

Preservice Teachers' Expectations of Faculty

Julie Quast

Julie J. Williams Mills

Henderson State University

Using a qualitative approach, we explored preservice teachers' expectations of their professor in an educational technology course. An open-ended survey was given to students who were asked to describe their expectations for the professor in the course. Based on the survey data, students expected the professor to be patient, supportive, and a clear communicator. The participants also expressed a need for a safe classroom environment and hoped to learn from their professor.

Understanding the students' expectations of instructors can help instructors meet the needs of the learners.

Keywords: college teaching, college student expectations

Student expectations for a course impact the learning experiences and interactions the professor has with the students. Meeting students' expectations can help students feel more empowered in their learning. Therefore, pre-service education majors enrolled in an Educational Technology course were asked what their expectations for the professor were for the course. An examination of the literature and this qualitative analysis of the data provides some key points to consider when planning instruction and interacting with students. The study was guided by the following research question, what expectations do preservice teachers hold for university faculty?

Review of Literature

Research regarding college student expectations of higher education faculty members can be found throughout various disciplines and often when examining online programs. However, studies specifically examining the expectations of undergraduate education students have of their professors were not as prevalent in the literature. According to our review of the

literature, undergraduate students, in general, had expectations of communication, feedback, classroom environment, learning, and faculty credentials.

Students expected their professors to communicate course structure and expectations. Shaw and Clowes (2017) found online students wanted consistency in online course structure and wished faculty held the same expectations across courses. According to Baile (2014), online students wished faculty to reach out a week prior to the semester to share relevant course requirements and information. University students in Australia, studying business, accounting, and economics also wanted faculty to clearly communicate the structure and requirements of the course and expected faculty to articulate and clarify course content through multiple methods (Handal et al., 2011). Among students attending a large university in the southern United States, women were more likely to expect faculty to be accessible outside of class time and to discuss exam materials during class (Moore et al., 2008).

Timely and helpful feedback was a

common expectation of students throughout the literature. According to Baile (2014), students enrolled in a fully online program, expected faculty to respond to emails within 12 to 24 hours. Over sixty percent of these same students believed major assignments should be graded within one week, and over thirty percent believed assignments should be graded within three days. Students also expressed their expectation of faculty to comment on previous work before their next assignment was due, in order for them to improve (Handal et al., 2011; Shaw & Clowes, 2017). Online students expected faculty to provide substantive feedback on ways for the student to improve and on how they excelled on course assignments (Shaw & Clowes, 2017). Handal et al. (2011) found several students expressed the need for individual and specific feedback rather than generic whole class feedback, although the participants did understand the necessity of generic feedback when enrolled in a large course.

In the online environment, Welch et al. (2015) compared student expectations with instructor dispositions. Through a student and faculty survey, the researchers found that the faculty placed more value on the expertise of the faculty than the students, yet students valued communication far more than faculty. Similarly, in an earlier study, Orso and Doolittle (2012) identified the qualities of effective online teachers, which included communication, compassion, organization, and quality feedback, as the highest valued. In semi-structured interviews, students discussed their need for faculty to establish safe and friendly teaching environments that encourage class participation (Handalet al., 2011). In order to create this warm setting, some students mentioned the value of faculty learning and calling students by name. They also

expected encouragement from faculty through positive words, nods, and smiles when students answered questions in class. According to Bagcivan and colleagues (2015), nursing students enrolled in a Turkish program most commonly expected faculty to act objectively and to be fair when evaluating students.

When surveying students enrolled in a particular marketing course, Moore et al. (2008) found participants expected to gain knowledge more so than receive a good grade. The majority of these students were taking this course because it was required, which could explain why learning was so important to them, and why about one-third expected to be academically challenged throughout the course. They also discovered that men were more likely to have grade and achievement-oriented expectations than women. When learning course content, business students (Handal et al., 2011) and nursing students (Bagcivan et al., 2015) expected to learn more than just theoretical knowledge and expressed their expectation of faculty to explain the importance of content learned and how it applied to their future careers. Many students expected faculty to have the necessary content knowledge and credentials (Bagcivan et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2008), while the nursing students also had high expectations of faculty to use appropriate teaching strategies and to be prepared for lessons (Bagcivan et al., 2015). Particularly women were more concerned about faculty knowledge of course content than men, as were students with high GPAs versus those with low GPAs (Moore et al., 2008).

The findings revealed undergraduate students expect clear communication, timely feedback, a safe and fair environment, and knowledgeable faculty members. Most of the literature regarding undergraduate student expectations of faculty was specific to online

students or fields of study other than education. This gap in the literature makes the findings of this study especially relevant to teacher education faculty.

Methods

A qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) was selected to analyze the open-response data from a “getting to know you” Google form used during the first week of an Educational Technology course to determine the expectations students held for their course instructor. The study was conducted at a small liberal arts university in the south. Data was collected over five consecutive fall and spring semesters, and multiple course sections each semester were analyzed. Although multiple professors taught this course, all the data is derived from one professor’s sections. The course format was hybrid, meaning students met and completed assignments in both face to face and online settings.

This course is required for all undergraduate students seeking teaching licensure, with the exception of music education majors who are enrolled in a content-specific technology course.

Therefore, preservice teachers seeking licensure in grades K-6, 4-8, 7-12, and K-12 are enrolled in the course. Participants in this study were seeking degrees in elementary, middle level, special education (SPED), physical education and health (PE), art, family and consumer sciences, social studies, mathematics, English, and/or computer science. The majority of students enrolled in this course are college sophomores and have not yet been admitted into the teacher education program.

Not intentionally intended for research, the student data form was used to inform the professor about students and to better understand how to support them as learners. After several semesters, the course instructor and researcher believed examining the data

for themes could be helpful in preparing for future and other courses. This study was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The survey tool asked a variety of questions regarding student interest, familiarity with digital tools, and expectations. For example, students were asked “What are your expectations for yourself and what do you hope to learn?,” but only the responses for the question “What are your expectations for me [course instructor]?” were selected for analysis of this study. The form did not ask the gender of the students, however, the instructor identified gender based on knowledge of the students and felt it may be relevant in analysis of the data.

Responses were collected from 119 students. There were 57 elementary majors, five middle level majors, and 57 secondary (7-12) or all level (art, PE, SPED) majors. Of the 81 participants who were identified as women, 52 majored in elementary, three in middle level, and 16 in secondary/all-level. Thirty-eight participants were identified as men, which included five elementary, two middle level, and 31 secondary/all-level majors.

An emergent data-driven approach to coding was chosen (Saldaña, 2013). The initial codes were selected by one author and then reviewed by the co-author. Initially, nine codes were identified, but after review and discussion some codes were omitted or combined to represent the final five codes: support and communication, clarity, patience, respect and a safe learning environment, and other (teach/learn). For this study solo coding was used, meaning only one researcher coded the data; however, they conferred with the other researcher during and after the coding process (Saldaña, 2013).

Findings

A content analysis of the student responses to the question, “What are your expectations for me [course instructor]?” was used to find common themes of undergraduate education majors’ expectations. The findings are organized by the five codes identified through the coding process: support and communication, clarity, patience, respect and a safe learning environment, and other (teach/learn). Each section includes student quotes in order to support the themes identified.

Support and Communication

Support from the professor was discussed 22 times throughout the data. Being “understanding” and “helpful” were common terms used to describe the expectations of faculty. Students expressed a desire that the professor “want me to succeed” and be willing to help when needed. One student stated, “I expect that you will help us all achieve our dreams of becoming teachers. I expect that you will have us come out of our comfort zone so we can be prepared for anything.”

Six students, five women and one man, stated their hesitation or dislike about technology: “I will probably be looking to you for help a lot of the time. Even though I’m a millennial I’m really not very good with computers.” Another student explained, “I expect you to be understanding in a way that helps others who might not be as savvy and quick to learn understand how everything functions.”

Learning from the professor’s prior teaching experience was expressed by one student who said, “to educate us and incite us on your experience.” Five lines of the data were initially coded as communication but align well with support. Students expected the instructor “to help me when I reach out or when you see I’m struggling,”

and “I expect you to be a good teacher that is good at communicating and easy to talk to when I need help.” Clear communication and expectations were expressed as needs by the students to support their learning: “I hope during the course of the semester you are able to thoroughly help in explaining the ways of education technology.”

Clarity

Clarity was coded six times in the responses and was described as clear expectations and being upfront. One student explained the importance of clear expectations for individual assignments as well as the class as a whole:

The classes that seem to go best for me, and usually the rest of my peers, are the ones where the teacher is clear about his/her expectations--not only for the class but for each individual assignment. If that is done, then I am always more than happy to work and strive hard to meet those expectations they layout. If they do not do this, it always makes for a long, and unnecessarily difficult, semester.

In less detail, another student stated, “Just be nice and give clear instructions, and give a bit of help when needed. Nothing crazy.” This sentiment resonated with other students as well, “Let me know what you expect from me and be clear about it. I expect you to be open to questions & willing to help.” Understanding assignments and providing specific feedback were common expectations of the students.

Patience

While the word “patience” was only mentioned specifically twice in the responses, patience was coded six times. Participants described a desire to be heard without frustration by stating, “I only ask that

you bear with me if I happen to have a lot of questions.” This openness to many questions was expressed as the only hope of one student who stated, “I don’t usually carry expectations for a teacher other than the hope that they are open to my many questions in class and over email.” Another student expected the professor to “just to have patience and a willingness to answer questions,” which was echoed in the other comments.

Respect and a Safe Learning Environment

Students wished to be respected in a safe learning environment. One student described an expectation for a “conductive” learning environment: “I expect you to provide a conducive learning environment for myself and my classmates and to adequately prepare us to incorporate technology into our future profession in education.” While another said, “expectations are not that high.[A] non-hostile environment is all I could ask for.” Respect was more thoroughly described by this student: “To teach to the best of your ability & care for our grades/wellbeing in the class if we make a commitment and actually try/care about the class/our grades.” The importance to “provide a safe and inclusive environment.” was seen throughout the responses.

Other-Teach/Learn

The generic phrases “to teach me” and “to learn” appeared the most in the data with 67 responses. Some were more specific than the general phrase “to teach me” and extended their expectation to understanding the value of the learning experience and the value of learning for their future students and classrooms: “I hope that you will teach me how to incorporate technology into my lessons and the value it has on learning.”

Another student stated an expectation to “expand my knowledge of technology that can be used later in my future classroom.” Specific tools were not mentioned often in the data, but one student, in particular, wanted “to learn more about technology and how to use things other than a Smartboard in my future classroom.”

Discussion

The magnitude of the expectation that students hold for professors was evident in this statement: “I expect that you will help us all achieve our dreams of becoming teachers. I expect that you will have us come out of our comfort zone so we can be prepared for anything.” This is similar to the findings of Handal et al. (2011) where students expressed a desire to apply the knowledge from the course to their future careers as educators. Not only do they want to apply this knowledge to future careers, but they want to gain knowledge from the experience faculty hold from teaching in the field.

Often students enter educational technology with a hesitation or dislike about technology. As pointed out by Handal et al. (2011), students value a safe, friendly teaching environment. The findings of this study also suggest the course should begin by building a safe classroom culture, which could include students sharing a digital introduction using a tool of their choice. Creating a “safe” and “conductive environment,” as described by the students, begins by creating a culture that fosters a growth mindset, where taking risks is encouraged.

Moore et al. (2008) and Bagcivan et al. (2015) described the students’ expectation for faculty to have the knowledge and credentials to teach the course, while Welch et al. (2015) found that faculty place more value on the expertise of the faculty than students. In this study, only one student expressed this specific expectation, but

students did attend class and meet the professor prior to completing the survey questions, so they were aware of the professor's credentials. They frequently stated their desire to learn or to be taught, which might imply they believed they could learn from the faculty member teaching the course.

In and out of class communication, as described in the literature, was important to participants, as several students described their expectations for their questions and emails to be answered. Baile (2014) explored timely and helpful feedback, which aligns with the findings from this study, as students expect professors to be available and willing to help. Additionally, Orso and Doolittle (2012) reported the most valued qualities of an effective teacher were communication and availability.

The literature discussed the impact of gender on student expectations. In this study, respect was more frequently noted by men than women, and to learn or be taught was most frequently noted by women. Women had the greatest expectation for patience and support. When considering the licensure area students were seeking, the secondary or all level group expressed the greatest expectation for clarity and respect. The elementary and middle level students desired the most patience and support.

Limitations

This study is limited to the students of only one professor in one particular teacher education program and therefore is not generalizable. However, readers may find levels of "transferability" based on the similarity between this study and their own students and classrooms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Students may not have dedicated as much time to in-depth answers due to the length of the survey, which could have caused a limitation in the study. Due to the

nature of the survey tool, students were not asked their gender or other demographic information, which could have been helpful in examining the expectations of subpopulations of students. The instructor did add gender identities based on her knowledge of each student throughout the semester; however, the researchers realize some participants could have been wrongly identified.

Conclusion

Most of the previous research regarding student expectations of instructors were limited to the online environment and fields other than teacher education; while this study specifically examined teacher education students' expectations enrolled in a hybrid course. Similar to the literature review findings students expect clear communication, timely feedback, a safe environment, and knowledgeable faculty members. Additionally, preservice teachers valued the importance of supporting students by being available and patient when answering questions was noted in this study. Part of the challenge extended in the course is for preservice teachers to begin thinking of themselves as professionals. Future research examining education students' expectations of their professors and themselves over time would be beneficial in understanding their growth as professionals. In conclusion, as professors and faculty members work with students, take to heart one final comment from an undergraduate preservice teacher: "Have compassion for your students, give all possible resources, have knowledge about what you are teaching, and have a graceful heart."

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- Dr. Julie Quast** is an assistant professor at Henderson State University. Her research interests include preservice teacher beliefs, assessment, classroom management, inclusive education, and effective pedagogy.
- Dr. Julie Mills** is an assistant professor at Henderson State University. Her research interests include parental involvement and preservice teacher beliefs.