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Abstract

A national sample of psychology instructors ($N = 134$) rated the appropriateness and frequency of 104 potential student behaviors, replicating and extending Parr and Valerius. The top 10 ratings for appropriateness and frequency differed from previous work. The author discusses the importance of clear communication of instructor expectations of student behavior in addition to course expectations as presented in the syllabus. Instructors may wish to use this list to help inform students of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors as well as to encourage students to increase the frequency of appropriate behaviors.

Keywords

student behavior, faculty opinion, appropriateness, frequency

You are about to start teaching your class in a classroom setting. Just after class begins, a student's cell phone rings. Does the student answer his or her cell phone? What would you advise the student to do? Have *you* ever answered your cell phone during class? To some extent, psychology educators model appropriate classroom behaviors for students. However, some students may not make tangible the connection between appropriately modeled behavior and their own behavior. Furthermore, students may be unaware of what a faculty member deems as inappropriate behavior. Not only would knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate behavior be useful for students, but faculty knowledge of the relative frequency of such behaviors would help faculty members know the likelihood of these behaviors occurring (this information could be particularly helpful to new faculty). By surveying psychology educators about the appropriateness and frequency of student behaviors, I provide current information to faculty members that may be helpful in the classroom.

For some time, researchers studied the optimal conditions under which teachers teach and learners learn (e.g., McKeachie, 2002). One component of this relationship is understanding multiple expectations: student expectations of faculty and faculty expectations of students. For instance, Trout (1997) asserted that disengaged students exhibit specific behaviors and attitudes, such as not completing assigned readings, avoiding class discussions, expecting high grades for mediocre work, desiring fewer assignments, resenting attendance requirements, preparing inadequately for tests, skipping opportunities for extra credit, resenting time requirements for successful course completion, and appearing to professors as somewhat unteachable.

Much of the literature concerning faculty and student perceptions addresses teacher behavior in the classroom. For instance, Epting, Zinn, Buskist, and Buskist (2004) found that in student comparisons of "typical" versus "ideal" teachers, students desire instructors who are highly accessible, allow student input into course policies and procedures, provide variety within the course, and provide a comfortable learning environment for students. Students are also clear about what they do not like about faculty–student interactions. Perlman and McCann (1998) documented students' most common pet peeves about teaching and teachers, and Appleby (1990) asked students about faculty member irritating behaviors and asked faculty members about students' irritating behaviors. R. V. Parish and T. S. Parish (1993) found that "negativism may breed negativism" (p. 150) for both attitudes and behaviors between students and instructors. Both instructors and students need to become more aware of how their actions affect one another, or else the gap grows between faculty and students (T. S. Parish & Necessary, 1994).

With regard to faculty perceptions of student behaviors, outside of grading issues (e.g., Coles & Stone, 1973), to my knowledge little work has addressed instructor perceptions of students' behaviors (but see Appleby, 1990). One exception

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is Parr and Valerius (1999), who specifically asked faculty about both the desirability and frequency of 56 student behaviors; this study is a replication and extension of Parr and Valerius. I asked faculty members to rate 104 student behaviors (including the 56 behaviors in Parr & Valerius) on dimensions of both frequency of occurrence and appropriateness of the behavior.

Method

Participants

I asked 500 members of Division Two (Society for the Teaching of Psychology) of the American Psychological Association to complete a survey about the frequency and appropriateness of student behaviors. I received 134 usable responses, for a response rate of 26.8%. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 83 ($M = 52.0$, $SD = 9.8$), and total years of college teaching experience ranged from 4 to 45 years ($M = 22.9$, $SD = 10.5$). Concerning highest academic degree, 96.2% indicated that they possessed a doctorate, 0.8% a master's degree, and 3.1% another type of degree. Concerning participants' sex, 46.2% of participants were women, and 53.8% men. The average number of courses taught per semester was 3.09 ($SD = 1.1$). The average number of psychology majors in the participants' department was 287.2 ($SD = 294.3$), ranging from 0 to 1600. The participants varied in academic rank, with 3.8% lecturers, 4.5% instructors, 6.8% assistant professors, 30.3% associate professors, and 54.5% full professors.

Materials

This study is a replication and extension of the work completed by Parr and Valerius (1999), who based their work on the Student Behaviors Questionnaire by Brozo and Schmelzer (1985). In addition to the items presented by Parr and Valerius (1999), I expanded the inventory of student behaviors based on a comprehensive review of the literature and consultation with content experts. For each behavioral item, participants rated the frequency of the behavior using 1 = *not very often*, 2 = *occasionally*, 3 = *sometimes*, and 4 = *often*. Participants rated the appropriateness for each behavior item on a scale of 1 = *very inappropriate*, 2 = *inappropriate*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *appropriate*, and 5 = *very appropriate*.

Procedure

In February 2006, I mailed a random sample of 500 Division Two APA members a cover letter, the four-page survey, and a self-addressed business-reply envelope via first-class mail. I asked recipients to reply in 1 month's time.

Results

The top 10 most appropriate student behaviors were (with the Parr and Valerius, 1999, ranking in parentheses; if a new item, "new" in parentheses) (a) asks questions during lecture (PV #2), (b) completes assignments on time (PV #3), (c) plans well

Table 1. Combinations of Items Rated at Both High and Low Levels of Appropriateness and Frequency

Items with higher appropriateness and higher frequency

types papers and reports
 completes assignments on time
 takes notes in class
 demonstrates respect for me
 arrives at class on time

Items with higher appropriateness and lower frequency

reports academic dishonesty of other students
 brings outside material to class to support a lecture concept
 seeks help from tutors or teaching assistants
 acts on my suggestions for further reading
 works with me on special projects

Items with lower appropriateness and higher frequency

comes late to class
 talks with other students during my lectures
 gestures to other students during lecture
 female student wears revealing clothing to class
 leaves class before professor is finished

Items with lower appropriateness and lower frequency

smokes in class
 drinks alcoholic beverages during lecture
 does not turn off cell phone after asked to
 plays hand-held games during lecture
 hums or sings during lecture

for course projects (PV #5), (d) participates in class discussions (PV #1), (e) takes notes in class (PV #16), (f) brings all required materials to class (new), (g) demonstrates respect for me (new), (h) types papers and reports (PV #11–tie), (i) comes into my office to discuss course material (PV #11–tie), and (j) discusses term paper and project topics with me (PV #7). It is interesting that only 5 of the items overlapped with the top 10 items identified by Parr and Valerius (1999), and 2 of these items are new items that appear in the top 10.

The top 10 most frequent behaviors were (a) types papers and reports (PV #3), (b) arrives at class on time (PV #4), (c) takes notes in class (PV #2), (d) completes assignments on time (PV #1), (e) demonstrates respect for me (new), (f) greets me when we meet on campus (PV #8), (g) addresses me as Dr. if appropriate (PV #31), (h) maintains frequent eye contact (PV #4), (i) uses proper grammar when speaking (new), and (j) addresses me as Dr. (PV #15). In comparison to Parr and Valerius (1999), only 6 of their top 10 most frequent behaviors were also most frequent on this list, and 1 entirely new item appears in the top 10 list for most frequent behaviors.

Table 1 presents a list of items that combines both appropriateness and frequency outcomes. To determine dual appropriateness and frequency ratings, I multiplied the mean values for each of the scales. Items with the highest combined scores appear in Table 1 as "higher appropriateness, higher frequency." Items with the lowest combined scores are reported in Table 1 as "lower appropriateness, lower frequency." To determine the intermediate categories (higher appropriateness, lower frequency and lower appropriateness, higher frequency), I examined difference scores.

Discussion

The compendium of student behaviors evaluated by faculty is substantially expanded in this work compared to previous work (Parr & Valerius, 1999). This outcome is important because items that previously appeared as most appropriate or most frequent did not remain so in this expanded list; conversely, behaviors not previously rated now appear among those most appropriate and most frequent.

One parsimonious explanation as to why the top 10 results in the present study do not match the top 10 results (for both appropriateness and frequency) in Parr and Valerius (1999) is that the additional items simply changed the nature of the evaluative task. Speculatively, there are other possible alternate explanations for the change in ratings over time. There is empirical evidence that a sense of entitlement is growing in today's college student as compared to the past. Twenge, Zhang, and Im (2004) reported that by using meta-analytic techniques, current college students show "increases in cynicism, individualism, and the self-serving bias" (p. 308).

The outcomes presented here are quite valuable in terms of understanding what instructors perceive as appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Instructors may find the information provided in Table 1 particularly helpful in classroom discussions. Faculty members, using evidence from this study, can present to students what they are doing well and often (higher appropriateness and higher frequency) and what they should not do and rarely do (lower appropriateness and lower frequency). The other two lists may be even more useful, however. Instructors may present the behaviors on the higher appropriateness and lower frequency list to encourage students with specific examples of what faculty members want, and these behaviors can give students opportunities to set themselves apart from the crowd. Those behaviors with lower appropriateness but higher frequency can serve as warnings for students about what not to do; perhaps these behaviors are indicators of incivility in the classroom.

Just as students have expectations of faculty behavior, faculty have expectations of the appropriateness and frequency of student behavior. Faculty need to send consistent messages to students about behavioral expectations. In addition to course expectations presented at the beginning of a new class, I recommend that faculty clearly express behavioral expectations of students and positively model those behaviors whenever possible. If the trends identified by Twenge et al. (2004) continue (poor school achievement, helplessness, ineffective stress management, decreased self-control, depression) in current and future college students, faculty members will face growing challenges of incivility in the classroom.

I recommend three strategies that are successful for me (based on anecdotal reflection), which may not apply universally. First, share the rationale of the course, explaining the design and purpose of an assignment. Understanding the pedagogical rationale of an assignment or course task may help motivate students toward higher achievement and help students to understand why they are doing what they are doing. Second,

communicate behavioral expectations clearly in the syllabus and throughout the course—the lists provided here may be helpful in this regard. Other resources to support syllabus development include Appleby (1999), Grunert (1997), and Project Syllabus sponsored by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (<http://www.teachpsych.org/otrp/syllabi/syllabi.php>). Encourage students to seek help if they begin struggling in class, and organize a syllabus calendar such that you can minimize stress and allow for some personal control and facilitate time management. Third, faculty should model appropriate behavior for students. Returning assignments in a timely manner will model the importance of students' turning in assignments in a timely manner. Not answering your cell phone during class will model for students that cell phones should not be answered during class. If students do not "catch on" that you are modeling appropriate behaviors, use of the lists provided here may be useful to instructors who want to communicate explicit expectations. Faculty members cannot reasonably expect a higher standard of behavior from students than they expect from themselves.

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Author's Note

The complete survey is available from the author upon request.

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