

Comparing student and faculty - perceptions related to academic freedom protection

De Vee Dykstra
University of South Dakota

David Moen
University of South Dakota

Thomas Davies
University of South Dakota

ABSTRACT

Faculty employ a number of classroom management practices in order to create an environment that facilitates optimum learning, which can be dependent on student motivation. When certain policies are adopted, academic freedom issues may arise, specifically whether the instructor has the freedom to adopt various practices. This study explores whether there is agreement between faculty and students as to whether such freedom exists when it comes to multiple scenarios involving policies related to instructor accessibility/availability and student attendance/participation. This paper summarizes the responses to a survey conducted of professors and students at a mid-sized, Midwestern liberal arts university who were asked by use of a survey whether instructors had the freedom to adopt 21 specific policies, and provides a statistical comparison of the results.

Keywords: classroom management, academic freedom, student motivation

INTRODUCTION

Not surprisingly, considerable educational research has focused on what can be done to facilitate student learning, which is of paramount importance to colleges and universities seeking to distinguish their academic programs so that they may attract both students and donors. It is now generally accepted that for this goal to be achieved, students must actively participate in their own learning. While it was once more commonplace for academicians to see their classes as a captive audience, pedagogy has become less dominated by lectures and more open to interactive teaching techniques.

Research has shown that students must be motivated in order for true learning to take place. Lumsden suggested that motivation related to a student's desire to participate in the learning process and could involve two types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn (1994). Students who are intrinsically motivated engage in an activity for enjoyment, to learn, and/or out of a sense of accomplishment, while extrinsic motivation arises out of a desire to be rewarded, for example with a higher grade, or to avoid a penalty. Motivation to learn, according to Marshall, entails the meaningfulness and value associated with completing an academic task (Marshall, 1987). Crump, as cited in Brewer's article, identified excitement, interest and enthusiasm towards learning as the three primary components of motivation (Brewer E. W., 2005)

There appears to be considerable agreement that faculty are at least partially responsible for motivating students to learn, although several studies have also shown that students may assume varying degrees of responsibility as well. Certain instructor characteristics have been shown to positively motivate students, including instructor fairness (Chory-Assad, 2002); Darr reported that the instructor's behavior is a crucial factor in a student's evaluation of the quality of instruction (1996). Likewise, instructor effectiveness is dependent on such qualities as perceived caring, enthusiasm, consistency and impartiality (Brewer E. , 1997). Two prior studies (Brewer E. D., 2001; Karsenti, 1994) found that classroom management practices can also affect the student's motivation to learn; in particular, "highly structured, well-organized, and outcomes-oriented teachers" appear to maintain student motivation. Yet it is also important to create a flexible classroom environment that empowers students (Brewer E. W., 2005). Weimer states, the goal with classroom policies and practices is to create conditions within the classroom environment that positively affect student behavior that positively impacts learning outcomes (2002).

Specific classroom management practices adopted by instructors can vary widely, and are typically dependent upon the professor's personal preference dictated by their own prior experience. Usually academicians have relatively broad discretion in structuring their classes. Frequently academic freedom is used as this justification for this relatively free reign. While this protection has a long history, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the then Association of American Colleges and Universities, issued the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which provided in part: "universities of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning." (1940) Conventional wisdom suggests that academic freedom protections extend to discussion of

the course subject matter or content. It is less clear and more controversial as to whether such freedom extends to adoption of classroom management practices. Thus, while there may be confusion over how much, if any, academic freedom faculty have in setting such policies, it is likely there will be at least some modicum of disagreement between faculty and students as to the acceptability of some rules. Some of this disagreement can perhaps be explained by considering the tendency of both groups to respond in accordance with their own self interests.

The authors undertook a study to determine whether students and faculty at a mid-sized Midwestern liberal arts institution believed instructors had the freedom to implement 21 specific policies and practices involving instructor accessibility/availability and student attendance/participation. While it is likely that students have less understanding of the legal protections afforded academicians, disagreements between the two groups can, as shown, have a negative impact on such factors as student motivation and their evaluation of the quality of instruction. Thus, to the extent such potential conflict can be avoided by careful planning, institutional and instructor goals may be more easily achieved.

METHODOLOGY

The authors described 21 accessibility/availability and classroom attendance/participation practices and policies and developed two surveys, one of which was administered to faculty and the other to students. In both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate (i.e., yes or no) whether the hypothetical professor in the scenario had the academic freedom or discretion to adopt the described policy or practice.

The faculty survey was administered to professors from various colleges and schools (including business, fine arts, arts and sciences, education, medicine and law) teaching at a Midwestern mid-sized doctoral granting liberal arts university. Participation was voluntary and faculty were assured their individual responses would remain confidential. Approximately 90 faculty members completed the questionnaire. One section of the faculty questionnaire asked several demographic questions. The following results were observed.

- With regard to age, 30% of the respondents were less than or equal to 40 years of age, 33% were between the ages of 41 and 50, and 37% were 51 or older.
- Almost 55% of the respondents taught in the College of Arts & Sciences, while 15% were School of Business faculty, about 19% were School of Education faculty, and 12% taught in other colleges/schools, e.g., Fine Arts, Law and Medicine.
- The highest educational degree for almost 78% of the respondents was a doctorate or professional degree, e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, DDS, DVM and JD, while the highest degree for about 21% of the faculty was a master's degree, e.g., MA, MS, M.Eng, and MBA.
- Ninety-three percent of the respondents were full-time college/university employees, while 7% were part-time.
- About 60% of the respondents were male, while approximately 40% were female.
- Approximately 35% of individuals responded they taught primarily freshmen and sophomores, 38% taught primarily juniors and seniors, and 27% taught primarily graduate students.
- About 16% of the respondents were lecturers/adjunct instructors, 35% were assistant professors, 26% were associate professors, and about 24% were full professors.

- Nearly 25% of the individuals were non-tenure track faculty, while 34% were tenure-track faculty, and about 42% were tenured faculty.
- Almost 51% of the individuals indicated that they had 11 or more years of college/university level teaching experience. The next largest percentage was associated with faculty who had between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience (28%). Twenty-one percent of the respondents indicated 0 to 5 years of teaching experience.

Instructions for completing the faculty and student surveys differed slightly. Specifically, faculty respondents were given the following instructions:

“For each of the following independent situations, please assume that the hypothetical professor, while not you, has demographic characteristics similar to your own (e.g., gender, teaching experience, field or discipline, rank). If you think the hypothetical professor’s described behavior in the following cases should be protected by the principles of academic freedom, please indicate by placing a check mark in the “Yes” column. If you think the hypothetical professor’s actions are not protected and could be cause for disciplinary action, please indicate by marking the “No” column.”

Students were given the following instructions:

“If you think the hypothetical professor should have the freedom or discretion to adopt the described behavior or policy in the following cases, please indicate so by placing a check mark in the “Yes” column. If you think the hypothetical professor should be subject to disciplinary action or not protected for adopting the described behavior or policy, please indicate so by marking the “No” column.”

The student survey was administered to undergraduate and graduate accounting, business and health services administration students at the same mid-sized Midwestern liberal arts institution. Students in upper level business and health services courses were surveyed. Participation was voluntary and students were assured their individual responses would remain confidential. A total of 205 student surveys were administered, of which 201 were completed and usable. One section of the student questionnaire asked several demographic questions. The following results were observed.

- Fifty-four percent of the respondents were male and 46% of the respondents were female.
- In terms of age, 39% of the respondents were 21 years of age or younger, 35% were between the ages of 22 and 24, and 26% were more than 24 years of age.
- Almost 83% of the respondents were undergraduate students, while slightly more than 17% were graduate students.
- Among the undergraduate students, almost 48% were accounting majors, slightly more than 20% were management majors, 10% were finance majors, 10% were health services administration majors, 7% were marketing majors, and almost 5% were non-business majors.
- Almost 39% of the graduate student respondents were MBA students, while 59% were MPA (Masters of Professional Accountancy) students, and 2% were non-business graduate students.

- Slightly more than 36% of the respondents indicated that their overall grade point average was between a 3.51 and 4.00; almost 37% indicated an overall GPA between 3.01 and 3.50; almost 23% indicated an overall GPA between 2.51 and 3.00; and slightly more than 4% indicated an overall GPA between 2.01 and 2.50.
- Almost all of the student respondents indicated that their race was White (91%), while slightly more than 3% indicated Asian, Pacific Islander or Black, and more than 5% did not wish to disclose their race.
- Sixty-nine percent of the student respondents classified themselves as traditional students, while 31% classified themselves as nontraditional students.

Responses to the faculty and student surveys have been tabulated and statistically analyzed using the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence and Fisher’s Exact Test. In a majority of the situations, statistically significant differences were found between the two groups.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Overall, three statistically significant differences related to accessibility/availability policies and 12 statistically significant differences related to attendance/participation policies, for a total of 15 statistically significant differences, were found. These are described more fully below. Table 1 displays the percent of students and faculty responding to the professor’s academic freedom for each accessibility/ availability scenario. The table also indicates whether there were statistically significant differences observed between the faculty and student groups, and, if there was, the p-value is provided. Three of the six accessibility/availability scenarios resulted in statistically significant differences between the groups.

Table 1: Accessibility/Availability Policies

	FACULTY Protected (%)		STUDENTS Protected (%)		Statistically Significant Difference (and if “yes”, p-value)
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
1	85.5	14.5	95.6	4.4	Yes (.003)
2	84.6	15.4	94.1	5.9	Yes (.010)
3	82.7	17.3	74.5	25.5	No
4	67.1	32.9	54.6	45.4	No
5	72.7	27.3	33.3	66.7	Yes (.000)
6	60.8	39.2	58.5	41.5	No

The three significant differences in the Accessibility/Availability Policies table (Table 1) are highlighted in the discussion that follows.

- Scenario 1 states, “The professor announces a job opportunity to the entire class.” Almost 96% of the students responded that instructors had the freedom to adopt this policy, and 85.5% of the faculty responded the same way. However, fewer faculty than what one

would expect under the assumption of independence between the two groups responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while students responded more than expected that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .003)

- Scenario 2 states, “The professor agrees to be a job reference for any student who asks.” Ninety-four percent of students responded this behavior was protected by academic freedom and 84.6% of the faculty responded the same way. However, fewer faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this behavior, while more students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this behavior. (p-value = .010)
- Scenario 5 states, “The professor answers out-of-classroom questions only during posted office hours, even though not all students can meet during those times.” Almost 73% of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this behavior; however, only one-third of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor had this freedom, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this behavior. (p-value = .000)

Table 2 displays the percent of students and faculty responding to the professor’s academic freedom for each accessibility/availability scenario. The table also indicates whether there were statistically significant differences observed between the faculty and student groups, and, if there was, the p-value is provided.

Table 2: Attendance/Participation Rules

	FACULTY Protected (%)		STUDENTS Protected (%)		Statistically Significant Difference (and if “yes”, p-value)
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
7	89.3	10.7	85.8	14.2	No
8	92.9	7.1	75.1	24.9	Yes (.001)
9	93.0	7.0	74.1	25.9	Yes (.000)
10	88.5	11.5	54.9	45.1	Yes (.000)
11	68.8	31.2	47.3	52.7	Yes (.001)
12	82.4	17.6	43.4	56.6	Yes (.000)
13	37.3	62.7	18.0	82.0	Yes (.001)
14	65.3	34.7	48.5	51.5	Yes (.013)
15	45.8	54.2	32.7	67.3	Yes (.046)
16	26.0	74.0	11.7	88.3	Yes (.003)
17	82.5	17.5	90.7	9.3	No
18	72.7	27.3	74.0	26.0	No
19	81.5	18.5	68.8	31.2	Yes (.030)
20	86.7	13.3	44.1	55.9	Yes (.000)

21	86.9	13.1	48.5	51.5	Yes (.000)
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Twelve of the 15 scenarios in the Attendance/Participation Rules table (Table 2) were found to be statistically significant. A discussion for each of these twelve scenarios follows.

- Scenario 8 states, “The professor does not require class attendance, so students are not penalized for skipping class no matter how many sessions they miss.” Ninety-three percent of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, while only 75% of the students responded that way. More faculty than expected under the assumption of independence responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this behavior, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this behavior. (p-value = .001)
- Scenario 9 states, “Adhering to announced course policy, the professor randomly (using shuffled note cards) calls on students each class session. The professor occasionally skips calling on selected students who are regularly prepared.” Ninety-three percent of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, while only 74% of the students responded that way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .000)
- Scenario 10 states, “Adhering to announced course policy, the professor randomly (using shuffled note cards) calls on students each class session. The professor occasionally skips calling on selected students who don’t appear to be prepared.” Almost 89% of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, while only 55% of the students responded that way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .000)
- Scenario 11 states, “The professor teaches two sections of the same class, one during the day (three 50 minute sessions each week) and another at night (one 150 minute weekly session). The professor does not require attendance in the day section. However, night-time students are penalized for absences because the professor believes these students cannot afford to miss so much class time.” Sixty-nine percent of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy; however, only 47% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .001)
- Scenario 12 states, “The professor regularly uses the Socratic method in class to cover material assigned for the day. The professor repeatedly calls on the same “suspect” students to ensure that they are adequately preparing for class and skips those who the professor believes are good students.” Eighty-two percent of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy; however, only 43% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .000)
- Scenario 13 states, “The professor, who has a strict written attendance policy, only applies it to lower the grade of those students perceived as not working hard enough in

the course.” Only 37% of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, and only 18% of the students responded the same way. Nevertheless, more faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .001)

- Scenario 14 states, “The professor has a written attendance policy that penalizes students for excessive unexcused absences. Since the professor believes fraternity and sorority members are in general given preferential treatment, all absences relating to participation in University-sponsored Greek events are not excused.” Sixty-five percent of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, while around 48% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .013)
- Scenario 15 states, “The professor allows student athletes additional time to complete examinations since they frequently have more absences than other students.” Almost 46% of faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy; however, only around 33% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .046)
- Scenario 16 states, “The professor has a written policy prohibiting extra credit work. Unbeknownst to the entire class, however, the professor gives student athletes and band members who miss class due to their participation in athletic events the opportunity to earn extra points.” Only 26% of faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, and only around 12% of students responded the same way. Nevertheless, more faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .003)
- Scenario 19 states, “The professor generally requires students to take the final exam when scheduled. Students who miss the test because of travel plans are given an “Incomplete” grade, and are allowed to take a make-up test after they return.” Almost 82% of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy, while almost 69% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .030)
- Scenario 20 states, “The professor requires all students to take the final exam when scheduled. Students who miss the test because of travel plans are given a zero, and are not allowed to take a make-up test either before they leave or after they return.” Almost 87% of the faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy; however, only 44% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .000)
- Scenario 21 states, “The professor does not allow students to make up a quiz or turn in homework late, irrespective of the reason why the student failed to comply with the given

task.” Eighty-seven percent of faculty responded that a professor had the freedom to adopt this policy; however, only about 49% of the students responded the same way. More faculty than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt this policy. (p-value = .000)

For the 12 scenarios in the Attendance/Participation Rules that were found to be statistically significant, it is interesting to note that in every case, more faculty than expected under the assumption of independence between the two groups responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt the policy, while fewer students than expected responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt the policy.

CONCLUSION AND ADITIONAL THOUGHTS

The most interesting observation about the accessibility/availability category of scenarios is the student’s and faculty’s incongruent beliefs about a professor’s academic freedom to answer out-of-classroom questions only during posted office hours, even though not all students can meet during those times. Consideration should be given to the likelihood that students are not fully aware of faculty’s tripartite responsibilities, i.e., teaching, research, and service. Students could be informed/educated about the tripartite responsibilities and, importantly, involved or asked to be involved in faculty research efforts. This last approach increases student motivation through enhanced excitement about the research topic, and is considered a “high-impact educational practice” which is a set of educational practices that research has demonstrated have a significant impact on student success (Kuh, 2008). On the other hand, faculty need to consider student expectations of “anytime, anywhere” connectivity with others, thanks to the pervasiveness of technology.

This study supports prior research that students and faculty have different perceptions about class attendance and participation. Students believe attendance should be part of their course grade because it is fair to reward those who come to class and participate (Higbee, 2006). However, several studies have advised for pedagogical reasons against using attendance as a basis for grades (Gump, 2004). All of the 12 statistically significant attendance/participation rule scenarios indicated more faculty than expected under the assumption of independence between the two groups responded that a professor should have the freedom to adopt the particular rule which fewer students than expected responded that a professor should the freedom to adopt the policy. This suggests faculty should exercise increased sensitivity to student perceptions, as well as pedagogical reasons, when selecting classroom policies and practices, as differences of opinion as to what may be acceptable can impact student motivation, learning and evaluation of the instructor.

Differing student-faculty perceptions about academic freedom related to various attendance/participation and accessibility/availability policies and practices likely impact student motivation about their courses which impacts their academic success. Jaasma & Koper (1999) found increased student motivation when faculty-student interaction is positive. Duplaga and Astani (2010) indicated fairness and justice are critical in education, while several studies indicate faculty fairness relates to student motivation, effort, and performance (Chory-Assad, 2002; Rodabaugh, 1994; Marsh H. &., 1980; Marsh H. &., 1997; Walsh, 1994). This study supports prior research by identifying areas of differing student-faculty perceptions about a

professor's academic freedom to adopt specific attendance/participation and accessibility/availability policies.

APPENDIX

Accessibility/Availability Policies:

1. The professor announces a job opportunity to the entire class.
2. The professor agrees to be a job reference for any student who asks.
3. The professor provides extra tutoring for student athletes outside of regular classroom hours.
4. The professor announces a job opportunity to only a select few good advisees.
5. The professor answers out-of-classroom questions only during posted office hours, even though not all students can meet during those times.
6. The professor invites selected student leaders, some of whom are currently enrolled in the professor's class, to dinner at the professor's home as a way to keep abreast of general student concerns.

Attendance/Participation Rules:

7. The professor does not specifically give students points for class participation, but gives the benefit of the doubt to above-average participating students when deciding borderline final grades.
8. The professor does not require class attendance, so students are not penalized for skipping class no matter how many sessions they miss.
9. Adhering to announced course policy, the professor randomly (using shuffled note cards) calls on students each class session. The professor occasionally skips calling on selected students who are regularly prepared.
10. Adhering to announced course policy, the professor randomly (using shuffled note cards) calls on students each class session. The professor occasionally skips calling on selected students who don't appear to be prepared.
11. The professor teaches two sections of the same class, one during the day (three 50 minute sessions each week) and another at night (one 150 minute weekly session). The professor does not require attendance in the day section. However, night-time students are penalized for absences because the professor believes these students cannot afford to miss so much class time.
12. The professor regularly uses the Socratic method in class to cover material assigned for the day. The professor repeatedly calls on the same "suspect" students to ensure that they are adequately preparing for class and skips those who the professor believes are good students.
13. The professor, who has a strict written attendance policy, only applies it to lower the grade of those students perceived as not working hard enough in the course.
14. The professor has a written attendance policy that penalizes students for excessive unexcused absences. Since the professor believes fraternity and sorority members are in general given preferential treatment, all absences relating to participation in University-sponsored Greek events are not excused.
15. The professor allows student athletes additional time to complete examinations since they frequently have more absences than other students.
16. The professor has a written policy prohibiting extra credit work. Unbeknownst to the entire class, however, the professor gives student athletes and band members who miss class due to their participation in athletic events the opportunity to earn extra points.

17. The professor awards extra-credit points to students who attend “extra” events such as research presentations and seminars conducted by invited professionals, even though not all students can attend due to class or work conflicts, etc.
18. The professor does not require those students who suffer a tragedy near the end of the semester to take the final exam.
19. The professor generally requires students to take the final exam when scheduled. Students who miss the test because of travel plans are given an “Incomplete” grade, and are allowed to take a make-up test after they return.
20. The professor requires all students to take the final exam when scheduled. Students who miss the test because of travel plans are given a zero, and are not allowed to take a make-up test either before they leave or after they return.
21. The professor does not allow students to make up a quiz or turn in homework late, irrespective of the reason why the student failed to comply with the given task.

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