

THE PERCEPTIONS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS REGARDING FACULTY CONSIDERATION

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ABSTRACT

Recent attention has been given to classroom incivilities reflecting student behavior, however, instructor care and respect toward students has received little attention. We examine perceptions of two groups (undergraduate accounting students, MBA students) regarding instructor care and respect. College instructor care and respect toward students is clarified by (1) explaining such behavior and the lack of it; (2) providing information from learner samples; (3) exploring, [a] caring, respectful behaviors, and [b] uncaring, disrespectful behaviors; and (4) specifying instructor behaviors which may convey that students are respected and cared about, and which help build positive classroom environments.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about the care and respect college instructors demonstrate towards students in their regular classroom interactions. When students perceive that they are not treated with care and respect there may be untoward consequences, and as faculty, we should have some knowledge and understanding of those consequences for student learning and for the quality of our relationships with our students. Until recently, this topic was not given much attention in the literature of higher education.

Recent research shows that the topic is important in the minds of students, if not instructors, as a substantial proportion of students can readily report instances where they were treated in an uncaring and/or disrespectful manner by their instructor. The whole matter of care and respect is not a one-way issue as there are many examples of student behavior that clearly demonstrates a level of incivility towards instructors.

As instructors, we need to do the best job possible in terms of our skills, knowledge, and dispositions to help our students learn and grow. Demonstration of care and respect falls into the last category - dispositions. Treating students well is the right thing to do. In a practical and self-interest sense, instructors have to demonstrate positive behavior toward students because, in most colleges and universities, the students rate the instructors' performance; students "vote with their

feet and computer mice,” and as consumers, our students have many opportunities to seek education from a variety of sources. With YouTube, Twitter, texting, Facebook, and other digital social connections, students can spread the word quickly and widely that professor X is perceived as having some problems with her/his students.

In this paper we will clarify the issue of care and respect of college instructors toward students by: (1) defining and explaining the behavior that may demonstrate caring and respectful behavior as well as the lack of that behavior; (2) providing data and information from two distinct samples of adult learners (undergraduate accounting students, MBA students); (3) exploring and categorizing the various forms of behavior that students regarded as, [a] caring and respectful, as well as, [b]) uncaring and disrespectful; and finally (4) a specification of several actions and behaviors in which instructors may engage that send the message to students that they are respected and cared about, and which also help in building positive classroom environments.

BACKGROUND

The study reported in this article began a few years ago. A colleague received an email from a student ten weeks into a semester course in which the student, a woman who was returning to collegiate schooling after a gap in time of several years, asked him to “please not give up on her” in the course. In part, her anxiety about her performance, her trepidation about mastering the course content, and her ability to keep up, caused her to believe that this behavior might stimulate the instructor to give up on her and her learning. The instructor, (see Hawk and Lyons, 2008) anticipating that this student already thought she had been given up on, talked directly with her and asked how she felt she was progressing in the course. The student told him that what he was doing in the course to help her and encourage her learning was just fine, well beyond her expectations, yet she was anxious. When asked if she had been “given up on” in past courses, her response was a resounding “yes.” She said she could report several different instances in which such perceptions were experienced and reinforced.

This somewhat unexpected response gave rise to an interest in exploring the issue of students perceiving that they may have been given up on by an instructor and what consequences such perception had for the student. We believe the information provided in this paper serves as an alarm for instructors because it reveals that our students are paying strict attention in terms of their perceptions and expectations of instructor behavior. The questions asked of samples of students that bring this research to life are:

1. Have you ever had the feeling that a faculty member or instructor had “given up” on you and your learning in a course?
2. What did the faculty member or instructor do or not do to give you that feeling?
3. What did you do as a result of that feeling or perception?
4. What are ways that a faculty member or instructor can communicate to you that he/she has not given up on his/her commitment to you and your learning in a course?

In later discussions with the students, those who reported feeling as though they had been given up on at some point in their academic career almost unanimously attributed the giving up by their instructors to a lack of caring and respect for the student and the student’s learning on the part of their instructors. While most instructors would take it for granted that they and their peers, in

general, do care for and respect students, the proportion of students who report a lack of care and/or respect is of a magnitude to demand our attention. Failure to demonstrate care and respect for students may have several undesirable consequences such as diminished student effort and commitment to academic work likely matched with poor performance, negative ratings of instructor performance, damaged reputation of an academic program of study and, depending on the severity of the perceived lack of respect or care, attrition resulting from student withdrawal from a program of study. Research completed by Buttner (2004) documented a large number of undesirable outcomes.

Given the student focus on respect and care, it seems reasonable to explore the respect and care literature as it may inform us about the dominant theme in the student responses. The literature is reviewed next, followed by the data and information provided by students to the four questions listed above.

Caring for Students In the Pedagogical Sense

There is little information in the literatures of the business disciplines, education, psychology, or philosophy that explicitly addresses the matter of caring in the teaching-learning context, although there are some exceptions. In their study, Hawk & Lyons (2008) found only two citations dealing with ethics and care in three leading business ethics journals (*Business and Society Review*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, and *Business and Society*).

There is a large body of literature that embraces the concept of care, not in the pedagogical context, but in-general. To fully explore that literature is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we present some fundamental ideas to introduce the student- instructor relationship with regard to care and respect. The work of Gilligan (1982), Tronto (1993), and Noddings (2002) and expresses that caring is more of a process than it is a product or result. Care occurs in a context and is largely relational.

As Hawk & Lyons (2008) report, within the broad umbrella of an ethic of care, there is a smaller literature on an ethic of care within the learning/teaching context, or pedagogical caring. The contextual and relational characteristics still prevail. In this framework, the instructor or teacher is the one caring and the student is the one cared for.

Hult (1980, p. 242-3) identifies three levels of recognition in the pedagogical relationship: (1) the teacher recognizes and understands the student as a unique individual self; (2) the teacher recognizes the student as a person in the sense of being a member of the category of all persons having certain ethical rights which the teacher is obligated to respect; and (3) the teacher recognizes the student, as one who has certain needs and expectations that a pedagogical service is to be delivered, and has rights which protect and guarantee that these expectations are fulfilled.

The first level, above, leads the teacher to discover what is unique or novel regarding each student. The second level asks or requires the teacher to respect each of the students as a person. The third level, that suggests a contractual relationship to an extent, leads the teacher to regard both the student and himself as role occupants. In the role as teacher, the teacher evaluates the student's performance as well as his/her own performance. In the faculty-student relationship,

class size may or may not limit or constrain caring behavior as the caring relationship could manifest in a one-to-one exchange or in a one-to-several exchange. Within some reasonable limits to class size, the caring relationship is not necessarily constrained by class size.

Demonstrating Respect in the Pedagogical Context

The literature on respect in the university classroom is even thinner than the literature on caring. The respect literature, however, also embraces the notion of *civility* to some extent and we report briefly on that concept in the section following this one.

The first two levels of pedagogical recognition proposed by Hult (1980, p.242-3 and see in the section immediately above) correspond to the concept of “recognition respect” and the third to the concept of “appraisal respect” introduced by Darwall (1977). Recognition respect is owed to virtually all individuals who should be taken seriously by others, in this instance, course instructors. Darwall (1977) suggests that the other form of respect, appraisal respect, is an attitude toward a person for whom we seek to help express their excellence in some specific pursuit. A caring and respectful instructor would have such an attitude toward students.

Classroom Incivilities and Disrespecting Students

Linked to the concept of respect is the notion of classroom incivilities. This area is receiving substantial attention in the popular press and literature if not in the research of pedagogy. In a recent article, Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) attest to the growing interest in the topic of classroom incivility. Most faculty can report recent instances of student behavior in class related to the sound of unique phone ring tones, students texting one another during class or even engaging in computer games during class and other clever uses of mobile technology. With recent developments such as the iPhone, Kindle, and the iPad, students have even more opportunities to distract themselves and others.

Buttner (2004) used an inductive, qualitative approach to examine 228 undergraduate student accounts of respectful and disrespectful behavior of instructors in their undergraduate business classrooms. Her content analysis of students’ responses to two questions yielded seven categories of respectful and disrespectful instructor behavior, that include: treatment of students, giving task-related help to students, responsiveness to students’ unusual situations, affirming students’ efforts, and maintaining classroom integrity. She found that respectful behavior was exemplified by recognition of students' perspectives and by the treatment of students, including showing concern and sensitivity to students' situations. She noted disrespectful instructor behavior in terms of poor treatment of students and an unwillingness to provide course-related assistance.

In summation, we, as instructors, should be aware, continually, that our students are unique individuals, leading to the realization that our relationships with them need to be contextual and concrete. Pedagogical caring and pedagogical respect would have us develop a repertoire of skills and dispositions that enhance the pedagogical relationship and a portfolio of pedagogical activities that offer guided participation and practice as well as scaffolding approaches to help our students become more competent in the content and skills of the course, more self-directed in

their learning, and more cultivating of the value of relationships. Faculty must extend recognition respect to all students as unique, developing human beings as well as appraisal respect for the academic progress they achieve.

In the next section of this paper we offer the details of our study of two samples of learners relative to their responses to four questions (see above, Background). Then, we present some information and guidance pursuant to care and respect in the classroom.

STUDY METHODS AND RESULTS

We identified two distinct types of students to survey with the four questions. The student groups represent samples of opportunity and the questioning took place over several semesters in a mid-Atlantic, public university in the United States. Nearly all participants fell within the 20 to 30 age range and the proportion of men and women per each sample was nearly equal. As the samples of students are from the same university, it is possible to assume that the results of the survey are reflective of that university, only. The important information from each of the four questions is displayed in table form.

TABLE 1.

QUESTION 1: *Have you ever had the feeling that an instructor had “given up” on you and your learning in a course?*

Student Group	Number of Course Sections	Number of Students	“Yes” N	Responses %	“No” N	Responses %
MBA Students (2 different courses)	14	210	93	44	117	56
Accounting Students	2	50	18	36	32	64
Total	16	260	111	43%	149	57%

In Table 1, we see that more than one-third of the accounting students reported having been given up on by an instructor and even more (44 per cent) of MBA students report the same thing. These figures seem somewhat alarming to us, and we realize that other observers may believe that the results are not particularly alarming. Also, the results may reflect conditions at the university where students were sampled and are not reflective of higher education institutions, in general. Students who reported perceptions of having been given up on by an instructor were asked to give a description or example of the behavior that they believed supported their perception. In both samples, all participants provided descriptions of the behavior. This next comment does not weigh on the data we collected and interpreted, however, we believe it is

worth noting. Interestingly, as we observed the participants respond to this item we noticed that, after being asked, virtually all of them immediately put pen to paper. There was no hesitation; there were no blank stares and no questioning looks. There may be several explanations for this behavior.

For this exploratory research, we decided to treat the two groups of participants as a single group of adult learners without making distinctions regarding how each separate group responded. We then assembled all of the descriptions the participants supplied, and by means of a hand sort, we independently placed all of the descriptions into 13 indicators. We had to reconcile small differences in our interpretations as well as eliminate duplicate responses. Insofar as possible we kept the response language in the words of the participants. This information appears in Table 2. Intuitively, we believed that these descriptors were not equally influential for students. Having categorized the *given up* descriptors into 13 categories, we next ranked the descriptors as to level of severity: mild, moderate, and strong. This ranking was determined by us through consensus and with input from faculty colleagues. Obviously, this is not a highly scientific process and placement of behaviors into the various categories is open to interpretation. Using the definitions of Darwall (1977) with regard to recognition and appraisal respect, we also sorted the behavior descriptions into these two respect categories.

TABLE 2.

QUESTION 2: *What did the instructor do or not do to give you that feeling?*

[Responses Categorized by Level of Severity and Type of Respect]

	<u>Lack of Recognition Respect</u>		<u>Lack of Appraisal Respect</u>
	<u>Mild Severity</u>		<u>Mild Severity</u>
2b.	Instructor showed no concern for helping me to catch up after a lengthy but legitimate absence.	2a.	Instructor had no enthusiasm for the course material.
		2c.	Instructor became detached from class; didn't teach the subject.
	<u>Moderate Severity</u>		<u>Moderate Severity</u>
2d.	Instructor showed a lack of compassion, caring, and understanding.	2m.	Instructor made no attempt to determine whether students were struggling.
2e.	Instructor did not speak or communicate with me.		
2f.	Instructor declined to call on me in class; expressed dissatisfaction with any of my attempts.		
2g.	Instructor didn't attempt to help with my requests for assistance.		
2l.	Instructor exhibited a generally discouraging attitude.		
	<u>Strong Severity</u>		<u>Strong Severity</u>

2h.	Instructor bluntly stated that I would not be able to pass the course no matter what I did.	2k.	Instructor failed to return graded assignments.
2i.	Instructor would not answer my questions and told me I should already know that.		
2j.	Instructor got irritated when students asked questions; insulted students.		

Our third question was about consequences. That is, we asked participants to tell us what they did as a result of their perception or belief that an instructor had given up on them and their learning. In a manner similar to that regarding question 2 above, we extracted through a hand sort four response categories for the participant's answers to the question. Table 3 offers four response categories that range from doing nothing (3 a-c), passive coping (3 d-e), active coping (3 f-h), to approaching the instructor (3 i-j). In a few cases, participants offered more than one response to the question. As closely as possible, we retained the participants' actual wording of their responses.

TABLE 3.

QUESTION 3: *What did you do as a result of that perception or belief?*

Doing Nothing

- 3a. Did nothing.
- 3b. Basically, I gave up on the course.
- 3c. Just got through the course.

Passive Coping

- 3d. Decided to avoid this instructor in the future.
- 3e. Stopped asking questions.

Active Coping

- 3f. I relied solely on the text, other materials and gave up on the lecture.
- 3g. I talked with other participants to help resolve my confusion about content.
- 3h. Sought out other instructors to help me.

Approaching Instructors

- 3i. Approached instructor about my learning but received an unacceptable response.
 - 3j. Told instructor how I felt about things - then determined to succeed in spite of him. I just decided to work harder.
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The last question asked of our sample participants required them to identify the specific ways in which an instructor can demonstrate or communicate to the participants that she/he has not given up on them and their learning in a course of study. All sample participants, regardless of whether they had or had not perceived that they had been given up on by an instructor were encouraged to respond to this question. Virtually all of the participants responded to this question.

Once more, with mutual agreement, we distilled all 24 of the response types into six categories: (1) instructor preparation and enthusiasm; (2) establishing an encouraging and safe environment; (3) recognizing participant learning differences; (4) involving students; (5) providing constructive and/or developmental feedback; and (6) instructor availability to learners. The titles of the six categories are somewhat arbitrary and open to interpretation. This information appears in Table 4.

TABLE 4.

QUESTION 4: *What are ways that an instructor can demonstrate or communicate to you that she/he has not given up on you or your learning?*

Instructor Preparation and Enthusiasm

- 4a. Being well-prepared and interested in each class session and enthusiastic about subject.
- 4b. Admitting fallibility, not knowing.

Establishing a Safe and Encouraging Environment

- 4c. Taking a personal interest in each student, knowing them.
- 4d. Giving personal words of encouragement.
- 4e. Continually encouraging and supporting students in class and individually.
- 4f. Exercising patience.
- 4g. Showing impartiality.

Recognizing Student Learning Differences

- 4h. Listening actively and carefully to students.
- 4i. Recognizing and acting on the uniqueness of each student.
- 4j. Adapting/adjusting to class learning pace and individual learning paces.
- 4k. Taking time to learn new ways to help students learn.
- 4l. Changing learning facilitation style to match that of students.

Involving Students and Checking for Comprehension

- 4m. Monitoring understanding of all students and retracing steps until all understand.
- 4n. Approaching students individually to check on comprehension and understanding.
- 4o. Asking probing questions to get students involved.
- 4p. Providing additional assignments aimed at helping students to understand.

Providing Constructive Developmental Feedback

- 4q. Giving frequent feedback on progress and progress reports during the term.
- 4r. Beginning feedback with something positive.
- 4s. Recommending appropriate student services.
- 4t. Asking students how the instructor can help them improve their performance.

Instructor Availability

- 4u. Being available to students especially after class and by email.
- 4v. Encouraging availability to students outside of class, one-on-one.
- 4w. Responding quickly to personal student communications.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

We choose to frame the discussion of results in two clusters: first, a contrast of our study data with the findings of the research of Boice (1996) and Buttner (2004). Second, we examine the findings from the perspectives of pedagogical caring and respect.

Two of Boice's categories of instructor behavior that did not convey care and respect towards students were: (1) discouraging students' questions and/or participation; and (2) being aloof and distant from students, and both were clearly reflected in the results of the present study. As Boice (1996) studied classroom incivilities on the part of instructor and students, it may be that instructor behavior in the face of student incivilities results in a withdrawal of care and respect towards students. That is, we may have a cause and effect relationship. This idea is supported by the research of Hirschy (2004) who reports that classroom incivilities have consequences for both the students and the instructor. Further, faculty may not have the training or skills to effectively manage the causes of classroom incivilities. Also, compared were the seven categories of the respectful/disrespectful statements from Buttner's (2004) research with the responses of the participants from our samples to question 2 in Table 2. With the exception of Buttner's category, affirmation of students' efforts, we are able to find descriptors for all other categories, and, in some cases, we find several descriptors for a given category. These comparisons serve as a validation of the general findings of Buttner and help to give greater shape to the landscape of student perceptions of instructor behavior. We had the same findings as Hawk and Lyons (2008) when it comes to seemingly important factors such as: (1) a mention of clearly stated course learning goals; (2) clearly stated grading criteria; and (3) comments about the course syllabus or plan. That is, there was no mention of these elements by any participants in our samples.

With regard to pedagogical caring and respect, the learners who responded to Question 2 (Table 2) provided their own interpretations of the behaviors they said they experienced. The primary interpretation was that the instructor had given up on them and their learning in the course of study. Reviewing the information in Table 2 clearly supports this interpretation as the information presents the instructor as one who does not engage in a caring relationship and who does not accord the learner recognition and/or appraisal respect.

The information in Table 2 may be interpreted to suggest that if instructors desire for the classroom environment to be one of mutual caring and respect, instructor-learner, then instructors may have to take the initiative to create opportunities for learners to offer feedback on how well the learning is taking place in the course. This initiative may also help avoid classroom incivilities (see Clark, 2009; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010). Instructors may take initiative to encourage students to be active seekers of feedback (Ashford, Blatt & Vande Walle, 2003) for the learner's own growth and to help learners move beyond passivity and conventionality when it comes to inquiring about what is done in the classroom. In the next and final segment of this article, we provide suggestions and guidance to instructors that flow from the information identified in our surveys.

BEHAVING IN CARING AND RESPECTFUL WAYS TOWARD LEARNERS

Learning that a relatively high percentage of students indicated that they perceived that at least one instructor in their post-secondary education had given up on them and their learning in a course came as a bit of a surprise. We were not surprised, however, by the descriptions of the behaviors they offered as indicative of giving up nor were we surprised by the several behaviors they explained that were indicative of a caring and respectful pedagogy.

Demonstrating or modeling pedagogical caring and pedagogical respect are the appropriate actions for an instructor. Caring helps us to reach all of our students. Students who experience an environment of care may be more committed to study in a course and may be more motivated to perform. In a related vein, the research on interactional justice in organizations and in workplace environments (Namie, 2000; Namie et al., 2001) indicates that employees who are respected and who are treated well frequently perform better on the job. Further, Buttner's (2004) findings indicate that when students are not treated with care or respect, many of them report accounts of how their self-esteem suffered and how their behavior toward the course and the instructor changed. Many said they declined to participate in class discussions, came to class late or left early, missed class, dropped the class, or a combination of these actions.

Depending on the sample under consideration, the questions placed before the learners in the present study reveal that a substantial percentage of them believe that one or more instructors had given up on their learning in a course of study. Nevertheless, there is a constructive side to the inquiry. Table 4 presents a number of behavioral indicators that learners felt were characteristic of instructors who had not given up on their learning. Many of those indicators are the mirror opposites of the indicators presented in Table 2. Furthermore, the six broad groupings in Table 4 of: (1) instructor preparation and enthusiasm; (2) encouragement and providing a safe environment; (3) recognition of diversity of student learning approaches; (4) checking on comprehension; (5) constructive feedback and (6) instructor availability are congruent with the characteristics of pedagogical caring and respect. These groupings also parallel, at least partially, the accounts reported in Buttner (2004).

The foregoing information and analysis suggests that there are a number of specific actions that instructors can take to model and cultivate pedagogical care and respect in their courses. Our review of the literature, the results from Buttner (2004) and Hawk & Lyons (2008), the results from our own surveys reported earlier in this work, and what we have learned from our own classroom practices, offer a number of practical suggestions.

Instructors should:

- *make sure course performance expectations and learning requirements are clear.*
- *strive to provide an encouraging and supportive environment for students to risk their ideas and questions, to offer their voices, to listen carefully, and to reflect on what is happening in class and in their own learning.*
- *get to know our individual students through the use of beginning-of-course questionnaire and/or personal interaction.*

- *recognize that it is likely necessary to provide different approaches to instruction because students do not all learn in the same way.*
- *provide much constructive feedback on student performance.*
- *model caring and respectful behavior to all students.*

Table 5 summarizes many of the course attributes that we have found to communicate pedagogical caring and respect.

TABLE 5.

Course Attributes that Communicate Caring and Respect

1. Sending out a welcome letter to the learners before the start of the course.
 2. Providing the course guide or syllabus, on-line or hard copy, to the learners before the start of class.
 3. Providing feedback and evaluation rubrics on all graded activities in the course guide or syllabus.
 4. Providing a desk name card for each learner during the first class session.
 5. Having the learners complete a personal data sheet during the first class session.
 6. Administering learning style instruments to the learners at the first class session and sharing results.
 7. Using open-ended questions to stimulate discussion.
 8. Providing sufficient wait-time after questions to allow for reflection and crafting of responses.
 9. Choosing learning activities that are active and involve the participants in their own learning processes.
 10. Giving clear and thorough written developmental feedback on all aspects of written papers.
 11. Giving the learners opportunities to hand in drafts of written work for developmental feedback.
 12. Offering the learners a mid-course opportunity to give you formative feedback on how the course is going.
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FINAL COMMENTS

One thing that emerges from this research and the research of others is the inference derived from student comments and reported perceptions that students want instructors to create and moderate somewhat inclusive and democratic classrooms. These classrooms embrace openness, mutual respect in terms of recognition and appraisal respect, and focus on helping students achieve instructional and personal goals. Elenas (2006) has defined a democratic classroom as one where all participants are welcome and students believe they can contribute to discourse.

Stone-Norton (2008) and Ladson-Billings (2001) help to shape the concept of the inclusive classroom by identifying several of the features we have listed above in our suggested practices. This includes, for example, asking for student feedback on class activities, using diverse teaching

techniques, inviting student participation, and demonstrating authentic care and respect toward students.

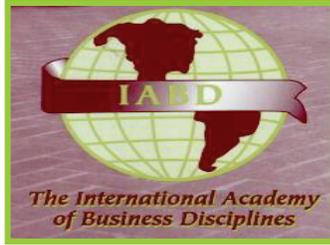
With reference to democratic and inclusive teaching environments, Jinkins (2003) has suggested that in post-secondary education courses instructors should place a priority on their interactions with students and on interaction of students with each other. This interaction can be moderated with the use of a variety of teaching methods and tools such as cases, simulations, and group projects. And, in courses that are conducted partially or wholly online, Machuca (2007), who studied the teaching of accounting to students online, suggests that a caring attitude toward students may be expressed by some one-to-one time with each student via chat technology or by phone and by moderating teaching methods so as to reach different (verbal, visual, etc.) learners' styles. Finally, in Smith's (2006) study of both accounting graduates and public accountants, he found that the two groups rated most highly these teaching methods: in-class discussions, in-class experiential exercises, and case work in class. Each of these methods involves students in active participation and thus demonstrates a positive valuing of student-as-participant.

Future exploratory research in the domain of pedagogical care could focus more on care effects by gender, differences among learners in different disciplines, and on various aspects of student performance to include participation and involvement in class discussions, absenteeism, performance on tests and quizzes, and grades. Instructors have the opportunity to model an ethic of care in their classrooms, in their relationships with their students, and in their relationships with their discipline, their colleagues, and themselves. Students who experience that modeling may be more willing to adopt an ethic of care in their own lives and become models for others.

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