

Needs Assessment for Quality Instruction: An Interactive Report on Perceptions of Good Teaching

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With the ever-increasing demand for adjunct faculty in colleges and universities, the concern for quality instruction in the undergraduate core gains more and more attention. Many institutions are consciously implementing GTA training programs and courses that go beyond the typical one-day orientation or course information packets to a focus on pedagogy and formalized mentoring programs (Gray and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1991; Gappa and Leslie, 1993; Moore, 1996).

Over the past two years, we have collected data from faculty, students, and GTAs/PTIs concerning teaching quality and needs of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Part-time Instructors at the post-secondary level. One of the aspects of the Needs Assessment for Quality Teaching (NAFQI) deals directly with perceptions of good teaching. At the recent Georgia Conference on College and University Teaching, we asked participants to complete the "perceptions of good teaching" part of the survey and to compare their perceptions of good teaching with the results from the three groups of participants in the original study. The purpose of this presentation was to increase awareness for perceptions of college teaching and to engage participants in an active discussion of appropriate pedagogy for developing effective classroom teachers among adjunct faculty, graduate assistants in particular.

Ironically, most of the participants involved in the presentation and discussion represented colleges and universities in Georgia that do not employ a great number of graduate teaching assistants. However, the survey comparison revealed that their perceptions of good teaching were in line with those of the Georgia State University faculty surveyed in the NAFQI research. For example, in the NAFQI study, the highest percentage response from faculty was a student-oriented one that we labeled "student performance; comprehension." At the conference presentation, six of the eight respondents (those who turned in their surveys) mentioned the same criteria for good teaching. Their language included such phrasing as: student performance, student learning, learning, meeting students needs for careers and skills, and student retention. Other student-oriented responses included, students reporting a valuable experience with the class, students willing to recommend the teacher, and repeat customers. The second highest percentage of responses by GSU faculty was concerned with a more teacher-oriented focus. Pedagogical concerns, use of materials, teacher characteristics and communication rated highest in this category. Again, the participants indicated these as criteria on which good teaching should be based. Their remarks included: modeling knowledge, skills, attitudes for students, ability to involve all students in learning activities, integration of entire curriculum, etc. Another teacher-oriented category mentioned by the GSU faculty has to do with teacher knowledge. Only two of the participants mentioned

this specifically, and the comments were generally connected to communication, and student-orientation: Instructor knows material, presents it in a logical and compelling fashion. Instructor respects students, their values, and is available to help students succeed in the course.

During the discussion of these criteria, nine categories emerged as significant. By far the most important criterion, according to this group of participants, was: Good teaching should be based on student learning, outcomes, and skills. This was followed by: Content knowledge on the part of the teacher, modeling, integrating and relating material, student retention, material retention, teaching of ethics and citizenship, creative and resourceful teaching, and availability of instructor for students. It was interesting to note that as we looked across groups in the NAFQI survey, students in the original study indicated that student performance, as a category for "good" teaching, was less descriptive, as this category received the lowest percentage of responses. For students, it appears, teacher characteristics (style) and communication are the most important criteria, along with pedagogy and teacher knowledge. The differences in perception are certainly interesting.

As student learning and pedagogy were primary concerns for both the faculty in the study and the faculty present at the presentation, the conversation shifted to a discussion of strategies and pedagogical issues that capture student learning. Participants were asked to list strategies or pedagogy that seemed most effective to them. The most commonly mentioned strategy involved collaborative learning. Participants discussed emphasizing active, problem-based methods of instruction that stimulate student involvement in their own learning. Real world examples and simulations were suggested. Many discussed the need to transfer responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student. In addition, the group mentioned the importance of learning and teaching styles in terms of tailoring teaching with these in mind. Self-assessment and peer assessment emerged as discussion topics, although no concrete suggestions for how to accomplish these were discovered during the limited time. Finally, several teachers in the group emphasized the need to find ways to connect with students as learners and as people in the classroom.

This study and presentation, then, while not resolving any "problems" nor discovering "new" perceptions of good teaching, served as a forum for discussion of common concerns and interests regarding teaching at the post-secondary level. We were all informed, once again, that as faculty we share similar goals, concerns, and perceptions of teaching. What we discovered as presenters is that the next discussion needs to start here and move toward more specific means of accomplishing these criteria as we work with future faculty.