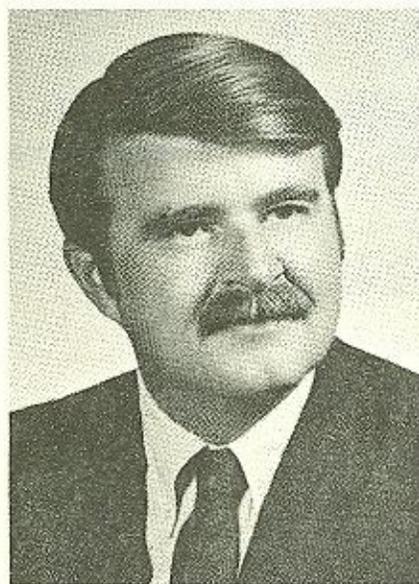


Using nearly 10,000 college students, this study isolated six factors of an instructor's behavior which influence how much students learn and whether they would take another course from the instructor. The results provide suggestions for improving your instruction.

# the goal of classroom instruction: entertainment or learning

by Don B. Croft



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Recent events on and off campuses across the country have brought increased attention to university teaching, and have provided a renewed impetus for faculty to examine both their course content and methods of classroom instruction. The emphasis upon improving university instruction has arisen from a variety of sources: decreased student enrollment, faculty merit and tenure decisions, contentions of non-relevance from students, emphasis upon competency-based instruction, and of course a continuing faculty interest in instructional improvement.

One basic component of many instructional improvement programs at the college and university level is the use of student rating forms. In spite of conflicting evidence associated with the reliability, validity, and usefulness of student ratings, the information obtained is often used by faculty as one among several sources of information for improving classroom instruction.<sup>1</sup> Then the question is asked: "How may student feedback be used to improve classroom instruction?" Student rating forms are often of two basic types; evaluative or descriptive. Evaluative forms in most instances simply report student opinion of how "good" or "bad" were various aspects of the classroom instruction. Descriptive forms, on the other hand, may indicate what is occurring in the classroom but may not necessarily provide information for improving instruction. Moreover, the particular attributes included in any single student rating form may not span the instructional attributes that prior research has associated with effective teaching.

The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between descriptive attributes of classroom instruction and overall evaluative ratings students reported for university classrooms. The two overall ratings students employed to evaluate the classroom included: 1) a self-report of the **amount the student learned**, and 2) how much the student **would like to take another course from the instructor**. Although these criteria for classroom instructional effectiveness were primarily "student outcome oriented," the findings might offer instructors information for guiding the direction of a self-initiated instructional improvement program.

An instrument, the University Classroom Description Questionnaire (UCDQ), was developed to obtain the students' description of "how often" certain instructor behaviors occurred and to obtain the students' overall ratings of the course. For three successive years, different pilot forms of the instrument were administered to a total of 9,623

university students and analyzed to identify specific clusters of questionnaire items.

The statistical techniques of factor analysis and varimax rotation were used to select the items which were retained in the final form of the UCDQ. The retained items obtained an average factor loading of .68 (range = .49-.81) on the appropriate factor, and an average of .11 (range = .00-.39) on each of the other factors. Thus, both the criterion of .40 or above recommended by Kaiser,<sup>2</sup> and the criteria of Thurstone's simple structure were met.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the UCDQ was considered a "factorially pure" measuring instrument. On the basis of the analyses conducted, the following six factors, e.g., clusters of items, were named and defined:

**Enthusiasm** — refers to expressed enjoyment in teaching, interesting teaching style, enthusiasm and humor. The "showmanship" of the instructor.

**Class participation** — describes the instructor's ability to stimulate class discussion, encourage dialogue, and allow students to express their own views.

**Course difficulty** — refers to course difficulty with reference to pace, complexity of concepts, and amount of work required to learn the material.

**Clarity of presentation** — refers to organization of presentations, appropriate level of terminology, complexity expressed understandably, and the material covered agrees with course objectives.

**Objectivity of exams** — refers to fairness in grading, balanced coverage, and sufficient review and time given prior to the exam.

**Individual assistance** — describes the availability, friendliness and rapport of the instructor with individual students.

Each one of the constructs above has been discussed as an attribute of classroom instruction by one or more of the following investigators; Deshpande,<sup>4</sup> Isaacson,<sup>5</sup> Remmers,<sup>6</sup> Hildebrand,<sup>7</sup> Coffman,<sup>8</sup> Gibb,<sup>9</sup> Ryans,<sup>10</sup> and Hoyt.<sup>11</sup> Although the investigators identified a somewhat different cluster of items, each cluster appears to be representative of a similar underlying construct. The particular set of six constructs obtained in the study reported here, however, were the ones which emerged after the series of factor analysis with the sample of students in the Southwest United States.

Now, in what manner are the six attributes of instructor behavior associated with the overall ratings reported by students? A multiple regression analysis was used to identify how each construct, in and of itself, was associated with the overall ratings as well as how "predictable" the criteria were when all the constructs were taken together. The results of the multiple regression analyses are presented in Table 1.

First of all, note the magnitude of the multiple correlation coefficients, which are respectively, .65 and .82 for predicting **Amount learned** and **Take another course from the instructor**. Both of the multiple correlation coefficients are significant and account for a sufficient amount of the variance to warrant discussion of the individual predictors. In other words, the item clusters identified by the factor analyses were relevant predictors of the student ratings.

Table 1  
Partial Correlations of Instructor Attributes with Overall Ratings

Instructor Attribute	Overall Ratings by Students	
	Amount learned in the course	Take another course from the instructor
Enthusiasm (rr = .75) <sup>1</sup>	.01	.33*
Class participation (rr = .72)	.12 *	.04
Course difficulty (rr = .58)	.08	-.09
Clarity of presentation (rr = .66)	.70 *	.35*
Objectivity of exams (rr = .62)	.00	.08
Individual assistance (rr = .67)	.09	.20*
Multiple correlation	.65*	.82*

\*significant at or beyond .05

1. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient

An examination of Table 1 indicates that a significant contributor to the **amount learned in the course** by the students was the instructors' **clarity of presentation** (beta = .70). It appears that the organization and presentation of the class materials remains an important stimulus to learning in spite of the current de-emphasis upon lecturing and the stress upon student initiated instruction. Note, however, that the instructors' ability to elicit discussion and **class participation** (beta = .12) is also significantly associated with self-reports of student learning. Thus, dialogue between class members and the instructor serves to enhance the amount learned by students, and one may therefore infer that instructor and student discussion of course content helps students learn.

When the partial correlations for wanting to **take another course from the instructor** were examined a different style of instructor behavior emerged. Apparently, in addition to the main contributor of **clarity of presentation** (beta = .35) two other attributes were also important. These attributes were instructor **enthusiasm** (beta = .33) and the **individual assistance** (beta = .20) that the instructor provided to students. Thus, the "entertaining" facet of instruction was the impetus for students to want to take additional courses from the same instructor. This finding may have implications for instructors who want to increase class enrollments.

It is important to note that the correlation between the two overall ratings, **amount learned** and **take another course** was very high (r = .70). However, in spite of the high correlation between the two overall criteria, different sets of classroom attributes were associated with each rating. Accordingly, the overall ratings are sufficiently independent to infer that they

describe different outcomes for the class. These two outcomes have implications for the direction an instructor takes for improving classroom instruction.

Thus, in general, the results indicate that if the instructor organized course content, presented the materials clearly, and involved students in class discussions, then the students reported that the **amount learned** was high. On the other hand, if the instructor in addition to organizing course content and presenting the material clearly was enthusiastic, and gave individual assistance, then students indicated high interest in taking another course from the instructor.

Accordingly, the following advice can be offered to instructors as a guide for a self-directed instructional improvement program. If student learning is the most important outcome you expect from classroom instruction, then spend time upon the improvement of course content. In addition, if you include the goal of having students take additional courses from you, then develop the "entertaining" qualities of your classroom presentation.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Frank Costin, et. al. "Student Ratings of College Teaching: Reliability, Validity, and Usefulness," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (December, 1971), pp. 511-535.

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3. L. L. Thurstone, *The Vectors of Mind*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), pp. XV + 266.

4. A. S. Deshpande, et. al. "Student Perceptions of Engineering Instructor Behaviors and Their Relationships to the Evaluation of Instruction and Courses," *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 55 (1964), pp. 344-351.

6. J. J. Remmers, *Manual of Instructions for the Purdue Rating Scale for Instruction* (Revised Edition), (West Lafayette, Indiana: University Bookstore, Purdue University, 1965).

7. M. Hildebrand and R. C. Wilson, *Report to the Faculty on Effective University Teaching and Its Evaluation* (Davis, California: The University of California at Davis, 1970).

8. W. E. Coffman, "Determining Students' Concepts of Effective Teaching from Their Ratings of Instructors," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 45 (1954), pp. 277-286.

9. C. A. Gigg, "Classroom Behavior of the College Teacher," *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 15 (1955), pp. 254-263.

10. David G. Ryans, *Characteristics of Teachers: A Research Study* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1963), pp. 415-441.

11. Donald P. Hoyt, *Improving Instruction through Student Feedback* (Manhattan, Kansas: Office of Educational Research, Kansas State University, 1969).

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The lesson of the past may . . . only confirm what both radicals and conservatives have often said but have not always really believed—that man does not live by bread alone. Affluence does not buy morale, a sense of community, even a quiescent conformity. Instead, it may only permit larger numbers of people to express their existential unhappiness because they are no longer crushed by the burden of the economic struggle.

Robert L. Heilbroner, **An Inquiry into the Human Prospect**  
New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974, p. 70