

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

Using a unique online approach to data gathering, students were asked to isolate the characteristics they believe are essential to effective teaching. An open-ended online survey was made available to over 17,000 graduate and undergraduate students at Memorial University of Newfoundland during the winter semester of 2008. Derived from this rich data is a set of student definitions that describe nine characteristics and identify instructor behaviours that demonstrate effectiveness in teaching. The survey also takes into account the opinions of students studying both on-campus and at a distance via the web, with the intention of determining if the characteristics of effective teaching in an online environment are different from those in the traditional face-to-face setting. Students identified nine behaviours that are characteristic of effective teaching in both on-campus and distance courses. Instructors who are effective teachers are respectful of students, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organized, responsive, professional, and humorous. Students indicated that the nine characteristics were consistent across modes of delivery. Respondents to the distance portion of the survey, however, did place different emphasis from the on-campus responses on the significance of each characteristic.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my students, past, present and future, for their unending and endearing ability to teach me new things about myself and the wonderful profession that I practice.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page .....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments .....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables .....	vii
List of Appendices.....	viii
Chapter 1 – Introduction and Overview .....	1
Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature .....	10
Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology .....	24
3.1 – Research Design.....	24
3.2 – The Survey Instrument.....	25
3.3 – Mode of Delivery .....	27
3.4 – Marketing the Study .....	28
3.5 – Data Analysis .....	29
Chapter 4 – Research Findings and Discussion.....	33
4.1 – Respectful.....	37
4.2 – Knowledgeable.....	45
4.3 – Approachable .....	50
4.4 – Engaging .....	55
4.5 – Communicative .....	59

4.6 – Organized .....	64
4.7 – Responsive .....	68
4.8 – Professional .....	71
4.9 – Humorous .....	74
Chapter 5 – Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations .....	78
5.1 – Summary .....	78
5.2 – Recommendations .....	88
5.3 – Conclusions .....	89
Appendices .....	91
References .....	137

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 – Characteristics Identified and the Coding Numbers Assigned.....	31
Table 4.1 – List of the characteristics mentioned by on-campus respondents .....	34
Table 4.2 – List of the characteristics mentioned by distance respondents.....	35

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A – Survey Instrument .....	91
Appendix B – Survey Web Sites .....	105
Appendix C – Newspaper Ad .....	110
Appendix D – Banner Ads.....	112
Appendix E – Demographic profile of survey respondents (on-campus) .....	114
Appendix F – Demographic profile of survey respondents (distance).....	118
Appendix G – Characteristics and the frequency they were mentioned (on-campus) .	122
Appendix H – Characteristics and the frequency they were mentioned (distance).....	127
Appendix I – Ethical Principles in University Teaching .....	131



## Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

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The notion of asking students to provide feedback on the quality of the teaching that they encounter during their academic career has been with us for almost a century. Student rating of instruction was introduced into North American universities in the mid-1920s (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). However, the desire to clarify the qualities that make university teaching effective has been revitalized, as a renewed mandate to enhance teaching and learning appears predominately in the strategic plans of many universities and colleges. The escalation in concern over the quality of university teaching has fostered a significant body of research that attempts to isolate characteristics of effective university teaching (Young, Cantrell & Shaw, 1999).

Teaching is being seen as increasingly more important relative to the research goals of higher education. In 2006, the Canadian Council of Learning called on Canada to establish clear, coherent, and consistent goals for post-secondary education, many of which reflect on the quality of teaching and learning (Cappon, 2006). This renewed emphasis on teaching necessitates valid means of measuring effective teaching in the post-secondary setting. There is a growing body of literature pertaining to students' assessment of instruction in higher education and the relevance of course evaluation questionnaires as a way of communicating to instructors the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching.

Much has been written in recent years about the connections between teaching and learning in higher education. Marsh and Roche (1993) examined students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness as a means of enhancing university teaching. Ryan and Harrison (1995) investigated how students weight various teaching components in arriving at their overall evaluation of teaching effectiveness. More recently, Ralph (2003) conducted a study on teaching effectiveness using how well students learn as the criterion. This study took place in a Canadian university and students represented four different instructional settings: Business, Sociology, Education, and Physical Education. The students were given 32 hypothetical instructor profiles and were asked to rank nine selected teaching factors developed by Marsh and Hocevar (1991). In that study Ralph identified five attributes of effective instructors: commitment to learners; knowledge of material; organization and management of the environment; desire to improve; and collaboration with others. Ralph concluded that exemplary university teaching is discernable and the quality of components that define it can be assessed.

Similar studies provided students with a set of characteristics from which to choose. Clark (1995) identified cognitive and affective goals of effective teaching at the university level. He developed a questionnaire covering a wide range of teaching activities associated with effective instruction and the achievement of cognitive and affective objectives. The questionnaire, administered at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, identified qualities of effective university teaching determined by the researcher. These included four cognitive components: knowledge, organization of instruction, clarity of expression, and quality of presentation. In addition, there were four

affective components: student interest; student participation and openness to ideas; interpersonal relations; and communication and fairness. Many course evaluation questionnaires administered at university campuses across Canada, including Memorial University, include these qualities. Students are asked to identify how each course/instructor ranks in each of these qualities.

Devlin (2002) examined the strengths and weakness of a survey used at the University of Melbourne to identify students' perceptions of their learning environment. The Perceptions of Learning Environment Questionnaire (PLEQ) was first used in 1994 and was developed as part of a larger project, Teaching and Learning in Tertiary Education at Queensland University of Technology. Devlin argues that the PLEQ fails to sufficiently identify student perceptions in depth. The design of the PLEQ forces students to focus on and comment on the behavior of others, and, "does not allow them to communicate their views on how they themselves are contributing to their learning" (p. 290). Devlin suggests that this approach is contrary to the PLEQ design to report on good teaching and contains none of the "... constructivist views of learning ... which emphasize that learners actively construct knowledge for themselves" (p. 290). Traditional course evaluation questionnaires, she argues, assume the "student as listener-follower" point of view and a transmission model of delivering courses. While students may have been aware in the past of their own behavior and how it helped or hindered learning, the standard course evaluation questionnaires simply did not provide the means to demonstrate or express that awareness.



These studies and others like them offer to students the researchers' understanding of the applicable characteristics in the form of Likert scale questionnaires, or controlled sets of stimuli such as the 32 teacher profiles used in Ralph's 2003 study. The purpose of this study was to establish, through the use of an open-ended survey instrument, students' perceptions of effective teaching at Memorial University. Drawing from their own experiences as post-secondary students, participants were asked to identify five characteristics of effective teaching, for both on-campus and distance courses, describe these characteristics, identify instructor behaviours that demonstrate the characteristics, and rate the characteristics in order of importance. The survey instrument allowed students to identify characteristics that they believe are important to effective teaching, rather than simply agree or disagree with a set of prescribed characteristics. This approach proved successful as respondents offered rich descriptions and detailed narratives about their experiences as students.

While much research has been conducted on the questions related to effective teaching in post-secondary institutions, projects that investigate the nature of effective teaching across modes of course delivery are rare. The growth of online distance education leads researchers to questions about the characteristics of effective teaching in online courses. Are the characteristics of effective teaching in a face-to-face environment the same as the characteristics of effective online teaching? And if so, how are these characteristics manifested through electronic media?

The primary purpose of this research was to identify the characteristics of effective on-campus and distance teaching as they are perceived by students at Memorial



University, to determine if these characteristics are consistent across the two modes of delivery, and to isolate instructor behaviours that students believe are components of effective teaching in both on-campus and distance courses. The research questions were posed as follows:

1. What are students' perceptions of effective teaching in higher education for both on-campus and distance modes of delivery at Memorial University?
2. How do instructors demonstrate these characteristics?
3. Are the behaviours that instructors use to demonstrate effective face-to-face instruction the same as the behaviours that they would exhibit to demonstrate effective online teaching?

Traditional student questionnaires and course evaluation forms are designed with the underlying assumption that the designer and the respondents agree on the characteristics of effective teaching. The method used to gather data to study students' perceptions of effective teaching at Memorial University challenges this assumption. The first nine questions of the survey asked students for demographic information. Thirty of the remaining 40 items were open-ended and asked participants for text-based responses. The survey instrument offered students an opportunity to express their own ideas about the characteristics of effective teaching at the post-secondary level. Students were asked to draw on their own experiences as university students to identify five characteristics of effective instructors, describe each characteristic and explain why it is important, and to identify instructor behaviours that demonstrate the characteristic. Finally, students were

asked to rank the five characteristics from one to five, with one referring to the least important and five referring to the most important. The set of four questions was repeated five times for both on-campus teaching and instruction at a distance.

A goal of this study was to leave open-ended the qualities of effective teaching. Students were to be free to identify the characteristics and how they are demonstrated without having their belief system influenced by researchers' views of effective teaching. Since the origins of perceptions are found in the belief systems of the students, the rich narratives provided by the students could identify, with greater certainty, the beliefs of the participants.

The research was carried out exclusively through the use of online surveys. Studies have indicated that an online approach is an effective and efficient means of gathering data. Several recent studies have suggested that the rate of responses of Web surveys is on par with those completed on paper. For example, a study of 58, 288 college students in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in Indiana University revealed that students who completed web-based surveys responded as favorably as those who engaged in paper surveys. This response rate held for both genders, and all age groups. (Carini, Hayek, Kuh, Kennedy & Ouimett, 2003)

The survey was developed and delivered using the learning management system employed at Memorial University, Desire2Learn. Using Desire2Learn as a delivery tool provided electronic safeguards that prevented students from completing the survey more than once. The software also provide a registration system that allowed students to be

entered for a chance to win one of the incentives offered for completing the survey, while assuring that each students could be anonymous through the analysis stage.

The survey was made available to students from February 25, 2008 to April 4, 2008. Approximately 17,000 Memorial University students, including undergraduate and graduate students, had access to the survey. The university's students are divided among four campuses (Prince Philip Drive campus, St. John's; Marine Institute, St. John's; Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, Corner Brook; Harlow Campus, London, Great Britain) and numerous work-study sites. Administering the instrument online provided the potential to reach all of the university's undergraduate and graduate students registered for the winter semester of the 2007-2008 academic year.

The online approach to delivering the survey was effective. Three hundred and thirty students provided rich data on their beliefs about effective teaching at Memorial University. These narratives provided students with a clear voice as to their expectations of post-secondary teaching. In the analysis phase of the project, 69 adjectives that described instructor behaviours were isolated. Further analysis of these 69 characteristics, and the behaviours associated with them, distilled to nine predominant themes, indicating nine prominent characteristics and sets of behaviours that, for these Memorial University students, are indicators of effective teaching. These nine behaviours are listed below in order of the number of times they were mentioned in the survey results (most noted to least noted) as described by students who completed the on-campus segment of the survey:



1. Respectful
2. Knowledgeable
3. Approachable
4. Engaging
5. Communicative
6. Organized
7. Responsive
8. Professional
9. Humorous

Also unique to this study is the focus on both on-campus and distance modes of teaching. The nine characteristics were consistent across modes of delivery. Respondents to the distance portion of the survey, however, did place different emphasis from the on-campus responses on the significance of each characteristic. Students who completed the distance portion of the survey place emphasis on the nine characteristics in the following order:

1. Respectful
2. Responsive
3. Knowledgeable
4. Approachable
5. Communicative
6. Organized
7. Engaging



8. Professional

9. Humorous

There is great potential for this study to inform research in related areas. These results may be useful to researchers investigating the gap between students' and faculty perceptions of effective teaching; the change over time of students' perceptions of effective teaching; a comparison of Memorial University to other Canadian universities in regard to students' perceptions of effective teaching; and the influence (if any) of the amount of university experience on students' beliefs regarding effective instruction. Hopefully, this study will be the beginning of a more extensive research agenda in the area of effective teaching at the post-secondary level.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

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A renewed mandate to enhance teaching and learning appears predominately in the strategic plans of many institutions of higher education. A significant body of research and numerous reports attempt to isolate factors that determine the effectiveness of teaching (Young et al., 1999). Much research has also been conducted to determine students' perceptions of effective teaching, create instruments to measure these perceptions, and establish criteria by which to judge an instructor's effectiveness (Beran, Violato, Kline & Fridere, 2005). Research into the affective domain has identified compelling linkages between positive emotions, and enhanced learning and creative thought (Norman, 2005).

Also pertinent to this study is research concerning the nature of instructor effectiveness in courses delivered online. Much research has been conducted in an attempt to identify characteristics of effective online instructors, and to determine if these characteristics are different from those identified in traditional settings (Young, 2006). Finally, literature pertaining to the gathering of survey data has influenced the methods employed to complete this study. Sources consulted (Carini, Hayek, Kuh, Kennedy & Ouimet, 2003) indicate that web-based data collection methods are as effective as pencil and paper approaches. A web-based approach to data gathering afforded this study the opportunity to obtain a sample that provided a very similar demographic profile to the base population.

Encouragement to isolate and quantify characteristics of effective teaching in higher education have come from a number of sources and driven much research. In 2006 the Canada Council on Learning called on Canada to establish clear, coherent and consistent goals for post-secondary instruction. To a large extent these concerns have been prompted by the rapid growth in post-secondary education in recent years; full time enrollment has grown by approximately 23% between 2001 and 2005 (Cappon, 2006).

Axelrod (2008) has found that students' perceptions of what constitutes effective instruction transcend time and mode of delivery. He notes that the characteristics of effective teaching identified by contemporary students are consistent with evidence he has gathered from the study of historical memoirs, and biographies. He has isolated seven qualities that he believes are, "common elements of good teaching," and "transcend time, place, discipline, and instructional type" (p. 24). These qualities are:

- accessibility and approachability
- fairness
- open-mindedness
- mastery and delivery
- enthusiasm
- humour
- knowledge and inspiration imparted

The desire of universities and colleges to improve instruction is manifested in a number of ways. Many post-secondary institutions have looked to technology to improve



instruction and expended substantial resources to integrate technological infrastructure into existing classroom facilities. Many of these institutions have also implemented programs for the distance delivery of courses using web-based resources. In some instances faculty are left to their own skills with technology to create these resources, while in other cases groups of technologically-savvy educators have been charged with supporting faculty as they work to integrate information and communications technology into their teaching and their students' learning.

While research has indicated many positive aspects of using the technologies that are predominant in the economic and cultural fabric of our society in teaching and learning, numerous articles and reports establish provisos. Zemsky and Massy (2004) noted in their report, *Thwarted innovation: What happened to e-learning and why*, that technology on its own did not guarantee effective teaching. They highlighted the positive potential of technology in teaching and learning but also noted numerous applications of technology that were considered ineffective by students. Meyer (2002) in *Quality in distance education: Focus on on-line learning*, quoted the following conclusions by Russell:

There is nothing inherent in technologies that elicits improvements in learning, although the process of redesigning a course to adapt the content to technology can improve the course and improve the outcomes. In other words, learning is not caused by the technology but by the instructional method embedded in the media. (p. 14)

One of the most prolific manifestations of the attempt to improve university and college instruction is the course evaluation survey. Student evaluations of courses and



instructors are employed by 98% of universities; 82% consider self-evaluation or personal statements; and 58% use a system of peer review of classroom teaching. The student course evaluations are most often Likert scale questionnaires that ask students to rate various aspects of the course and instructor behaviours. Much research has been conducted investigating the validity of this process and the reliability of course evaluations to indicate effective teaching practice (Shao, Anderson & Newsome, 2007).

Ralph (2003) noted that “teaching at Canadian universities is being seen as increasingly more important relative to the research mission of higher education. This renewed emphasis on teaching necessitates credible means of measuring effective teaching in the university setting” (p. 2). The purpose of Ralph’s study was to determine the importance that students in different instructional contexts place on individual teaching factors in their overall evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

The study took place in a Canadian university with students representing four different instructional settings: Business, Sociology, Education, and Physical Education. The students were given 32 hypothetical instructor profiles and were asked to rank nine selected teaching factors developed by Marsh and Hocevar (1991). Through this process Ralph (2001) identified five attributes of effective instructors:

1. commitment to learners;
2. knowledge of material;
3. organization and management of the environment;
4. desire to improve; and
5. collaboration with others. (p. 100)

Ralph concluded that “exemplary teaching is identifiable and the quality of its constituent components can be assessed” (p. 106).

Reflecting on one’s teaching practise is often an implicit goal for faculty development programs. University teaching involves diverse modes of instruction including lectures, seminars, laboratory experiences, and mentoring. Disciplines, courses, and instructors also vary widely in their emphasis on such varied educational objectives as learning new knowledge, stimulating student interest, developing cognitive skills and leading students to question established tenets. Marsh and Roche (1993) studied the effectiveness of students’ evaluations of teaching effectiveness as a means of enhancing university teaching. They evaluated the effect of interventions into instructor behaviours that were informed by evaluations conducted at midterm and end-of-term. They found that factors contributing to the effectiveness of teaching could be improved if the intervention included concrete strategies to facilitate the enhancement of specific areas of instruction.

Ryan and Harrison (1995) examined how students weight various teaching factors in arriving at their overall evaluation of teaching effectiveness. They carried out an experiment in three different institutional contexts where students evaluated hypothetical instructors based on a manipulation of nine teaching factors: learning, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, examination fairness, assignments and course difficulty. The results indicated that the amount of learning was consistently the most important factor, and course difficulty was the least

important factor. Students' evaluations of the importance of the remaining teaching factors were similar across the three contexts.

Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle and Orr (2000) quoted Marton and Booth (1997), describing the "essence of good teaching" as:

[Pedagogy depends on] meetings of awarenesses which we see as achieved through the experiences that teachers and learners undertake jointly... Teachers mould experiences for their students with the aim of bringing about learning; and the essential feature is that the teacher takes the part of the learner... The teacher focuses on the learner's experience of the object of learning. (p. 23)

Clark (1995) identified cognitive and affective goals of effective teaching at the university level. He developed a questionnaire covering a wide range of teaching activities associated with effective instruction and the achievement of cognitive and affective objectives. Known as the UW – QUIQ (University of Winnipeg's Quality of University Instruction Questionnaire), it measures the following qualities that are useful for thinking about the quality of university teaching.

Cognitive goals:

1. Knowledge – One of the goals of university teaching is to change students' factual knowledge and competence in the course material, strengthen various cognitive capacities (e.g., writing and reasoning skills) and to foster an intellectual appreciation for the subject matter.
2. Organization of Instruction – This quality reflects the extent to which individual lectures and discussions are carefully organized and planned in a



coherent manner. Well-organized instructors also demonstrate how ideas in specific lessons fit into the whole course and relate to other components of the course, such as labs, and readings.

3. Clarity of Expression – A third cognitive aspect of effective teaching involves techniques that are used to explain concepts and principles. Clear explanations are important for university teaching and to help students connect new and challenging material to concepts, examples and language that they already know. There is often a large gap between sophisticated knowledge from disciplines and the knowledge of students. Effective instructors hone techniques to bridge that gap between expert faculty and novice students.
4. Quality of Presentation – A fourth factor that contributes significantly to the achievement of cognitive learning outcomes involves voice and other aspects of presentation by a teacher. Quality of presentation includes articulation, attention, and enthusiasm.

Affective goals:

1. The first of the affective goals is to stimulate student interest.

The UW – QUIQ asks for student perceptions of the extent to which the teacher is interested in subject matter and the degree to which student interest is promoted.



Stimulation of interest is considered important for university teaching because it increases student attention to lectures and class discussion. Little learning occurs without such attention and interest motivates students to think about the course material and to work harder.

## 2. Student Participation and Openness to Ideas

Effective teachers try to foster active involvement, participation and interaction of students in classes, and to communicate their openness to and respect for alternative and challenging points of view.

Student participation is desirable because it actively involves students in their learning, provides instructors with feedback about the progress and difficulties of students, and provides opportunities for instructors to model for students problem-solving behaviors and application of course materials to novel examples.

Openness to ideas is desirable because students should be encouraged to think for themselves in a flexible and creative manner and because commitment to one view should generally follow critical evaluation of alternative perspectives.

## 3. Interpersonal Relations

A third affective goal of effective teaching is to promote agreeable and friendly interpersonal relations between instructors and students and to convey concern and respect for individuals. The purpose of good rapport is to create a

congenial atmosphere in which students who are having difficulty will seek help from the instructor and in which students feel welcome to offer alternative explanations in class and to get feedback on their ideas.

#### 4. Communications and Fairness

Open and effective communication about evaluations and other aspects of the course contribute to student learning and performance by avoiding unnecessary uncertainty associated with vague assignments and by providing students with constructive feedback about their performance so they can learn from their mistakes.

Research that compares traditional and online courses indicates that students in online courses learn at least as well as students taking courses in traditional settings (Meyer, 2002; Neuhauser, 2002; Rovai, 2002; Schulman and Sims, 1999; Young et al., 1999). Well-planned opportunities for students to interact with the content, the instructor, and other students enhance the tendency of asynchronous, learner-centred, online courses to support conversation and collaboration as opportunities for participation are more equal and democratic (Moore, 1997; Klemm, 1998; Northrup, 2002). While online students may learn as much in an online course, the nature of the online environment leads them to value teaching in different ways (Young, 2006).

Communications, flexibility, feedback, student and instructor roles, and the quality of course materials have been the focus of many studies of online teaching (Young, 2006). Students are required to take on different roles in their learning in an

online environment. They need to be more actively involved while instructors take on more of a facilitative role (Young et al., 1999). Given these new roles, students' concerns about teacher effectiveness in online courses focused on communication, noting that timely responses from instructors were the most valued interactions (Northrup, 2002). Hara and King (2000) concurred with these findings. They noted that students in their study were highly distressed by communication issues including breakdowns and having to keep up with frequent and lengthy email discussions. The researchers highlighted frustrations that students were having with ambiguous communications from the instructor, as well as delays that are characteristic of the anytime-anywhere nature of asynchronous communication. The lack of spontaneity in the online environment was a source of frustration.

Other researchers discovered that students prefer online courses that provide high-quality materials that offer assignments that are professionally meaningful, and that provide high-quality feedback. The students studied also noted that communication in online courses is crucial (Tricker, Rangecroft, Long & Gilroy, 2001; Spangle, Hodne & Schierling, 2002).

Young (2006) researched students' views of effective online teaching in higher education. She concluded that the research in online teaching indicates that the online environment is similar to traditional on campus teaching in many ways. She noted that there are important differences, however, such as the changing roles of students and instructors and an increased emphasis on planning. This concurs with Marsh (2001) who



suggested that effective teaching is contextual, and therefore, must be studied in different settings with different criteria.

Underlying the concerns of communication and quality isolated in other research are issues related to meaning, tone, understanding and relationships. Young (2006) found that students' learning in online environments had a core set of perceptions about effective teaching that were not dependent on technology. She surveyed 199 students using a twenty-five item Likert survey developed from the correlates of effective teaching combined with characteristics of online teaching. Seven elements were isolated as core to effective online teaching from the survey:

- adapting to student needs;
- using meaningful examples;
- motivating students to do their best;
- facilitating the course effectively;
- delivering a valuable course;
- communicating effectively; and
- showing concern for student learning. (p. 65)

In open-ended comments students wrote that effective teachers are visibly and actively involved in the learning. Effective teachers endeavour to create trusting relationships, and provide a structured, yet flexible learning environment.

The quest to identify and quantify the characteristics of effective teaching in higher education has led to widespread use of student questionnaires. Much research has



been conducted in an attempt to determine the reliability of these questionnaires and validate their use as predictors of teaching ability (Abrami, d'Apollonia & Cohen, 1990). These questionnaires are most often pencil-and-paper instruments that ask students to rate on some numerically based scale specific aspects of instruction and course delivery (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). But, researchers have been investigating the extent to which students can express accurately the aspects of teaching that they believe are effective and meaningful to them using a Likert scale approach.

Devlin's (2002) research examines the strengths and weaknesses of a survey used at the University of Melbourne to identify university students' perceptions of their learning environment. It is entitled the Perceptions of Learning Environments Questionnaire (PLEQ). The PLEQ was first used in 1994 and was developed as part of a project, *Teaching and Learning in Tertiary Education at Queensland University of Technology*.

Devlin argues that the PLEQ fails to sufficiently identify student perceptions in depth. The design of PLEQ forces students to focus on and comment on the behavior of others and "does not allow them to communicate their views on how they themselves are contributing to their learning" (p. 290). Devlin suggests that this approach is contrary to the PLEQ design to report on good teaching and contains none of the "... constructivist views of learning . . . which emphasize that learners actively construct knowledge for themselves . . . and [interpret] this on the basis of assuming responsibility for their own learning" (p. 290).

Traditional course evaluation questionnaires, Devlin argues, assume the 'student as listener-follower' point of view and a transmission model of delivering courses. Her goal, therefore, was to re-design the questionnaires so that it more adequately reflects students' perceptions of their own contributions to learning and identification of their own behaviors that might hinder their learning. While students may have been aware in the past of their own behavior and how it helped or hindered learning, the standard course evaluation questionnaires simply did not provide the means to demonstrate or express that awareness.

Consequently, a section was added to the PLEQ which was an open-ended means of gathering information on students' perceptions of their own behavior and how it contributed to learning. Students were asked to complete statements. For example, one of her survey items reads, "In \_\_\_ seminars/tutorials \_\_\_ my learning is helped when \_\_\_ the lecturer/tutor asks questions \_\_\_ because \_\_\_ it makes me put my ideas into my own words." While this accommodates students' views more effectively, does this approach still direct students' responses, perhaps lowering the student voice to a whisper?

Also of interest to this study is research on the mode of delivery of student questionnaires. The research by d'Apollonia et al. was conducted prior to 1997, before the web-based modes of collecting survey data were common. The proliferation of the Internet and web-savvy applications has provided researchers with other data collection options. This in turn has pegged questions about the reliability of surveys administered

online in comparison to questionnaires completed using traditional pencil-and-paper methods.

Carini, Hayek, Kuh, Kennedy and Ouimet (2003) conducted an extensive study of university and college student responses to web-based and pencil-and-paper surveys. They examined the responses to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) from 58,288 students. These researchers concluded that data gathered using web-based instruments did not differ significantly from data collected using pencil-and-paper.

The literature provided guidance in three key areas. First, the characteristics of effective teaching have been well researched using a number of instruments. None of the research that has been identified, however, provided students with as clear a voice as the methodology applied in this study. Second, the literature suggested that the characteristics of effective teaching transcend time and mode of delivery, but, again, there is no indication of a definitive student voice on this issue. Finally, investigations into the reliability of online data gathering informed the decision to offer the survey in a web-based format, allowing the questionnaire to reach as many potential respondents as possible in the selected study group.



### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

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Isolating and defining characteristics of effective teaching in higher education has been a goal of researchers for almost a century. Researchers working in this area of study have employed a broad spectrum of research methodologies. Student rating of instruction was introduced into North American universities in the mid-1920s (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). The most widely used approach to assessing students' attitudes about university teaching is Likert scale surveys, with most offering some open-ended items at the end of the questionnaire (Abrami et al., 1990; Anderson, Cain & Bird, 2005; Arbuckle & Williams, 2003; Billings, Connors & Skiba, 2001; Elnichi, Kolarik & Bardella, 2003; Jackson, Teal, Rains, Nannsel, Force & Burdsal, 1999; Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier & Moore, 2007; Young, 2006). The presentation of Likert scale items, however, are static, offering students only researcher-conceived notions of the characteristics of effective teaching, possibly biasing students' perceptions. The goal of this research project was to provide students with a clear voice on their views of the nature of effective teaching at Memorial University.

#### **Research Design**

In order to give students an opportunity to clearly articulate their perceptions of effective teaching in higher education a qualitative approach was employed. Qualitative research, as defined by Van Maanen (1979), is:

at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms



with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (p. 520)

The paramount objective of the qualitative researcher is to understand, rather than to generalize, the ways in which the inhabitants of a setting make meaning of their experiences. Understanding comes with the interpretation and analysis of the expression of those experiences (Whitt, 1990). The interpretation of students' experiences was a key goal of this research, directing the study toward a grounded theory approach.

Grounded theory studies grow out of questions researchers ask about people in specific contexts. To understand the patterns of experience, researchers using grounded theory gather descriptions of the experiences of participants (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 125). The goal of this research was to gather students' perceptions of effective teaching without the preconceived notions that are presented to students by Likert scale instruments. Employing a new approach to data gathering would be essential in order to meet this goal.

### **The Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument used by the majority of student evaluations of university teaching is Likert scale questionnaires (Young et al., 1999). In order to give students at Memorial University a clear voice on issues related to effective teaching a new type of instrument was employed. A 49-item survey tool was developed. The first nine items asked for demographic information, employing clickable radio buttons that identified the students' responses. Students were asked to identify their gender, their university level (undergraduate or graduate), the number of university courses they had completed

successfully, their student status (part time or full time), their status of employment, their age, the reason they attend university, and the faculty in which they study. The ninth question asked them to indicate if they had successfully taken a distance course.

Thirty of the remaining 40 items were open-ended text-based responses to three questions, repeated ten times. Students were asked to identify a characteristic of on-campus effective teaching, describe the characteristic, and then identify instructor behaviours that demonstrate the characteristic. They were then asked to rank the characteristic in relation to other characteristics that they identified, five being the most important, and one being the least important. Students chose their ranking by clicking the appropriate radio button (see Appendix A for a copy of the online survey). These four questions were repeated five times for both on-campus and distance teaching, giving students the opportunity to identify five characteristics of effective on-campus teaching, and five characteristics of effective teaching at a distance.

This approach to data gathering was adopted from a method developed by Delaney (2009) for a study of student perceptions of effective teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador high schools (levels I to III, students age 14 to 20). In that study Delaney asked students to identify five characteristics of effective teaching, describe each characteristic, and rank each characteristic in relation to the other characteristics they identified, with five being the most important and one being the least. The study conducted with university students added an item requesting data about instructor behaviours. This question was added to provide data on behaviours specific to modes of teaching. Are the characteristics of effective on-campus teaching different from those for

distance teaching? Are instructor behaviours that demonstrate these characteristics different for different modes of teaching?

### **Mode of Delivery**

The Delaney (2009) instrument was deployed as a pencil-and-paper survey, an approach appropriate for the high school context. Carini et al. (2002), however, concluded that data gathered using web-based instruments did not differ significantly from data collected using pencil-and-paper. Therefore, an online approach to data gathering was used in this study. The online approach proved to be effective for three reasons. First, the survey of university students needed to be as user friendly as possible to encourage participants to complete the entire questionnaire. The open-ended nature of the instrument put unusually high demands on the respondents. Thirty of the survey items asked students to provide text-based responses, as opposed to merely clicking on the desired choice. The online approach provided students with text boxes to organize their responses, and allowed them to type their responses, eliminating issues that could arise with the legibility of handwriting.

Second, a goal of the research was to reach as many Memorial University students as possible. The university's students are divided among four campuses (Prince Philip Drive campus, St. John's; Marine Institute, St. John's; Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, Corner Brook; Harlow Campus, London, Great Britain) and numerous work-study sites. Administering the instrument online provided the potential to reach all of the university's undergraduate and graduate students registered for the winter semester of the 2007-2008 academic year.



Third, employing an online approach allowed us to manipulate the significant amount of data that was collected with relative ease. Because respondents entered the data into the survey digitally, their responses were easily organized and transferred to various software programs that assisted with the analysis.

The online approach to data gathering provided access to the entire student body registered at Memorial University. The questionnaire was made available to the students through the survey tool of the university's learning management system, Desire 2 Learn. Approximately 17,000 students had access to the survey (see Appendix B for a copy of the survey web site).

### **Marketing the Study**

Providing access to the survey was not a guarantee that students would be cognizant of the research project. Therefore, the study was marketed to students through ads in campus newspapers, The *MUSE*, published by Memorial University of Newfoundland Student Union (MUNSU) and the *Gazette*, published by the Division of Marketing and Communications at Memorial University (see Appendix C for copies of the newspaper ad). A news story was also published in the *Gazette* highlighting the approach and goals of the project. The study was also advertised using banner ads. The banners were placed in high traffic student areas in the University Centre and the Queen Elizabeth II Library on the Prince Philip Drive campus, the Marine Institute, and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College. Students were invited to complete the survey for a chance to win one of two \$1000 tuition vouchers. Students had access to the survey from February 25, 2008 to April 4, 2008 (see Appendix D for copies of the banner ads).



## Data Analysis

At the end of the survey period, data was taken from Desire 2 Learn and compiled in comma-delineated format. This arrangement of data permitted a batch download of information into Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet software. The data resides in a spreadsheet that is 50 columns wide. The respondents are not identified. A random number designates the data record of each respondent that provided usable information. Each record is contained in a single row that spans 49 columns. Each column holds the data from one survey item. The columns are in the order that the items were presented to the participants. Placing the items in an Excel spreadsheet provides the opportunity to filter and sort the data as required.

Because of the open-ended nature of the survey items, using software to perform searches for specific strings of text was not viable. For example, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software could not be used to search for *approachable* as a characteristic because of the potential of typing errors and other anomalies in the data. Therefore, the data was coded manually.

The 400-page spreadsheet file was printed and assembled into 25 sheets, each eight and one half inches wide and approximately 14 feet long. The data was reviewed to determine the characteristics offered by the respondents. A unique number was handwritten into the cell of the each characteristic on the hardcopy of the data. For example, approachable was identified as 0001, enthusiastic as 0002, available 0003, and so on. The data was coded using these unique numbers. When the manual coding of the data was completed, the numbers were entered into the cells of an electronic copy of the data in the

spreadsheet software. Coding the data in this manner designated each characteristic with a unique identifier that could be filtered by the spreadsheet software to yield specific sets of information. Sixty-nine adjectives were identified in the coding process. See table 3.1 for a list of these adjectives.

Table 3.1

## Characteristics Identified and the Coding Numbers Assigned

Approachable	0001	Trustworthy	0036
Enthusiastic	0002	Positive	0037
Available	0003	Empathetic	0038
Knowledgeable	0004	Dedicated	0039
Stimulating	0005	Current	0040
Personable	0006	Dependable	0041
Humorous	0007	Caring	0042
Understanding	0008	Engaging	0043
Flexible	0009	Happy	0044
Understandable	0010	Constructive	0045
Open Minded	0011	Competent	0046
Communicative	0012	Creative	0047
Punctual	0013	Realistic	0048
Responsive	0014	Compassionate	0049
Sincere	0015	Professional	0050
Concerned	0016	Qualified	0051
Organized	0017	Pleasant	0052
Interesting	0018	Hygienic	0053
Patient	0019	Accommodating	0054
Fair	0020	Reasonable	0055
Motivating	0021	Consistent	0056
Clear	0022	Perceptive	0057
Respectful	0023	Kind	0058
Challenging	0024	Interactive	0059
Practical	0025	Focused	0060
Energetic	0026	Charismatic	0061
Thorough	0027	Efficacious	0062
Helpful	0028	Credible	0063
Attentive	0029	Assertive	0064
Eclectic	0030	Passionate	0065
Efficient	0031	Diplomatic	0066
Accessible	0032	Reflective	0067
Prepared	0033	Humble	0068
Confident	0034	Collaborative	0069
Friendly	0035		



After completing the coding, records that contained specific characteristics were isolated. For example, the records from respondents who identified approachable as a characteristic of effective teaching were filtered and placed into a separate spreadsheet file. The records from respondents who identified enthusiastic as a characteristic were filtered and placed into a separate spreadsheet file, and so on. Sixty-nine separate spreadsheet files were created, one for each unique characteristic identified. From the separate files was harvested the student descriptions of each characteristic, and the instructor behaviours that students believe demonstrate the characteristic. From this data, definitions, lists of instructor behaviours, and sets of student comments for each of the 69 characteristics were drafted. These results were further analyzed for common themes and repetitions, and distilled into the nine characteristics of effective teaching highlighted in the results of this study. The analysis of the data from the distance segment of the survey was conducted using the same approach.

Despite the fact that web-based technology played a significant role in the data gathering segment of this study, computer based technology played only a minor role in the analysis phase. The open-end nature of the data required a manual approach to the coding and analysis of the data. Even though the manual analysis of the data was tedious, the direct interaction with student responses proved rewarding. The participants in this study provided rich data, giving students an opportunity to voice their opinions on the nature of effective teaching at Memorial University for both on-campus and distance courses.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion**

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Approximately 17,000 Memorial University students had access to the Students' Perceptions of Effective Teaching survey from February 25, 2008 to April 4, 2008. Of that group, over 2500 opened the survey but only 330 provided usable responses. The demographics of the 330 respondents were very similar to the demographic profile of the larger university population (see Appendix E), the two exceptions being the gender proportion, and the proportion of students who participated in the survey from the Faculty of Science. Seventy-three percent of the students who completed the survey were female, compared to sixty percent of the university population. Thirty-one percent of the students who completed the survey study in the Faculty of Science, compared to eighteen percent of the university population. Of the 330 students who completed the survey, 161 of them provided data for both on-campus and distance delivery of courses. The demographics of the 161 respondents deviated from the demographics of the university population, but these discrepancies were consistent with the general demographics for distance students (see Appendix F).

The on-campus data was analyzed first. The manual coding of the data identified 69 adjectives that students used to identify characteristics of effective teaching (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Alphabetical list of the 69 descriptors used to identify effective on campus teaching.

Accessible	Creative	Helpful	Prepared
Accommodating	Credible	Humble	Professional
Approachable	Current	Humorous	Punctual
Assertive	Dedicated	Hygienic	Qualified
Attentive	Dependable	Interactive	Realistic
Available	Diplomatic	Interesting	Reasonable
Caring	Eclectic	Kind	Reflective
Challenging	Efficacious	Knowledgeable	Respectful
Charismatic	Efficient	Motivating	Responsive
Clear	Empathetic	Open Minded	Sincere
Collaborative	Energetic	Organized	Stimulating
Communicative	Engaging	Patient	Thorough
Compassionate	Enthusiastic	Passionate	Trustworthy
Competent	Fair	Perceptive	Understandable
Concerned	Flexible	Personable	Understanding
Confident	Focused	Pleasant	
Consistent	Friendly	Positive	
Constructive	Happy	Practical	

The data was coded by assigning a unique coding number to each of these descriptors, and then entering that code number next to the appropriate descriptor (See Appendix G for a table of the 69 descriptors and frequency that they were mentioned by respondents to the on-campus segment of the survey). After completing the coding process, the data was filtered according to these unique numbers and new spreadsheets were derived, one spreadsheet for each characteristic identified. The descriptions and instructor behaviours identified by the students for each characteristic were then harvested, and definitions and a list of instructor behaviours were compiled for each characteristic. The analysis of these definitions and behaviours led to further grouping of the data along behavioural themes. After completing the analysis, nine characteristics of



effective teaching were identified. Effective university teachers at Memorial University are: respectful, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organized, responsive, professional, and humorous.

The same approach was used to analyze the data for the characteristics of effective teaching in distance courses. No new descriptors were identified in the responses to the part of the survey that dealt with the distance delivery of courses (See Appendix H for a table of the 53 descriptors and frequency that they were mentioned by respondents to the distance segment of the survey). Fifty-three of the adjectives identified in the on-campus segment of the survey appeared in the responses to the distance segment (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Alphabetical list of the 53 descriptors used to identify effective teaching at a distance.

Accessible	Constructive	Friendly	Prepared
Accommodating	Creative	Helpful	Professional
Approachable	Current	Humorous	Punctual
Attentive	Dedicated	Interactive	Realistic
Available	Dependable	Interesting	Reasonable
Caring	Diplomatic	Kind	Respectful
Clear	Eclectic	Knowledgeable	Responsive
Collaborative	Efficient	Motivating	Thorough
Communicative	Empathetic	Open Minded	Trustworthy
Compassionate	Engaging	Organized	Understandable
Competent	Enthusiastic	Patient	Understanding
Concerned	Fair	Passionate	
Confident	Flexible	Personable	
Consistent	Focused	Practical	

The characteristics identified for distance teaching did correlate to the same nine behaviours identified in the on-campus segment of the survey. Distance students did, however, indicate different emphasis on the characteristics when compared to the on-campus results. These nine behaviours are listed below in order of the number of times they were mentioned in the survey results (most noted to least noted) as describe by students who completed the on-campus segment of the survey:

1. Respectful
2. Knowledgeable
3. Approachable
4. Engaging
5. Communicative
6. Organized
7. Responsive
8. Professional
9. Humorous

Students who completed the distance portion of the survey place emphasis on the nine characteristics in the following order:

1. Respectful
2. Responsive
3. Knowledgeable
4. Approachable

5. Communicative
6. Organized
7. Engaging
8. Professional
9. Humorous

### **Respectful**

The on-campus students who identify the characteristic *respectful* in the survey used the following adjectives to describe both the personal and pedagogical behaviors of their instructors: fair, understanding, flexible, caring, patient, helpful, compassionate, open-minded, sincere, diplomatic, concerned, reasonable, consistent, kind, empathetic, humble, trustworthy, and realistic. *Respectful*, or the correlated descriptors associated with the characteristic, appeared in the on-campus segment of the survey 341 times, significantly more than any of the other eight characteristics. This characteristic was also the most commonly identified in the distance segment of the survey. The adjectives sincere and humble did not appear in the distance segment. The 161 respondents identified respectful or one of its correlates 129 times.

Those students who highlighted the personal nature of *respectful* in both on-campus and distance courses noted the nature of the valued relationship between instructor and students. They appreciate instructors who are compassionate and understanding of the unique and challenging situations that students sometimes experience when enrolled in a course. Respondents to the survey commented:



Professors should be compassionate with regards to their students, who could be going through a rough time or have extenuating circumstances that requires adaptation of the normal course requirements. (on-campus response)

A level of understanding is often required in dealing with students. Many students struggle with family or health issues in addition to academics. When severe cases arise it is reassuring to know instructors are understanding and somewhat flexible. We all have our good and bad days . . . and life is often a bumpy ride. (on-campus response)

At university level most students will not be affected to the point of leaving school or failing without support or interest from profs. However, my experience has been that those who are interested in their students learning have a bigger impact on student learning - usually in a positive manner. (distance response)

These aspects of the characteristic *respectful* are particularly important for new students.

Professors can have a bad attitude towards young or first year students, looking at them judgmentally because they are young and ignorant. This, along with the fact that most professors hate teaching first year classes (ask any student in second year or higher and they will tell you it's true) makes them uncomfortable and feel stupid in class and could scare them from attempting a second year. When professors care that you understand what they are teaching, they will be more approachable to ask stupid questions outside of class. No one likes to feel stupid. (on-campus response)

Students from both modes of delivery single out instructors who were caring and patient. They describe a caring instructor as one who displays an interest in them, makes them feel comfortable, learns their names, and offers to help. Patient instructors are those who are willing to answer many questions and explain a concept several times if necessary. Such instructors appreciate that all students do not learn at the same pace.

Because it's not always the students' fault that they don't understand. Maybe they need to see things in a different light to process the information correctly. (on-campus response)

Since distance students cannot take advantage of a classroom for opportunities to ask questions and gain understanding, the distance profs have to be prepared for more questions. (distance response)

An instructor's impatience is quite obvious and tends to disrupt the learning process.

Frustration on the instructor's part with a student who doesn't understand is clearly visible and it shames students into giving up on understanding. (on-campus response)

Another on-campus student argues:

. . . being able to rephrase ideas more simply, or being prepared to refer the student to another resource will help the student understand the concept so much better. (on-campus response)

Other personal qualities that are cited under the characteristic *respectful* are *kind* and *empathetic*. Students prefer instructors who treat them with common courtesy and respect. It helps them feel comfortable enough to approach the professor to ask questions. Instructors who are empathetic relate to their students' interests and as one respondent commented, help them feel like "we're all in this together." Comments included:

Students want to feel appreciated for their work. Professors shouldn't act like they have never been a student. (on-campus response)

It just means that the professor actually connects with the students in such a way as to let them know that they are valued and important. (on-campus response)

An instructor has to show that he cares about the wellbeing of the students and wants to see them succeed . . . he needs to show understanding and compassion for their problems and be able to discover the best ways to deal with particular problems that students may have. (on-campus response)

Students appreciate professors who word their criticism in a constructive manner. They want instructors who, "think before speaking."

Telling a student that they are pretty much a failure is horrifying and humiliating. Also, being untactful towards students is completely unprofessional and ruins a professor's reputation. (on-campus response)

Since there's no face-to-face communication, the instructor needs to offer effective feedback to each student and/or expressive feedback to the group. It's difficult for the online students to know what the prof would want when they're not in the classroom. (distance response)

Without exception, the students who cited 'concerned' as a characteristic of effective teaching were referring to the professors' concern for the students' academic success. They noted that students would perform better for an instructor who exhibits an emotional investment in their academic achievement.

More often than not students fall through the cracks in a course because professors do not take the time to help them. If a student asks for help, than pros should take the time to help them. It shows that the prof cares, making he or she more approachable. Also good teacher-student relationships are formed. (on-campus response)

Concern for students is imperative if they are to learn from the mistakes they made on past assignments/exams. (distance response)



Humility is another aspect of being respectful, according to students responding to the on-campus segment of the survey. Students expect their professors to admit mistakes when they make them. They feel that the learning environment would be better if professors did not act as if they were superior to their students. One respondent expressed this sentiment in the following comment:

A cocky prof is horrible; they think they know it all and many are horrified when they realize that they have made a mistake. (on-campus response)

Students link humility with trust and see these as important characteristics of effective teaching. Trust has several dimensions. First, they need to trust the professional qualifications of their instructors. Secondly, they want their instructors to be honest about not knowing content. They are critical of instructors who try to bluff their way through an answer. In contrast, students are eager to accept and respect an instructor who is truthful about not knowing the answer to a question but is willing to find the answer and bring it back to class. Honesty is cited as a key component in the relationship between students and professors. Respondents commented:

No one's perfect . . . and by admitting that you're wrong about something can actually promote respect, and clearly shows a student that you are genuinely interested in making sure that the right information is being learned. When this isn't done, it can create a lot of unwanted stress for a student to confirm who is right and why. (on-campus response)

I appreciate an honest person. Someone whom I can trust. I think most other students feel the same way. To another extent false fronts are often a problem. Be honest with us up front. If a prof doesn't know an answer, don't waste 15 minutes of class time on a tangent filling us up with

speculation. Simply reply that they will find an answer and return it next class. (on-campus response)

I want to trust your answers and your teaching. (distance response)

Have adequate resources . . . but don't go overboard. I have a busy life outside of school. There must be a balance that I can work with. If a student asks a question, give a answer to the best of your ability and then give extra resources. You will be surprised exactly how indepth a student's curiosity will take them. (distance response)

Other students focused on the notion that professors are in a position of power and should be trusted not to abuse this situation.

Teachers are in a position of trust and power, and a teacher who can be trusted makes students more eager to learn and more comfortable in a classroom environment. (on-campus response)

Several other characteristics listed under this category speak to the pedagogical behaviors of instructors. This refers to aspects of the instructor's behavior that relate directly to how courses are taught. Students expect their professors to be fair and reasonable with respect to their expectations of the class. This includes: not examining material that has never been covered in class; grading all students using the same criteria; providing students with equal opportunities for success; being clear on what is expected on examinations and assignments; and giving plenty of advance notice on deadlines. Students prefer professors who find new ways to assess, other than the traditional exams and assignments.

Students feel that professors need to appreciate student workload and at times be more lenient. They should be more concerned that learning has taken place than with meeting deadlines. Respondents observe that:

Students are typically bogged down with work. Teachers need to recognize this and have reasonable expectations of students. (on-campus response)

Many of the students completing online courses, particularly at the Masters level, are people with full time jobs, families, etc. A professor needs to realize that the students do not have the same amount of time to spend on courses as full time students and adjust the academic expectations to reflect this. (distance response)

Another aspect of the pedagogical nature of being 'respectful' is to be helpful. This is defined as the professor who is sincere in his or her efforts to help students achieve in the course. The professor who is helpful encourages students to ask questions, is available during office hours and over email, and provides guidance on assignments and examinations.

Students also expect their instructors to be open-minded. This type of instructor is described as someone who appreciates the opinions of others and does not discriminate. Open-minded instructors encourage discussion and debate, and respond to students equally. Consistent with this characteristic is the notion of fairness. Respondents indicate that fairness is multi-faceted. It includes a professor's expectations of students' work, fair and consistent grading of examinations and assignments, and equal treatment. One student pointed to the practice of "pegging" students at a certain mark at the beginning of the semester. Another criticized the practice of placing all the "evaluation eggs" in one



basket. Another student cited the instructor who “plays up” answers from some students and “downplays” answers from others.

Students who identify realistic as a characteristic of effective teaching express a number of points of view. For some, realistic is applied to expectations. These students want realistic or reasonable expectations clearly identified by the instructor. Others want their professors to put a realistic focus on course material. They would like to see course material related to real world examples, when possible.

Students know exactly what to expect and when! Clearness of guidelines allows students to pace their workload and to plan accordingly. (on-campus response)

Provide assignments, assessments, tasks that relate to the real world - how would you deal with this situation instead of describe the characteristics of \_\_\_\_\_. (distance response)

Survey respondents emphasize flexibility as a characteristic of two areas of effective teaching: in the instructor’s knowledge of how to teach and what to teach (see definition of Knowledgeable); and in the administration of a course. Respondents indicate that:

In my opinion, life cannot be lived exactly by rigid standards. Flexibility in some cases is necessary and helps students feel understood. (on-campus response)

Flexibility is important for many reasons; an instructor should be flexible in the answers they receive. They should not have one viewpoint of something and not allow people to argue otherwise. If someone makes a logical argument they should be open to that argument even if it goes against what they believe. Also, it's important to be flexible for deadlines but not TOO flexible. There have to be limits. (on-campus response)

Several students highlight the variety of demands that can be placed on a student's schedule and the willingness of professors to accommodate those demands. They are asking for flexibility and tolerance in regards to due dates for assignments and flexibility with regards to the timing and administration of tests. Some students note that flexibility in teaching strategies and in evaluation components would be favorable.

Taking a course online requires patience from the instructor in getting assignments in on time. Most people taking distance courses are doing so out of necessity and probably have a lot on their plates. Flexibility from an instructor relieves stress associated with the isolated feeling of a distance course. (distance response)

. . . the many different opportunities to learn the concepts may mean that if the student doesn't understand something at first, he or she isn't lost for the rest of the class, because there will be more detail on the topic later. It helps to cover different types of learning, it breaks up a class and makes it less difficult to get through than if a teacher was to ask you to write all class without saying anything, or if they talk the entire time. (on-campus response)

Too often I have come across instructors who just want a student to regurgitate line by line from the text book, this is NOT teaching and this is NOT learning. (on-campus response)

### **Knowledgeable**

Students who identify *knowledgeable* as a characteristic of effective teaching in the on-campus segment of the survey used adjectives that include: flexible, competent, eclectic, credible, current, practical, reflective, and qualified. Respondents who replied to the distance segment used the same adjectives, however, credible, qualified, and reflective were not mentioned. *Knowledgeable* and its correlated descriptors were mentioned 231 times in the responses pertaining to on-campus teaching, making this

characteristic the second most noted characteristic of the nine. The students who responded to the distance segment of the survey only mentioned this characteristic 89 times, placing *knowledgeable* third on the list for distance teaching.

A significant aspect of the data collected is that respondents from both groups rarely separated content knowledge and the ability to teach well. For this reason, knowledge of content and knowledge of pedagogy are not separated in the findings. Respondents indicated clearly that they believe effective teachers have strong content knowledge, and knowledge and expertise on how to teach what they know.

Students expect effective instructors to have knowledge of the subject area in which they teach above and beyond course objectives. Students expect faculty to have the ability to communicate freely about their subject area, possess a strong background in the area; inspire confidence by serving as a student resource, elicit student interest, and the ability to respond to students' problems. Some students equate the instructor's command of the content to the level of student trust.

If I believe him/her to be credible, I will be more prone to trust what the instructor has to say. (on-campus response)

. . . ability to convey the content of the material in a way that is easily understood by the students, while this may seem a "given" - Just because a professor has a Phd and has done research does not qualify them to be a good teacher! (distance response)

It is extremely important for an instructor to be competent as an instructor. This includes both a knowledge of the subject matter, as well as being able to be organized and prepared. This also includes being able to give feedback in a prompt manner. (distance response)



Students also express the expectation that professors be current and active in ongoing investigations in their field of study. They indicate that researching, reflecting, and/or practicing in an instructor's chosen field is significant to faculty's ability to make teaching engaging. Adjectives respondents used to describe this aspect of *knowledgeable* included: competent, credible, current, reflective and qualified. Respondents noted:

Students learn better from someone who has been there. (on-campus response)

I feel it is important that my teacher is still inquiring and searching for answers to questions they have posed to themselves. I think it is important for teachers to be active in the same type of learning that they expect from their students. (on-campus response)

Personal anecdotes, knowledge of current day trends/practices (distance response)

The other component of *knowledgeable* that students identified is pedagogical knowledge. Respondents identify an instructor's ability to vary teaching strategies as a characteristic of effective teaching and an indication of strong content knowledge. For example, of the 43 students who identified flexible as a characteristic of effective teaching, 23 of them associated the notion with flexibility in teaching. These students defined flexibility as the ability to adapt to the learning styles of students, provide different approaches to teaching the material (i.e., switch often from giving notes, to class discussion, to small group work). Others highlighted the importance of offering a variety of evaluation alternatives noting that not all students perform well in written tests and prefer other forms of assessment. Others who defined flexible in terms of teaching and

learning highlighted the importance of professors to consider openly the opinions of students on the content. Students noted:

Students learn in many different ways; it's important to deliver the material effectively in as many ways as necessary. (on-campus response)

Variety is the spice of life and this applies to teaching . . . (distance response)

. . . the use of videos (perhaps made by the instructor) or audio clips, alternate websites, previous course content, etc, could be implemented. (distance response)

Other adjectives students used to describe the ability of faculty to vary teaching methods included: practical, eclectic, qualified and reflective. When students use the word 'practical' as a descriptor of engaging, they are indicating that students want their course material to be related to real life as much as possible. They would appreciate assignments that show the application of theory to practices in their future careers. This is particularly true in the professional schools, but a number of students suggested an even broader application. Comments included:

In order for a professor (in the Faculty of Education) to teach students what they truly need to know, the professor must be aware of the everyday demands of the classroom, of the stressors that teachers face, of curriculum outcomes, etc. (on-campus response)

Especially with regard to nursing, it is pointless to "teach" something that you know nothing about. For example, if somebody is teaching community health they should have experience in that area. (on-campus response)

We're all at MUN to do something with our lives, not to just study numbers and concepts. Applying examples to real life makes it more interesting and perceivably useful for the future. It makes us feel like what

we're learning could make a difference later on in our careers. (on-campus response)

This characteristic is important because it expands the campus to the outside community, and shows the students that the skills they learn in the classroom are not useless knowledge but practical experience. (on-campus response)

An instructor can demonstrate this by pushing their English students to go out and write reviews of currently playing movies or plays, or by having their Biology students conduct field research even in their first year courses. (on-campus response)

This characteristic expands the campus to the outside community. (on-campus response)

Students want to learn from professors who are up to date on the current research and practices of their field. (distance response)

Knowledge of technology was mentioned by a small proportion of on-campus responses, but students who replied to the distance segment of the survey often noted that faculty should possess a good knowledge of information and communications technologies.

A distance instructor should know how to use the web-based tool (D2L) and how to do so properly (distance response)

In order to effectively teach a web based course, a professor needs to have some basic technology skills (sending e-mails, posting messages, etc.) to communicate with students. (distance response)

This characteristic is important because since the course is done through distance computers are all that connects students to the instructor and course material and sometimes exams. The instructor needs to know a great deal about computers and D2L so that when the exam day arrives students will be able to access the exam with no problems. (distance response)



## **Approachable**

Students who identified *approachable* as a characteristic of effective teaching describe these behaviors using adjectives that include: friendly, personable, helpful, accessible, happy and positive. Students who completed the distance segment of the survey cited all of these adjectives excluding happy and positive. *Approachable* and its correlated descriptors were highlighted, by on-campus students, 210 times, making it the third most noted characteristic of the nine. Respondents to the distance portion mentioned the characteristic 69 times, placing it fourth for distance delivery. The expectations cited by both groups, however, are similar. The methods of communication students described vary for on-campus and distance course delivery, but appropriately so given the modes of instruction. The frame of reference for students who responded to the on-campus segment of the survey focused mainly on face-to-face communications, mentioning electronic forms of communication infrequently. Students who completed the distance segment understandably emphasized characteristics of electronic communication as they described instructor behaviours for this characteristic.

The definitions that students provided encompass three main themes: the positive interaction between professor and students; the comfort level of students to ask questions and to seek advice; and the sincere effort on the part of instructors to help students reach their academic goals.

The descriptor positive, commonly used in the on-campus part of the survey, includes a broad range of behaviors. First, students want their professors to be positive about teaching them. One student felt that:

. . . it is all too easy to tell that some professors would rather have their teeth pulled than teach a class. A positive attitude impacts how hard the students work and can be enhanced in small ways like smiling. (on-campus response)

Secondly, students look for faculty who are friendly, helpful and patient. They appreciate it when instructors learn their names and show an interest in their progress. They would like for them to chat outside of class and greet students in class. Thirdly, some respondents indicate that there is a connection between being positive and students' academic success. They are critical of those professors who tell their students that the course is difficult and that many of them will not pass. They feel that faculty should encourage students, provide guidance on course work and use a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate students' needs.

As learning is not the same for every student, professors need to be able to be approached by students if they have questions regarding material discussed, help with projects, papers, etc, or just have questions in general that the instructor could answer. (on-campus response)

Often students have questions or concerns that are not easily dealt with through written interaction. The prof has to be able to cope with such problems so that the student will understand and be successful in the course. (distance response)

Have great written communication skills. If a problem is encountered that is hard to solve through written communication, take the time to do it orally (phone recording). Then take steps necessary to fix the problem so that it doesn't occur next time. (distance response)

The behavior of *approachable* also includes creating an atmosphere where students are comfortable asking questions and seeking help, both during class and outside

of class. To that end, students want their instructors to be available and accessible, to maintain appropriate office hours and respond to emails in a reasonable time period.

Some respondents commented:

Students need a prof's support in order to achieve to their highest potential. This means that the prof should be willing to provide guidance on how to achieve higher academic success in their course, and later courses. (on-campus response)

This characteristic is important because students who may be struggling in his/her class may need help and an instructor should be willing to provide that help and use his/her time to help a student. (on-campus response)

Sometimes (especially for difficult subjects) it is hard to grasp all the material in one lecture. To help a student who is willing to go out of their way to find their prof and ask for extra help is important. (on-campus response)

Some instructors are not nearly as available to their online students as they are to their traditional classroom students. Often they do not respond to questions for a very long time and some do not respond at all. (distance response)

While the instructor is obviously not present as he/she would be in a classroom setting, it is important that students are able to reach them if they have questions about anything course related. (distance response)

A third theme in this behavior relates to the instructors' concern for students' academic achievement. Several respondents to both the on-campus and distance portions of the survey single out their wish to have instructors who are sincere in helping them achieve in their courses. These instructors do not ridicule their students if they do not understand the course material. One student suggests that faculty should "let their students know they can come to them with any questions they might have, no matter how trivial they may seem." Another student feels that an effective instructor is one who is



able to “answer any questions and not make you feel stupid about not knowing something.” They suggest there is a correlation between the instructor’s interest in being there and the students’ success in the course.

This characteristic is important because if the instructor seems happy to be there and teaching the subject then it relays to students and it sometimes makes the course easier and more interesting to learn. (on-campus response)

This characteristic is important because it makes the students feel as though they are actually in a class not just looking at or reading off a computer screen all the time. (distance response)

Being friendly, according to a number of on-campus students, will result in better class attendance and a greater responsiveness to course material. Also, being friendly is perceived by some students as being a prerequisite for good interpersonal communication which is an important part of their education. Respondents to the distance segment of the survey noted this aspect of the characteristic as well.

University can be intimidating for some. It’s nice to know that you can go see or talk to your professor if you need clarification or help with an assignment. (on-campus response)

. . . even online, having a friendly prof is nice. (distance response)

Answer promptly . . . don’t make students wait too long. This means that we are important to you. Hard to smile over the computer . . . but keep notes to the point and share some information about yourself. (distance response)

Many respondents emphasize *approachable* as a behavior of effective teaching because of their concern for the effects of intimidation, especially on first year students.

Their comments include:

This characteristic is very important because many profs have first year students who are still trying to adapt to the university life. Having profs that are approachable helps those who are nervous about this new phase in their lives. Being able to talk to someone, especially the profs, really helped me during my first year. (on-campus response)

The instructor is the expert in the field and we are the students. Therefore, we have lots of questions and need plenty of guidance. Being approachable means that we can help ourselves achieve our academic goals with your assistance. Being unapproachable means that we may founder unnecessarily because we were too intimidated to ask. (on-campus response)

Although a prof may have an open-door policy it is not pleasant to acquire help if one is made to feel like an idiot or if one is intimidated. This is especially important in first year courses and is a common complaint about professors. An unapproachable prof really limits a student's options for finding help. (on-campus response)

Often students are too intimidated to go and seek help with a course because the professor seems very intimidating. This affects the performance of the student within the course since they are not comfortable with the professor and they may feel stressed when confronted in class in an interview etc. (on-campus response)

By removing intimidation an instructor is keeping those channels of communication open and enhancing the learning process. (on-campus response)

It is hard to determine someone's tone in an online message, so if a response seems overly critical, a student may misinterpret that as nastiness. (distance response)

By being friendly in the posts, professors can encourage student participation. (distance response)

According to the students who identify *approachable* as a behavior of effective teaching, professors who are *approachable* add life to their courses. They are enthusiastic and upbeat in their teaching. They develop a rapport with their students and build a positive learning atmosphere where everyone has an opportunity to succeed. One student observes:

[having an approachable instructor] fosters an academic environment where communication and respect promote the essence of knowledge sharing. (on-campus response)

The conclusion is that “professors who are not *approachable* are unaware of how students are really progressing in the course until it’s too late. Students end up failing assignments and then the professor wonders why they fail.” Clearly, it is important to students that professors are genuinely interested in teaching them and the subject regardless of the mode of delivery.

### **Engaging**

On-campus students who identify instructor behaviors that were *engaging* describe these behaviors using adjectives that include: enthusiastic, interesting, passionate, motivating, creative, positive, charismatic, stimulating, interactive, energetic, and assertive. Distance students again follow suit. They did not include in their responses, however, assertive, challenging, charismatic, energetic, positive, or stimulating. Respondents to the on-campus portion of the survey highlight *engaging* and its correlated descriptors 198 times, making it the fourth most noted characteristic of the nine.



Respondents to the distance section of the survey highlighted the characteristic 44 times, making it the seventh most noted of the nine.

The definitions respondents from both segments of the survey provided for characteristics that fell under *engaging* predominately dealt with three attributes: the passion and enthusiasm demonstrated by the instructor for the course material and teaching; their ability to share this passion and enthusiasm with their students; and the level to which this energy influences their pedagogical choices.

Demonstrating passion for the course was highlighted as a positive behavior, one that respondents believed would draw students closer to the topic being studied, help students enjoy learning, inspire students, and make the course interesting through fostering a positive atmosphere.

If an instructor is passionate about the subject they are teaching they won't mind having a conversation with the students if they have questions. They would be more likely to take the extra effort to have convenient office hours, and be flexible. (on-campus response)

. . . being enthusiastic about the material makes learning easier, and more pleasant. (distance response)

when instructors demonstrate passion for their subject area it signals to their students that they are knowledgeable in that area and in most cases inspires interest in his/her students. (distance response)

The instructors' enthusiasm or lack thereof can be infectious and lead the student to do more learning out of the classroom and or a more thorough job of learning the subject matter. (on-campus response)

Students also indicate that an obvious desire to investigate, research, and/or practice in their chosen field is a good indicator of an instructor's level of interest in their subject area.

. . . it is hard for an online instructor to demonstrate this, but it could be done by actively posting interesting info related to the course from the news, providing interesting facts pertaining to material taught, relating material to real life, etc. (distance student)

Another characteristic identified by respondents is that faculty should have a desire, and openly enjoy, teaching and working with their students. They believe that a good attitude toward students and their efforts help to create a positive learning environment and is a strong motivational factor. Respondents identified a number of behaviors that would be an indicator of this characteristic including: smiling, interacting with students, getting to know students, lecturing in a positive manner, being well prepared for class, utilizing effective public speaking practices, varying tone of voice, varying teaching strategies, and being accessible to students.

The results indicate that students believe that passing on an instructor's passion for their discipline has a cause and effect relationship with the pedagogical choices that teachers make. Students note that they are engaged and motivated by professors who encourage them to become involved actively in the lecture. Interactive teachers are described as stimulating, energetic, and charismatic.

Sheepish instructors are not listened to well. There are certain instructors that though they may be fully competent in their field, completely fail to spark any kind of interest in the topic. A professor that isn't confident in

teaching their material is often just as good as having no professor at all.  
(on-campus response)

being eager, using many different teaching instructions/methods, keep the class active, shows passions and zeal for teaching subject matter. (distance response)

Students want faculty to be creative with their approach to teaching and value instructors who employ a variety of teaching strategies and interactive activities. Creative approaches keep students interested in topics. They make dry, abstract content come alive.

Having a prof who is creative helps to make the class enjoyable. In university you have a choice if you want to attend class or not. No one is on your back wondering why you miss classes or why things are not passed in etc. When you have a class which you enjoy going to because it is different all the time and creative ideas are coming out of it, you want to attend and do well. (on-campus response)

It's important to be creative because, as I would assume, most students like to learn interactively, rather than just by having a teacher read excerpts of the book. We can do that by ourselves. I feel it's a waste of time to show up to a class where a teacher is just reading me the book. (on-campus response)

Creative instructors use interesting teaching methods that hold attention and offer refreshing variety and spark interest and understanding. They also propose interesting ideas and leave you with something to think about. (on-campus response)

This can be demonstrated by having good "filler" in between slides, or while students are copying notes. Also a teacher who has "fun facts" about their material, or other trivial knowledge concerning the material will help students become engaged. Also involving the students within the classroom is an important factor as well. (on-campus response)

Students may lose interest in the content when working by computer. They may also be unable to stay on task and may fall behind in the course material. Instructors need to be able to come up with creative ways to keep



students interested and on task so that they can learn the content. (distance response)

Creative projects/discussion keep students interested and active and help us gain knowledge. (distance response)

They also highlighted the desire for their instructors to demonstrate confidence in their knowledge of their content area by being able to respond to questions, and by being able to challenge students. Respondents rarely separate pedagogical and content knowledge when they describe good teaching. The conclusion drawn from this is that strong content knowledge does not guarantee good teaching, but good teaching is dependent on strong content knowledge.

### **Communicative**

Respondents to the on-campus and distance portions of the survey highlighted several personal attributes under *communicative*. They used specific adjectives to describe this characteristic, including clear, understandable, thorough, constructive, and attentive. Respondents who completed the on-campus segment of the survey mentioned *communicative* or its correlated descriptors 153 times, making the characteristic the fifth most noted of the nine. Students who responded to the distance portion of the survey mentioned the characteristic 69 times, tying it with *approachable* for the fourth most noted characteristic of effective teaching at a distance.

The majority of on-campus students noted the importance of language, particularly effective command of English. For some on-campus and distance students, *communicative* means using a variety of teaching methods to help students understand

course content. Some students feel that being organized is part of being *communicative*. Other on-campus students highlighted the importance of astute listening skills. They indicated that they want their instructors to be approachable and able to talk to them in a meaningful way about course content.

An instructor should try to attentively listen to, and ensure that they understand questions posed by students. They should also try to interpret their body language/facial expression to judge the student's understanding (i.e., Do they look confused or bored?) (on-campus response)

Answer questions carefully and be sure to address the actual point of the question instead of sort of going around it. Be logical in presenting information. (on-campus response)

Students who responded to the distance segment of the survey noted many of the same concerns as their on-campus counterparts, but focused their discussion on communication through electronic modes.

Because distance education relies so much on written content in the way of email, postings and course manuals being a good communicator is key. Being able to get points across and explain material to students is what this type of learning is all about. (distance response)

Doing distance courses can bring up a lot of misunderstandings and having an instructor that is easy to get a hold of makes a world of difference. Quick responses really aid the student when a question arises during a study period. (distance response)

Survey respondents from both the on-campus and distance segments of the survey who chose the word 'clear' as a descriptor gave it two dimensions. First, they note that instructors should be clear in the presentation of material. They indicate that professors should ensure their notes are well organized and the visuals and demonstrations are used



to clarify difficult content. Secondly, students feel that instructors should make clear their expectations for evaluation. They want their instructors to be specific about requirements for tests and assignments, and that course outlines be clear and concise.

No lecture is successful if an instructor fails to clearly impart his material; no matter how brilliant a professor may be, his students will fail to appreciate this if he cannot communicate his knowledge. (on-campus response)

Much of an online course is based on written communication. A professor needs to be able to write clearly and concisely in order for the course to be effective. (distance response)

Students need to have clear and concise explanations of concepts covered in the course in order to effectively understand the material. There is nothing worse than an instructor who cannot get his/her message across or cannot bring the material 'down to a student's level'. (on-campus response)

Since you do not meet your prof online, they need to be able to convey their expectations and thoughts very clearly in writing. With an online course, it is more difficult to have an exchange of ideas quickly. (distance response)

A very clear course syllabus would be a great start, one that not only delineates the general course outline but also clearly states evaluation format, descriptions, and dates. Also, professors should be readily available to answer questions about content and evaluation. Questions should be answered in such a way as to add to student understanding. (on-campus response)

Doing a course on-line is different than in class. there is no personal connection so communication of expectations is very important as this is the only avenue you have to know what it is you have to do. You cannot rely on fellow classmates to explain an assignment because they could live across Canada. (distance response)

Consistent with the descriptor 'clear', students also chose 'understandable' as a part of being communicative. Students want instructors to deliver coherent lectures or



well organized and clear web content, give practical work to support learning, speak clearly and loudly or write clearly in discussion forum postings and email, and explain what is expected in their course.

This is an important characteristic because it is extremely annoying to take notes from a person who writes all over the board with no headings or any kind of structure. Also, neatness is necessary for reading instructor's feedback and their solutions to problems on assignments and tests. (on-campus response)

Students also want their instructors to be thorough. For on-campus students this descriptor refers specifically to maximizing use of instructional time, avoiding irrelevant material, providing lists of supplementary course materials, and giving tutorials. Students who take courses online want their instructors to accommodate the fact that many of them have not taken courses in many years.

I need a prof who does not waste time, is very clear in expectations and instruction. I have no time to waste...I want and need profs who are to the point and consistent. (on-campus student)

An Instructor should understand that the base level of education of the student taking an online course may not be the same as that of a student enrolled on-campus. The student may be older, have not taken a course in a much longer time period. The material covered should reflect this, and the instructor should be available to help alleviate any problems. (distance response)

Prompt, quality feedback is a theme that appears often in student responses both for the on-campus and distance segments of the survey. The distance students, however, were very concerned about the speed with which instructor feedback was forwarded to them. Prompt feedback appeared to be a very important characteristic of effective

teaching at a distance. Students who note constructive as a characteristic of effective teaching focused on the importance of constructive criticism from professors. They indicate that constructive feedback could encourage student learning and provide experiences that could bolster self-confidence. To that end, they prefer that their instructors avoid sarcasm and degrading remarks.

It enables a student to learn from their mistakes effectively. A single number or letter grade only informs a student that they may or may not have been perfect. Constructive criticism improves performance for remaining material. (on-campus response)

Receiving personal feedback from a professor, especially when there are so many others in the course, really makes a student feel good, and helps the student feel more connected to the course and the professor. When a professor responds to some, but not all, you kind of feel like you are being ignored. (distance response)

Students see constructive criticism as a link to more effective evaluation.

Do not mark midterms and assignments so that the class fails, but then end up with the grade distribution expected by the university administration. This seems to be a fairly common practice, to mark excessively hard throughout the term in an attempt to scare students into learning, and then miraculously passing everyone. This is not conducive to true learning. Students evaluated this way do not know what they have learned vs. what they haven't, they just know they muddled through a course and got the grade they needed. (on-campus response)

Since there's no face-to-face communication, the instructor needs to offer effective feedback to each student and/or expressive feedback to the group. It's difficult for the online students to know what the prof would want when they're not in the classroom. (distance response)

Another descriptor of the characteristic communicative is attentive. On-campus students who identified attentive as an aspect of effective teaching focused on listening

skills and their instructor's attention to detail. They want their instructors to be vigilant when students are writing examinations, pay due diligence while students are doing presentations, return tests and assignments in a reasonable period of time, and listen carefully to students as they ask questions.

If the instructor is attentive to the students, especially during presentations given by the student(s), then the students will [feel that] their input and participation has value, and the student will be more inclined to work harder. (on-campus response)

Students who responded to the distance segment of the survey highlighted the approach that instructors use when communicating with students in discussion forums or email. They want their instructors to pay attention to what the students write and respond appropriately.

Paying attention to what students have to say may help to better the course for the students and improve the course itself. May also show the students that the prof is actually involved with students' concerns. (distance response)

Instructors must be quick in replying to e-mails and providing necessary information to students. Otherwise, meeting deadlines becomes a challenge. (distance response)

Pay attention to students especially in the discussion forum as they may be providing information that may help the professor enhance the course for the student or better the course for future students. (distance response)

## **Organized**

Respondents to both the on-campus and distance segments of the survey identified *organized* as a characteristic of effective teaching. Other adjectives that



students used to describe this set of behaviours included efficient, focused, and prepared. Students who responded to the online segment of the survey highlighted *organized* or its correlated descriptors 133 times, making the characteristic the sixth most mentioned of the nine. Distance students noted the characteristic 68 times, making it the fifth most mentioned in the distance portion of the survey, just one behind approachable and communicative, both mentioned 69 times.

Both on-campus and distance students value this aspect of effective teaching, as they feel that it has a reciprocating effect. One on-campus student notes:

If the prof is organized in teaching the course, I will be organized in doing the course. (on-campus response)

Students prefer instructors who are *organized* in their lectures and online content, in their approach to the subject matter, and in their dealings with students. An *organized* instructor's actions include having lectures prepared; using clear visual aids; being coherent in class or with notes on a web site; reviewing a test when it is handed back to students; providing a course outline; and providing feedback consistently throughout the course.

The first behavior identified by students in this category is being prepared. On-campus students believe that to be prepared means to maximize instructional time and to know course content. Instructors should tell students what they will be learning and what is expected of them. Students noted that:

A prof shouldn't have to waste class time sorting through notes looking for things. Everything should be ready to go before class starts. (on-campus response)

When students know what is expected of them from the beginning of the course they are able to decide if that course is right for them. Also they will know how much time and effort are required. (on-campus response)

Students who responded to the distance survey identified similar behaviours, but framed their comments in the context of the online delivery of courses.

If the D2L website isn't organized and well laid out then it can create confusion for students and frustrate instructors. All information, notes etc should be easily found on the site. (distance response)

Set out clear goals and expectations, provide timelines, have well constructed and developed notes (distance response)

Students also identified focused as a characteristic of *organized* teaching. On-campus students noted that instructors should stay on topic. Students comment that it is difficult to understand or pay attention when a professor is not focused on topic. Distance students made similar comments, but in the context of online delivery.

It's really hard to understand a subject and to pay attention when the prof keeps going off on tangents every two minutes. Some off topic time is okay and can even help, but every class or multiple times a class makes the subject confusing. (on-campus response)

A focused teacher creates focused students. (on-campus response)

If the instructor is not focused on the course, the content or the progression of the students, then the students themselves won't be. (distance response)

Give students their tasks, tell them not to exceed any more then what they are asked to do and then provide them with the most effective feedback. (distance response)

The third characteristic used to describe *organized* is efficient. Students in both on-campus and distance segments of the study identify two important aspects of this behavior: providing sufficient feedback to them and making the most of instructional time, be it in the classroom or online. Students from both groups prefer to receive feedback on examinations and assignments in a reasonable period of time. For distance students, efficient also referred to responding to email and discussion postings promptly.

Students need to know how well they are performing in any given course so that they can adjust the amount of effort they are putting into the course. Many times instructors do not provide sufficient feedback to students or they are very slow in returning completed assignments and exams. (on-campus response)

This is important because students need to get feedback regarding assignments and tests in an efficient manner. (on-campus response)

This characteristic is important because when doing distance courses you do not have the same advantage of doing the course in the classroom with the instructor so the instructor needs to check their email a great deal so that they can reply to students questions, comments or concerns quickly and efficiently. (distance response)

Being quick with marks and comments is important with online courses. Students want the feedback so they will not make the same mistakes again. In distance students do not have the in class instruction for papers or assignments so they rely on the feedback and comments. (distance response)



## Responsive

Students who completed the on-campus portion of the survey want professors to be *responsive*. They used adjectives that include available, helpful, efficient, perceptive and accommodating to describe the behaviour. Respondents indicated that *responsive*, as a behavior, encompasses two attributes, the instructors' responses to students' oral and written work, and the instructors' awareness of individual student needs. On-campus students identified *responsive* or one of its correlated descriptors 91 times, making *responsive* the seventh most mentioned characteristic of on-campus teaching.

Respondents to the distance portion of the survey identified the same behaviours as did the respondents to the on-campus segment except for perceptive. There was, however, a significant difference in the emphasis distance students placed on *responsive* behaviours. Distance students identified *responsive* or one of its correlates 100 times, making the characteristic the second most mentioned of the nine.

The first attribute of being *responsive* is to provide students with timely, thorough and constructive feedback in their course work. While on-campus students appreciate the busy workload of faculty, they feel that the longer it takes to receive comments on their work, the more difficult it is to address the changes suggested by the instructor or to understand the grades. To discuss their progress with professors, respondents suggest that faculty set and maintain reasonable office hours and respond to all emails as soon as possible. Some students suggested that:

This is important because it allows the students to speak one-on-one with the instructor and gain insights into how to perform effectively in the course. (on-campus response)

Availability is shown by responding promptly to students' emails, being available in their offices to meet with students and by arriving a little early and staying a little late for classes in order to allow students to speak with them. (on-campus response)

Two important components of feedback are discussion and questioning during class time. Students would like their instructors to involve them more in the learning process. This would result in a more effective and efficient use of instructional time.

Students who responded to the distance segment of the survey shared similar concerns with on-campus students but framed their responses in the context of distance technologies used to deliver online courses.

If you have to wait WEEKS to get a response from a professor, it can be highly frustrating. Also helps gain trust between the student and instructor. After all, if I can never get a response, it leaves me with little faith that if I ever had a problem with something in the course, the professor would be of any use. (distance response)

Responding to postings and questions in a timely fashion is important for students in web courses. Waiting for days or sometimes even weeks to get a response or even worse no response is extremely frustrating. Thankfully there are sometimes other students that can help out. (distance response)

The second attribute of being *responsive* is the instructors' awareness of individual student's needs. Both on-campus and distance students believe that effective teaching involves being perceptive; specifically, being attentive to signs from students that indicate the course material is too difficult or a particular concept is not well understood. Students' questions and body language, in the case of on-campus teaching, should help the instructor with that insight. Students who completed the distance portion

of the survey want their professors to be attentive to these signs as they appear in online communications, responding quickly and carefully to email and discussion forum postings, and asking for clarification on the part of the student should the need exist.

Furthermore, instructors should accept the fact that everyone does not learn and express ideas at the same pace. For that reason, they suggest that professors should be more accommodating with deadlines and flexible in the time frame for examinations. Students concluded that being *responsive* in a timely and efficient manner as well as being sensitive to their individual differences and accommodating their needs will result in a greater sense of trust between teacher and student.

We are all different. We come from different backgrounds and have had different experiences, all of which help define us. Only when a person feels their voice is valued, are they able to offer something from which everyone can learn. This is trust. (on-campus response)

Success is achieved mostly by setting up the student from what they already know, do and have learned. Building on what students already know is vital and so if a teacher is able to quickly figure out what the students know then they are better able to set the student up for success. This also alleviates the frustration of the student!! (distance response)

It is important because many students have learning difficulties and need accommodations for taking notes, writing a test, etc. Students should be provided with options so that they can maximize their learning. (distance response)

The respondents believe that an instructor who “cares about being an effective teacher, not just his or her area of expertise, will help them reach their highest potential as students.”

Students who completed the distance segment of the survey were greatly concerned about the responsiveness of faculty teaching online. Their concern is quite



valid given that for the vast majority of distance students, all communication with instructors is mediated electronically, through email, discussion forums, or audio or video conferencing (i.e., web-based audio and video conferencing, or telephone). For distance students, timely and constructive feedback to questions or evaluation components is extremely important.

Students are online at different times and are completing course material at different rates. Receiving timely feedback on email requires that a professor be available more often than an on-campus professor would be. (distance response)

...it is important that profs make themselves available for students to be able to contact them especially in key points of a term such as midterms, finals and papers. When it comes to web based courses e-mail and telephone comes in to play. (distance response)

Interaction with the instructor within the discussion forum is the equivalent to interaction in discussions within the classroom for on-campus courses. Without this, discussions can get off track or one person can dominate. (distance response)

### **Professional**

Respondents to the on-campus segment of the survey who identify *professional* as a characteristic of effective teaching use adjectives that include dedicated, punctual, dependable, efficacious, hygienic, and confident. The responses from the distance portion of the survey were similar. Distance students omitted efficacious, and hygienic. On-campus students mentioned *professional* or its correlated descriptors 85 times, and distance students 27 times, making the characteristic the eighth most mentioned of the nine for both sets of data.

The descriptions provided by on-campus students focus on appropriate dress, punctuality, trust, honesty, and a measured presence in terms of the instructors' interaction with students. Students note that they want their professors, not teaching assistants, to teach the course.

Having TA's teach the course shows the professor and university is not valuing the students. (on-campus response)

They expect their instructors to be appropriately dressed and hygienic.

Smelly, dirty profs turn me off from going to a class. (on-campus response)

It is hard to take someone seriously when they are dressed like a mess or like a slob. (on-campus response)

Appropriate work attire. We always judge a book by its cover, that's human nature. (on-campus response)

Both distance and on-campus students expect faculty to maintain a *professional* demeanor when dealing with students' questions, both in person and electronically. Several respondents note the importance of prompt responses to emails and other electronic communications. They expect instructors to be in class on time with well-planned lectures and activities. Needlessly cancelling classes is described as unacceptable.

When profs are on time for lectures, students are eager to get to classes on time as well. If a prof is always late, students tend to come to class late, which in some cases interrupts classes. (on-campus response)

This characteristic is important because if an instructor is very slack in his or her work, being late for class, taking a long time to pass back assigned work, and end classes early every other class, passes on such characteristic to the students. Students will then follow suit by showing up to class late or not going at all then leaving in the middle disrespectfully. (on-campus response)

Just because a course is online doesn't make it any less important than other courses, and I think some distance professors often forget this. (distance response)

Post sections on websites where questions will be asked and where they can respond easily. Also, always set aside time for asking questions and clarification. (on-campus response)

They want their professors to stay on the course material, but appreciate the interjection of personal anecdotes that highlighted concepts being studied in the course material. They want to be able to trust their instructors to be faithful to the course syllabus and to establish *professional* expectations for student conduct in their classes and laboratory activities. They note that when a professor exhibits a *professional* presence and is dedicated to teaching they feel valued as students. For some, being dedicated means keeping up with technology and new teaching methods.

Can't expect students to work hard if you don't put the same effort in as well (on-campus response)

Professors realizing they offer a service to students who pay for that service (on-campus response)

When teachers show dedication, students show dedication. (on-campus response)

This characteristic is important because when students realize that the instructor is dedicated to teaching the subject, the student may become more interested in learning the subject. (distance response)



A professor that is techno savvy and interested in web courses will be more likely to seek the most recent and effective teaching techniques and styles for web based learning... (distance response)

Furthermore, students expect their professors to display a sense of confidence and to pass that confidence on to their students. Without confidence students are left to doubt their own knowledge because they doubt the material being taught. Distance students also noted that instructors should be confident in their technical skills.

This characteristic is important because a professor who is confident in his/her work and in his/her students will raise students self-esteem and provide confidence to the students. (on-campus response)

An instructor can demonstrate this characteristic by using several examples or stories, depending on the type of class, to help demonstrate the point he/she is trying to teach. The professor can also provide positive reinforcement by giving the students positive remarks, such as you're all doing great in this course, you're a good class, etc. (on-campus response)

Confidence in their technological ability and course topic is necessary to impart to students that you only have limited access to. All interactions must be quality interactions. (distance response)

## **Humorous**

Students appreciate a sense of humor as a characteristic of effective teaching. It encompasses many facets of the instructor's personality, including having a positive outlook on teaching, being kind and approachable, and building a more *engaging* pedagogical experience through classroom atmosphere and student-teacher rapport. Two adjectives that are consistently used to describe a *humorous* instructor are happy and positive. On-campus students mentioned humor or its correlated descriptors 51 times, and

distance students 11 times, making the characteristic the ninth most mentioned of the nine for both sets of data.

Students who completed the on-campus segment of the survey contend that instructors with a sense of humor help them feel more relaxed. Their comments include:

Being able to laugh in the classroom engages more students, even if the jokes are academic. (on-campus response)

[Humor] lightens the mood and brings people out of their shell. (on-campus response)

It makes for better relationships between students and instructors. (on-campus response)

Humor helps create a positive learning environment. If you are too bored or the lesson drones on there is little chance of memory retention. For myself personally, I remember discussing topics in class more than I remember the material that I studied from notes. A bit of humor makes this easier still since funny things tend to stick in your memory. (on-campus response)

Responses provided by distance students concurred with the findings presented in the on-campus portion of the survey, but their comments were framed in the context of distance delivery.

This quality greatly impacts the atmosphere of a course, even if the course is completely web based. (distance response)

It is difficult when first entering the land of DELT. Having an instructor with a sense of humor allows us to feel more satisfied. (distance response)

Distance courses can be stressful with the extra work. Humour can ease the "pain". (distance response)

[humor] lightens the mood and also offers a personal connection letting the students know that the instructor is not a computer (distance response)

Students also recommend that instructors inject stories, personal experiences, and some humor into their lectures. They expect their professors to be positive about teaching the material and about being in class.

This characteristic is important because if the instructor seems happy to be there and teaching the subject then it relays to students and it sometimes makes the course easier and more interesting. (on-campus response)

This characteristic would add a more personal touch to the online component, which obviously lacks in personality. (distance response)

Makes the material come alive, more interesting (distance student)

In the opinion of the respondents, such qualities make a professor more approachable. They believe that friendlier instructors are more likely to be available to listen to students' concerns and questions. For on campus students, this characteristic is demonstrated by coming into class with a smile, greeting students, and having a 'chat' with them before class begins. Distance students would rely more on the content, language, and tone of electronic communications.

Professors who are bright and throw in bits of humor are more liked than others. I have experienced this first hand, where instructors who are happy and can take a joke, are more approachable and have better ratings by the students. (on-campus response)

Put a twist in your material, add random jokes, show media clips, SMILE, do something to prevent the class from falling into a REM cycle in the middle of a lecture. (on-campus response)

Online courses make it much more difficult to demonstrate a sense of humor. However, with the right mixture of humor in notes/postings - it can be achieved. (distance response)



Making "light" observations regarding the material and creating questions that not only cause us to think but also make us relax, through laughter.  
(distance response)

## Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

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### Summary

Providing students at Memorial University with an opportunity to voice their opinions on effective teaching produced compelling results. Using an approach that required text-based responses rather than Likert scale items was key in obtaining rich data, and narratives from the students' point of view. From their responses were derived nine categories of behaviours students believe are significant in establishing an effective teaching practice.

The data indicates the students value these nine characteristics regardless of the mode of delivery, either face-to-face on campus, or via the information and communications technologies used to deliver distance courses. However, the emphasis that students put on the nine characteristics for distance courses was different from what students described for on-campus courses. Students responding to the on-campus segment of the survey indicated a concern for prompt feedback, but did not express nearly as high a level of concern as that demonstrated by distance students. The difference in emphasis may indicate a significant difference in the level of communication attained by each mode. On-campus students meet with their instructors face-to-face at regular intervals throughout the semester. The act of being in each other's presence brings with it a level of communication in relation to facial expression, body language and tone of voice that is absent in distance courses. The emphasis on prompt, accurate, and extensive feedback noted by distance students may be an attempt to fill a

void in communication created by the fact that instructor and students rarely, if ever meet face-to-face in a distance course.

Despite this difference in emphasis, the nine behaviours identified by students are their perceptions of the characteristics of effective teaching, regardless of the mode of delivery. How do these behaviours fit with the notion of what faculty members and university administration believe to be characteristics of effective teaching, and expect of themselves as teachers? Murray, Gillese, Lennon, Mercer, and Robinson (1996), in cooperation with the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, published, *Ethical Principles in University Teaching*, with the intent of encouraging dialogue on ethical practice in university teaching. The nine principles of ethical behaviour outlined in the document do not differ greatly from the expectations identified by Memorial University students.

Survey results indicate that students expect their instructors to be knowledgeable. Respondents to the survey, however, did not separate content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Students recognize that broad knowledge of the content being taught is characteristic of effective teaching, but not a guarantee. Effective instructors were described as having an abundance of content knowledge, and the ability to teach the content using a variety of engaging methods.

The authors of *Ethical Principles in University Teaching* also identify content and pedagogical knowledge as aspects of ethical practice. Unlike the students who responded to the survey, however, they delineate these two types of knowledge in two separate principles, Principle 1: Content Competence, and Principle 2: Pedagogical Competence.



### Principle 1: Content Competence

A university teacher maintains a high level of subject matter knowledge and ensures that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the position of the course within the student's program of studies.

### Principle 2: Pedagogical Competence

A pedagogically competent teacher communicates the objectives of the course to students, is aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies, and selects methods of instruction that, according to research evidence (including personal or self-reflective research), are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives. (Murray et al. 1996, p. 1)

Knowledge of content and pedagogy are the two areas where students' opinions and faculty expressions of ethical behaviour are in agreement. However, characteristics identified by students were very specific, highlighting behaviours that identified how instructors can demonstrate pedagogical competence.

In much the same way as the authors of the ethical principles, students expect their university instructors to maintain subject matter competence. Students noted that good instructors keep current in their subject areas, are actively involved in research or in practice within their discipline, and that the material covered in their courses is consistent with the stated course objectives and the student assessment.

Students also reported that they are eager to be engaged in their own learning, and that this engagement, in large part, is dependent on the instructor. The respondents want their instructors to be enthusiastic about the subject area in which they teach. Students indicated that their instructors can show enthusiasm for the content and for student

learning by being energetic when working with students, using methodologies that promote interaction with fellow students and the instructor, providing interesting lectures that place the content in authentic settings, and being creative with teaching strategies. Students highlight that this form of engagement provides strong motivation and makes learning interesting.

Students also want their university teachers to be organized and clear about what is expected of students in terms of assessment. They want their teachers to be responsive and provide them with opportunities to show that they understand the material being presented, and they want instructor feedback on their progress. Students also want their teachers to be flexible, and have the ability to vary their approaches to teaching to accommodate a variety of learning styles. Murray et al. (1996) also noted these characteristics in the description of the second principle.

The eighth principle listed in the ethics relates to the assessment of students. For the students who responded to the survey, assessment is a pedagogical issue, and is therefore related closely to effective teaching.

#### **Principle 8: Valid Assessment of Students**

Given the importance of assessment of student performance in university teaching and in students' lives and careers, instructors are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that assessment of students is valid, open, fair, and congruent with course objectives. (Murray et al, 1996, p. 4)

Many students highlighted assessment in their comments noting that they expect instructors to be fair and only to evaluate what had been taught. Respondents note that instructors should use a variety of assessment methods and provide students with

assessment options so that students can express what they have learned in ways that are best suited to their learning style. Students also want assessment techniques to match the knowledge and skill objectives of the course. Students also note that assessment requirements should be emphatically stated early in the course, providing students with a clear understanding of grading standards. Students indicated that they want their assessments graded carefully and fairly, and that they be provided with prompt and constructive feedback. Murray et al. (1996) echo these concerns in their description of the eighth principle.

The third of the ethical principles addresses how faculty should deal with sensitive issues.

### Principle 3: Dealing with Sensitive Topics

Topics that students are likely to find sensitive or discomforting are dealt with in an open, honest, and positive way. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 2)

Murray et al. highlight that university teachers need to identify sensitive areas in the curriculum, identify their own perspectives on issues, and compare their positions to alternative approaches or interpretations, illustrating for students the complexity of the issues. Students described similar behaviours, identifying the characteristic as open-minded, caring, empathetic, and flexible. These characteristics and the behaviours that demonstrated them were grouped under the broader characteristic of respectful. Respondents wanted their university instructors to recognize diverse views, provide thoughtful feedback and criticism, while respecting students' perspectives and aspects of



the students' self image. As one respondent pointed out, "no one likes to be made to feel stupid."

The fourth principle of the *Ethical Principles in University Teaching* highlights the academy's responsibility for student development.

#### Principle 4: Student Development

The overriding responsibility of the teacher is to contribute to the intellectual development of the student, at least in the context of the teacher's own area of expertise, and to avoid actions such as exploitation and discrimination that detract from student development. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 2)

The text of the principle and the description that follows in the document designates student development as the teacher's most basic and overriding responsibility. The description provided by the Murray et al. charges faculty with the task of designing instruction that facilitates learning and encourages autonomy and independent thinking in students. They point out that teachers should "treat students with respect and dignity, and to avoid actions that detract unjustifiably from student development" (p. 2). They continue to note that "failure to take responsibility for student development occurs when a teacher comes to class underprepared, fails to design effective instruction, coerces students to adopt a particular value or point of view, or fails to discuss alternative theoretical interpretations" (p. 2).

The explanation of the significance of this principle continues to highlight the nature of the instructor/student relationship.

Less obvious examples of failure to take responsibility for student development can arise when teachers ignore the power differential between themselves and students and behave in ways that exploit or denigrate students. Such behaviors include sexual or racial discrimination; derogatory comments toward students; taking primary or sole authorship of a publication reporting research conceptualized, designed, and conducted by a student collaborator; failure to acknowledge academic or intellectual debts to students; and assigning research work to students that serves the ends of the teacher but is unrelated to the educational goals of the course. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 3)

The qualities outlined in the text of this principle were echoed by the student responses in the survey. Students want their instructors to provide engaging instruction that helps them learn to think creatively. They want prompt and constructive feedback on their evaluations. Students also expect their instructors to behave in a professional manner, to be organized, to be on time for class, to show that their teaching is purposeful, and to demonstrate a high level of dedication to their students and the subject they teach.

Another requirement that respondents highlighted repeatedly is that they want their instructors to be approachable. The ability for students to interact with faculty in an atmosphere that is free of emotional stress and tension was considered to be a significant factor in the effectiveness of instruction. Students noted that instructors should be friendly, personable, helpful and accessible.

The vast majority of the survey respondents listed at least one characteristic that fell under the broad behavioural category of respectful. Many of the characteristics that fell under respectful highlight the importance that students place on a cordial and trusting, yet academically productive, relationship they have with their instructors. Students want to be successful and attain the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in future

endeavours, but they want to develop in an atmosphere that is just, and compassionate, while recognizing the university's responsibility to society to train skilled professionals, and maintain standards. As they proceed along that journey of development, they simply want to be treated fairly.

The fourth ethical principle also highlights the notion that faculty should treat their students fairly, and not take advantage of the power differential between instructors and students. The students who responded to the survey indicate that they wanted to be treated fairly and not be taken advantage of by instructors. Students wanted to trust their instructors and, according to this principle, instructors want and need to be trusted by their students.

The notion of trust continues to resonate in principles five and six of the *Ethical Principles in University Teaching*.

#### Principle 5: Dual Relationships with Students

To avoid conflict of interest, a teacher does not enter into dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favoritism on the part of the teacher. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 3)

The notion that faculty should avoid favoritism was present in some student responses to the survey. More often, however, students highlighted these issues in their responses by describing behaviours that exemplified fairness. Some noted that students should be treated equally or that the teacher should not show bias to a student or group of students.



#### Principle 6: Confidentiality

Student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes, or if there are reasonable grounds for believing that releasing such information will be beneficial to the student or will prevent harm to others. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 3)

The notion of confidentiality was not prominent in students' responses. The importance of confidentiality or issues with a breach of student information was not mentioned. Given the extent to which Memorial University policy safeguards student information, respondents may have not viewed privacy of student data as a serious issue.

The seventh principle deals with the instructors' relationships with their colleagues.

#### Principle 7: Respect for Colleagues

A university teacher respects the dignity of her or his colleagues and works cooperatively with colleagues in the interest of fostering student development. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 4)

The overriding theme of this principle is student development, and highlights the importance of maintaining an atmosphere within the university that is conducive to learning. Student development is best served when the cordial environment students require in class, and in the relationship with their instructors, is extended and modeled in the relationships that faculty have with each other. None of the students mentioned specifically the importance of relationships between their instructors and other faculty. They did, however, highlight often that it is important that their teachers function

professionally within their discipline. Modeling sound ethical practice with colleagues is a component of professional practice.

The ninth principle, respect for the institution, also concerns student development, and highlights the significant role played by institutional goals, policies, and standards in that process.

#### Principle 9: Respect for Institution

In the interests of student development, a university teacher is aware of and respects the educational goals, policies, and standards of the institution in which he or she teaches. (Murray et al., 1996, p. 5)

None of the students who responded to the survey noted aspects of the institution or faculty members' relationship to it. Students may perceive issues of institutional policy as outside of the control of their individual instructors, and, therefore, would not equate these issues with effective teaching.

Using the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education *Ethical Principles in University Teaching* as a comparative framework indicates that there are a great many similarities between students' perceptions of effective teaching, and faculty expectations of ethical practice in university teaching. The two exceptions being principles related to faculty members' relationships with their colleagues and the institution, two aspects of practice that fall outside of the purview of the student perspective. These similarities are encouraging in that both faculty and students have a similar notion of the ideal. Attaining the ideal then becomes a question of practice on the part of both students and faculty.

The unique approach employed in the collection of data for this research provided a rich narrative from students on what they perceive to be the essence of effective teaching at Memorial University. The aggressive marketing used to aid in the dissemination of the survey yielded a representative sample of the university community, despite the demanding nature of the open-ended survey questions. This research thus provides an accurate and compelling image of the nature of teaching at the institution. The findings coincide with much of the literature on effective teaching indicating that the characteristics transcend time and mode of delivery.

### **Recommendations**

More research needs to be conducted, however, to confirm the approach, and determine if the perceptions held by students at Memorial University are unique or are similar to those held by students in the rest of the country, or in other political jurisdictions. Using this strategy in countries with cultures different from Canada will provide data on the effects of culture on notions of effective teaching. Is the definition of ethical practice in teaching defined in Canada the same or similar to the notion of ethical practice in other countries? Do students from diverse cultures value the same characteristics of instructors as students at Memorial University? Perhaps the answers to these questions and others pertaining to practice in teaching and learning in higher education can be found in the stories told by our students.

There is potential for this study to inform research in related areas. These results may be useful to researchers investigating the gap between students' and faculty



perceptions of effective teaching; the change over time of students' perceptions of effective teaching; the comparison of Memorial University to other Canadian universities in regard to students' perceptions of effective teaching; and the influence (if any) of the amount of university experience on students' beliefs regarding effective instruction. Hopefully, this study will be the beginning of a more extensive research agenda in the area of effective teaching at the post-secondary level.

### **Conclusions**

The rich data provided by the participants in this research leads to a number of compelling conclusions. Firstly, the approach to data gathering provided students with a clear voice on their perceptions of effective teaching in higher education. The stories they shared indicate that their opinions on this topic correlate to characteristics identified in the literature and the ethical principles set down by Murray et al. (1996).

Secondly, the data clearly indicates that the characteristics of effective teaching transcend the mode of delivery. Students who completed the distance portion of the survey identified, in a very similar manner, the nine characteristics identified by respondents to the on-campus segment, the only marked difference being the deep concern that distance students expressed over instructor communication. Given the emphasis that both sets of data place on respectful behaviour on the part of professors, the emphasis on communication on the part of distance students is compelling. All other aspects of effective teaching obviously hinge on strong communication. Given that electronic communication is, for most online students, the only form of communication,

responsiveness on the part of professors is key to demonstrating all of the other characteristics.

Thirdly, responses to both the on-campus and distance segments of the survey highlighted the significance of the affective domain. The emphasis that students placed on respectful instructors indicates the intense importance that relationships play in teaching and learning. As Norman (2004) indicates, "When you feel good . . . you are better at brainstorming, at examining multiple alternatives" (p. 19). This emotional perspective holds with teaching and learning. Students place a premium on instructors who are cognizant and respectful of them as people. Students feel better in classrooms that respect their individuality and, therefore, are better able to learn. The nature of the student/instructor relationship has also been highlighted in the literature and in Murray's *Ethical Principles of University Teaching*. There is much agreement that the affective domain plays a key role in learning.

Finally, the study indicates that students have a great deal to share about their experiences in university. The rich data they provided have produced compelling results, indicating that students can play an active role in improving the quality of university teaching and their own learning. Hopefully, the results of this study and those that follow will fuel the debate about effective teaching practice at the university level, leading to a increase in the quality of teaching and learning for every student.

## APPENDIX A – SURVEY INSTRUMENT





## Student Perceptions of Effective Teaching - Preview

[Exit Preview](#)

### Student Perceptions of Effective Teaching in Higher Education Survey

#### Section 1: Demographics

Please complete the following by clicking on the appropriate response.

##### Question 1

Gender

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

##### Question 2

I am a(n)

- ☐ undergraduate student  
☐ graduate student

##### Question 3

To date I have successfully completed \_\_\_\_\_ university courses.

- ☐ 0  
☐ 1 to 5  
☐ 6 to 10  
☐ 11 to 15  
☐ 16 to 20  
☐ 21 to 25  
☐ 26 to 30  
☐ 31 to 35  
☐ greater than 36

##### Question 4

I am a \_\_\_\_\_ student

- ☐ full time  
☐ part time

**Question 5**

In addition to taking university courses I am \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ employed full time
- ☐ employed part time
- ☐ not employed

**Question 6**

My current age is in the \_\_\_\_\_ range.

- ☐ 17 to 20
- ☐ 21 to 23
- ☐ 24 to 26
- ☐ 27 to 30
- ☐ Greater than 30 years

**Question 7**

My primary reason for taking university courses is:

- ☐ next step after high school
- ☐ career preparation
- ☐ professional development
- ☐ personal satisfaction
- ☐ other

**Question 8**

The majority of my courses have been completed in the:

- ☐ Faculty of Arts
- ☐ Faculty of Education
- ☐ Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
- ☐ Faculty of Science
- ☐ School of Social Work
- ☐ School of Human Kinetics and Recreation
- ☐ School Nursing

- ☐ School of Music
- ☐ Faculty of Business Administration
- ☐ School of Pharmacy
- ☐ Faculty of Medicine
- ☐ Fisheries and Marine Institute
- ☐ Sir Wilfred Grenfell College

#### Question 9

I have successfully completed a course offered via distance technologies (i.e., a course that was offered through the use of Internet-based technologies with no on campus classes).

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

If you answered yes to question 9 please complete both Section 2 and 3 of the survey. If you answered no to question 9 please complete Section 2 only.

### Section 2: Characteristics of Effective Instruction (On Campus)

**Directions:** In this section of the survey we would like to you identify five characteristics that you believe are important for effective instructors in on campus courses. There is a short set of questions for each characteristic: we would like you to first name the characteristic, explain briefly why it is important, identify briefly how an instructor might demonstrate this characteristic, and then rank each characteristic in comparison to the others you have listed.

#### Characteristic 1

##### Question 10

Characteristic



**Question 11**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 12**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 13**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3  
☐ 4  
☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 2**

**Question 14**

Characteristic

**Question 15**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 16**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 17**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 3**

**Question 18**

Characteristic

**Question 19**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 20**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 21**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 4**

**Question 22**

Characteristic

**Question 23**

Why this characteristic is important?



**Question 24**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 25**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 5**

**Question 26**

Characteristic

**Question 27**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 28**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 29**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3  
☐ 4  
☐ 5

---

**Section 3: Characteristics of Effective Instruction (web-based distance education)**

**Directions:** In this section of the survey we would like to you identify five characteristics that you believe are important for effective instructors in web-based distance education courses. Please note that the characteristics you list in this section of the survey need not be different from those you listed in the on campus section. How an instructor demonstrates this characteristic, however, may be different from how an on campus instructor would demonstrate the same characteristic. There is a short set of questions for each characteristic: we would like you to first name the characteristic, explain briefly why it is important, identify briefly how an instructor might demonstrate this characteristic, and then rank each characteristic in comparison to the others you have listed.

---

**Characteristic 1**

**Question 30**

Characteristic

**Question 31**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 32**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 33**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 2**

**Question 34**

Characteristic



**Question 35**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 36**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 37**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 3**

**Question 38**

Characteristic

**Question 39**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 40**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 41**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 4**

**Question 42**

Characteristic

**Question 43**

Why this characteristic is important?

**Question 44**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 45**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

---

**Characteristic 5**

**Question 46**

Characteristic

**Question 47**

Why this characteristic is important?



**Question 48**

How can an instructor demonstrate this characteristic?

**Question 49**

With 5 referring to the most important characteristic, and 1 referring to the least, rank this characteristic with the others you have mentioned.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Save

Submit

## APPENDIX B – SURVEY WEB SITES

## Information Web Page On Distance Education and Learning Technologies Web Site



**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY**  
Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

Welcome to Memorial | Memorial Self-Service | Student Services | my.mun.ca | News & Events | Alumni

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 [International Students](#) | 
 [Graduate Studies](#) | 
 [Programs & Courses](#) | 
 [People & Departments](#) | 
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### Distance Education and Learning Technologies

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Instructional Development Office

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Campus/Course Technology

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### Your Opinions Matter

Access to the online survey will be available starting February 25, 2008 through March 31, 2008.

The purpose is to help us investigate student perceptions of effective teaching in higher education. Specifically, we are exploring the characteristics of university instructors that make teaching effective.



The results of the study will be used to establish best practice parameters for the delivery of both on-campus and web-based courses. Your participation will be a key factor in improving the learning experience for university students.

The online survey is accessible through Memorial's learning management system, Desire2Learn. To access the survey and your chance to win one of two \$1000 tuition vouchers, you will need your MUN Login ID and password. Note: the survey will be listed on the left hand side of the screen. Upon entering the survey you will be indicating your consent to participate. Your participation will consist of responding to the items on the questionnaire. It is completely voluntary and anonymous, and you may choose NOT to respond to any particular item within the survey or choose to withdraw at any time.

We request that in your responses, you do NOT identify any particular course by course number or title, or identify instructors. Completion of this survey has no bearing on the courses in which you are currently enrolled.

The study is entitled *Students' perceptions of effective teaching in higher education*. The investigators are Drs. Jerome Delaney, Trudi Johnson, Dennis Tresian (members of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University) and Albert Johnson (Senior Instructional Designer with Distance Education and Learning Technologies, Memorial University).

This study has received the approval of the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) for Memorial University. The results of this research will be made available to the university community via the web upon completion. If you have questions or concerns about the research that are not dealt with by the researchers, you may contact the Chairperson of that Committee through the Committee's secretary, Ms. Eleanor Butler, at the Office of Research, Memorial University.

We estimate the survey will take 15 minutes to complete.

### Distance Education and Learning Technologies Links

[Access your Web Course](#)

[Technical Support](#)

[Student/Faculty General Inquiries](#)

[Fall Course Listings](#)

[Apply Now](#)

[Desire2Learn™ Workshops](#)

[On-campus Course Set-up Request Form](#)

[Forms](#)



If you experience difficulties working through the survey please contact **Albert Johnson**.

[See Contest Rules.](#)

Project investigators:

**Jerome Delaney**

**Albert Johnson**

**Trudi Johnson**

**Dennis Treslan**

[Take me to the survey NOW!](#)

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Last Updated: February 25th, 2008



# Your Opinions Matter

## Student Perceptions of Effective Teaching in Higher Education

### Greetings:

We are inviting you to participate in a study to help us investigate student perceptions of effective teaching in higher education. Specifically, we are exploring the characteristics of university instructors and instruction that students believe make it effective.

Data will be collected via an online survey. Your participation will consist of responding to the items on this questionnaire. Clicking on "Survey" in the course menu at the top of screen will indicate your consent to participate. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous.

We request that in the anecdotal responses in the survey items that you do not identify any particular course by course number or title, or identify any instructors. Completion of this survey has no bearing on the courses in which you are currently enrolled.

The study is entitled "Students perceptions of effective teaching in higher education." The investigators are Drs. Jerome Delaney, Trudi Johnson, Dennis Treslan (members of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University) and Albert Johnson (senior instructional designer with Distance Education and Learning Technologies, Memorial University).

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You are also free to not to respond to any particular survey item. This study has received the approval of the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) for Memorial University. The results of the research will be made available to the university community in a web site upon completion of the study. If you have questions or concerns about the research that are not dealt with by the researchers, you may contact the Chairperson of that Committee through the Committee's secretary, Ms. Eleanor Butler, at the Office of Research, Memorial University.

We estimate that the survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The results of the study will be used to establish best practice parameters for the delivery of both on-campus and web-based courses. Your participation will be a key factor in improving the learning experience for university students.

If you experience difficulties working through the survey please contact Albert via the email addresses listed below.

We sincerely thank you in advance for your participation.

Jerome Delaney – [jdelaney@mun.ca](mailto:jdelaney@mun.ca)

Albert Johnson – [albertj@mun.ca](mailto:albertj@mun.ca)

Trudi Johnson – [trudij@mun.ca](mailto:trudij@mun.ca)

Dennis Treslan – [dtreslan@mun.ca](mailto:dtreslan@mun.ca)



## APPENDIX C – NEWSPAPER AD



## **Your Opinions Matter**

Let us know what you think  
about effective teaching  
and learning from February 25<sup>th</sup>  
to March 31<sup>st</sup>. Complete our  
survey for a chance to win  
one of two \$1,000 tuition  
vouchers at

***[www.distance.mun.ca/survey](http://www.distance.mun.ca/survey)***

Research supported by



Distance Education  
and Learning Technologies

## APPENDIX D – BANNER ADS



Horizontal Banner – Actual Size – 3 feet by 9 feet



Vertical Banner – Actual Size – 33 inches by 72 inches



APPENDIX E – DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS  
(ON-CAMPUS)

Demographics of Results for On Campus Survey  
Sample Compared to Population

Access to the survey	17,000
Usable surveys completed	330
Response Rate	2.0

	Survey Numbers	Survey Percentage	University Population
Total Surveyed	330	100	100

Gender

Females	241	73	60
Males	88	27	40
Unspecified	1	0	0
Total	330	100	100

Level

Undergraduate	283	86	87
Graduate	47	14	13
Total	330	100	100

Status

Full Time	265	80	82
Part Time	65	20	18
Total	330	100	100



Age

17 to 20	101	31	36
21 to 23	102	31	28
24 to 26	34	10	
27 to 30	20	6	(24 to 30) 21
Over 30	72	22	15
Unspecified	1	0	0
Total	330	100	100

Faculty or School

Arts	81	25	25
Business	28	8	8
Education	43	13	10
Engineering	16	5	10
HKR	16	5	4
Marine Institute	12	4	3
Medicine	0	0	3
Music	6	2	3
Nursing	11	3	7
Pharmacy	1	0	2
Science	101	31	18
Social Work	1	0	2
SWGC	11	3	3
Unspecified	3	1	2
Total	330	100	100

Distance Courses

Taken DE Course	161	49
Not Taken DE Course	169	51
Total	330	100

Employment

Part Time	124	38
Full Time	74	22
Not Employed	130	39
Unspecified	2	1
Total	330	100

APPENDIX F – DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS  
(DISTANCE)



Demographics of Results for Distance Survey  
Sample Compared to Population

Access to the survey	17,000
Usable surveys completed	161
Response Rate	1.0

	Survey Numbers	Survey Percentage	University Population
Total Surveyed	161	100	100

Gender

Females	130	81	60
Males	31	19	40
Unspecified	0	0	0
Total	161	100	100

Level

Undergraduate	130	81	87
Graduate	31	19	13
Total	161	100	100

Status

Full Time	113	70	82
Part Time	48	30	18
Total	161	100	100

Age

17 to 20	21	13	36
21 to 23	53	33	28
24 to 26	23	14	
27 to 30	14	9	(24 to 30) 21
Over 30	50	31	15
Unspecified	0	0	0
Total	161	100	100

Faculty or School

Arts	40	25	25
Business	16	10	8
Education	30	19	10
Engineering	9	6	10
HKR	11	6	4
Marine Institute	4	2	3
Medicine	0	0	3
Music	2	1	3
Nursing	9	6	7
Pharmacy	0	0	2
Science	35	22	18
Social Work	1	1	2
SWGC	4	2	3
Unspecified	0	0	2
Total	161	100	100

Distance Courses

Taken DE Course	161	49
Not Taken DE Course	169	51
Total	330	100

Employment

Part Time	52	32
Full Time	58	36
Not Employed	50	31
Unspecified	1	1

Total 161 100



APPENDIX G – CHARACTERISTICS AND THE FREQUENCY THEY WERE  
MENTIONED (ON-CAMPUS)

## Data Analysis

### Characteristics – On Campus – By Number of Students Who Identified a Characteristic

Number	Characteristic	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of Total
0004	Knowledgeable	39 26%	111 74%	150	45.4%
0017	Organized	29 27%	77 73%	106	32.1%
0001	Approachable	17 18%	77 82%	94	28.5%
0012	Communicative	29 32%	61 68%	90	27.3%
0002	Enthusiastic	22 39%	35 61%	57	17.3%
0020	Fair	16 34%	31 66%	47	14.2%
0007	Humorous	12 27%	32 73%	44	13.3%
0009	Flexible	11 25%	32 75%	43	13.0%
0023	Respectful	10 25%	30 75%	40	12.1%
0043	Engaging	7 18%	33 72%	40	12.1%
0008	Understanding	8 21%	30 79%	38	11.5%
0035	Friendly	10 26%	28 74%	38	11.5%
0003	Available	8 24%	26 76%	34	10.3%
0006	Personable	7 23%	24 77%	31	9.4%
0042	Caring	5 17%	24 80%	30 1 unsp.	9.1%
0022	Clear	9 31%	20 69%	29	8.8%
0019	Patient	10	16	26	7.9%

		38%	62%		
0028	Helpful	5 21%	19 79%	24	7.3%
0050	Professional	7 29%	17 71%	24	7.3%
0014	Responsive	6 30%	12 70%	20	6.1%
0018	Interesting	1 5%	18 95%	19	5.8%
0033	Prepared	5 26%	14 74%	19	5.8%
0039	Dedicated	5 28%	13 72%	18	5.5%
0010	Understandable	5 29%	12 71%	17	5.2%
0065	Passionate	4 24%	13 76%	17	5.2%
0013	Punctual	2 13%	14 87%	16	4.8%
0021	Motivating	4 33%	11 67%	15	4.5%
0025	Practical	5 33%	10 67%	15	4.5%
0036	Trustworthy	5 33%	10 67%	15	4.5%
0047	Creative	4 31%	9 69%	13	3.9%
0011	Open Minded	3 25%	9 75%	12	3.6%
0016	Concerned	3 25%	9 75%	12	3.6%
0034	Confident	1 9%	10 91%	11	3.3%
0055	Reasonable	3 27%	8 73%	11	3.3%
0037	Positive	2 20%	8 80%	10	3.0%
0049	Compassionate	2 20%	8 80%	10	3.0%
0032	Accessible	1 11%	8 89%	9	2.7%
0041	Dependable	3 33%	6 67%	9	2.7%

0046	Competent	3 38%	5 62%	8	2.4%
0027	Thorough	2 29%	5 71%	7	2.1%
0058	Kind	2 29%	5 71%	7	2.1%
0061	Charismatic	5 71%	2 29%	7	2.1%
0026	Energetic	1 17%	5 83%	6	1.8%
0031	Efficient	1 17%	5 83%	6	1.8%
0038	Empathetic	4 67%	2 33%	6	1.8%
0040	Current	2 33%	4 67%	6	1.8%
0059	Interactive	1 17%	5 83%	6	1.8%
0015	Sincere	1 20%	4 80%	5	1.5%
0029	Attentive	2 40%	3 60%	5	1.5%
0030	Eclectic	5 100%	0	5	1.5%
0045	Constructive	3 60%	2 40%	5	1.5%
0054	Accommodating	1 20%	4 80%	5	1.5%
0056	Consistent	1 20%	4 80%	5	1.5%
0044	Happy	1 25%	3 75%	4	1.2%
0048	Realistic	1 25%	3 75%	4	1.2%
0053	Hygienic	2 50%	2 50%	4	1.2%
0068	Humble	0	4 100%	4	1.2%
0024	Challenging	0	3 100%	3	<1%
0052	Pleasant	1 33%	2 67%	3	<1%
0064	Assertive	2	1	3	<1%



		67%	33%		
0005	Stimulating	2 100%	0	2	<1%
0057	Perceptive	1 50%	1 50%	2	<1%
0060	Focused	0	2 100%	2	<1%
0062	Efficacious	0	2 100%	2	<1%
0066	Diplomatic	0	2 100%	2	<1%
0067	Reflective	0	2 100%	2	<1%
0051	Qualified	0	1 100%	1	<1%
0063	Credible	0	1 100%	1	<1%
0069	Collaborative	1 100%	0	1	<1%

APPENDIX H – CHARACTERISTICS AND THE FREQUENCY THEY WERE  
MENTIONED (DISTANCE)

## Data Analysis

### Characteristics – Distance – By Number of Students Who Identified a Characteristic

Number	Characteristic	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of Total
0004	Knowledgeable	15 25%	46 75%	61	37.9%
0017	Organized	10 17%	48 83%	58	36.0%
0014	Responsive	8 17%	40 83%	48	29.8%
0003	Available	4 11%	34 89%	36	22.4%
0022	Clear	6 22%	21 78%	27	16.8%
0012	Communicative	4 17%	20 83%	24	14.9%
0032	Accessible	5 23%	17 77%	22	13.7%
0009	Flexible	3 14%	18 86%	21	13.0%
0001	Approachable	2 11%	17 89%	19	11.8%
0020	Fair	5 31%	11 69%	16	9.9%
0008	Understanding	3 20%	12 80%	15	9.3%
0043	Engaging	1 7%	13 93%	14	8.7%
0042	Caring	1 9%	10 91%	11	6.8%
0039	Dedicated	2 18%	9 82%	11	6.8%
0007	Humorous	2 18%	9 82%	11	6.8%
0006	Personable	1 9%	10 91%	11	6.8%
0055	Reasonable	1 9%	10 91%	11	6.8%

0035	Friendly	1 10%	9 90%	10	6.2%
0023	Respectful	2 20%	8 80%	10	6.2%
0047	Creative	1 13%	7 87%	8	5.0%
0002	Enthusiasm	3 38%	5 62%	8	5.0%
0028	Helpful	0	7 100%	7	4.3%
0011	Open Minded	0	7 100%	7	4.3%
0045	Constructive	1 17%	5 83%	6	3.7%
0059	Interactive	0	6 100%	6	3.7%
0019	Patient	1 17%	5 83%	6	3.7%
0050	Professional	0	6 100%	6	3.7%
0013	Punctual	2 33%	4 67%	6	3.7%
0031	Efficient	0	5 100%	5	3.1%
0048	Realistic	0	5 100%	5	3.1%
0054	Accommodating	0	4 100%	4	2.5%
0029	Attentive	1 25%	3 75%	4	2.5%
0016	Concerned	0	4 100%	4	2.5%
0065	Passionate	1 25%	3 75%	4	2.5%
0033	Prepared	0	4 100%	4	2.5%
0027	Thorough	1 25%	3 75%	4	2.5%
0036	Trustworthy	1 25%	3 75%	4	2.5%
0010	Understandable	1 25%	3 75%	4	2.5%



0056	Consistent	0	3 100%	3	1.9%
0030	Eclectic	1 33%	2 67%	3	1.9%
0058	Kind	1 33%	2 67%	3	1.9%
0049	Compassionate	1 50%	1 50%	2	1.2%
0046	Competent	1 50%	1 50%	2	1.2%
0041	Dependable	1 50%	1 50%	2	1.2%
0066	Diplomatic	1 50%	1 50%	2	1.2%
0038	Empathetic	1 50%	1 50%	2	1.2%
0018	Interesting	0	2 100%	2	1.2%
0021	Motivating	1 50%	1 50%	2	1.2%
0069	Collaborative	1 100%	0	1	<1%
0034	Confident	0	1 100%	1	<1%
0040	Current	0	1 100%	1	<1%
0060	Focused	0	1 100%	1	<1%
0025	Practical	0	1 100%	1	<1%

## APPENDIX I – ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

## **Ethical Principles in University Teaching**

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### **Preamble**

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of basic ethical principles that define the professional responsibilities of university professors in their role as teacher.

Ethical principles are conceptualized here as general guidelines, ideals or expectations that need to be taken into account, along with other relevant conditions and circumstances, in the design and analysis of university teaching.

The intent of this document is not to provide a list of ironclad rules, or a systematic code of conduct, along with prescribed penalties for infractions, that will automatically apply in all situations and govern all eventualities. Similarly, the intent is not to contradict the concept of academic freedom, but rather to describe ways in which academic freedom can be exercised in a responsible manner.

Finally, this document is intended only as a first approximation, or as food for thought, not necessarily as a final product that is ready for adoption in the absence of discussion and consideration of local needs.

Ethical Principles in University Teaching was developed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, and is endorsed by the winners of the national 3M teaching award whose names appear on the cover page. The document was created by individuals actively involved in university teaching, and will be distributed to university professors across Canada.

The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education believes that implementation of an ethical code similar to that described herein will be advantageous to university teachers (e.g., in removing ambiguity concerning teaching responsibilities); and will contribute significantly to improvement of teaching. For these reasons, STLHE recommends that the document be discussed thoroughly at Canadian universities, with input from professors, students, and administrators, and that universities consider adopting or implementing ethical principles of teaching similar to those described in this document.

### **Principle 1—Content Competence**

A university teacher maintains a high level of subject matter knowledge and ensures that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the position of the course within the student's program of studies.

This principle means that a teacher is responsible for maintaining (or acquiring) subject matter competence not only in areas of personal interest but in all areas relevant to course goals or objectives. Appropriateness of course content implies that what is actually taught in the course is consistent with stated course objectives and prepares students adequately for subsequent courses for which the present course is a prerequisite. Representativeness of course content implies that for topics involving difference of opinion or interpretation, representative points of view are acknowledged and placed in perspective. Achievement of content competence requires that the teacher take active steps to be up-to-date in content areas relevant to his or her courses; to be informed of the content of prerequisite courses and of courses for which the teacher's course is prerequisite; and to provide adequate representation of important topic areas and points of view. Specific examples of failure to fulfill the principle of content competence occur when an instructor teaches subjects for which she or he has an insufficient knowledge base, when an instructor misinterprets research evidence to support a theory or social policy favored by the instructor, or when an instructor responsible for a prerequisite survey course teaches only those topics in which the instructor has a personal interest.

### **Principle 2—Pedagogical Competence**

A pedagogically competent teacher communicates the objectives of the course to students, is aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies, and selects methods of instruction that, according to



research evidence (including personal or self-reflective research), are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives.

This principle implies that, in addition to knowing the subject matter, a teacher has adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills, including communication of objectives, selection of effective instructional methods, provision of practice and feedback opportunities, and accommodation of student diversity. If mastery of a certain skill (eg., critical analysis, design of experiments) is part of the course objectives and will be considered in evaluation and grading of students, the teacher provides students with adequate opportunity to practice and receive feedback on that skill during the course. If learning styles differ significantly for different students or groups of students, the teacher is aware of these differences and, if feasible, varies her or his style of teaching accordingly. To maintain pedagogical competence, and instructor takes active steps to stay current regarding teaching strategies that will help students learn relevant knowledge and skills and will provide equal educational opportunity for diverse groups. This might involve reading general or discipline-specific educational literature, attending workshops and conferences, or experimentation with alternative methods or teaching a given course or a specific group of students.

Specific examples of failure to fulfill the principle of pedagogical competence include using an instructional method or assessment method that is incongruent with the stated course objectives (eg., using exams consisting solely of fact-memorization questions when the main objective of the course is to teach problem-solving skills); and failing to give students adequate opportunity to practice or learn skills that are included in the course objectives and will be tested on the final exam.

### **Principle 3—Dealing With Sensitive Topics**

Topics that students are likely to find sensitive or discomforting are dealt with in an open, honest, and positive way.

Among other things, this principle means that the teacher acknowledges from the outset that a particular topic is sensitive, and explains why it is necessary to include it in the course syllabus. Also, the teacher identified his or her own perspective on the topic and compares it to alternative approaches or interpretations, thereby providing students with an understanding of the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of achieving a single objective" conclusion. Finally, in order to provide a safe and open environment for class discussion, the teacher invites all students to state their position on the issue, sets ground rules for discussion, is respectful of students even when it is necessary to disagree, and encourages students to be respectful of one another. As one example of a sensitive topic, analysis of certain poems written by John Donne can cause distress among students who perceive racial slurs embedded in the professor's interpretation, particularly if the latter is presented as the authoritative reading of the poem. As a result, some students may view the class as closed and exclusive rather than open and inclusive. A reasonable option is for the professor's analysis of the poem to be followed by an open class discussion of other possible interpretations and the pros and cons of each.

Another example of a sensitive topic occurs when a film depicting scenes of child abuse is shown, without forewarning, in a developmental psychology class. Assuming that such a film has a valid pedagogical role, student distress and discomfort can be minimized by warning students in advance of the content of the film, explaining why it is included in the curriculum, and providing opportunities for students to discuss their reactions to the film.

### **Principle 4—Student Development**

The overriding responsibility of the teacher is to contribute to the intellectual development of the student, at least in the context of the teacher's own area of expertise, and to avoid actions such as exploitation and discrimination that detract from student development.

According to this principle, the teacher's most basic responsibility is to design instruction that facilitates learning and encourages autonomy and independent thinking in students, to treat students with respect and dignity, and to avoid actions that detract unjustifiably from student development. Failure to take responsibility for student development occurs when the teacher comes to class under-prepared, fails



to design effective instruction, coerces students to adopt a particular value or point of view, or fails to discuss alternative theoretical interpretations (see also Principles 1, 2, and 3). Less obvious examples of failure to take responsibility for student development can arise when teachers ignore the power differential between themselves and students and behave in ways that exploit or denigrate students. Such behaviors include sexual or racial discrimination; derogatory comments toward students; taking primary or sole authorship of a publication reporting research conceptualized, designed, and conducted by a student collaborator; failure to acknowledge academic or intellectual debts to students; and assigning research work to students that serves the ends of the teacher but is unrelated to the educational goals of the course.

In some cases, the teacher's responsibility to contribute to student development can come into conflict with responsibilities to other agencies, such as the university, the academic discipline, or society as a whole. This can happen, for example, when a marginal student requests a letter of reference in support of advanced education, or when a student with learning disabilities requests accommodations that require modification of normal grading standards or graduation requirements. There are no hard and fast rules that govern situations such as these. The teacher must weigh all conflicting responsibilities, possibly consult with other individuals, and come to a reasoned decision.

#### **Principle 5—Dual Relationships with Students**

To avoid conflict of interest, a teacher does not enter into dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favoritism on the part of the teacher.

This principle means that it is the responsibility of the teacher to keep relationships with students focused on pedagogical goals and academic requirements. The most obvious example of a dual relationship that is likely to impair teacher objectivity and/or detract from student development is any form of sexual or close personal relationship with a current student. Other potentially problematic dual relationships include: accepting a teaching (or grading) role with respect to a member of one's immediate family, a close friend, or an individual who is also a client, patient, or business partner; excessive socializing with students outside of class, either individually or as a group; lending money to or borrowing money from students; giving gifts to or accepting gifts from students; and introducing a course requirement that students participate in a political movement advocated by the instructor. Even if the teacher believes that she or he is maintaining objectivity in situations such as these, the perception of favoritism on the part of other students is as educationally disastrous as actual favoritism or unfairness. If a teacher does become involved in a dual relationship with a student, despite efforts to the contrary, it is the responsibility of the teacher to notify his or her supervisor of the situation as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made for supervision or evaluation of the student. Although there are definite pedagogical benefits to establishing good rapport with students and interacting with students both inside and outside the classroom, there are also serious risks of exploitation, compromise of academic standards, and harm to student development. It is the responsibility of the teacher to prevent these risks from materializing into real or perceived conflicts of interest.

#### **Principle 6—Confidentiality**

Student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes, or if there are reasonable grounds for believing that releasing such information will be beneficial to the student or will prevent harm to others.

This principle suggests that students are entitled to the same level of confidentiality in their relationships with teachers as would exist in a lawyer-client or doctor-patient relationship. Violation of confidentiality in the teacher-student relationship can cause students to distrust teachers and to show decreased academic motivation. Whatever rules or policies are followed with respect to confidentiality of student records, these should be disclosed in full to students at the beginning of the academic term.

In the absence of adequate grounds (i.e., student consent, legitimate purpose, or benefit to student) any of the following could be construed as a violation of confidentiality: providing student academic

records to a potential employer, researcher, or private investigator; discussing a student's grades or academic problems with another faculty member; and using privately communicated student experiences as teaching or research materials. Similarly, leaving graded student papers or exams in a pile outside one's office makes it possible for any student to determine any other student's grade and thus fails to protect the confidentiality of individual student grades. This problem can be avoided by having students pick up their papers individually during office hours, or by returning papers with no identifying information or grade visible on the cover page.

#### **Principle 7—Respect for Colleagues**

A university teacher respects the dignity of her or his colleagues and works cooperatively with colleagues in the interest of fostering student development.

This principle means that in interactions among colleagues with respect to teaching, the overriding concern is the development of students. Disagreements between colleagues relating to teaching are settled privately, if possible, with no harm to student development. If a teacher suspects that a colleague has shown incompetence or ethical violations in teaching, the teacher takes responsibility for investigating the matter thoroughly and consulting privately with the colleague before taking further action.

A specific example of failure to show respect for colleagues occurs when a teacher makes unwarranted derogatory comments in the classroom about the competence of another teacher...for example, Professor A tells students that information provided to them last year by Professor B is of no use and will be replaced by information from Professor A in the course at hand. Other examples of failure to uphold this principle would be for a curriculum committee to refuse to require courses in other departments that compete with their own department for student enrolment; or for Professor X to refuse a student permission to take a course from Professor Y, who is disliked by Professor X, even though the course would be useful to the student.

#### **Principle 8—Valid Assessment of Students**

Given the importance of assessment of student performance in university teaching and in students' lives and careers, instructors are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that assessment of students is valid, open, fair, and congruent with course objectives.

This principle means that the teacher is aware of research (including personal or self-reflective research) on the advantages and disadvantages of alternative methods of assessment, and based on this knowledge, the teacher selects assessment techniques that are consistent with the objectives of the course and at the same time are as reliable and valid as possible. Furthermore, assessment procedures and grading standards are communicated clearly to students at the beginning of the course, and except in rare circumstances, there is no deviation from the announced procedures. Student exams, papers, and assignments are graded carefully and fairly through the use of a rational marking system that can be communicated to students. By means appropriate for the size of the class, students are provided with prompt and accurate feedback on their performance at regular intervals throughout the course, plus an explanation as to how their work was graded, and constructive suggestions as to how to improve their standing in the course. In a similar vein, teachers are fair and objective in writing letters of reference for students.

One example of an ethically questionable assessment practice is to grade students on skills that were not part of the announced course objectives and/or were not allocated adequate practice opportunity during the course. If students are expected to demonstrate critical inquiry skills on the final exam, they should have been given the opportunity to develop critical inquiry skills during the course. Another violation of valid assessment occurs when faculty members teaching two different sections of the same course use drastically different assessment procedures or grading standards, such that the same level of student performance earns significantly different final grades in the two sections.



### Principle 9—Respect for Institution

In the interests of student development, a university teacher is aware of and respects the educational goals, policies, and standards of the institution in which he or she teaches.

This principle implies that a teacher shares a collective responsibility to work for the good of the university as a whole, to uphold the educational goals and standards of the university, and to abide by university policies and regulations pertaining to the education of students.

Specific examples of failure to uphold the principle of respect for institution include engaging in excessive work activity outside the university that conflicts with university teaching responsibilities; and being unaware of or ignoring valid university regulations on provision of course outlines, scheduling of exams, or academic misconduct.

### References

The authors are indebted to the following for ideas that were incorporated into the present document:

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3. Matthews, J.R. (1991). The teaching of ethics and the ethics of teaching. *Teaching Psychology*, 18, 80-85.

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