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College Instructors' Perceived Responsibilities: A Descriptive Study

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Introduction

- Nationwide, colleges are working to reduce equity or opportunity gaps in students' academic achievement and retention and graduation rates.
    - Marginalized students (e.g., students of color, women, and low-income students) typically receive lower grades and are more likely to drop out than their more privileged peers (Bok, 2017).
- In the classroom, students and faculty benefit when faculty perceive a shared responsibility for student learning.
    - Shared responsibility for student learning has been linked to student success and retention (Chávez & Longerbeam, 2016).
- Similarly, high-impact practices (e.g., inclusive teaching and equity-minded best practices) benefit student learning and positively affect retention and graduation rates (Borko, 2004).
    - Highly equitable classroom practices benefit all students, but especially students of color and first-generation students.
- The present study investigated the perceived responsibilities of college instructors from both a faculty and student perspective with a focus on highly equitable classroom practices.
- The aims of the study are:
    1. To describe faculty and student perceptions of responsibilities to students, respectively.
    2. To compare faculty and student perceptions of responsibilities to students, respectively.

Method

Participants:

- Faculty and undergraduate students at a public, comprehensive university with a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation
- 153 faculty from approximately 28 departments
    - No demographic data was collected, but faculty at this university are primarily White (73%) with 55% female.
- 66 undergraduates from the Psychology Participant Pool
    - Ages ranged from 18 to 39 ($M = 22.92$, $SD = 6.58$)
    - 77.3% women; 19.7% men; 3.0% non-binary/non-conforming
    - 45.5% White (non-Latinx); 42.4% Latinx. 9.1% two or more ethnicities; 1.5% Asian-American, and 1.5% not specified

Design/Measures:

- Faculty completed surveys at department meetings; students completed surveys online via Qualtrics
- *Responsibilities of a College Instructor Survey*: 20-item Likert-style survey; rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)
    - Items were adapted from materials provided by ESCALA Educational Services, Inc.
    - Instructors were asked to respond to the following prompt, "As a college instructor, it is my responsibility to…"
    - Internal reliability scores were good for faculty ($\alpha = .82$) and acceptable for students ($\alpha = .70$).

Results

Aim 1: To describe faculty and student perceptions of responsibilities to students, respectively (see Table 1).

- The mean for students was 3.84 ($SD = 0.36$) out of 5 while the mean for faculty was 4.25 ($SD = 0.41$) out of 5.

Table 1: Most and Least Highly Endorsed Equitable Classroom Practices by Students and Faculty, Respectively*

	Students' Most Highly Endorsed Items	Mean (SD)	Faculty's Most Highly Endorsed Items	Mean (SD)
1	Promote a sense of belonging in the classroom.	4.58 (0.61)	Promote a sense of belonging in the classroom.	4.75 (0.47)
2	Provide frequent feedback to students.	4.58 (0.53)	Build students' confidence through experiences where students see themselves as capable of learning.	4.55 (0.64)
3	Build students' confidence through experiences where students see themselves as capable of learning.	4.55 (0.53)	Make an effort to hear from all students, not just the "serial" responders in class.	4.55 (0.70)
	Students' Least Endorsed Items		**Faculty's Least Endorsed Items**	
1	Promote a colorblind classroom because students' ethnicities/races, gender, sexual orientation, etc. should not play a role in their learning. (R)	2.56 (1.50)	Be fair and apply the same rules to each student in my class regardless of special circumstances. (R)	3.54 (1.10)
2	Be fair and apply the same rules to each student in the class regardless of special circumstances. (R)	2.68 (1.28)	Promote a colorblind classroom because students' ethnicities/races, gender, sexual orientation, etc. should not play a role in their learning. (R)	3.76 (1.52)
3	Present themselves as an expert with all the answers. (R)	3.17 (1.00)	Tell my own educational story, complete with challenges and setbacks.	3.88 (0.91)

Aim 2: To compare faculty and student perceptions of responsibilities to students, respectively (see Table 2).

- There was a statistically significant difference between faculty and students' total scores, $t(205) = -5.84$, $p < .001$. The average faculty summed score was 84.14 ($SD = 8.78$); the average student summed score was 76.89 ($SD = 7.23$).

Table 2: Group Differences in Equitable Classroom Practices among Students and Faculty*

Item	Student Mean (SD)	Faculty Mean (SD)	t	df	p
Get to know my students' interests (e.g., career and other interests).	3.39 (0.88)	4.29 (0.69)	-7.33	104.99	.0001
Give students control and options over some aspects of their learning.	3.95 (0.71)	4.30 (0.75)	-3.18	134.09	.002
Present myself as an expert with all the answers. (R)	3.17 (1.00)	4.09 (0.96)	-6.33	205.00	.0001
Promote a colorblind classroom because students' ethnicities/races, gender, sexual orientation, etc. should not play a role in their learning. (R)	2.56 (1.50)	3.76 (1.52)	-5.28	200.00	.0001
Go out of my way to find course materials and examples from people of diverse backgrounds.	3.88 (1.09)	4.35 (0.82)	-3.45	204.00	.001
Prioritize class time to lecture, which often means there isn't time for active learning strategies, group work, or reflections in class. (R)	3.33 (1.04)	4.15 (0.80)	-5.64	101.93	.0001
Reflect on how my own cultural background influences my attitudes and assumptions about students, ways of organizing my course and classroom.	3.52 (0.95)	4.36 (0.82)	-6.57	204.00	.0001
Promote a competitive environment with high expectations; not everyone can or should succeed in the major. (R)	3.59 (1.15)	4.14 (0.95)	-3.39	108.21	.001
Be fair and apply the same rules to each student in my class regardless of special circumstances. (R)	2.68 (1.28)	3.54 (1.10)	-4.69	112.04	.0001

Note. We used a Bonferroni alpha correction of .0025 to correct for multiple comparisons.

*Table notes. (R) signals an item has been reverse-coded. Items presented are from the faculty survey. The student survey had slightly different wording.

Discussion

- Results indicate generally high endorsement of equitable classroom practices for faculty and students. Overall, faculty scored higher on perceptions of responsibility than students.
- There was considerable overlap in the most and least highly endorsed equitable classroom practices for students and faculty. Students and faculty at this institution have similar ideas about the responsibilities of instructors to students and are both aware of the importance of equitable classroom practices.
    - Both groups agreed that promoting a sense of belonging, building students' confidence, and hearing from all students were among the top responsibilities of college instructors.
- Future research can use knowledge of perceptions to target and assess classroom practices and behaviors that align with instructor responsibilities to reduce equity gaps among marginalized students.
- Limitations include the small sample size for students and the anonymity of faculty surveys.

References

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