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AUTHOR Sneed, Don; Wulfemeyer, Tim
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the pilot study described in this paper was to produce a set of video report cards for the parents of a small group of college journalism students and then to determine the perceived effectiveness of such cards. Fifteen students at San Diego State University volunteered to participate in the study. Questionnaires were distributed to parents, designed to elicit their evaluations of the effectiveness of the video report cards as a method for communicating information about grades and the process of assigning grades. Fifty-seven percent of the parents returned questionnaires. About 95% of these parents said video report cards (VRC) were a good idea for college students. In general, mothers tended to react more favorably to the concept of VRCs than did fathers. The problems associated with production were related to obtaining video cassette recorders and equipment to prepare the tapes. The parents of college students in this survey overwhelmingly approved of the concept of video report cards. Such a response warrants further study and experimentation with VRCs. One of the greatest benefits of VRCs may be their ability to enhance the outreach programs of colleges and universities. (One table of data is included and 21 references are attached.) (MG)

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Video Report Cards: Testing the Effectiveness of Visual Summative Evaluation

Don Sneed and Tim Wulfemeyer
Department of Journalism
San Diego State University
San Diego, California 92182-0116
(619) 594-6790
(619) 594-6635

CS506890

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Video Report Cards: Testing the Effectiveness of Visual Summative Evaluation

Some researchers have suggested that the traditional, printed report card is a rather unsatisfactory method for reporting information about a student's performance (Brodinsky, 1972; Chansky, 1975; DeSpain, 1973; Giannangelo, 1975; Malcolmson, 1985; Patterson, 1976; Powell, 1980; Walling, 1975). For example, Shedlin (1988) found that "report cards have become so quantitative and narrowly focused that their information potential is rarely realized." He criticized printed report cards for rarely providing information about a student's "creativity, curiosity, perseverance, flexibility, imagination or true thinking ability."

Mehrens and Lehmann (1978) criticized a "marks only" grading system for three major reasons:

(1) Marks can be inadequate for reporting certain competencies and many important course/school objectives.

(2) Marks can produce detrimental side effects--feelings of failure, excess competitiveness, cheating and too much emphasis on getting a good grade rather than learning.

(3) Marks usually do not facilitate effective communication between home and school.

Mehrens and Lehmann concluded that all "single" grade reporting systems are inadequate for meeting the important objectives of student evaluation. They advised supplementing the traditional, printed report card with such methods as letters and conferences.

The development of computer-generated report cards has elicited additional calls for improvements. Fleming(1988) reported that "computer-generated report cards must be analyzed, evaluated, explained and acted upon in the same manner as any other professional report." Simply filling in a letter or number bubble on a computer sheet is not an adequate method for reporting student performance and progress.

The purpose of this study was to develop and test the effectiveness of video report cards(VRCs) to determine if visual communication techniques can be used to improve the traditional, printed report card for college journalism students. VRCs were thought to be especially appropriate for journalism students because such students regularly engage in visually oriented, course-related activities that can be captured on videotape.

Quality summative evaluation of a student--the determination of a final grade--is important for at least three major reasons(Mehrens and Lehmann, 1978):

(1)Summarizing formative evaluations. Formative evaluations include such things as test scores and graded assignments. Such evaluations are designed to facilitate further learning by informing students of their progress while instruction is taking place.

(2)Providing guidance. A comprehensive final evaluation of a student's performance/progress can be helpful for a student's long-range planning.

(3) Providing motivation. Thorough, honest and insightful evaluation can motivate a student to work harder to increase knowledge and improve skills. Evaluation can take the form of friendly encouragement, mild chastising or even harsh criticizing designed to instill at least a small degree of fear of future failures.

Whatever form grading or marking takes, most experts agree that it is best when it is an honest "confrontation with reality in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance" for students, instructors and other interested parties (LaBenne and Greene, 1969). Such honest and sincere reality checks help students develop accurate self-concepts and provide important information for others as well.

There are at least three major groups of people, besides students, who can benefit from quality summative evaluations: parents, educators and prospective employers (Mehrens and Lehmann, 1978). Parents want and need to know how their children are doing in school. Parents usually play important roles in the educational and vocational planning of students, so parents need to know the academic strengths and weaknesses of their children. Few parents have much contact with schools, especially colleges and universities, and many schools do a relatively poor job of explaining course or program objectives, so better summative evaluations could do much to improve relations between home and school.

Educators--teachers, counselors and administrators--can benefit from the task of preparing formal, summative evaluations, because, if done properly, the process promotes a careful examination of student achievements, course goals and objectives, assignments, methods and resource materials. Such introspection can result in better teaching and better evaluation systems.

Prospective employers can profit from quality summative evaluations in at least two major ways. They can obtain more detailed information about a person's abilities and limitations and they can better identify those institutions that are best preparing students for careers in the real world.

Providing quality, comprehensive summative evaluation for elementary, junior high school and high school students is a complicated process, but it becomes even more complicated for college students. College students are adults and many do not live with their parents. Printed reports of final grades normally are sent to students, not parents. Despite these realities, many parents continue to make financial and other contributions to their children and many want to know how their children are progressing in college.

One way to improve the traditional, grade reporting process and involve parents more in what goes on at colleges and universities is to produce and distribute video report cards. VRCs offer both aural and visual messages. As a form of "machine-assisted interpersonal communication," VRCs combine characteristics of interpersonal communication and mass communication (Dominick, 1987). They allow the sender and receiver of modified "face-to-face" communication to be separated by time and distance. They give an "electronic permanence" to interpersonal messages. They make it possible for parents to see and hear instructors, plus scenes of class activities, exercises and assignments.

The "you are there" dimension of video report cards can help improve lines of communication, because it conveys a sense of immediacy and allows a communicator to maintain eye contact and "mind contact" with

the intended receivers of his communication(Rhodes, 1971). The "powerful sensations of experiencing the reality of the situation" that result from seeing and hearing people, places, things and actions plus the changing image that occupies the visual sense and demands attention can do much to enhance the communication process(Ciano and Carne, 1982; Lentz, 1982).

Video report cards allow educators to employ some of the latest technological advances in communications. As Adler(1981/82) has pointed out, one of the most significant scientific breakthroughs in the past 50 years, in terms of impact on our lives, has been the revolution in communications technology and it is important for educators to keep pace with the rapid changes taking place in the Information Age. Hamm and Adams(1987) have even suggested that being able to create and manipulate video images will be an important part of the changing teaching strategies of the future.

One purpose of this pilot study was an attempt to enhance the grade reporting process through the use of telecommunications technology; however, the main purpose was to produce a set of video report cards for the parents of a small group of college journalism students and then determine the perceived effectiveness of such cards.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How effective are video report cards for college students?
2. How effective might video report cards be for students in high school, junior high school and elementary school?
3. What are the advantages of video report cards?
4. What are the disadvantages of video report cards?
5. Are there any differences in the perceptions of mothers and fathers regarding video report cards?

METHODS

Near the end of a 15-week, Fall, 1988 semester course in editorial and critical writing at San Diego State University, students were asked if they wanted to have a video report card detailing their performance in the course sent to their parents. Fifteen of the 20 students volunteered, furnished their own blank tapes and agreed to either take the video report cards home or have them mailed to their parents. Since student grades are mailed to students rather than parents, asking for volunteers ensured that student privacy rights were not violated.

Of the five students who did not volunteer, two received final grades of F, one received a D, one earned a B and another earned an A. The grades for the 15 who volunteered were: 4 A's, 8 B's and 3 C's.¹

In addition to the video report cards, questionnaires were distributed to parents. Parents were asked 17 questions designed to elicit their evaluations of the effectiveness of video report cards as a method for communicating information about grades and the process of assigning grades. A self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope was provided.

The video report cards were made at the home of the instructor for the course, so they lacked studio-quality production values. Each tape was approximately 25 minutes long.² The first five minutes of each tape featured the rationale for producing video report cards and an overview of the course. The rationale included the following:

(1) A video report card is an attempt to improve the relationship between the university and the community by giving parents additional information about at least one course at the university.

(2) A video report card allows for a more detailed, "personalized" explanation of why a grade has been assigned than does a typical, printed report card.

(3) A video report card is an attempt to improve the student evaluation process by utilizing advancements in communications technology.

After the standardized rationale and overview, the next five minutes of each tape consisted of excerpts from class activities. Brief clips from the field trips, guest speakers, videotapes and reviewed books, movies, concerts and art exhibits were edited together in this segment.

The final 15-20 minutes of each video report card was "individualized" to provide an analysis of how a student's grade was assigned. Copies of graded papers with the instructor's comments were shown and the instructor discussed the strengths and weaknesses of a student's writing, suggested areas that needed improvement, cited areas where improvement had occurred, and identified problems with writing mechanics, story organization, information gaps or unanswered questions.

This portion of the tape also noted especially creative or effective writing and/or other contributions the student had made over and above what was necessary. Finally, the instructor addressed late assignments, lack of effort, absenteeism and perceived underachievement.

The questionnaires contained 11 five-point Likert-type items. Response range was "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." For the results reported in this paper, the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories were combined and so were the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" categories.

In addition to the quantitative portion of the questionnaire, five open-end questions were included. The more qualitative questions asked parents to comment on what they liked best and least about their child's video report card and whether they planned to keep it.

Questionnaires were returned by 57% of the parents.³

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

About 95% of the parents said video report cards were a good idea for college students.⁴ (See TABLE 1) Parents were not so enthused about the prospect of VRCs for other students, though. About 80% of the parents thought VRCs would be a good idea for high school students, about 60% thought they would be good for junior high school students and about 40% thought they would be good for elementary school students.

Generally, mothers tended to like the idea of video report cards more than did fathers. For example, all of the mothers and 88% of the fathers liked VRCs for college students. About 88% of the mothers and 63% of the fathers liked VRCs for high school students.⁵

More than 80% of the parents felt video report cards were an improvement over the traditional, printed report cards that they had seen. About 90% of the parents thought printed report cards provide too little information about how a grade was assigned. Almost 95% indicated that the VRC helped improve their understanding of the subject area their child was studying.

About 40% of the parents wanted to receive both a printed and a video report card. About 80% expressed the desire to have VRCs for all of their children and 65% said they wished they had been given VRCs for the courses they took in school.

PLACE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Generally, in their responses to open-end questions, parents praised the concept of video report cards and acknowledged the effort that it took to produce the VRCs. **Every** parent indicated that the VRC would be kept.

One wrote, "I plan to keep it forever, make copies for grandparents and replay it whenever I feel unsure of my contribution to the world."

Some parents appreciated the teaching/grade reporting innovation of video report cards. Comments included:

"I sincerely hope you have set a precedent that will become common practice. It is refreshing to find teachers who are not tradition bound, but who are seeking and willing to be innovative."

"I think this is a great technique and wonderful vehicle to communicate to the parents about their child in college."

Some parents indicated that the video report cards might even have a ripple effect--a kind of motivation for others.

One wrote, "I feel my son who is in high school was motivated to strive for higher scholastic achievement after viewing his sister's progress in college."

Some parents remarked about the form and content of the video report cards. Comments included:

"Your evaluation of our son was so accurate it was uncanny. We plan to review the tape with our son to point out your confirmation of our opinion of his work attitude and skills. My hand and heart are out to the person who stood or sat and held the cotton pickin' camcorder while you expounded on a whole class of students."

"The explanation of what the course entailed was the best part of the video report card."

"I had a clear picture of what the class was about, the assignments required and how my daughter was progressing. I also liked meeting the teacher through the video."

"This is the first time I've been given the opportunity to 'see' one of my son's instructors and make an evaluation for myself of his competency and personality. I hope I can continue to receive his grades in this manner."

"It is helpful to me since I'm a parent outside the household and don't get a regular opportunity to share in my daughter's progress."

"What a wonderfully creative way to encourage parental participation in the growth of children."

Some of the unfavorable comments made by parents about the video report cards dealt with the impracticality of creating VRCs for each member of a large class. One parent, who was a third grade teacher, said he was already required to provide lengthy comments on printed report cards, so he did not see the need to spend the time creating VRCs.

Several parents criticized the poor tape quality of the video report cards; however, one parent said the quality of the tape, noises from planes and children and less-than-perfect lighting did not detract from the VRC, but actually served as examples of the instructor's sincerity in producing it.

About one-third of the parents said the tape was a bit too long. A few parents suggested that the pace of the tape was a little slow, especially at the beginning.

CONCLUSIONS

Video report cards were favorably received by almost every parent surveyed. In addition, all of the students who requested a VRC indicated they liked the finished product. Hence, the investment in time, energy and resources needed to produce VRCs seems justified.

One of the greatest benefits of video report cards may be their ability to enhance the outreach programs of colleges and universities. VRCs can provide important links between the the families of students and the college or university. Such links could lead to needed contributions of time, energy, resources and money.

Too few parents have an opportunity to interact with or even meet professors. While it's true that VRCs are examples of linear, one-way, machine-assisted interpersonal communication, they do allow parents to find out significantly more about what their children are doing in college than do traditional printed report cards. And, when questionnaires are included as part of the package, a viable feedback loop is added and the one-way communication dimension is diminished somewhat.

Even though the idea for video report cards for college journalism and mass communication students seems to be a good one, VRCs probably are not practical for all courses. Because of the time necessary to create them, VRCs seem best suited for low-enrollment courses--fewer than 20 students. Because of the need to really "know" students and to have tangible examples of student performance, VRCs seem best suited for skills courses where instructors can evaluate a student's ability and aptitude based on concrete, "real-world" writing, reporting, editing and production projects or assignments.

While parents seem receptive and appreciative of video report cards for college students, they do not seem to think VRCs would be as effective for children in elementary, junior high or high schools. This may indicate that perhaps parents feel they know more about K-12 educational programs and teachers than they do about college and university programs and so the more elaborate and complete grade reporting opportunities that a VRC provides are not needed as much for younger students.

In general, mothers tended to react more favorably to the concept of VRCs than did fathers. None of the slight differences between mothers and fathers on any of the variables was statistically significant, however.

The technology-related problems associated with the production of video report cards cannot be overlooked. Not everyone owns a video cassette recorder (VCR); however, with VCR penetration approaching 70% of the households with televisions (Agee, Ault & Emery, 1988), even parents who do not own a VCR likely will know someone who does and so will have access to one. In those cases where a VCR is not readily available to parents, perhaps an instructor could create an "audio report card" or write the parents a letter.

Instructors might encounter some problems obtaining and using taping equipment--cameras, lights, microphones, tripods, editing systems and props. As Tamashiro and Campoy (1988) have noted, "The dominance of new technologies such as computers, interactive video and electronic communications poses a dilemma for schools: On the one hand, educators want to use these technologies in the curriculum. On the other hand, they are obstructed by limited budgets, lack of expertise and even resistance to technology."

Such problems can be mitigated in a number of ways. Campus media center equipment usually can be used for little or no expense. Help and advice from experts is usually available on most campuses for little or no expense. How-to workshops are often offered by campus media centers, local video stores and by extension or adult education programs. Reading owner's manuals and simply practicing with equipment can also help overcome a lack of knowledge and experience with video equipment.

The experience that comes with practice will likely help lessen the impact of another problem that surfaced in this study--poor production values. The VRCs in this study lacked studio-quality production values. Some shots were unsteady, the lighting was uneven in spots, there was some tape breakup occasionally, the audio levels were not always consistent, background noises were sometimes distracting and there were occasional editing glitches.

A tripod, studio lighting and controlled audio would have made for a much superior product. As Hamm and Adams(1988) suggest, "To communicate to a target audience requires an understanding of visual aesthetics, message design, video technology and the characteristics of effective instruction."

Another critical point is that instructors need to begin taping appropriate course-related activities and evaluations from the very first class meeting. Ideally, if tape supplies are sufficient, a different tape should be used for each activity--guest speakers, field trips, in-class assignments. Having a set of tapes rather than a single master tape will facilitate easier and faster editing when it comes time to create the individual VRCs.

Despite the amount of time, energy, assistance and resources required, despite the difficulty and expense of obtaining and using the necessary equipment, despite the fact that not everyone has a VCR, and despite the fact that video report cards may not be practical or effective at all levels of education and/or for every class, the parents of college students in this survey overwhelmingly approved of the concept of video report cards. Such a response warrants further study and experimentation with VRCs as a method for improving the reporting of grades for students enrolled in college-level journalism and mass communication courses.

NOTES

¹The average grade in upper division courses in the Department of Journalism at San Diego State University is a B. The editorial and critical writing course traditionally attracts some of the best students in the department.

²The authors estimate that it took about 20 hours to produce the 15 VRCs used in this pilot study. The estimate includes shooting, editing and dubbing the videotapes. It does not include time spent critiquing student assignments or determining final grades.

³Some students indicated they lived in single-parent households and could not guarantee that out-of-household parents would see the VRC and/or complete the questionnaire. In addition, some students indicated that their parents might return a single questionnaire to represent the "family" view rather than return both questionnaires.

⁴Students were not formally surveyed, but all of the 15 students informally reported they had seen their VRC and they all enthusiastically endorsed the technique.

⁵Chi-square statistical tests were performed for each variable. None of the mother-father differences on any of the variables was statistically significant. (See TABLE 1)

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TABLE 1Perceived Effectiveness of Video Report Cards by Sex of Parent^A

<u>STATEMENT</u>	<u>PARENTS</u> (N=17)	<u>FATHERS</u> (N=8)	<u>MOTHERS</u> (N=9)
VRCs are a good idea for college students	94%(1.3) ^B	88%(1.5)	100%(1.1)
VRCs are a good idea for high school students	77%(1.9)	63%(2.3)	89%(1.6)
VRCs are a good idea for junior high school students	59%(2.5)	50%(2.8)	78%(2.2)
VRCs are a good idea for elementary school students	41%(3.0)	38%(3.3)	56%(2.7)
A VRC is an improvement over a printed report card	82%(1.8)	75%(1.6)	89%(1.5)
A VRC helps me understand what my child is studying	94%(1.7)	88%(1.6)	100%(1.2)
Printed report cards offer too little information about grades	88%(2.1)	75%(2.2)	100%(1.9)
A VRC and a printed report card should be issued to parents	41%(2.9)	38%(3.0)	56%(2.2)
I'd like VRCs for my other children who are or have been in school	82%(2.2)	75%(2.3)	89%(1.9)
I wish I had VRCs for courses I took	65%(2.4)	62%(2.4)	67%(2.1)

^A Percentages of "agreement" with statements. "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses were collapsed.

^B Range 1-5. Lower the mean, greater the agreement with statement.