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Business Faculty Perceptions Of Positive And Negative Student Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

The behavior of students can enhance or degrade the classroom experience for students and faculty alike. While a stream of research has focused on student behaviors in primary and secondary education, little attention has been directed at student behaviors in the higher education setting. The qualitative research presented in this manuscript identifies student behaviors that business faculty perceive to be examples of unusually positive or negative behaviors. Research implications and suggestions for future research are also presented.

Keywords: student behaviors, disruptive student behaviors, business education

Teachers of all experience levels view classroom management, including the management of student behaviors, to be one of the most challenging and disturbing aspects of the teaching profession (Edwards, 1993; Kulinna, Cothran, & Regualos, 2003). Student behaviors can enhance or degrade the classroom experience for students and faculty alike. For example, insightful questions and participation in class discussions can have a positive impact on the learning experience while disruptive behaviors, such as talking with other students while the teacher is lecturing, can have a negative impact on the learning experience (Fernandez-Balboa, 1991). Further, negative student behaviors have the potential to exacerbate faculty job burnout and other unpleasant outcomes (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers 2004). In fact, a recent study identified disruptive student behaviors as one of the primary reasons for teachers leaving the teaching profession (Cholo, 2003).

The ability to manage student behaviors has been identified as a key characteristic differentiating effective from ineffective teaching (Siedentop & Tannehill 1999). As a result, a significant stream of research has focused on student behaviors. Unfortunately, this research has tended to focus on primary and secondary schools, with little attention to student behaviors in higher education and even less attention paid to the behavior of business students. Further, the research that is available concerning student behaviors in the higher education setting while insightful, is becoming dated (for example see Williams and Winkworth 1974; Bronzo and Schmeizer 1985; Appleby 1990; Parr and Valerius 1999).

The purpose of this study is to explore student behaviors in the business higher education setting. The study was conducted in a mail format with a national sample of business faculty. Following a qualitative approach suggested by Appleby (1990) faculty were asked to identify student behaviors that had either “irritated or annoyed” or “pleased or impressed” them. The responses were then content analyzed by two independent raters to identify the student behaviors that business faculty tend to perceive to be exceptionally positive or negative classroom behaviors. In the pages that follow these results are presented along with a discussion of the implications of the research and suggestions for future research; however, first the available literature on positive and negative student behaviors in higher education will be reviewed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Williams and Winkworth’s 1974 article was the first to investigate student behaviors that faculty found rewarding in the higher education setting. This research consisted of asking faculty members to categorize a

predetermined list of thirty-one student behaviors as pleasant, satisfying, or rewarding. The thirty-one behaviors had been derived by the researchers, along with a pilot study and a study skills textbook.

Table 1 presents the twelve student behaviors that received the most positive rating across faculty. Importantly, Williams and Winkworth found significant variation in faculty’s perceptions of student behaviors across academic units. For example, humanities faculty tended to emphasize informality in the classroom (i.e., comments on subject presentation, asks for a few minutes of class time to present an idea), while agriculturalists valued friendly relationships outside class (i.e., smiles and says “hello” when we meet on the campus, shows he knows something about my own academic history).

A decade later Brozo and Schmeizer (1985) expanded on Williams and Winkworth’s research by asking faculty at two southern universities to rate a series of 57 student behaviors either positively or negatively using a five-item scale anchored in very undesirable (-2) and very desirable (+2). The 57 items used in this study, termed the Student Behaviors Questionnaire (SBQ), were taken from the list developed by Williams and Winkworth (1974), along with additional items suggested by students and taken from study skills research. Tables 1 and 2 present the twelve highest rated negative and positive student behaviors seen in the Brozo and Schmeizer study.

Table 1
Leading positive student behaviors seen in previous research

	Williams & Winkworth (1974)	Brozo & Schmeizer (1985)	Parr & Valerius (1999)
1.	Participates in class discussions	Completes assignments on time	Participates in class discussion
2.	Completes assignments on time	Participates in class discussions	Ask questions during class
3.	Asks questions during class	Asks questions during class	Completes assignments on time
4.	Offers his own ideas relating to some topic I’ve mentioned as worth exploring	Arrives on time	Further explores topics brought out in class
5.	Makes and keeps office appointments	Plans well for course projects	Acts on my suggestions for further readings
6.	Comes to my office with course-related or future activities for discussion	Writes legibly	Brings outside material to class to support a lecture concept
7.	Shows he has pursued a reference I’ve described	Further explores topics brought out in class	Discusses team paper & project topics with me
8.	Accepts – and acts – on my suggestions for additional reading	Can identify his or her own topic for a paper or project	Maintains contact through office visits
9.	Has a well-prepared plan of action for some project related to the subject	Brings class outside material to support a lecture topic	Makes comments such as, “I enjoy your lectures”
10.	Inquires about class-related, but not required, projects	Acts on my suggestion for further reading	Expresses positive nonverbal reactions in my class
11.	Comments on subject presentation	Discusses with me term paper & project	Types papers & reports
12.	Shows he is clearly aware of implications when discussing term paper topics	Types papers & reports discuss course materials	Comes into my office to

In a more recent study, Parr and Valerius (1999) replicated the Brozo and Schmeizer study by asking faculty at two midwestern universities to rate a list of fifty-six student behaviors on a scale ranging from strongly negative (-2) to strongly positive (+2). This list of student behaviors was an updated version of the SBQ used by Brono and Schmeizer (1985). The update of the SBQ consisted of dropping items that were no longer relevant (e.g., smoking in class), the addition of two items “addresses me by my first name” and “notifies me when he/she will miss class” and separating certain items into positive and negative facets of a particular behavior (i.e., expresses nonverbal reactions to my class and expresses negative nonverbal reactions to my class). Parr and Valerius also expanded on the Brozo and Schmeizer study by asking faculty how frequently they encountered each of these student behaviors on a five-item scale ranging from never to very frequently. Although a decade had passed between the Brozo and Schmeizer study and the Parr and Valerius study, the results shown in Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate a high degree of consistency. In fact, eight of the twelve leading positive behaviors and seven of the twelve leading negative behaviors were consistent over the two studies.

Table 2
Leading negative student behaviors seen in previous research

	Brozo & Schmeizer (1985)	Parr & Valerius (1999)	Appleby (1990)
1.	Reads newspaper in class	Reads newspaper in class	Talks during lectures
2.	Asks to borrow my personal books	Sleeps during class	Sleeping during class
3.	Dresses sloppily	Talks with other students during lecture	Chewing gum, eating, or drinking noisily
4.	Smokes in class	Flirts with me	Being late (tie)
5.	Talks with other students during lecture	Comes to class late	Cutting class (tie)
6.	Sleeps during lecture	Expresses negative nonverbal reactions in my class	Acting bored or apathetic (tie)
7.	Calls me at home to discuss class problems	Request special favors	Not paying attention
8.	Disputes grades or tests and reports	Eats in class	Being unprepared
9.	Eats in class	Does not take notes in class	Creating disturbances
10.	Asks to borrow my lecture notes	Rarely makes eye contact	Wearing hats
11.	Brings coffee or other drinks to class	Asks to borrow my lecture notes	Cheating (tie)
12.	Request special favors	Calls me at home to discuss class problems	Packing-up books & materials before class is over (tie)

* Not seen in previous research

While different items and different scales were used in each of the studies, this stream of research has been grounded in the common quantitative methodological approach of asking faculty to rate a predetermined series of student behaviors. Research published by Appleby in 1990 displayed a different approach to the study of negative student behaviors. Instead of asking faculty to rate a predetermined list of behaviors, Appleby asked faculty to

identify student behaviors that they found irritating. The behaviors provided by the participating faculty were then content analyzed to identify the major types of behaviors that faculty found irritating.

The subjects in Appleby's research were 63 faculty representing sciences, humanities, and professional studies at one midwestern college. The content analysis indicated that faculty gave a range of 2 to 8 irritating behaviors with a mean of 3.25 different irritating behaviors per participating faculty member. Table 2 presents the twelve most frequently mentioned irritating items found in the Appleby study. It is important to note that three of those top mentioned irritating items (e.g., cheating, cutting class, and packing-up books and materials before class is over) were not included in the studies using the SBQ (Brozo & Schmeizer, 1985; Parr & Valerius, 1999). These negative student behaviors may have never been identified using a predetermined instrument such as the SBQ. The potential to allow unexpected insights to emerge from the subjects themselves is one of the strengths of qualitative research approaches such as the approach utilized by Appleby (Patton, 1990).

Appleby's research is important as it allowed faculty to identify irritating students in their own voice. In other words, it allowed the positive and negative behaviors to emerge from the subjects themselves. However, the generalizability of Appleby's research is limited due to the fact that it was conducted with a small cross-disciplinary sample (63 faculty) at one university. Additionally, more than 15 years have elapsed since Appleby's research. The following sections detail a study designed to update and expand Appleby's research with a national sample of business faculty.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Williams and Winkworth's research (1974) demonstrated that faculty's perceptions of student behaviors vary across disciplines. As a result, to avoid the potential of cross-discipline dilution of results a decision was made to focus this exploratory study on one general academic discipline, business. The subjects for the study were the members of a national association of business faculty, the Federation of Business Disciplines (FBD). Using the members of the Federation of Business Disciplines provided the opportunity to obtain insights from faculty that teach and research in most areas of business. For example, the Federation of Business Disciplines include faculty from accounting, economics, finance, management, and marketing. Using a mailing list provided by the association, all 1800 members of the association were mailed a questionnaire package consisting of three items: a questionnaire, a return envelope, and a cover letter describing the study, requesting participation, and promising confidentiality.

The questionnaire used in this study was designed to allow examples of student behaviors to emerge from the faculty themselves. To that end, the questionnaire asked the respondent to "think back over your career as a professor" and respond to the two following open-ended questions:

- a) Please list "concrete" student behaviors that you have observed that have impressed you, and
- b) Please list "concrete" student behaviors that you have observed that have annoyed you.

Subjects were also asked to provide their gender and years of college teaching experience.

A total of 305 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a 17 percent response rate. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were male. The respondents' college teaching experience ranged from less than one year to 40 years, with a mean of almost 16 (15.8) years.

Following the approach presented by Gilbert and Morris (1995), the incidents of student behaviors collected were reviewed for common themes by the primary researcher. These commonalities formed the categorizational schema used by two independent judges to classify the incidents. To avoid the potential of biasing the categorization by using judges with similar backgrounds (Ericsson & Simon 1984), two judges with very diverse backgrounds were used in this research. One of the judges was a male faculty member at the professor rank with more than a decade of experience teaching business courses in higher education. Conversely, the second judge was a female adjunct professor with less than two years experience teaching on a part-time basis. The two independent judges agreed in their classification of student behaviors on eighty-seven percent of the cases, which is considered

an acceptable rating for inter-rater agreement (Hughes & Garrett, 1990; Fleiss, 1981). Items of disagreement in the categorization were eliminated through a joint discussion by the two judges.

RESULTS

Overall, 2,687 items were coded in faculty descriptions of student behaviors. Of that total, 1,112 were positive student behaviors, or an average of 3.6 different positive behaviors per participating faculty member, and 1,575 were negative behaviors, or an average of 5.2 different negative behaviors per participating faculty member.

Table 3 presents the twenty-seven positive student behavior categories or themes that emerged from the content analysis. The twenty-seven positive behavior categories are ranked in Table 3 by the percentage of faculty who mentioned a behavior categorized into that behavioral theme. Thus, with 37.7 percent of the responding faculty mentioning an instance of “asking questions in class” this was the most often mentioned positive behavior. Conversely, the least frequently mentioned category of behaviors, instances of good teamwork were mentioned by only 2.4 percent of the respondents. As indicated in Table 3, almost half of the positive student behaviors (13) had not been seen in any of the previous student behavior studies.

Table 3
Positive student behaviors

Category	Frequency	%	% of Cases
Ask questions in class	110	9.9%	37.7%
Complimented professor	105	9.4%	36.0%
Participates in class discussions	97	8.7%	33.2%
Critical thinking*	78	7.0%	26.7%
Good social skills	75	6.7%	25.7%
Prepared for class	70	6.3%	24.0%
Good performance*	68	6.1%	23.3%
Further explores class topics brought out in class discussion	65	5.8%	22.3%
Attentive behaviors	64	5.8%	21.9%
Maintains contact with office visits	50	4.5%	17.1%
Thanking the professor	36	3.2%	12.3%
Bring outside material to class to support a lecture topic	35	3.1%	12.0%
Accepts responsibility for learning	32	2.9%	11.0%
Helping classmates*	30	2.7%	10.3%
Good attendance*	23	2.1%	7.9%
Challenges professor or material	22	2.0%	7.5%
Enthusiasm for learning*	22	2.0%	7.5%
Completes assignments on time	18	1.6%	6.2%
Helping professor with class*	17	1.5%	5.8%
Arrives for class on time	16	1.4%	5.5%
Keep in touch after course/graduation*	16	1.4%	5.5%
Good effort/worked hard*	13	1.2%	4.5%
Professional/neat appearance*	13	1.2%	4.5%
Improvements in performance*	12	1.1%	4.1%
Creative/innovative solutions*	9	.8%	3.1%
Displayed leadership*	9	.8%	3.1%
Good teamwork*	7	.6%	2.4%

* Not seen in previous research

Table 4 presents the thirty-four negative student behavior categories that emerged in this study. As seen in Table 4, ten of the thirty-four behaviors seen in this study had not been included in previous research.

Table 4
Negative student behaviors

Category	Frequency	%	% of Cases
Talks to other students during lecture	176	11.2%	59.3%
Comes to class late	114	7.2%	38.4%
Unprepared for class	100	6.3%	33.7%
Disrespectful to professor	94	6.0%	31.6%
General rude behavior*	85	5.4%	28.6%
Leaving class early*	83	5.3%	27.9%
Sleeps during class	81	5.1%	27.3%
Dishonest behavior (e.g., lie, cheat, plagiarize)	76	4.8%	25.6%
Requests special favors	69	4.4%	23.2%
Asking poor questions	53	3.4%	17.8%
Doing work for another class in class	50	3.2%	16.8%
Complaining about workload	49	3.1%	16.5%
Annoying comments, such as “Will this be on the test?” and “Did we do anything important?”	48	3.0%	16.2%
Inappropriate comments in class* (e.g., sexist, insensitive, crude comments)	40	2.5%	13.5%
Cellular phones, pagers, beepers in class*	39	2.5%	13.1%
Reading newspaper, magazines, novels in class	39	2.5%	13.1%
Cutting class	39	2.5%	13.1%
Doing as little as possible to get by*	39	2.5%	13.1%
Inattentive behavior (e.g., yawning, slouching, infrequent eye contact)	32	2.0%	10.8%
Lack of participation in class	32	2.0%	10.8%
Not accepting responsibility for performance	27	1.7%	9.1%
Disputes grades on tests or reports	26	1.7%	8.8%
Eating in class	24	1.5%	8.1%
Creating disturbances	22	1.4%	7.4%
Disrespectful to classmates*	21	1.3%	7.1%
Inappropriate attire (e.g., wearing hats, sloppy, or revealing attire)	19	1.2%	6.4%
Dominating class discussion	18	1.1%	6.1%
Taking punitive action against professor*	13	.8%	4.4%
Packing-up books & materials before class is over	13	.8%	4.4%
Leaving class and returning*	13	.8%	4.4%
Making excuses	11	.7%	3.7%
Trying to buy grade (through flirting or money)	10	.6%	3.4%
Failure to follow professor’s directions*	10	.6%	3.4%
Unprepared to take the course*	10	.6%	3.4%

* Not seen in previous research

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research has been to increase our knowledge concerning faculty perceptions of positive and negative student behaviors by expanding and updating previous research. While this is not the first study to focus on the faculty’s perceptions of student behaviors, it is one of the first to allow the behaviors to emerge from the faculty instead of simply asking the faculty to rate a series of behaviors predetermined by the researchers. Additionally, this is the first student behavioral study to focus specifically on business students in higher education.

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, several of the leading positive and negative behaviors emerging in this study have not been seen in previous research. Conversely, several behaviors seen in previous studies did not appear in this study. Some of these changes may simply be the result of environmental changes that have occurred between studies. For example, technological innovation over the past decade has resulted in the widespread use of cellular

telephones, pagers, and beepers. While the use of these technologies has made it easier and more convenient to contact and communicate, the results of this study indicate that these technologies have emerged as an annoyance in the classroom. Conversely, the SBQ contained a series of items concerned with writing (i.e., uses colored ink on tests, uses a pen for writing reports, types papers and reports) that were not mentioned by the faculty participating in this study. Perhaps this again can be attributed to a technological innovation, the personal computer. In fact, with the widespread use of computers, it would be surprising to actually receive a report from a business student written by hand in ink.

Other behaviors that emerged in this study may result from the tumultuous environment that today's student must navigate. Newton (1998) points out that it is not unusual to find students whose parents have been poor role models, who see their surroundings to be hostile, or who often go through intermittent periods of stress, often with physiological symptoms. Newton continues to suggest that "irritation, frustration, and anger are rampant" with today's college student (p. 6). Perhaps negative behaviors such as inappropriate comments, disrespectful behaviors, and general rude behavior can partially be attributed to these environmental circumstances and the state of mind of many of today's college students.

Other changes in behaviors seen in this study may reflect changing student attitudes toward the educational experience. For example, taking some form of punitive action against the professor emerged as a negative behavior in this study. In a review of changing student attitudes, Bishop, Lacour, Nutt, Yamada, and Lee (2004) identified a trend to distrust leaders and institutions. Bishop et al. suggest that today's students tend to see themselves as consumers and that they are willing to use pressure tactics, such as petitions and litigation to get what they feel they deserve. Certainly, this could include taking punitive action against a faculty member - one of the negative behaviors that emerged in this study. This view of students as consumers may also explain some of the other behaviors that emerged in this study. For example, this study indicated that faculty often see students leaving class early or leaving and returning as negative behaviors. However, if a student views him/herself to be a consumer of the university, then leaving class early or leaving and returning the class may seem no more inappropriate than leaving a movie early or stepping out to take a telephone call then returning to his or her seat later in the movie.

Other changes in behaviors seen in this study may reflect real or perceived changes in the quality of secondary education. A recent study of higher education faculty (Sanoff, 2006) found that 84 percent of the faculty surveyed felt that high school graduates were unprepared or only somewhat well-prepared for college. In general the faculty participating in the study felt that today's high school graduate was less prepared for college than graduates were ten years ago and that many students lacked motivation. These perceptions were reflected in the current study with negative behaviors such as students unprepared to take the course and doing as little as possible to get by in the course. In fact, continuing with this same line of reasoning, the negative behavior of not following instructions could be attributed to a lack of motivation or a lack of ability.

The concerns for the general student population expressed in the Sanoff (2006) study may also help explain several of the positive behaviors first noted in this study. For example, if a professor views the general student population as unmotivated then, by comparison, a student exhibiting an enthusiasm for learning would tend to stand out. Further, if faculty tend to see students as unprepared for college, then students that display creative or innovative solutions or critical thinking might seem that much more striking.

Other behaviors that have emerged in this study may reflect the methodological approach taken in this research. As previously discussed, the trend in this stream of research has been to ask faculty to rate a series of behaviors provided by the researchers. The approach taken in this research was to allow the behaviors to emerge from the respondents. This approach is more appropriate for discovery of the positive and negative student behaviors that actually impress or annoy faculty. Other omissions, such as the fact that none of the business faculty mentioned students taking notes during class may be explained by the nature of the study. Most faculty would probably rate "takes notes in class" as a desirable trait, but not one that a faculty member would list as an "impressive" behavior.

LIMITATIONS, RESEARCH DIRECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

It is important to note several limitations of this research. First, the methodology used in this study was exploratory in nature. The goal was to simply identify examples of student behaviors that higher education business faculty perceived to be either extremely positive or negative. The research was qualitative in nature, with results derived on a content analysis of replies from two open-ended questions. While care was taken to conduct the content analysis in a rigorous manner, following accepted approaches to limit methodological weaknesses, such as inter-rater bias, such methodological weaknesses should be noted. The methodology used in this study does not offer any insights into the prevalence of these behaviors, or the degree of positive or negative affect associated with any of these behaviors. Further, the methodology used in this research does not offer any insight into the causes or results of any of these behaviors. It is also important to note that this study focused only on student behaviors in business courses. Care should be taken in generalizing the results of this research to other student populations.

To attempt to explain the rationale behind each of the new positive or negative behaviors that emerged, or failed to emerge, in this study is beyond the scope of this research. Regardless of the reasons behind their inclusion, this research has identified 61 student behaviors that business faculty consider to be examples of exemplarily positive or negative behaviors. The next research priority is to determine a) how often these behaviors occur, and b) how extremely positive or negatively faculty view these behaviors. For example, how often do business faculty encounter students falling asleep in their classes or reading a newspaper, and how irritating or annoying is this behavior. To that end, researchers can use the behaviors identified in this study as the starting point to modeling positive and negative student behaviors and constructing a survey instrument to measure the frequency of these behaviors and the intensity of positive or negative feelings elicited by these behaviors.

A second research priority would be to investigate students' perceptions of the behaviors identified in this study. For example, several faculty identified students leaving and returning to their classes as annoying behavior. Several interesting questions emerge concerning students. First, do students realize that faculty view such behaviors to be annoying? Second, do students also find such behaviors annoying? Conversely, several faculty identified visiting the professor's office as a positive behavior. Do students realize that faculty view such behaviors to be positive? Would knowing that certain behaviors annoy faculty and that certain behaviors impress faculty actually impact student behavior? Does frequency of annoying or impressive behavior impact classroom learning? Does annoying or impressive behavior have an impact on student grades?

The major contribution of this research has been the development of a list of behaviors that higher education business faculty perceive to be examples of positive or negative student behaviors. This list of behaviors should facilitate instrument development and continued research into student behaviors and their impact on the classroom experience from both the student and faculty perspective.

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