four general types of professors: "researcher, socialite, administrator, and teacher." Each type was differentiated according to his interpersonal relationship with the student. The types can be summarized as follows: (a) socialite - acts as an advisor to a fraternity, is an active member of a lodge, socializes with faculty and nonfaculty alike, frequently attends plays, concerts, parties, and conventions; (b) researcher - directs large-scale research projects, associates himself with other active researchers, presents papers at professional conventions and publishes articles; (c) teacher - acts as an academic advisor to students, devotes large amounts of time to the preparation of his lectures, works with students and colleagues toward more effective instruction; and (d) administrator - has been interested in and aspires to a high office in college administration, works with the registrar, deans, treasurer, and other administrators.

All other noncritical style descriptors were the same across professor types. A complete behavioral and operationalized description can be found in Yamamoto and Dizney (1966). In this first Yamamoto study, 300 secondary education students at Kent State University reported the most preferred role was that of "teacher" followed by "researcher." The latter gained in preference from the junior through senior years, while "teacher" and "socialite" indicated an opposite trend. The main findings were replicated in the second study (Dizney & Yamamoto, 1967) with 54 graduate education students and again in a third study with 90 students at the University of Iowa (Yamamoto & Dizney, 1968). On the basis of earlier studies (Jacob, 1957; Kerr, 1963), one hypothesis was that the personality traits of the students would correlate with their style preference. All three Yamamoto and Dizney studies included this hypothesis and attempted to correlate personality variables of the students with their rating characteristics, but no strong associations were found. Yonge and Sassenrath (1968) also studied the relationship and found little evidence to support such a correlation.

This lack of correlational support between student's personality traits and teaching style preference would tend to negate the value of obtaining individualized student ratings. Yet, further evidence should be gathered; a replication could be conducted using students from a different institution, replacing the personality instrument with a student biographical data questionnaire.

There are two experimental reasons for the modified replication. First, systematic biographical data has not been reported with the dependent variable of college teaching style preference. Second, the earlier studies were conducted during the late 1960's when students were

generally denied significant decision-making powers in curriculums, school priorities, and expenditure of funds. This present study gathered data in 1973 which reflects a change in student behavior. That is, there is a movement toward student participation in faculty and boards of trustees meetings, and there is a tightening and shifting of the job market, both of which might have had an effect on student priorities. One of the questions this study addresses itself to is whether that change in priorities also is reflected in a change in student preference of college teaching style.

Method

Subjects

The biographical data and preference characteristics survey was obtained from 75 students enrolled in undergraduate education and engineering courses at Bucknell University. This randomly chosen population included 13 freshmen, 37 sophomores, 15 juniors, and 10 seniors. The 48 males and 27 females were all volunteers.

Procedure

The College Professors Style Questionnaire (Yamamoto & Dizney, 1966) and the biographical data form were administered and analyzed during the spring semester of 1973. The College Professors Style Questionnaire is an 85-item five-choice, Likert-type rating scale. It is composed of eight brief descriptions of professors from education and engineering colleges. Because previous research (Yamamoto & Dizney, 1968) found high correlations between these two teaching areas, this study's questionnaire was reduced to include only four types of professors in the same college as the class participating in the study. The subjects

in the education classes were given the descriptions of four professors from the College of Arts and Sciences while the students in the engineering classes were given the descriptions of four professors from the College of Engineering. The four types were presented in random order, and each subject was asked to rate his preference for each professor type on a scale ranging from "strongly reject" (5 points) through "neutral" (3 points) to "strongly prefer" (1 point).

Results

Table 1 shows the overall rejection and preference characteristics for the education students (N = 44), and the engineering students (N = 31). Chi-square analysis between education and engineering students revealed no differences in their response patterns on preference of professor style. The results in every case, regardless of biographical differences, continually support the professor style of the teacher. A preference test was performed using socialite, researcher, and administrator for the education majors and for the engineering majors. The engineering students showed no preference for any one style after that of teacher, whereas the education students significantly preferred ($X^2 = 7.10$, $\underline{df} = 2$, $\underline{p} < .05$) professor style of researcher.

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The total student sample was then divided in half on G.P.A., i.e., college professor style preference with students' G.P.A. lower and higher than 2.8 (on a four-point scale). For three of the styles there were no differences; for researcher there was a significant chi-square

(X^2 = 7.41, df = 2, p < .025). The style of researcher was a pivotal one in the analysis, in that a significant difference was also reported between lower division education and engineering students (X^2 = 6.73, df = 2, p < .05). There were no differences between these groups at the upper division level. The lower division engineering students were more accepting of this style than the education students. The population size of the students' hometown also affected the acceptance pattern of researchers' style (X^2 = 7.84, df = 2, p < .025). The hometown with a population of less than 10,000 took a more neutral position toward this style than the students from larger cities. The size of the hometown also affected the acceptance pattern of the socialite style. The students from larger hometowns accepted this style more than the students from smaller hometowns (X^2 = 7.36, df = 2, p < .05).

Discussion

This study supports the Yamamoto and Dizney studies in that there is an overwhelming preference for a professor who sees himself, and is seen, as a teacher rather than researcher, administrator, or socialite. The study also adds to the Yamamoto and Dizney studies in that this preference was found to exist across sex, class level, and student self-reported personality ratings. These results, combined with the early studies supporting the professor's style of teacher, suggest that one of the criteria for hiring a college teacher should be prior successful teaching experience.

Unfortunately, it is not common practice in many colleges or universities to ask students their opinions when hiring new staff

members. This places the goal of effective teaching toward the back of the list of hiring criteria. What emerges as critical in the hiring of new faculty becomes past publications, a colleague goal (since colleagues do most of the hiring), followed by contributions to the university, an administrative goal, and finally, the effectiveness of teaching, a student goal.

This and previously cited studies demonstrated that students prefer the faculty style of teacher. Perhaps if students are allowed into the decision-making process, three things might emerge. First, students will not feel alienated or in a conflict relationship with faculty. Presumably, the relationship should be a helping one, rather than a manipulative one. Second, the students will feel as if they are a part of the system and begin to respond toward the university as a partner, rather than a transient. Third, the faculty members may also begin to realize their norm behavior toward the style of teacher which will strengthen the interrelationship between students and faculty since their goals will be one and the same.

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TABLE 1

Percentage of Students' Preference and Rejection

Responses to Professor Style: College Major*

Students	Socialite	Researcher	Teacher	Administrator	X^2	P
Education Majors						
Reject	29.5	22.7	0	22.7	11.73	< .01
Neutral	54.5	45.5	2.3	59.0	22.13	< .005
Prefer	15.9	31.8	97.7	18.2	47.89	< .001
Engineering Majors						
Reject	32.2	38.7	0	41.9	12.20	< .01
Neutral	51.6	25.8	3.2	29.0	13.30	< .005
Prefer	16.6	35.5	96.8	29.0	27.00	< .005

*df = 3