Assessing Teaching Practices in Predominantly Freshman Courses

“What helps learning in this class?”

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Background

UC Merced Freshman Enrollment 2012
- First Generation
- Hispanic Population

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence
Students Assessing Teaching and Learning
SATAL helps faculty, teaching assistants, and academic programs gain a better sense of student learning experiences in their classes and in other academic contexts.

Research Goal

To gain freshman students’ perspective on the teaching practices that help them learn.

Methods

- The SATAL Program aggregated class interview results from predominantly freshman courses from the academic year of 2011-2012.
- These are the questions that guided our research:
  - What helps learning in this class?
  - What changes could the instructor make to improve your learning?
  - What changes would you do to your learning?

Courses Included

- School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts N=106
  - HIST 40, Technology in Society (n=22)
  - WRI 10, College Reading & Composition (n=15)
  - CORE 1, The World at Home (n=69)
- School of Natural Sciences N=89
  - BIO 5, Biology Today (n=44)
  - CHEM 1, Preparatory Chemistry (n=45)

Participating Students

Freshman Participants AY 2011-2012
- Freshman 39.60%
- Other 60.40%

Results

School of Natural Science (SNS)

- “What helps learning in this class?”
  - Homework: 72 or 81%
  - Examples: 41 or 46%
  - Lecture: 29 or 33%
  - Discussion or lab sessions: 24 or 27%
  - Office hours with professor: 21 or 24%

- “What changes could the instructor make to improve your learning?”
  - Give reviews for exams: 69 or 78%
  - Provide answers/review homework: 43 or 48%
  - Prepare lecture better (organization of slides, more examples): 36 or 40%
  - Stay focused on topic of lecture: 25 or 28%
  - Provide more interactive activities: 25 or 28%

- “What changes would you do to your learning?”
  - Attend office hours: 38 or 43%
  - Study more: 34 or 38%
  - Put in more effort: 25 or 28%
  - Ask questions: 20 or 22%
  - Read materials before coming to lecture: 17 or 19%

School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA)

- “What helps learning in this class?”
  - Class Discussions: 62 or 59%
  - Peer reviews for assigned essays: 40 or 38%
  - Videos that promote interaction between students and instructors: 38 or 36%
  - Examples: 25 or 24%
  - Group activities: 22 or 21%

- “What changes could the instructor make to improve your learning?”
  - Be specific in regards to reading assignments: 39 or 37%
  - Post agenda/ schedule ahead of lecture: 26 or 25%
  - Have more discussion with the class as a whole: 25 or 24%
  - Utilize discussion time better: 23 or 22%
  - Go over the lecture in discussion session to understand main points: 16 or 15%

- “What changes would you do to your learning?”
  - Prepare for class by reading ahead: 45 or 43%
  - Complete assignments in a timely manner: 40 or 38%
  - Attend office hours: 36 or 34%
  - Pay attention during lecture: 29 or 28%
  - Utilize feedback more effectively: 15 or 14%

Discussion

- Results show that what helps students learn vary according to school, whether SNS or SSHA.
- There was a strong correlation between student responses in the interview and the 7 Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.
- Students are aware of behaviors to improve their performance in courses across schools.
- Cooperation is a practice identified by students from both schools. Cooperation is expressed as “formal” group work, for e.g., peer reviewed essays in SSHA courses and lab partners in SNS courses.
- Future research will focus on collaborative learning activities.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our thanks to Mike Roona from IRDS for providing pertinent data, SATAL students for collecting and reporting the class interviews data, and instructional faculty who have requested and continue to request services from the SATAL Program.