



# **Examining the Importance of Teaching Clarity: Findings from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement**

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# Overview of Relevant Literature

- Teaching clarity is:
  - *“a cluster of teaching behaviors that result in learners’ gaining knowledge or understanding of a topic” (Cruickshank & Kennedy, 1986, p. 43).*
  - *“the ability of the teacher to provide instruction, expositional or otherwise, which helps students come to a clear understanding of material” (Metcalf, 1992, p. 275).*
- Undergraduates who perceive higher levels of teaching clarity tend to exhibit more growth in various student outcomes, such as leadership, openness to diversity, moral reasoning and positive attitudes toward literacy (Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, n.d.).

# Purpose of the Study

- To begin the examination of teaching clarity using information from faculty members by exploring the importance faculty place on teaching clarity behaviors and the relationships between that level of importance and other effective educational practices.
- Research Questions:
  - What teaching clarity behaviors do faculty find most and least important?
  - What characterizes faculty with moderate, high, and very high perceptions of the importance of teaching clarity?
  - How does the perception of teaching clarity relate to other forms of effective educational practice?

# Data Source and Sample

- 2011 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement
  - Course-based and typical-student options
- 4,400 faculty
  - 74% white, 55% male, 41% 55 years or older
  - 26% full Professors, 23% Associate Professors, 26% Assistant Professors, 24% Instructor/Lecturer
- 40 institutions
  - 18% doctoral granting, 40% master's granting, 42% baccalaureate granting

# Experimental Items

## Faculty Teaching Clarity (FTC) Scale

- How important is it to you [faculty] to do the following:
    - Clearly explain course goals and requirements
    - Teaching course sessions in an organized way
    - Use examples or illustrations to explain difficult points
- Use a variety of teaching techniques to accommodate diversity in student learning styles
  - Clarify that material is understood before moving on
  - Provide standards for satisfactory completion of assignments
  - Provide frequent written or oral feedback on students' academic progress
  - Provide prompt written or oral feedback on students' academic progress
  - Describe the practical application of course material

# Variables

- **Course-based/typical-student option scales:**
  - Quality of campus relationships, campus support, faculty-student interactions
  - Emphasis on/perceptions of students' gains in intellectual skills, gains in practical skills, and gains in personal and social responsibility
  - Emphasis on/students' use of reflective learning, integrative learning, and higher-order thinking
- **Demographics and controls:**
  - Disciplinary field, academic rank, years of teaching experience, receipt of a doctorate degree, course load, age, gender, citizenship status, race/ethnicity
  - Private/public control and Carnegie classification

# Analysis

1. Frequencies of teaching clarity items
2. Scores on the FTC scale were divided into three groups and demographic characteristics of the three groups were analyzed
3. Unstandardized coefficients in a series of OLS regressions with standardized variables were examined to look at the relationship between the FTC scale and dependent measures

# Results: RQ1

- More than 80% of faculty reported clearly explaining course goals and requirements, teaching course sessions in an organized way, and using examples or illustrations to explain difficult points to be 'very much' important
- Around 60% of faculty reported finding the remaining teaching clarity behaviors to be 'very much' important
- 13% found using a variety of teaching techniques to accommodate different learning styles to be 'very little' or 'somewhat' important

# Results: RQ2

- Three categories of perceptions of importance placed on teaching clarity behaviors:
  - Moderate: FTC ranged from 1 to 3.20, average of 2.85, standard deviation of .32
  - High: FTC ranged from 3.33 to 3.83, average of 3.6, standard deviation of .18
  - Very High: FTC scores of 4
- All three groups had approximately 1,500 faculty

# Results: RQ2

- **Very High level of importance**
  - Overrepresented: faculty from Education, Black/African American faculty
  - Underrepresented: males, full professors, faculty from Biological Sciences, Engineering, and Physical Sciences
- **Moderate level of importance**
  - Underrepresented: Black/African American, part-time lecturers, faculty with a doctorate, females, faculty from Business, Education, or other Professional fields, faculty teaching in auxiliary locations or teaching from a distance

# Results: RQ3

	Course-Based Unstd. B	Typical-Student Unstd. B
Quality of Campus Relationships		+
Campus Support		++
Faculty Student-Interaction	++	++
Intellectual Skills	+++	+++
Practical Skills	+++	+++
Personal and Social Responsibility	++	++
Reflective Learning	++	++
Integrative Learning	++	++
Higher-Order Thinking	+++	+++

# Implications

- Faculty developers and centers for teaching and learning should target teaching clarity, focusing on faculty preparation and institutional encouragement
- Differences by faculty characteristics should be further explored
- Faculty are encouraged to use instructional technology to promote greater clarity and, as a result, increased engagement, deep approaches to learning, and self-reported gains.

# Thank You

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