Student Perception on Professors' Teaching Attributes in a Post-Secondary Hospitality Management Degree Program

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Abstract

This study characterizes how students in higher education perceive their professors' teaching attributes. This paper draws on a survey and includes information collected from students in their junior and senior year pursuing a Bachelor degree in Hospitality Management at a post-secondary institution. The study presents different significant areas of student perception on their professors' teaching attributes, what students expect from their professors in terms of teaching, and what they do not care for. The study can serve as an identifier of how to bridge the gap between students and professors in higher education institutions to increase the quality of learning.

Introduction

This study was conducted as part of the EDA 7416 course requirement with the purpose of examining the perception of higher education students on their professors' teaching attributes. This study assumes that professors in higher education teach classes according to their discipline, research, knowledge, and accreditation. What we are not sure of is how the information is reaching the students. With the assumption that quality teaching attributes can contribute to the process of learning in the classroom, this study is seeking to look at the perception of students on teaching attributes and shed light on what students expect against what is actually delivered to them by their professors.

The study was based on a sample of higher education students in their junior and senior year studying hospitality management at a regionally accredited university. There was a general assumption in the study that freshmen higher education students may not be able to accurately answer the questions presented to them in the survey since they do not have the experience of taking a variety of classes with different professors since they are at the beginning stages of their pursuit of their higher education degrees.

Statement of Problem

Ideally, faculty should hold the minimum educational requirements for any available teaching position in higher education. This varies from one educational institution to another. For example, some colleges and universities require a minimum of a Master's degree from all faculty while other institutions require a terminal degree. This varies usually according to accreditation requirements. In more career driven higher education institutions, there may be some sort of industry experience requirement. For example, some institutions may require a minimum of ten

years of management experience from all candidates, and a minimum of a Master's degree. While the credentials of faculty were verified, their teaching attributes and performance in the classroom remains unknown and it is generally unveiled through student feedback after several classes the faculty taught.

Faculty in higher education may have extensive teaching experience, but such experience may not necessarily be of high quality level and include the ability to relay information to students in a pedagogic manner. The fact that faculty taught in other academic institutions in the past does not guarantee that their teaching attributes are advanced and relevant and that the information is reaching the students.

Purpose of Study

For the purpose of this study, an "effective teacher" is defined as one that can hold students' attention and deliver the course material in an interesting and engaging manner, while meeting all course objectives and outcomes. Studies suggest that students in higher education perform better in an engaging classroom environment. An effective teacher should possess the ability to deliver the course material in such manner, hence defined as an "effective teacher" for the purpose of this study.

In his article "A Good Teacher", Drazen (1996) states that he was fortunate to have motivating teachers not only in high school but also in college and medical school. "In college, the inspiring figure was a professor of electrical engineering, who taught me to use my reasoning ability to solve problems and how to use the solutions to improve our understanding of physical processes." (p. 13). This could serve as an example of what the student perceived to be effective and necessary for the learning outcome, and what the student could take out of the class with the

specific professor. Additionally, Drazen (1996) reveals that: "I learned that if I did not really understand the problem, I could not find a true solution to it. In medical school, I was lucky enough to study with a professor of physiology who taught me that the search for truth meant accumulating an understanding that would let one reason from observations to root causes. All these teachers were nurturing in that they demanded the best from us and would not settle for less; they had the gift to motivate their students." (p. 13). The fact that Drazen made the connection between motivation and effective teaching is significant for this study as it will be unveiled in the conclusion.

According to Sowell (2002): "A "good" teacher is not defined as a teacher whose students learn more. A "good" teacher is someone who exemplifies the prevailing dogmas of the educational establishment. The general public probably thinks of good teachers as people like Marva Collins or Jaime Escalante, whose minority students met and exceeded national standards. But such bottom-line criteria have long since disappeared from most public schools." (pp. 9-9)

Sowell's choice of words "prevailing dogmas of the educational establishment" serves as an example of the importance of good teachers aligning with their institutional goals, and Drazen provides a solid example of how good teachers can positively influence their students.

Research Questions

Ideally, faculty in higher educational institutions should possess the minimum educational requirements as related to their respected fields of teaching, as well as some sort of industry experience, but can they actually teach a class?

What is the student perception of their professors' teaching attributes in higher education institutions?

Additional research question:

Once student perceptions have been identified and coded, is there a way to bridge the gap between student expectations and faculty teaching attributes?

Significance of Study

The significance of the study is to discover how students perceive their professors in higher education considering current generations in the classroom. Although faculty may be experts in their respected fields, the purpose of this study is to offer a connection between the student and the professor based on the student's perception of their professor's ability to deliver a subject matter in a classroom environment while captivating all students' attention, engaging students, and treating students in a respectful manner. Therefore, finding out the professor's teaching attributes can potentially streamline the connection between student and professor expectations from the learning process.

Role of Researcher

Student perception on their faculty member's teaching attributes may unveil information on how higher education institutions can validate the teaching attributes of a potential faculty member at the hiring point. Finding information on how students perceive the teaching attributes of their professors may offer a better understanding of administration and faculty in higher education institutions on how content should be delivered utilizing the faculty teaching attributes.

Throughout the study, the research remains unbiased in order to allow students to share their sincere thoughts on how they perceive an effective teacher and what the attributes of an

effective teacher are as oppose to an ineffective teacher. Open-ended questions were distributed using a survey that stressed anonymity of the information shared. The researcher then collected the data, coded it, and drew conclusions.

Methodology

Research Design

The study design is a typical case (Miles & Huberman, 2013) which is appropriate to collect data that might answer the research questions. The data-gathering technique used two open-ended questions in a survey distributed to a total of 98 junior and senior students seeking a Bachelor degree in Hospitality Management at Johnson & Wales University, North Miami campus.

Sampling Plan

Site. Johnson & Wales University (JWU), North Miami campus was chosen as the site of the study since the researcher had access to the sample as a full time faculty of The Hospitality College. Johnson & Wales University, established 1914, is a private nonprofit NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges)-accredited institution. The university offers an education model designed to inspire professional success and lifelong intellectual growth. The university educates 17,000 students on average from nearly 100 countries in more than 40 undergraduate, graduate, online, continuing education and accelerated programs in arts & sciences, business, culinary arts, hospitality, technology and education. The university main campus is located in Providence, Rhode Island with three additional regional campuses in Denver, Colorado; North Miami, Florida; and Charlotte, North Carolina.

Sample. The researcher identified a total of 98 junior and senior students to participate and represent the sample. Freshmen and sophomore students were excluded from the sample with the understanding that they do not have as much experience taking a variety of college level courses to elaborately answer the open-ended questions of how they perceive their professors' teaching attributes. A total of 42 students responded, which translates to a 43 percent response rate.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations for this study include the sample size, accuracy of responses, willingness to fill out the survey, and the fact that the survey contains open-ended questions. The sample size is relatively small and includes a total of 42 students who responded to the survey. The survey was distributed among a total of 98 students in the same higher education institution. While the researcher assumes the information provided by the students is accurate, the fact that some students provided inaccurate information should be considered. Additionally, participants may have scaled down their responses since the questions were open-ended and not guided or short answer questions.

Delimitations for this study include the fact that question were open-ended, accessibility to sample, accessibility to technology to distribute the survey, and that no IRB was required for this exercise. Open-ended questions may promote students to elaborate on their own thoughts and provide information according to their honest opinion. In order to deliver the survey accurately and on a timely manner, the researcher utilized the classroom electronic management system available to classes the researcher teaches at the higher education institution the researcher is employed as a full time faculty.

Data Collection

Data was collected utilizing a survey with a total of two open-ended questions intended to have students think of how they perceive the teaching attributes of their professors. The open-ended questions read as follows:

1) Think of a class you have taken at this institution where you felt the professor was a good teacher.
   What did the professor do to motivate you to learn?

   Describe what teaching strategies contributed to understanding the course subject.

   Please refrain from mentioning the professor name or other identifying attributes.

2) Think of a class you have taken at this institution where you felt the professor was not a good teacher.
   What did the professor do to demotivate you to learn?

   Describe what the professor should have done to contribute to your understanding of the course subject.

   Please refrain from mentioning the professor name or other identifying attributes.

   The survey was distributed through an electronic classroom management system (Blackboard) and students were informed that the process is and will remain anonymous. The survey was purposely designed and distributed in a way where the researcher cannot identify the student respondent. This was designed to allow students to share their honest thoughts on their professors' teaching attributes, reducing the fear of information leaking.

Data Analysis

First cycle coding. The sample yielded a total of 42 responses (43% return rate) which was then analyzed using first cycle coding. The following codes were used for the initial process of data analysis:

1. (P) PASSION
2. (A) ATTITUDE
3. (M) MOTIVATE
4. (KN) KNOWLEDGABLE
5. (PR) PROFESSIONAL
6. (C) CHALLENGING
7. (I) INTERACTIVE
8. (UNK) UNKNOWLEDGABLE
9. (DISR) DISRESPECTFUL
10. (DEM) DEMOTIVATES
11. (DISO) DISORGANIZED
12. (PRO) PROCRASTINATE
13. (IRR) IRRELEVANT

Categories. Emerging themes came out of the first cycle coding where it was evident that the following categories contained the most responses from the sample, and it is then assumed those categories mean the most to the participating students in the survey. The codes were narrowed down under the following umbrella categories:

1. (C) CARE
2. (DNC) DO NOT CARE
3. (KN) KNOWLEDGABLE
4. (IRR) IRRELEVANT

Care (C) includes the professor passion and motivation to teach. These emerging themes were intertwined and repeated often. Do Not Care (DNC) represents procrastination,

demotivates, and disorganized. Knowledgeable (KN) represents the knowledge on the topic, challenging, and interactive. Irrelevant (IRR) represents the opposite of knowledgeable, where the professor appears to be unknowledgeable on the topic and therefore irrelevant delivering the content.

Reliability. The sample relates to students in a higher education institution pursuing a Bachelor degree in hospitality management. The data represents students in higher education and it can be assumed to be a representation of how students perceive their professors' teaching attributes across higher education, although the sample is of students pursuing a degree in hospitality management. It is to be determined through future research on this topic if this sample indeed represents students across higher education in different disciplines other than hospitality management.

Validity. The study was conducted at a well-established, regionally accredited university. Students were encouraged to share their honest opinion and freedom of thoughts in answering the open-ended survey questions. It is assumed that the information in the sample is valid since there is no evident reason to believe otherwise. There was no motive for students to share invalid information or information that may not be of truth in its nature.

Generalizability. The study represents a relatively small sample size in a post-secondary hospitality degree program. There are general assumptions for higher education based on the sample and research for this study. It is important to keep in mind the sample size and understand the assumptions of this study are generalized. Future research is advised.

Findings

The findings of this qualitative study reveal that students who contributed to the study are looking for professors who are knowledgeable and exemplify passion and motivation to teach that translate to how much the professor cares about the students and the learning process. The study also revealed that students do not care for the exact opposite, which is when their professor is irrelevant and does not care.

Care

The majority of participating students in this study shared that a motivating professor that is passionate about the topic will encourage them to learn and take interest in the course topic and the student academic progress. Responses included the following comments: "*In my view when an instructor is passionate in the subject matter they are presenting that energy is then passed on to the students.*" It is interesting to note the passing of energy, where a passionate professor will transfer the passion, possibly knowingly, to the students. They can feel the passion and it motivates them to learn. Additionally, some participants indicated that: "*His passion to the subject came through as he was lecturing to the class and made the [learning] experience much more enjoyable.*" The word "enjoyable" was interesting to see in connotation to learning. It can be assumed that when the professor cares about the class, learning becomes enjoyable as oppose to the general student population perception that taking a college class is not usually enjoyable.

Additional information revealed that professors who care about their students care about them not only in the classroom, but also outside the formal classroom setting: "*Also, he was passionate and eager to help outside of the classroom.*" This is an interesting comment to see the truthfulness and how professors genuinely care for their student learning process, and can

identify that caring about the student progress should continue outside the formal setting of a classroom.

The study also reveals the importance of motivation in the classroom: "*I need a professor who is going to push me*"; "*The professor motivates me (the class) each week by showing his face through video and with a cheerful smile and charisma. That motivates me*!"; "T*he class I was most motivated to learn was one where the professor was most excited about teaching and motivated everyone to achieve and be successful.*" The responses indicate the importance of motivating students and it appears that motivation should be on an continuous basis and not sporadic: "*The professor was relentless with his efforts to motivate the entire class from day one up until the final exam.*" This indicates the importance of consistency in motivating students. It appears they desire constant motivation, someone who is going to cheer them up and believe in them, similar to a coach or a mentor rather than a professor. Hence, it could be assumed that professors who are looking to connect with their students should wear multiple hats and act as a coach as well as a teacher.

Do not care

In this category, students reported professors who do not care generally show signs of procrastination with their own work and on-time grading, professors who demotivate students, and professors who are disorganized. Some distinct comments about how professors demotivate students include: "*A professor that demotivated me was my [course name] professor because he went strictly from the book with no real life connections to the class and no real passion for the subject he was teaching.*" This particular comment is interesting since the student made the connection between teaching from the textbook to real life experience to passion. Three

additional students made similar connections. An additional interesting comment indicated a professor who walked into class and told the students he is ill prepared.

Disorganized professors also feel into this category as students perceive they do not care about the class: "*A teacher who isn't organized, or who I feel making my life slightly more difficult than it should be is usually the professor who does not teach well in the class*." And interesting connection was made here on how the professor's lack of organization affects the student's life. This could particularly be true for classes accompanied by an electronic management system such as Blackboard. Disorganized Blackboard site can result in students spending extra time figuring out where to find information if it is not organized in a sequential manner. This information was confirmed by two additional responses in this category.

Lastly in this category procrastination was mentioned repeatedly and the focus was on response time and grading turn around. Students indicated they felt a professor that does not respond to their emails on a timely manner (which was not specified or quantified) and a professor that does not return graded assignments on a timely manner, is a professor that does not care. Looking at the data it is evident that it is not necessarily important to quantify what is an appropriate response time as the questions led students to share their perception. If they perceive the professor does not respond on a timely manner, it can be assumed that the window of time students expect response is realistic since the sample is of adult learners in their junior and senior year.

Knowledgeable

According to the responses in the sample, a knowledgeable professor is one that knows the content well able to interact with students utilizing the knowledge in an interactive manner.

Some responses in this area included the following comments: "*In my experience, the professor had full knowledge and understanding of the topic he was teaching.*" Additionally, "*The professors shared their knowledge and showed their passion for the subject, projects, or topic*." The data shows evidence of how students can pick up on professors who are proficient or experts in their fields. This makes the case of the importance of matching the right professor with the right topic. The professor should be very comfortable delivering the content, otherwise it shows and students pick up on the lack of knowledge.

Another interesting finding in this category was the fact that students are looking to be challenged: "*I enjoyed that he [the professor] gave us an assignment that fulfilled the learning concepts of the course and he really challenged us to go to our assigned venues.*" This particular comment also suggests the interactive portion of the class as students had to find information outside the classroom (hence "venues.") Additional comments on the importance of an interactive classroom were evident throughout the sample.

Irrelevant

In this category, the data suggested a connection between unknowledgeable professors and irrelevancy. It appeared that the students made the connection between the two. One particular comment indicated that "*students cannot be fooled*", which was an interesting comment to read how this student felt almost cheated by the unknowledgeable professor. The student expected more and appeared to have high standards towards learning. Additional comments in this area include: "*To me, a teacher should be extremely knowledgeable*" as well as "*The professor made us watch videos that were not pertaining to the class and had no bearing on the topic that the class was focused on.*"

Discussion

The study presented here has implications for understanding how students perceive their professors in terms of teaching attributes. A significantly interesting finding was the overwhelming response on how students made the connection between teaching attributes and professors who care. The word "care" in its connotation to this study may suggest that professors who teach from the heart with passion are the ones that connect with the students in a higher academic level and are able to deliver the content in an effective and efficient manner, adding the "feel good" touch that is appealing to students. Hence, professors who care promote a balanced relationship between the teacher and the student and thus bridging the gap and promote learning. According to Hardman (2012): "More recently, developmental models of leadership have brought leaders and followers into a more balanced relationship." (p.1). The analogy of a teacher as a leader in the classroom and the students are the followers present the case of a more balanced relationship that can be promoted through teaching from the heart, that is when the professor cares about the students and the students identify it and are more engaged in the learning process.

Conclusion

This study tested a relatively small sample but can be identified as a representation of how students perceive teaching attributes. While the data collection was from one university in a particular major, the diversity of participants promotes different perspectives from different cultures. Participating students are from different areas of the United States as well as different parts of the world. The emerging themes suggest what is important for students in terms of

teaching attributes, and how professors can improve their teaching attributes to bridge the gap and make the classroom relevant to students while maintaining high academic standards.

Although the general perception of professors may be that students may not want to learn, or maybe they are in college to have fun and learning is secondary, the information presented in this study suggests otherwise. One conclusion from this study can lead to teaching self-reflection. Professors in higher education can now ask themselves if they really care about their students. This is a self-reflection question that only one can answer honestly to him or herself. Professors who can accurately answer this question and identify how they can increase the level of care towards their students may benefit from a stronger connection with their students, and promote a better learning environment.

Recommendations

The first and most significant recommendation based on this research is to continue this research in other higher education institutions to identify patterns. It would be interesting to see if there are commonalities across students in higher education, or does the information presented here pertain only to students who study hospitality management.

Recommendations for further research include the following:

- An evaluation of how professors who teach from the heart can better connect with their students. Additionally, it would be interesting to interview professors who learned to teach from the heart and care more about their students, and how this transformation affected the learning outcomes in their classrooms.
- A more in-depth study can be conducted to continue exploring the connection between teaching attributes and teaching from the heart (i.e. care).

- A longitudinal study of how students perceive their professors' teaching attributes can expose us to additional information on what is important to students, what do they expect from their professors, and how professors can be the leaders, the change agents, that implement and cultivate a better learning environment in the classroom that promotes learning at a higher level.
- A continuous study that will seek for a potential connection between student perception of their professors' teaching attributes and student retention.

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Appendix List

Appendix A: Survey Protocol

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Appendix C: Analytic Memo

Appendix A

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY FOR CLASS FIELD STUDY

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1) Title of Research Study: Student Perception on Professors' Teaching Skills in Higher Education

2) Investigator: Oren Hertz, FAU Doctoral Student

3) Purpose: The purpose of this class field study in EDA 7416: Advanced Qualitative Inquiry is to examine the perception of students of their professors' teaching skills. Once the perception is better understood, it is then possible to propose new ideas on how to bridge the gap between student expectations and professors' teaching skills.

4) Procedures: Data will be collected electronically utilizing an Internet-based survey. Expected time to complete the survey is approximately 10 minutes.

The survey will include a total of 2 open-ended questions that will promote you to think of scenarios that will lead into perceptions of teaching skills.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

5) Risks: In Internet research there is a general risk of information or data being breached or compromised. To avoid this risk it will be an anonymous survey. There will be no names or any identifying information on the survey.

6) Benefits: Student perception on their faculty member's teaching skills may unveil information on how higher education institutions can validate the teaching skills of a potential faculty member at the hiring point. Finding information on how students perceive the teaching skills of their professors may offer a better understanding of how content should be delivered by faculty.

7) Contact Information: For questions, please contact Oren Hertz, at 305-892-5325 (office) or email: ohertz@fau.edu or Oren.Hertz@jwu.edu

Appendix B

Survey Questions

1) Think of a class you have taken at this institution where you felt the professor was a good teacher.
   What did the professor do to motivate you to learn?

   Describe what teaching strategies contributed to understanding the course subject.

   Please refrain from mentioning the professor name or other identifying attributes.

2) Think of a class you have taken at this institution where you felt the professor was not a good teacher.
   What did the professor do to demotivate you to learn?

   Describe what the professor should have done to contribute to your understanding of the course subject.

   Please refrain from mentioning the professor name or other identifying attributes.

Appendix C

Analytic Memo

- What are you learning from the data gathered?

Interesting information is emerging from the data. One significant from the initial observation of the data is the way the current generation is perceiving teaching skills. It is immediately evident that students are looking for friendliness from their professor. It is my own personal experience, assumption, and past reading of the literature that suggests that older generations would not care so much for a professor who's their friend. Instead, they look for a subject matter expert that holds them accountable. This is true for the Baby Boom generation as well as Generation X. The initial look at the data already indicates that Generation Y, the majority of students who took the survey, is looking for a professor and a friend simultaneously.

- Is the data informing your research questions?

It is indeed. The questions were answered well. The majority of answers are blunt and to the point. You can almost feel the passion and how important it is for students to have a professor that interacts well with them and understands and caters to their needs.

- Are there any methodological concerns?

The initial review of the data does not suggest any methodological concerns except the mere volume of data. The methodology is and remains qualitative. There is almost no way to quantify the data, and it works very well with this qualitative study.

- Any issues with data collection or access to sites and sample?

There were no issues accessing the site since all participating students are currently taking classes with me. The only minor concern is the consideration that although the survey was anonymous, some students may be hesitant to share their true vision and thoughts on the topic as they may be concerned that the data will be misinterpreted. It was very clear in the instructions as well as verbal instructions for this survey that it is intended to collect anonymous data; however it is valid to assume some students approached their responses with caution.