

Faculty Perceptions Concerning the Ethics of Classroom Management Practices

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the results from a study that was conducted of academicians teaching at a Midwestern midsized doctoral-granting liberal arts university. Faculty and administrators were asked whether a hypothetical professor's behavior in 42 described scenarios was totally ethical, totally unethical, or somewhere in between the two extremes. The purpose of the study was to provide guidance to professors in setting their own classroom policies and procedures.

Keywords: faculty perceptions, classroom management practices, ethics

Introduction

Ethics is susceptible to different meanings and thus alternate interpretations. Conceptually, it generally involves moral principles and practically, it requires doing the right thing, which some would argue depends on the situation (i.e., situational ethics). In the case of business schools, the study of ethics seems to ebb and flow. While not merely a fad, its curricular significance or importance at any particular moment tends to depend on the current state of the business environment. According to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), ethics is deserving of more elevated status. While the AACSB does not require any specific ethics classes to be offered, the curriculum must include learning experiences designed to provide students with an understanding of ethics at the undergraduate level, plus convey the importance of ethical and legal responsibilities in organizations and society in both the baccalaureate and graduate programs. Furthermore, the institution or the business program is required to establish expectations for ethical behavior by administrators, faculty and students. Likewise, those who teach must operate with integrity when dealing with students and colleagues; students are expected to do the same. It is likely that nonbusiness academic units are subject to the same expectations, although “standards of ethical conduct may vary somewhat across disciplines.” (Whicker and Kronenfeld, 1994, 7-8).

How professors manage their classes has significant professional consequences. Faculty are subject to annual performance reviews, and are typically evaluated by students at least as frequently. Continued employment, raises, promotion and tenure are likely dependent on how these reviews and evaluations turn out. But what are appropriate classroom policies and practices are not always known, and may depend on a number of factors, not the least of which is who is being asked. This study was conducted to shed light as to what practices professors think either are or are not ethical, given the importance of teaching both to the institution and the individual academician.

Methodology

The authors described 42 classroom management practices, course policies, and faculty/student scenarios and asked respondents to a survey to indicate their perception of the hypothetical professor’s degree of ethical behavior. The survey was administered to professors from various colleges and schools (including business, fine arts, arts and sciences, education, medicine and law) teaching at a Midwestern mid-sized doctoral granting liberal arts university. Approximately 90 faculty members completed the questionnaire. An earlier paper by the authors (Dykstra, Moen, and Davies, 2008) discussed the issue of academic freedom with regard to adopting a described policy or practice. This paper focuses on the faculty perceptions concerning the degree of ethical behavior for those same classroom management practices.

Specifically, respondents were given the following instructions: “For each of the following independent situations, please assume that the hypothetical professor, while not you, has demographic characteristics similar to your own (e.g., gender, teaching

experience, field or discipline, rank). Please indicate your assessment of the hypothetical professor's degree of ethical behavior by checking the appropriate response." The degrees of ethical behavior were defined as: (1) totally ethical (TE), (2) slightly to moderately unethical (S/MU), and (3) moderately high to highly unethical (MH/HU).

The 42 classroom management practices, course policies, and faculty/student scenarios can be found in the Appendix. While the order in which the scenarios were presented to respondents in the survey was random, they were subsequently grouped into the six categories listed below for analysis, and have been renumbered to aid in their presentation for this paper. The scenarios are grouped into the following six categories: grading policies and procedures, accessibility and availability policies, classroom management practices, attendance and participation rules, assignment, quiz and exam practices, and differential treatment issues.

In addition, the last part of the survey included a number of demographic questions. The following letters are associated with eight such questions and correspond to the column headings found in Tables 1 and 2. Potential answers to these questions are shown in brackets.

- A: What is your age? [Under 41, 41 – 50, 51 and over]
- C: In what college do you teach? [Arts & Sciences, Business, Education, Other]
- D: What is your highest educational degree? [Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEng, MBA), Doctorate/Professional (e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, DDS, DVM, JD)]
- G: What is your gender?
- L: What year students do you primarily teach (please choose only one)? [Freshman/Sophomore, Junior/Senior, Graduate]
- R: What is your academic rank? [Lecturer/Adjunct Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Full Professor]
- T: What is your tenure status? [Non-Tenure Track, Tenure Track, Tenured]
- Y: How many years have you taught at the college/university level? [0 – 5 years, 6 – 10 years, 11+ years]

Using the responses from the 42 individual survey questions and the aforementioned demographic questions, two-way contingency tables were created to display the frequencies of the joint responses. Hypothesis tests were then performed in order to compare the counts of these categorical responses for independence; specifically, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. Statistical tests were run for each of the 42 scenarios to determine whether there were significant differences in responses based on the respondents' demographic category. It should be noted that in addition to the demographic questions listed above, respondents were also asked the demographic question, "Have you had any academic administrative experience?" [Yes, No]. However, no statistically significant differences were found for any of the 42 scenarios, and so a column for this demographic question has not been included in the tables below.

Summary of Results

Overall, 30 statistically significant differences were found. These are described more fully below. As shown in the cross-tabulation in Table 1, the following numbers of significant differences were observed by scenario category and demographic category.

TABLE 1

Scenario Category	Demographic Category								
	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y	Total
1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
3	0	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	6
4	0	1	0	3	1	0	0	0	5
5	1	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	6
6	3	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	8
Total	4	3	1	11	2	2	5	2	30

Table 2 below provides, by scenario category, the percent of respondents who indicated the scenario's practice, policy or behavior was totally ethical (TE), slightly to moderately unethical (S/MU), or moderately high to highly unethical (MH/HU). Additionally, Table 2 summarizes the statistical tests for each scenario by demographic category. As mentioned, the scenarios are presented in the Appendix. A single asterisk (*) indicates a 0.10 level of significance, two asterisks (**) indicate a 0.05 level of significance, and three asterisks (***) indicate a 0.01 level of significance.

TABLE 2
Grading Policies and Procedures

	Degree of Ethical Behavior (%)			Demographic							
	TE	S/MU	MH/HU	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y
1	85.2	12.5	2.3								
2	54.0	28.7	17.2				**				
3	56.3	32.2	11.5								
4	96.5	3.5	0.0								
5	54.7	36.0	9.3				*	**			
6	31.0	50.6	18.4								
7	64.7	18.8	16.5								
8	6.7	46.1	47.2								
9	1.1	20.0	78.9								
10	2.2	9.0	88.8								

Accessibility and Availability Practices

	Degree of Ethical Behavior (%)			Demographic								
	TE	S/MU	MH/HU	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y	
11	97.7	1.2	1.2									
12	66.7	27.4	6.0									
13	51.1	34.1	14.8									
14	48.3	34.5	17.2									
15	26.4	48.3	25.3		***		**					

Classroom Management Practices

	Degree of Ethical Behavior (%)			Demographic								
	TE	S/MU	MH/HU	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y	
16	90.6	8.2	1.2									
17	77.0	14.9	8.0									
18	12.6	44.8	42.5									
19	56.8	27.3	15.9				**		**	***		
20	18.0	36.0	46.1		**				**	*		
21	1.1	26.7	72.2									

Attendance and Participation Rules

	Degree of Ethical Behavior (%)			Demographic								
	TE	S/MU	MH/HU	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y	
22	63.6	30.7	5.7									
23	77.4	19.0	3.6									
24	63.6	30.7	5.7									
25	42.2	51.1	6.7									
26	27.6	37.9	34.5		*		**					
27	23.5	60.0	16.5				*	*				
28	5.7	36.4	58.0				***					

Assignment, Quiz and Exam Practices

	Degree of Ethical Behavior (%)			Demographic							
	TE	S/MU	MH/HU	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y
29	92.0	8.0	0.0	*							
30	71.3	21.8	6.9								
31	71.6	21.6	6.8				*				
32	21.3	55.1	23.6				*				
33	65.5	21.8	12.6								*
34	63.5	27.1	9.4								
35	16.1	55.2	28.7							**	
36	29.9	47.1	23.0				**				

Differential Treatment Issues

	Degree of Ethical Behavior (%)			Demographic							
	TE	S/MU	MH/HU	A	C	D	G	L	R	T	Y
37	56.8	35.2	8.0	***							
38	19.5	47.1	33.3								
39	51.2	35.7	13.1	**		***	*			*	***
40	18.4	40.2	41.4								
41	12.5	36.4	51.1	**						***	
42	3.3	26.7	70.0								

As mentioned, 30 tests resulted in statistically significant differences. Eleven of these tests were significant at 0.10, another 12 were significant at 0.05, and 7 were significant at the 0.01 level of significance. The seven tests that were significant at the 0.01 level in Table 2 are discussed in detail below, organized on the basis of the demographic category resulting in the difference.

Results by respondent's age. Consider the responses based on age to scenario number 37 found in the differential treatment issues category. The scenario states, "The professor allows international students having English as a second language more time to complete exams than what is allowed the other students." 56.8% of all respondents to this scenario indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, while 35.2% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 8.0% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. However, 77.4% of the faculty 51 or older responded that this behavior was totally ethical, while only 30.8% of the faculty

under 41 years of age provided that same response. That is, older faculty responded more than what one would expect under the assumption of independence that this behavior was completely ethical, while younger faculty tended to respond differently. Faculty in the 41 to 50 age bracket responded about as one would expect under the assumption of independence. (p-value = .010)

Results by college in which respondents teach. Consider the responses based on the college in which the faculty member teaches to scenario number 15 found in the accessibility and availability practices category. The scenario states, "The professor answers out-of-classroom questions only during posted office hours, even though not all students can meet during those times." Overall, 26.4% of all respondents to this scenario indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, 48.3% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 25.3% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. However, based on college, 34.8% of the Arts & Sciences faculty indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while 0% of the Business faculty and only 6.3% of the Education faculty provided that same response. That is, Arts & Sciences faculty responded more than what one would expect that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while Business and Education faculty tended to respond differently. (p-value = .004)

Results by respondent's highest educational degree. Consider the responses based on highest educational degree to scenario number 39 found in the differential treatment issues category. The scenario states, "The professor invites selected student leaders, some of whom are currently enrolled in the professor's class, to dinner at the professor's home as a way to keep abreast of general student concerns." 51.2% of all respondents to this scenario indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, 35.7% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 13.1% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. Based on highest educational degree, 35.3% of the master's degree respondents indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while only 6.2% of the doctorate/professional degree respondents provided that same response. That is, master's degree faculty responded more than what one would expect that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while doctorate/professional degree faculty tended to respond differently. (p-value = .005)

Results by respondent's gender. Next consider the responses based on the respondent's gender to scenario number 28 found in the attendance and participation rules category. The scenario states, "The professor, who has a strict written attendance policy, only applies it to lower the grade of those students perceived as not working hard enough in the course." Only 5.7% of all respondents to this scenario indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, while 36.4% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 58.0% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. Based on gender however, 77.1% of the women responded that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while only 43.1% of the men provided that same response. That is, women responded more than what one would expect that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while men tended to respond differently. (Men responded more than expected that this behavior was slightly to moderately unethical.) (p-value = .005)

Results by respondent's tenure status. Scenarios 19 and 41 were both significant at the 0.01 significance level based upon the respondent's tenure status. Consider first the responses based on the respondent's tenure status to scenario number 19 found in the classroom management practices category. The scenario states, "The professor never makes class notes, transparencies, etc. available to students, even those who have an excused absence." 56.8% of all respondents to scenario 19 indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, 27.3% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 15.9% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. However, 38.1% of the non-tenure track faculty indicated that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while only 3.4% of the tenure track faculty and 13.5% of the tenured faculty provided that same response. Thus, non-tenure track faculty responded more than what one would expect that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while tenure track and tenured faculty tended to respond differently. (p-value = .009)

Scenario 41 is found in the differential treatment issues category. This scenario states, "The professor allows student athletes additional time to complete examinations since they frequently have more absences than other students." Only 12.5% of all respondents to scenario 41 indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, while 36.4% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 51.1% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. Based on tenure status, however, 33.3% of the non-tenure track faculty indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, while only 6.7% of the tenure track faculty and 5.6% of the tenured faculty provided that same response. Thus, non-tenure track faculty responded more than what one would expect that this behavior was totally ethical, while tenure track and tenured faculty tended to respond differently. (p-value = .009)

Results by respondent's years of teaching experience. Finally, consider the responses based on the respondent's number of years of teaching experience to scenario 39 found in the differential treatment issues category. The scenario states, "The professor invites selected student leaders, some of whom are currently enrolled in the professor's class, to dinner at the professor's home as a way to keep abreast of general student concerns." (Recall that there was also significance at the 0.01 level to this scenario based on the respondent's highest educational degree.) 51.2% of all respondents to this scenario indicated that this behavior was totally ethical, 35.7% responded that the behavior was slightly to moderately unethical, and 13.1% indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical. Based on years of teaching experience, 27.8% of the faculty with 0 to 5 years of teaching experience indicated that the behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while only 4.7% of the faculty with 11 or more years of teaching experience provided that same response. That is, faculty with 0 to 5 years of teaching experience responded more than what one would expect that this behavior was moderately high to highly unethical, while faculty with 11 or more years of teaching experience tended to respond differently. Faculty with 6 to 10 years of teaching experience responded as one would expect under the assumption of no difference. (p-value = .005)

Conclusion

What is considered appropriate behavior is generally a personal decision that can be shaped by one's view of ethics. Few would argue that what a professor teaches, i.e., the substance of a course, is likely more important than the method employed to teach it. While policies, practices and procedures an instructor uses to manage his or her classroom would typically be viewed as being of secondary importance, the absence of well thought out policies and procedures could hinder student learning. How course management techniques are perceived by students, fellow faculty and administrators may have a bearing on a number of important issues, including annual evaluations, merit raises and promotion decisions.

The paper described a survey that was administered to faculty teaching at a Midwestern mid-sized doctoral granting liberal arts institution, with the objective of shedding light on the degree of ethical behavior associated with 42 classroom management practices. An individual's perception, however, could be impacted by his or her own demographic characteristics, and thus statistical tests were performed to identify these differences. Based on category, the least number of significant differences (only two) occurred in the accessibility and availability practices category, while the greatest number (i.e., eight) of statistically significant differences occurred in the differential treatment issues category. Based on demographics, the greatest number of significant differences was due to a respondent's gender (11), followed by tenure status (five), and age (four). In general, because of the number of statistically significant differences discovered regarding the degree of ethical behavior across the six scenario categories, further work is needed to clarify expectations about protections afforded by academic freedom.



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Appendix

Grading Policies and Procedures:

1. The professor allows students to keep all graded exams, and commonly includes some of the old test questions on the final exam. Prior to the final, the professor comments in class that a good way for students to study for the exam is to review old test material.
2. The professor allows students to keep all graded exams, and commonly includes some of the old test questions on the final exam. The professor mentions to students who stop by seeking individual help for the final that a good way to study is to review old exams.
3. The professor awards extra-credit points to students who attend "extra" events such as research presentations and seminars conducted by invited professionals, even though not all students can attend due to class or work conflicts, etc.

4. The professor consistently and uniformly adheres to the (written) policy that in no event and under no circumstances will any student be allowed to earn extra credit.
5. The professor generally requires students to take the final exam when scheduled. Students who miss the test because of travel plans are given an "Incomplete" grade, and are allowed to take a make-up test after they return.
6. The professor does not require those students who suffer a tragedy near the end of the semester to take the final exam.
7. The professor requires all students to take the final exam when scheduled. Students who miss the test because of travel plans are given a zero, and are not allowed to take a make-up test either before they leave or after they return.
8. The professor has no written policy regarding extra credit work and makes no mention of a policy in class. Unbeknownst to the rest of the class, however, the professor gives the opportunity to earn extra points to students who ask.
9. The professor teaching the second of two required sequential courses agrees to pass a failing student who has failed the class previously and who promises not to take any advanced classes in the discipline.
10. The professor agrees to pass a failing student as long as the student agrees to not take a class from the professor again.

Accessibility/Availability Policies:

11. The professor announces a job opportunity to the entire class.
12. The professor agrees to be a job reference for any student who asks.
13. The professor provides extra tutoring for student athletes outside of regular classroom hours.
14. The professor announces a job opportunity to only a select few good advisees.
15. The professor answers out-of-classroom questions only during posted office hours, even though not all students can meet during those times.

Classroom Management Practices:

16. The professor provides donuts for students attending the regularly scheduled 8:00 a.m. class session every Friday morning.
17. Whenever students carry on a conversation during class, the professor makes a point of calling on them to inquire as to what they are visiting about.
18. The professor provides refreshments to students on the day of the teaching evaluation.
19. The professor never makes class notes, transparencies, etc. available to students, even those who have an excused absence.
20. The professor requires students to work in teams when completing class projects. Student teams are required to regularly meet outside of normal class time to work on assignments. Because of these mandatory work sessions, students sometimes have to miss other classes or other scheduled events such as examinations which necessitates make-up tests in other courses.
21. When returning graded examinations and assignments, the professor routinely comments loudly about how well each student performed.

Attendance/Participation Rules:

22. The professor does not specifically give students points for class participation, but gives the benefit of the doubt to above-average participating students when deciding borderline final grades.
23. The professor does not require class attendance, so students are not penalized for skipping class no matter how many sessions they miss.
24. Adhering to announced course policy, the professor randomly (using shuffled note cards) calls on students each class session. The professor occasionally skips calling on selected students who are regularly prepared.
25. Adhering to announced course policy, the professor randomly (using shuffled note cards) calls on students each class session. The professor occasionally skips calling on selected students who don't appear to be prepared.
26. The professor teaches two sections of the same class, one during the day (three 50 minute sessions each week) and another at night (one 150 minute weekly session). The professor does not require attendance in the day section. However, night-time students are penalized for absences because the professor believes these students cannot afford to miss so much class time.
27. The professor regularly uses the Socratic method in class to cover material assigned for the day. The professor repeatedly calls on the same "suspect" students to ensure that they are adequately preparing for class and skips those who the professor believes are good students.
28. The professor, who has a strict written attendance policy, only applies it to lower the grade of those students perceived as not working hard enough in the course.

Assignment, Quiz, Exam Practices:

29. The professor gives students the option of throwing out their low exam score.
30. The professor adopted a policy that exempts those students with A's in the class from taking the comprehensive final exam.
31. The professor allows all students the same amount of time to complete an examination, even those with unregistered but likely disabilities.
32. The professor has a written policy prohibiting make-up quizzes, but occasionally allows some absent students who have a good excuse to take them late.
33. The professor does not allow students who miss an exam to take a make-up test. Instead, the professor follows the policy of weighting the next test, or the final, more heavily.
34. The professor does not allow students to make up a quiz or turn in homework late, irrespective of the reason why the student failed to comply with the given task.
35. The professor teaches two sections of the same class. One sections meets three times a week during the day for 50 minutes each session, and includes traditional students. The other section is a night class that meets once a week for two and one-half hours each time, and consists mostly of nontraditional students. The professor uses identical examinations in both sections, giving students their respective regular class period to complete the test. The professor's rationale is that students in the

night class need additional time to complete the test because they generally have less time to study.

36. The professor teaches two sections of the same class. One section meets three times a week during the day for 50 minutes each session, and includes mostly full-time traditional students. The other section is a night class that meets once a week for two and one-half hours each time, and consists mostly of nontraditional part-time students who work full-time. The professor requires the daytime students to turn in homework, but does not require the same of the evening students.

Differential Treatment Issues:

37. The professor allows international students having English as a second language more time to complete exams than what is allowed the other students.
38. The professor has a written attendance policy that penalizes students for excessive unexcused absences. Since the professor believes fraternity and sorority members are in general given preferential treatment, all absences relating to participation in University-sponsored Greek events are not excused.
39. The professor invites selected student leaders, some of whom are currently enrolled in the professor's class, to dinner at the professor's home as a way to keep abreast of general student concerns.
40. The professor has no stated policy regarding extra credit work. The professor does, however, give a failing student (of the opposite sex) who needs the class to graduate the opportunity to earn additional points by doing extra assignments.
41. The professor allows student athletes additional time to complete examinations since they frequently have more absences than other students.
42. The professor has a written policy prohibiting extra credit work. Unbeknownst to the entire class, however, the professor gives student athletes and band members who miss class due to their participation in athletic events the opportunity to earn extra points.