

EXPECTED AND DESERVED GRADE DEVIATIONS: DO THEY AFFECT STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION?

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ABSTRACT

Even with grade inflation, students continue to overestimate their grades. They not only exaggerate their total class performance, they also overestimate the grade they expect to receive on exams immediately after completing them. Some researchers have speculated that there will be a positive relationship between the overestimation of grades and the evaluations that students would give to the course and/or the instructor.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The marketing education literature is silent on the effect of inflated grade expectations on any aspect of education, let alone its effect on the students' perception of instruction. Suggested by the literature, this exploratory study tries to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do students overestimate their grades?
2. Do students believe they "deserve" grades even higher than those they expect?
3. Are there different student demographic characteristics of those who overestimate their grades, compared to those who do not?
4. Is the deviation between expectations and reality related to the evaluation of the instructor and the course?

METHODOLOGY

Over 700 students from 14 sections of introduction management and marketing courses volunteered to be in the study. Students completed four questionnaires over the period of a semester that asked what grade they expected and deserved to receive at the end of the term, what their current grade was, and what grade they currently deserved. They were also asked to evaluate the course and the instructor on a number of variables, including personality. The students' actual grades were recorded.

FINDINGS

1. Students overestimated their expected grade throughout the semester. This gradually decreased,

but was still significant even in the last week of the term. At this late date, over 77% believed their final grade would be at or above the actual class averages.

2. At every point during the term, "deserved" grades were higher than expected grades. Only 3% believed they "deserved" a grade lower than they expected. Over 87% of the students believed they "deserved" a grade that would be average or above their actual grade at the end of the term. Almost twice as many students indicated that they deserved an A, as believed they would receive an A.

3. There were no demographic differences between those who overestimated their grades compared to those who did not. GPA was important to expected grades, but not to deserved grades.

4. Were the deviations of grade expectations and the evaluations of the course and/or instructor related? The answer is overwhelmingly yes. The greater the deviation of deserved grades from expected grades, the lower the students perceived the course, the instructor, and the instructor's personality. With expected grades, there was no increased advantage in evaluations when expected grades were higher or even the same as those actually received, but expecting a grade lower than the one actually received significantly lowered all measures of teaching evaluation and instructor personality.

IMPLICATIONS

Students are inaccurate when estimating their own performance. They generally inflate their expected grades, and then believe they deserve grades even higher. Unmet expectations result in lower student evaluations of instruction. Students need to be more involved and made more aware of their actual performance levels. The study implies that grade inflation has had a negative effect on the students' ability to judge their own level of learning and performance, and on the evaluations students make of instruction. The literature is mostly silent on the issue of grade inflation and its impact on marketing education.