HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Enhancing Student Success through Faculty Development : The Classroom Survey of Student Engagement
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Citation	高等教育ジャーナル : 高等教育と生涯学習, 18, 115-120
Issue Date	2011-01
DOI	https://doi.org/10.14943/J.HighEdu.18.115
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/56770
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	JHELL18_017.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Enhancing Student Success through Faculty Development: The Classroom Survey of Student Engagement

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Abstract — This paper describes a new survey instrument, the Classroom Survey of Student Engagement, or CLASSE, which was specifically designed to address the alignment between what faculty value and what students do or experience both in and outside their class. The paper discusses the development of the CLASSE Faculty and CLASSE Student surveys, the CLASSE implementation process, survey reporting and results, and how faculty used the results. It concludes with a discussion of the promise of this tool for faculty development and the improvement of student learning and success.

(Revised on 26 August, 2010)

1. Introduction

Good teaching and student success, it is argued, have a strong positive relationship. Faculty members who approach teaching with a learner-centered pedagogical methodology tend to create a classroom environment that employs innovative classroom assessment techniques, clearly identify and communicate student learning objectives/expectations, and embed enriching educational experiences within their courses. The flip side, of course, is the less engaged a faculty member is during class, the less likely a student is to learn, become energized by the topic, and, in turn, be successful. The two-pronged question is, "How do faculty really know what students are doing during and outside of their classes to become engaged and stay engaged with the course and its content?" and "How can a faculty member identify the areas of connections and gaps?" Furthermore, once these gaps are identified, how can these data be used to communicate to faculty the importance of effective educational practices and to induce faculty members to devote the time and energy necessary to create educationally purposeful activities to enhance student learning? And finally, how can faculty use these data to stimulate students to channel their energy toward activities that matter?

This paper will describe a new survey instrument—CLASSE—the Classroom Level of Student Engagement that my colleague Robert (Bob) Smallwood and I created based on the National Survey of Student Engagement. A description of the history of the CLASSE survey, the implementation process, survey reporting and results, and how these data are being used for faculty development

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and student success will be discussed.

During the inaugural year of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), team members talked to faculty and students at eight colleges and universities from across the United States of America to obtain feedback on survey items for a new instrument that focused on student engagement. During their conversations, NSSE team members discovered that some faculty did not realize that several of the practices covered in the NSSE survey, the *College Student Report*, were important to student learning or important for them, as faculty members, to embrace in their classroom. Other faculty reported that their students were engaged and wondered why it was necessary to collect data about students' college experiences and why only the students' perceptions were included, i.e. soft data. Many faculty did like the idea of comparing the results nationally and thought the findings would be interesting. Later that year, Bob Smallwood, then at Texas State University, disseminated NSSE results and many assessment coordinators reported that numerous faculty members who were confronted with negative results responded, "This is not true in my class; my students are very engaged."

Because of the discrepancy between what students and faculty were reporting, we partnered with the NSSE staff to create a faculty version of the *College Student Report*, now known as the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) which to date has been used by 535 four-year colleges and universities with almost 120,000 faculty members responding. The FSSE, then and now, focuses on the importance faculty place on various engaging activities and the extent to which faculty use these activities in their classes. When confronted with discrepancies between faculty and student responses to FSSE and NSSE, some faculty members continued to respond, "Not in my class."

In an attempt to understand what was going on at the classroom level, we approached George Kuh, then NSSE Director, about augmenting the College Student Report to focus on specific classes, thus addressing the comments of "not in my class." The survey would draw on items from the NSSE survey, add specific content items for courses, and refine the response options to reflect the classroom-level focus. The other departure is that NSSE traditionally targets first-year and senior students; however, CLASSE does not limit its focus to these groups, embracing the idea of working with faculty who teach courses at both the lower and upper course levels. Currently however, we have not had the experience of using CLASSE at the graduate level.

2. What is CLASSE?

CLASSE is a two-component tool comparing faculty expectations with what students report experiencing in a class. The CLASSE Student survey is similar to the *College Student Report* in that it asks students to reflect on their behavior both during class and outside of class; however, unlike NSSE respondents, students reflect on behaviors for a specific class and not on their entire year of coursework. We focused on the NSSE items that are based on Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. These principles—encourage contact between students and faculty; develop reciprocity and cooperation among students; encourage active learning; give prompt feedback; emphasize time on task; communicate high expectations; and respect diverse talents and ways of learning—are essential for student learning and indispensable when designing an effective faculty development program.

In addition to the selected NSSE items, we worked with Paul Raffeld at Texas State University to develop items that address study habits and study styles, enabling us to examine the relationships between study behaviors and levels of student engagement. Faculty members participating in the pilot project also worked with us to design items that focused on tools used to enhance learning, Internet use, and interest level. These additional items helped faculty personalize the items and make the data more pertinent to their teaching style and their particular course.

Because students were to focus on a particular class, we inserted the name of the class in every item where applicable. We also changed the response options to make them relevant to the time frame of a class. For example the item, "Asked questions during your Physics 181 class" has response options of *Never*, *1-2 times*, *3-4 times*, and *5 or more times*. The focused response options provided faculty with more specific class-level information than the typical NSSE response options of *Never*, *Sometimes*, *Often*, and *Very Often*.

We realized from our discussions with faculty using NSSE and FSSE data that what was key to faculty development was to identify the congruence between what faculty valued and what students reported doing. As a result,

we designed the CLASSE Faculty to measure the value faculty place on engaging activities, rather than as a measure of what faculty members think students are doing; hence the second component—the CLASSE Faculty.

The CLASSE Faculty survey, as a parallel survey to the CLASSE Student, asks faculty how much they value the activities students are responding to in their CLASSE. The four response options for faculty are *Not Important*, *Somewhat Important*, *Important* and *Very Important*. It is also worth noting that when a faculty member had more than one class participating in the study, they were asked to complete the CLASSE Faculty for each class because the importance of certain engagement activities might change depending on the class size, type, level, or material.

3. CLASSE Pilot Study

During the Fall 2003 pilot study we discovered various oversights in our questions and response options that needed to be addressed if we were to continue with the project. We changed a few items and added a second set of questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) to the faculty version. We asked the faculty members to rate the five elements of the taxonomy (memorizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, making judgments) on importance for the particular class. We included another item block that parallels the student version by asking faculty how important engaging in activities at the various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy is for students to accomplish the class objectives. We also added a few additional items related to study habits for exams, interest level, and whether the exams are reflective of the class material.

Once we fine tuned the instrument, we expanded our study to two universities in four areas—Mass Communication, Psychology, Physics, and Math. These classes were of varying size, mode of delivery, and level. We shared the results in two ways. When the whole department participated, we presented the aggregated results. Each faculty member who participated also received a report for their class that participated. If a faculty member participated in multiple classes, he or she received a report for each class. In the event that only one faculty member participated in a department, we met with that faculty member one-on-one to discuss the results.

4. CLASSE as an Assessment Tool

Two reports were handed to participating faculty and departments. The first was a survey look-alike (SLA). The data were presented in the same format that the questions were asked of the students (Table 1). Student response frequencies were displayed for each item, and a color-coding scheme was used to compare the impor-

Table 1. CLASSE Survey Look-alike Pilot Version

So far this semester, how often have you done each of the following in your Math class? N=18	**Not Important**	**Somewha Important**	**Important**	**Very Important**
	Never %	**1-2 times %**	**3-5 times %**	**>5 times %**
6. Worked with classmates on projects during your Math class	**67**	13	13	7
7. Worked with other students outside of your Math class to prepare class assignments	**47**	27	13	13
8. Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments for your Math class	7	19	**47**	27

tance levels defined by the faculty member to students' reports of engagement. When the level of importance matched the response with the greatest frequency, the cell was color-coded to indicate congruence; however, when faculty valued the activity higher than students reported participating, a different color-code was used to indicate incongruence. When students reported engaging in an activity at a higher level than faculty valued the activity, an outlined box was used to represent this type of incongruence. (See Table 2 for an updated version of the SLA.)

Another, perhaps more visually efficient, method of analyzing the data is using quadrant analysis. This technique is commonly used in marketing research as a way of comparing behavior and importance. Both the Admitted Student Questionnaire (n.d.) and Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (n.d.) use this technique to compare satisfaction with importance. We grouped the items by area: Engagement, Bloom's Taxonomy, and Study Techniques. We then plotted the item means on a set of horizontal and vertical axes, producing four quadrants with the top right and bottom left quadrants representing "Successes"—faculty value and students are engaging in those activities at corresponding levels (congruence). The top left and bottom right quadrants, which represented incongruent responses from faculty and students, were labeled as "Challenges." After sharing these graphs with faculty and getting feedback, we changed the labeling and plotting to make it simple to produce and straightforward in appearance.

For example, instead of labeling successes and challenges we put the actual response labels in each quadrant—*Very Important* or *Important* for faculty and below average student frequency (M<2.5) in the upper left quadrant indicating incongruence in faculty and student responses. We then list all the items from the survey that meet that criterion in each quadrant, which provides a quick reference of what faculty might want to focus on improving. (See Figure 1 for an example of the updated quadrant analysis.)

5. CLASSE's Contributions

CLASSE offers several benefits to faculty. After disseminating the results, faculty reported that they: (1) used the findings to help them improve their teaching style and their communication to students regarding what activities might help them be more successful in learning the material; (2) appreciated the positive, upbeat, non-competitive approach to identifying areas for potential improvements; and (3) recommended participating to their colleagues and would themselves participate again. In addition, Depart-

Table 2. CLASSE Survey Look-alike

Part I: Engagement Activities Student					Faculty Value Level
So far this semester, how often have you done each of the following in your Psych 1300 class?	Never	1 or 2 times	3 to 5 times	More than 5 times	
Asked questions during your Psych 1300 class	16%	51%	25%	8%	Important
Contributed to a class discussion that occurred during your Psych 1300 class	9%	28%	44%	19%	Very Important
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment in your Psych 1300 class before turning it in	74%	16%	7%	3%	Somewhat Important
Worked on a paper or a project in your Psych 1300 class that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	10%	68%	16%	6%	Important

ment Chairs were able to identify educational practices that appeared to be particularly valued by their faculty; and as a result, could advance initiatives that would support that emphasis in the department.

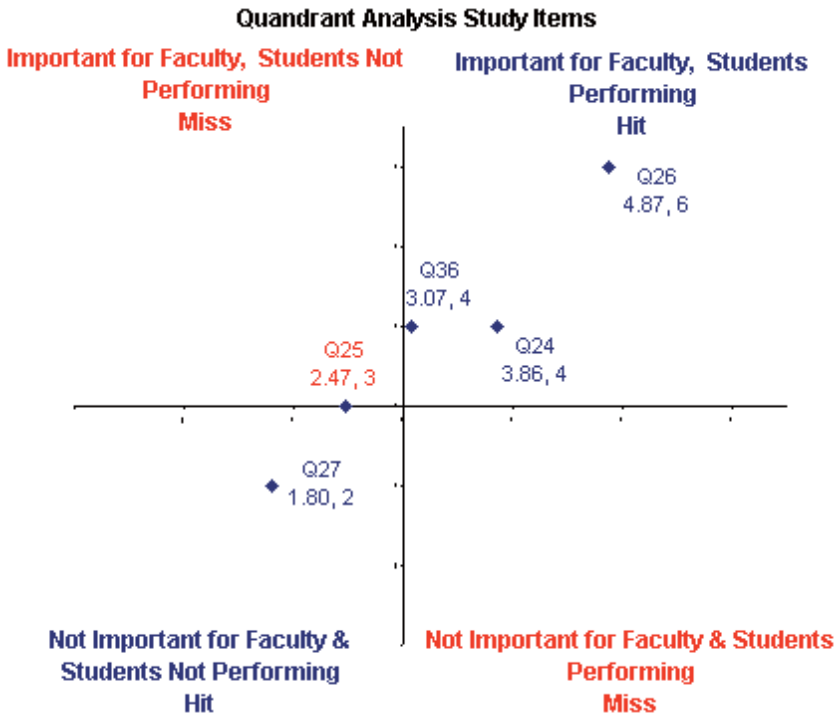
6. Next Steps

This project is still in its infancy. As a result, we do not have specific findings to report. Our goal over the next year is to implement CLASSE in a variety of disciplines, with classes of different sizes, and possibly involve different types of colleges and universities in pilot administrations with the intent to further fine tune the instrument, develop norms, and collect information concerning the ways faculty have used the findings to enhance student learning.

Good teaching is vital to student success. One way to improve the quality of teaching and learning is through an effective faculty development program. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning movement seeks to involve faculty in systematic study of their own teaching and their students' learning (Hutchings, 2000). This paper promotes an approach to faculty development organized around the systematic collection of student and faculty data at the classroom level—specifically, data that document student engagement, or the extent of students' exposure to and involvement in proven effective educational practices. A successful faculty development program thus provides faculty with the skills and knowledge necessary to create a classroom environment that emphasizes best practices and communicates their expectations to students.

An important question involves the alignment between what faculty value regarding student activities and practices in the context of a particular class, and what students are in fact doing inside and outside of that class. Identifying the connections and gaps between what faculty value and what students are doing can help involve faculty members in the diagnosis of their classroom learning environment, and can thereby induce them to devote time and energy to promoting educationally purposeful activities to enhance student learning.

Figure 1. Quadrant Analysis



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