

What Characterizes A Good Teacher

Eugene Ross
Abstract

Students in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University were surveyed during the fall, 1979, about their perceptions of characteristics of a good college classroom teacher. Characteristics mentioned most frequently were "Prepares well organized notes and lecture," "Answers your questions and does not embarrass you," "Is interested in teaching," "Knows the materials," "Is interesting," "Can relate to the student," "Goes over important information," "Has the ability to get the information across," "Adds new information to the class," "Gives clear explanations," "Speaks clearly," "Helps students when asked," and "Personally knows students' first names."

The students also identified faculty characteristics that contribute to good student-professor relationships: "Is concerned about students," "Is friendly, talks to you in and out of class," "Helps you when you need it," "Shows respect for students," "Answers questions gladly," "Is honest with students," "Knows you on a personal basis," "Lets you have your say," "Is available after class," "Will not insult students," "Has patience," "Informs students about their subject," "Is not so strict," "Enjoys teaching," and "Tells students where they are according to their grades."

The main identified characteristics of a good student advisor were "Helps you pick out classes towards your major," "Helps you meet your requirements," "Helps you with problems (personal and academic)," "Is honest," "Is understanding," "Is up-to-date," "Is concerned about students," "Checks up on your grades and files," "Knows students personally," "Guides students to graduation," "Takes time to visit with you," "Lets you know where you stand (requirements and grades)," and "Goes over your records with you."

"The mission of New Mexico State University is to improve society through education, research, and public service." ¹ Accomplishment of this mission depends upon thriving enrollment. A serious drop in enrollment could cause a decrease in the number of faculty members (particularly young faculty members), graduate assistants, and support staff members. With these reductions, the total amount of research would be reduced.

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The enrollment of the College of Agriculture and Home Economics over the past six years was as follows:

1974-75, summer, 285; fall, 1,372; and spring, 1,302
1975-76, summer, 350; fall, 1,442; and spring, 1,414
1976-77, summer, 414; fall, 1,603; and spring, 1,493
1977-78, summer, 495; fall, 1,625; and spring, 1,517
1978-79, summer, 459; fall, 1,520; and spring, 1,368.¹

Many underlying conditions could cause a decline in enrollment in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics. Inferior advisement, poor student/professor relationships, quality of teaching, cost of an education, decline in the number of farm and ranch families, increasing inflation, job competition, job opportunities, inadequate teaching facilities, inadequate instruments and equipment, are all possible causes of decreasing enrollment.

Because enrollment decline forecasts the arrival of problems, a need was felt to identify areas where improvements might help. This study was an effort to explore factors related to student-professor relationships.

Students in the New Mexico State University (NMSU) College of Agriculture and Home Economics were surveyed regarding their perceptions of faculty characteristics that enhance student-faculty relationships. The objectives of the study were to identify characteristics associated with a "good"* college classroom teacher, "good" student-professor relationship, "good" student advisor, and the level of satisfaction with student advisors as perceived by the students in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University.

Review of Related Literature

Vaughn recently completed a study of teaching quality determined by student evaluations. He states, "The quality of instruction that a university provides is often measured in terms of student ratings."² In an effort to identify factors associated with teaching quality, he randomly selected twelve teachers in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University. Using a multiple regression technique, he identified four variables in combination that had a relationship of .99 with student evaluations. The following table identifies the variables and summarizes the regressive analysis (see Table 1).

*The term "good" hereinafter means those particular behaviors which the professor performs to help the student in his/her college career. Identification of the specific behaviors was one of the objectives of this study.

Table 1. Multiple Regression of Student Evaluations on Selected Teacher Characteristics

Teacher Characteristic	Multiple R	R Square	R Square Change	F
Clarity	.75	.56	.56	145.98*
Variability	.95	.89	.34	105.62*
Humor	.98	.96	.06	26.10*
Enthusiasm	.99	.98	.03	8.07*

R = .99, F = 79.49*

*Significant at .05 level.

Method of Investigation

From a 1979, fall semester listing of students enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics, a random sample of 135 (10 percent of the total population) was drawn. A questionnaire was developed, pretested, and reconstructed three times with the help of 60 students in three different classes in the College. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and asking for cooperation from the respondents was formulated and sent to the sample on October 16, 1979, two weeks in advance of a personal interview. Interviews were conducted by telephone.

Presentation and Summary of Data

The 135 randomly selected students enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics were asked, "In your own mind, what are the characteristics of a good college classroom teacher?" Table 2 indicates the responses of the students.

Half or more of the students mentioned at least one of the following characteristics: "Presents well organized notes and lectures," "Answers your question and does not embarrass you," "Is interested in teaching," "Knows the materials," and "Is interesting." Forty-two percent

Table 2. Number and Percent of Students Identifying Characteristics Associated With a Good College Classroom Teacher in the College of Agriculture Home Economics at New Mexico State University, Fall, 1979.

N = 135			
Response	No.	%	
1. "Presents well organized notes and lectures."	77	57	
2. "Answers your question and does not embarrass you."	76	56	
3. "Is interested in teaching."	72	53	
4. "Knows the materials."	70	51	
5. "Is interesting."	68	50	
6. "Can relate to the students."	57	42	
7. "Goes over important information."	55	40	
8. "Has the ability to get information across."	54	40	
9. "Gives new information, not only what is in the book."	48	35	
10. "Gives clear explanations."	44	32	
11. "Speaks clearly."	37	27	
12. "Helps students when asked."	34	25	
13. "Is personal, knows your first name."	22	16	

of the students mentioned that a good classroom teacher "Can relate to the student." Forty percent mentioned that a good teacher "Goes over important information" and "Has the ability to get the information across." Other characteristics designated by sizable percentages of students were: "Gives clear explanations," "Speaks clearly," "Helps students when asked," and "Personally knows students' first names."

In identifying characteristics associated with student-professor relationships, the students were asked, "In your own mind, what are the characteristics of a good student-professor relationship?"

Table 3. Number and Percentage of Students Identifying Characteristics Associated with a Good Student - Professor Relationship in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University.

N = 135			
Responses	No.	%	
1. "Is concerned about student."	90	66	
2. "Is friendly, talks to you in and out of class."	83	61	
3. "Helps you when you need it."	80	59	
4. "Has respect for students."	78	57	
5. "Lets you ask questions."	70	51	
6. "Is honest with students."	42	31	
7. "Knows you on a personal basis."	19	14	
8. "Lets you have your say."	11	8	
9. "Is available after class."	6	4	
10. "Will not insult students."	5	3	

Table 3 indicates their responses and the number and percentage of the students giving them.

More than half of the students named one or more of the following: "Is concerned about students," "Is friendly, talks to you in and out of class," "Helps you when you need help," "Gives students chance to ask questions." Thirty-one percent of the students in the sample would like professors to "Be as honest with students as possible." Fourteen percent of the students said they would like professors to "Get to know them on a personal basis." Eight percent of the students indicated they would like professors to "Let you have your say," while four percent suggested they would like professors to "Be available after class." Three percent indicated they would like professors "Not to insult them." Three students mentioned, "Patience."

The students in the sample were also asked, "In your own mind, what are the characteristics of a good student advisor?" Table 4 indicates the responses by number and percentage of students.

Sixty-four percent of the students said good student advisors would "Help you pick out classes towards your major." Sixty-three percent suggested they would like an advisor to, "Help you meet your requirements." Fifty-four percent indicated an advisor should "Help you with problems (personal and academic)." Forty-two percent felt that advisors should be "Honest," while 37 percent indicated a good student advisor would be "Understanding." Thirty-six percent stated a good advisor should be

Table 4. Number and Percent of Students Identifying Characteristics Associated With A Good Student Advisor in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University.
N = 135

Responses	No.	%
1. "Help you pick out classes towards your major."	87	64
2. "Help you meet your requirements."	86	63
3. "Help you with problems, (personal and academic)."	74	54
4. "Honest."	57	42
5. "Understanding."	51	37
6. "Up-to-date."	49	36
7. "Concerned about student."	47	34
8. "Check up on your grades and files."	37	27
9. "Know students personally."	33	24
10. "Guide students to graduation."	29	21
11. "Take time to visit with you."	19	14
12. "Keep you informed."	17	12
13. "Let you know where you stand, (requirements and grades)."	13	9
14. "Go over records with us."	11	8

"Up-to-date," while 24 percent felt an advisor should be "Concerned about students." More than a third of the students suggested an advisor should, "Check up on your grades and files." Twenty-one percent specified a good advisor should "Know students personally." Other sizeable percentages indicated that an advisor should "Guide students to graduation," "Take time to visit with you," "Let you know where you stand (requirements and grades)," and "Go over your records with you."

Summary and Recommendations

The overall objective of this study was to identify and report characteristics and other factors thought to be associated with student-professor relationships in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University during the fall of 1979.

As a result of the findings and the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. A longitudinal study should be made to show the levels of satisfaction in student-professor relationships in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University as a means of determining more thoroughly if student-professor relationships are a factor in student dissatisfaction and performance or in enrollment decline.
2. Other universities should be encouraged to survey student-professor relationships within their colleges of agriculture and home economics to gain evidence for comparisons with this study, to obtain a better understanding of the importance of student-professor relationships, and to assist colleges of agriculture and home economics in improving the quality of their student-professor relationships.
3. A similar study should be done with previous graduates from New Mexico State University to explore their attitudes toward student-pro-

fessor relationships while they were enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics. Such a study could provide valuable comparisons of student-professor relationships and teaching quality.

4. A similar study covering the entire University should be completed. It would be a means of determining the levels of satisfaction of student-professor relationships, quality of teaching, and student advisors within the other colleges of the University. The University could utilize the results of such a study as a possible means of maintaining or increasing student population by improving effectiveness and public relations and increasing retention of potential drop-out students.

Colleges within New Mexico State University could use such a study to determine which departments or colleges have excellent student-professor relationships and which do not. Improvements could be made where weaknesses were identified.

5. Serious thought should be given by administration of the College of Agriculture and Home Economics to the student-identified factors that determine good student-professor relationships, good college classroom teachers, and student advisors. It is further recommended that:

- These factors be discussed with faculty in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics.
- Faculty training sessions be considered.
- Efforts be made with faculty to understand what the factors are and how to utilize them in their teaching and advising responsibilities.

6. Efforts should be made to continue a high quality of student-professor relationships, teaching, and student advisement within the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University.
7. A study should be made of students who drop out of New Mexico State University to identify factors associated with reasons students drop out. If the factors are found to be associated with student-professor relationships, quality of teaching, and advising, then a strong effort should be made to decrease the drop-out rate of students.
8. The results of this study indicate that if a college wants to emphasize the identified factors associated with good teaching, student-professor relationship, and advising, then extra professorial time will be required. This may also require extraordinary thought and activity by administrators.

Bibliography

1. New Mexico State University. August 1979. *Annual Report to the President of the University*, 11:41.
2. Vaughn, P. 1980. "Relationships between teacher characteristics and student evaluations." Unpublished data, NMSU. p.4.

1980 NACTA Distinguished Educator Award

Dr. Darrel S. Metcalfe, Dean, College of Agriculture, The University of Arizona, was presented the 1980 NACTA Distinguished Educator Award during the awards ceremonies at the 26th Annual Conference.

The Distinguished Educator Award, administered by the NACTA Executive Committee, recognizes meritorious service to post-secondary education and agriculture through NACTA, teaching, educational research, or educational administration. This award augments the coveted "NACTA Teacher Award" by recognizing outstanding educators in post-secondary level agriculture who may not qualify for the teacher award because of their unique role in higher education.

Dr. Metcalfe, a long-time member of NACTA, has contributed much to the effectiveness and success of NACTA as an organization to improve the effectiveness of teaching in agriculture. He served as Western Regional Director in 1967-68 and held the office of President of NACTA in 1970-71. As evidence of his interest in improving teaching, he won the E. B. Knight NACTA Journal Award in 1967.

Dr. Metcalfe's outstanding teaching ability was recognized by his peers when, in 1958, he was awarded the American Society of Agronomy's highest teaching award — The Agronomic Education Award. This was followed in 1959 by his being elected Fellow in the American Society of Agronomy.

Dr. Metcalfe, a native of Wisconsin, received his baccalaureate degree from the University of Wisconsin, his masters from Kansas State University, and his doctorate from Iowa State University.

In 1958 he was appointed Associate Dean and Director of Resident Instruction, College of Agriculture, at the University of Arizona. Prior to this appointment he taught in the Department of Agronomy, Iowa State University from 1946. In 1979 he was made Dean, College of Agriculture at the University of Arizona.

Dr. Metcalfe served in a leadership role in many prestigious organizations among which are The Commission on Education in Agricultural and Natural Resources (CEANR), National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences, Committee on Vocational Agricultural Education and Natural Resources in General

Education, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). In the latter organization he served as Chairman and Secretary, Resident Instruction Section, Division of Agriculture; Chairman and Secretary, Western Resident Instruction Committee on Organization and Policy (RICOP); Member, Joint USDA-NASULGC Committee on Education for Government Service. In addition, he served on numerous committees, including Research, Relation with Two-Year Institutions, Public Relations, Brochure, Rural Development, Summer Work Conference, and National Office.

Dr. Metcalfe was very active in international agriculture. He served as Chief, Survey Mission to Brazil for six weeks. During this time he evaluated agricultural colleges and universities in Brazil, made recommendations for their improvement and studied the possibility of an AID contract with a northeastern Brazil university. For several years, he made executive visits to the University of Ceara, Fortaleza, Brazil. He made other visits to several South American countries from 1955 to 1973. He was a delegate to and presented papers at the Organization for Economic Cooperative Development (OECD) in Paris.

Dr. Metcalfe is an author of several books on forages and crop production. He also was a major contributor to the *Advances in Agronomy* publications. He is author of numerous scientific articles in agronomy and agricultural education.

He has been accorded many honors. He is a member of Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi of which he was president; Phi Eta Sigma, Gamma Sigma Delta, Alpha Tau Alpha,

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