Examining Effective Faculty Practice: Teaching Clarity and Student Engagement

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NSSE
national survey of
student engagement

Create · Collaborate · Engage
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Agenda

- Why the interest in teaching clarity?

- What is teaching clarity?

- Literature on teaching clarity

- NSSE and NSSE 2.0

- Results from our study

- Discussion of results

- Implications for faculty development

Why Teaching Clarity?

- Improving the quality of learning in undergraduate education is a national imperative.

- Consider all possible levers to improve

- More faculty seem interested in relationship between pedagogy and student learning

- Wabash National Study found faculty teaching practices positively correlate with outcomes

- Need to learn more about relationship between engagement and teaching practices!

Defining Teaching Clarity

What do you think of as teaching clarity?

Defining Teaching Clarity

- "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)

Defining Teaching Clarity

- Teaching clarity can be thought of as a teaching method where faculty demonstrate a level of transparency in their approach to instruction and goal setting in an effort to help students better understand expectations and comprehend subject matter (Ginsberg, 2007)

NSSE Teaching Clarity Items

- Gave clear explanations of assignments
- Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points
- Reviewed and summarized course material effectively
- Made abstract ideas and theories understandable
- Gave assignments that helped you learn the course material
- Presented course material in an organized way
- Came to class well-prepared
- Used class time effectively
- Explained course goals and requirements clearly

Review of the Literature

- Considered an effective teaching practice (Feldman, 1989; Hativa, Barak, & Simhi, 2001; Sherman et al., 1987)

- Student comprehension of material (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Myers & Knox, 2001)

- Cognitive growth (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Braxton, 1996)

- Student satisfaction and achievement (Hativa, 1998)

- Student motivation (Ginsberg, 2007)

What is NSSE?

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
  - Annual spring survey to FY students and SR
  - Hundreds of institutions participate each year
  - Assesses exposure to and participation in effective educational practices

- <u>Goal</u>: To query undergraduates directly about their educational experiences

Research Questions (Methods)

1. What teaching clarity behaviors are students exposed to most and least frequently? (Frequencies)

2. What is the relationship between teaching clarity and student engagement? (Correlations)

3. How does teaching clarity relate to deep learning and students' reports of gains in college? (OLS Regressions)

Sample

- 38 institutions had teaching clarity items
- Around 8000 first-years (41%) and 12,000 seniors (59%)

Institution Characteristics		FY %	SR %
Control	Public	45	49
Carnegie Classification	Doctoral	19	17
	Master's	49	49
	Baccalaureate	31	34

Sample

Student Characteristics		FY (%)	SR (%)
Female		65	66
Transfer student		12	55
Full-time enrollment		91	73
Living on campus		65	18
First generation		49	56
Traditional age		88	48
Race or ethnicity	African American/Black	15	12
	Asian/Pacific Islander	7	5
	Caucasian/White	54	57
	Hispanic/Latino	13	14
	Other	7	6

Results: What do you think?

- Think about how your students or students at your institution would answer these questions

In your experience during the current school year, about how often did your instructors do each of the following? *(Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never)*	Estimated Result (% Very Often or Often)	Actual NSSE Result (% Very Often or Often)
Gave clear explanations of assignments	%	
Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points		
Reviewed and summarized course material effectively		
Made abstract ideas and theories understandable		

Results: Frequencies

In your experience during the current school year, about how often did your instructors do each of the following? (Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never)	Actual NSSE Result (% Very Often or Often)
Gave clear explanations of assignments	86
Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points	84
Reviewed and summarized course material effectively	82

Results: Frequencies

In your experience during the current school year, about how often did your instructors do each of the following? (Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never)	Actual NSSE Result (% Very Often or Often)
Made abstract ideas and theories understandable	78
Gave assignments that helped you learn the course material	82
Presented course material in an organized way	86

Results: Frequencies

In your experience during the current school year, about how often did your instructors do each of the following? (Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never)	Actual NSSE Result (% Very Often or Often)
Came to class well-prepared	91
Used class time effectively	87
Explained course goals and requirements clearly	88

Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

Level of Academic Challenge

•How challenging is your institution's intellectual and creative work?

Active and Collaborative Learning

•Are your students actively involved in their learning, individually and working with others?

Student-Faculty Interaction

•Do your students work with faculty members inside and outside the classroom?

Supportive Campus Environment

•Do your students feel the institution is committed to their success?

Results: Correlations

Rank order strength of the Teaching Clarity scale with NSSE's benchmarks of effective educational practice:

1. Supportive Campus Environment (r ≈ .5)
2. Level of Academic Challenge (r ≈ .4)
3. Student Faculty Interaction (r ≈ .3)
4. Active and Collaborative Learning (r ≈ .2)

Results: What do you think?

- Rank order which of these other forms of engagement you think had the strongest relationships with teaching clarity

	Estimated Result Rank Order (1-6)	Actual NSSE Result Rank Order (1-6)
Integrative Learning		
Higher Order Thinking		
Reflective Learning		
Gains in Practical Competence		
Gains in Personal and Social Development		
Gains in General Education		

1 is strongest
6 is weakest

Results: Regressions

	Actual NSSE Result Rank Order (1-6)	
Integrative Learning	**5**	(d ≈ .34)
Higher Order Thinking	**4**	(d ≈ .41)
Reflective Learning	**6**	(d ≈ .27)
Gains in Practical Competence	**1**	(d ≈ .50)
Gains in Personal and Social Development	**3**	(d ≈ .41)
Gains in General Education	**2**	(d ≈ .49)

Discussion of Results

- Did any result surprise you? Disappoint you? Encourage you?

- Why do you think your estimates might be higher than our averages? What do you do to promote higher teaching clarity?

- Why do you think your estimates might be lower than our averages? What can be done to promote more teaching clarity?

Key Findings

- Adds to research demonstrating that student perceptions of faculty teaching influences student engagement & desired gains.

- Suggests need to emphasize teaching clarity among faculty, particularly those teaching first year courses; and explore what it takes to promote higher level teaching clarity practices.

- Teaching clarity is measurable; and practice is modifiable.
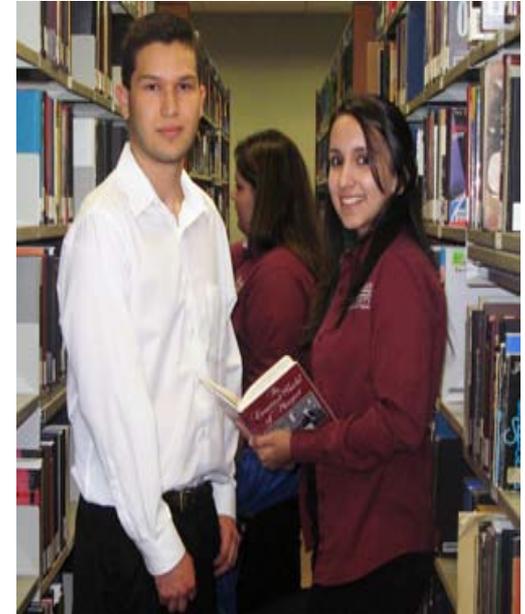
Implications for Faculty Development

- Help faculty developers better target initiatives regarding teaching clarity

- Use results to foster broader understanding among faculty, administrators & students about teaching clarity, and to create culture that values effective educational practices

- Encourage faculty to self-assess and collect formative feedback about clarity in courses

- *What else?*

What's Next?

- **NSSE 2.0 – updated survey launching in 2013!**
- **FSSE**
- **Future Research**
- **Additional questions**

For more information about NSSE 2.0, see
nsse.iub.edu/nsse2013

or email nsse2013@indiana.edu

Questions and Comments

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