What are Faculty Experiences Related to Student Evaluations of Courses?

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Faculty Disclosure

Debbie Marie Beck PhD (C), MSA/MSN RN, CNE
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Goals and Objectives

**Session Goal:**
Provide an overview of research on Nursing Faculty Perceptions of Student Evaluations, Grading Practices and Administrative Performance Reviews

**Objectives:**

- The learner will be able to describe the findings of a qualitative research study outlining faculty experiences with student end of course evaluations, grading practices, and administrative offerings of teaching contracts and promotion

- The learner will be able to explain the associated implications of the research findings related to student incivility, grade inflation, and measurement of faculty performance in nursing programs
Introduction

- Qualitative investigation of nursing faculty experiences related to student end-of-course (SEOC) surveys utilized in undergraduate nursing programs for performance evaluations, and decisions in offering promotion, contract renewals, and teaching assignments.

- Student cruelty from comments on SEOC surveys and the experiences of faculty related to grade inflation were examined.
Statement of the Problem

• Student evaluations and grade inflation studied in other disciplines
  
  (e.g., Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997 a, b; Isley & Singh, 2005; Lanbein, 2008; March & Roche, 1997; Olenik, 2009)

• Few studies in nursing examined these practices and student cruelty associated with student evaluations
  
  (e.g., Clark, Ahten, & Macy, 2013, 2014; Lindahl & Unger, 2010; Luparell, 2011)
Theories Supporting this Research

Attribution Theory
(Heider, 1944; Heider, 1958; Heider & Simmel, 1944;).

Grade Leniency
(Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997a; Gump, 2007)
Research Methodology

Qualitative Design

- IRB approval received for the study
- Face to face faculty interviews using an interview protocol
- Field Notes
- Reflective Journal
Methodology

Population and Sample

- Participants of the study 11 nursing faculty
- A combination of non-tenured faculty and adjuncts that had a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience in a pre-licensure nursing program in a multi-campus college in the Midwest.
- Interviews continued until content saturation occurred
Methodology

Data Collection

- Private interviews with nursing faculty who met inclusion criteria.
- Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and coded.
- Field notes, and reflective journals were written and coded for each interview session (Yin, 2011) and examined as a source of data (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).
- Each interview session began with a statement of what was studied, confidentiality, and obtaining signatures on informed consent form.
Methodology

Data Collection

- Participants were provided the opportunity to review their transcript data.

- A qualitative research expert reviewed the transcripts and provided feedback on findings. Comparisons of transcript analysis was done to have convergence of key findings (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2011).
Methodology

**Interview Questions**

1. Think back on your experiences related to student evaluations of faculty. Tell me about the experience.
   - What do you value about the student evaluation of faculty process?
   - What was the best part of the faculty evaluation process?
   - What was the worst part of the faculty evaluation process?

2. How have your grading practices changed over time?
   - How do the student evaluations affect the feedback you provide to students?
   - Tell me about a time when you changed a grade because of student threats or complaints.

3. What do you feel when you read your student evaluations of the courses you teach?
   - How does reading the narrative comments written on the student evaluations of the courses that you teach make you feel?
   - What are the reasons that some faculty find student evaluations useful while other faculty do not?
Methodology

Interview Questions Continued

4. What experiences have you had associated with SEOC scores and administrative decisions in offerings of promotion, contract renewals, and invitations to teach?

Tell me about a time when you were not offered an invitation to teach. What were the reasons given by administration in making this decision?

What have your experiences been related to offerings of promotion by administration?

Tell me about an experience in which you were not offered a contract renewal. What were the reasons provided by administration?

5. Have your student evaluations influenced your decision to remain employed in higher education or in considering leaving this setting to pursue other employment?

Have your student evaluations impacted your thoughts in any way about your decision to become a nurse educator?

Have your student evaluations influenced your thoughts about decisions to remain in the faculty role or leave higher education to pursue employment in another setting?

6. Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences in being evaluated by students?
Methodology

Data Analysis

- Data was analyzed from the investigator’s field notes, reflective journal, as well as the interview.
- The final process in the analysis of the data was to review the categories and look for connections, similarities, and differences. This process yielded common themes from the data.
- Samples of quotes made by the participant, connections between the data were identified and interpreted (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2009).
- Themes were used to organize the ideas that were used to portray what was learned from the research and utilized to interpret and report the data (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011).
- This process was repeated until the research questions were answered and sufficient meaning was extracted from the data (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011).
Findings

Major themes revealed:

- Faculty are exposed to a wide variety of unacceptable student behaviors that can have long lasting devastating effects.
- Faculty concerns about student comments which were hurtful, disturbing, and unrelated to teaching effectiveness.
- Higher final grades in a course and/or points earned on assessments are being posted by faculty than were merited.
- Lack of faculty support from course coordinators or administration when assigning low grades to students.
- Student End of Course (SEOC) evaluations of faculty were weighted heavily in faculty performance evaluations and administrative offerings of teaching contracts.
Findings

- Some student comments on the student end of course surveys have been shown to be inappropriate.
- Cruel student comments can provoke anger in faculty which can impact emotional health and well being.
- SEOCs raise self-doubt, questioning of abilities, and competence in teaching.
Findings

- Students use power of evaluation to tarnish faculty reputations
- Dealing with conflicts surrounding grades is time consuming
- Faculty do not feel support from administration when assigning grades
- Student end of course surveys continue to be used by administration as an integral component of faculty performance evaluations
- Some faculty inflate grades to improve student evaluations, in order to continue successful employment in an academic environment.
Limitations

- Due to the qualitative design sample sizes are small, and no generalizations can be drawn from this study.
- The data collected was restricted to one state.
- Participants were all from one multi-campus academic system.
- It cannot be absolutely established that the faculty were always truthful, were completely forthcoming in reporting their experiences of sensitive topics related to grading practices, and administrative evaluation of their performance, and may have omitted information in sharing their experiences.
Implications

• **Student evaluations have become an important piece in judging nursing faculty for re-appointment and promotion so it is imperative that they accurately reflect teaching effectiveness**

• **Student evaluations should only be used as one component of an effective faculty evaluation system** (Annan, Tratnack, Rubenstein, Metzler-Sawin, & Hulton, 2013).

• **Malicious and biased student comments should be removed from SEOCs and not be used to evaluate faculty** (Lindahl & Unger, 2010)
Implications

• Nursing programs must have enforceable policies governing student professional behaviors including uncivil and disparaging comments directed at faculty.

• Faculty need a safe environment to share feelings associated with uncivil encounters with students and negative comments on SEOCs (Clark, Ahten & Macy, 2014; Sprunk, LaSala, & Wilson, 2014).

• Faculty believe that in order to remain employed and avoid student conflicts they must earn good student evaluations; one way to achieve this is to award higher grades (Docherty & Dieckmann, 2015; Donaldson & Gray, 2012; Sprunk, LaSala, & Wilson, 2014).
Implications

- When course rigor is diluted and lenient grading is used to secure higher SEOCs, students may graduate without the core knowledge to enter nursing (Docherty & Dieckmann, 2015; Luparell, 2011).

- Grading practices need to be examined as there is impact on success on NCLEX and whether graduates will possess the necessary skills to competently practice nursing (King-Jones & Mitchell, 2012) which has implications for public health, safety, and welfare (NCSBN, 2011).
Implications

Personnel decisions surrounding faculty evaluation, student incivility, and conflicts related to grading practices can further contribute to the already well-documented problems of recruiting and retaining qualified faculty which may further exacerbate faculty shortages in nursing education.

(Larocque & Luhanga, 2013; McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2012)
Future Research

- Repeat current research in traditional campus based post-licensure programs and online
- Compare findings of post-licensure campus based program with online program
- Repeat study with another multi-campus system in other regions of the nation and in nursing programs outside of the United States
- Compare findings of U. S. based programs with those in other countries
Questions

What questions do you have?


References


References


