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THE EFFECTS OF SOURCE, REVISION POSSIBILITY, AND NUMBER OF COMMENTS ON STUDENTS' IMPRESSIONS OF FEEDBACK ON AN ASSIGNMENT

David Ackerman, California State University, Northridge
Barbara L. Gross, California State University, Northridge
Curt J. Dommeyer, California State University, Northridge

Marketing educators and students alike regard instructor-provided feedback on student work to be an essential tool in the learning process. When instructors alert students to the strengths and weaknesses of their work, it provides a means by which students may assess their own performance and make improvements in their future work. The act of providing feedback allows instructors to communicate overall quality standards and expectations and explain their grading rationale regarding the work of each student.

Most instructors view the provision of feedback to be part of their job and they spend a good part of their time writing individualized and substantive feedback comments on student work. Such feedback explains or justifies the earned grade, and most students expect to receive this feedback. Several studies aiming to define and describe the characteristics and practices of excellent marketing professors include, among other attributes and behaviors, that they provide timely and constructive feedback on exams and assignments. These are studies about both faculty perceptions (e.g., Conant, Smart, & Kelley, 1988; Smart, Kelley, & Conant, 2003) and student perceptions (e.g., Faranda and Clarke, 2004; Gruber et al., 2012). Providing clarifying and helpful feedback is seen as a form of mentoring students (Peltier, Drago, & Schibrowsky, 2003; Peltier, Schibrowsky, & Drago, 2007), as supportive of student learning, and as contributing to instructor-student rapport (Granitz, Koernig, & Harich, 2008).

However, many marketing educators question the efficacy of their efforts to provide such feedback, complaining that students are really only interested in their grade and pay little attention to the feedback as a tool for reflection and development. Although students express a desire for feedback (Fluckiger, Tixier y Vigil, Pasco, & Danielson, 2010), many do not appear to use it. This becomes especially germane and frustrating when faculty members are subject to high student-faculty ratios, are responsible for large classes, and teach courses requiring a high level of written and oral presentation as is typical of marketing curricula. The effort to provide substantive feedback that in turn students may only ignore can be mentally, emotionally and physically exhausting.

Ackerman and Gross (2010) took a different approach from earlier research, questioning whether students actually value the quantity of feedback that many instructors are prone to supply. They asked whether students perceive a high level of feedback as beneficial, or if in fact there can be too much feedback. The authors found through an experiment involving a hypothetical graded assignment that students seemed to prefer to receive fewer rather than more feedback comments. The authors concluded that if an instructor is most concerned with being liked and with having students receptive to feedback (because students believe the feedback is fair and/or because they feel that the instructor has a positive impression of them), then an instructor might want to provide only a modest amount of feedback.

This paper presents the results of a pilot study that investigates how various factors affect students' impressions of feedback. The pilot study used a between-subjects experimental design (3 feedback levels (none vs. low vs. high) x 2 sources of feedback (instructor vs. peer) x

2 revision possibilities (revision possible vs. revision not possible)) to measure how students react perceptually to feedback in a scenario utilizing a hypothetical assignment from a course they would take in a subsequent semester. This method has been used in research on biases and attributions regarding student academic performance (Marsh, 1986). Data were collected from students in an introductory marketing course at a large public university in the United States. Students were informed that the study would help the instructor improve instructional feedback. Data were collected about midway through the semester, and students present on the day of data collection participated in the study (n = 66).

Students were asked to think about an assignment in a course they would take during a subsequent semester (Marketing Strategy) and read the statement, "You have just received a grade of B-, 80 out of 100 points, on your paper for the Marketing Strategy course." Students then read additional information depending on which treatment they received for feedback level, source of feedback, and whether the feedback was for a draft to be revised or for a final product. Thus there were 10 (3 x 2 x 2 - 2) versions of the questionnaire.

The results of this pilot study found that whether an assignment is a final product or a draft that can be revised for an improved grade has a pronounced effect on student reactions to level of feedback. This suggests that it would be helpful for instructors to remind students of the purpose of feedback before they provide it. Students who perceive feedback as personal criticism are less likely to utilize it, but students who more clearly apprehend the purpose of feedback on assignments will be more likely to apply it to improve their understanding, skills, and performance. Improved understanding of feedback may also lead to more favorable evaluations of instructors since students will better appreciate the purpose of the feedback they receive.

Another finding is that the implicit theories held by students, i.e., whether students held an entity theory view or an incremental theory view, had a significant effect on their perceptions of the instructor's impression of them. The higher level of entity theory outlook students held (the belief that ability is fixed and cannot be changed) the more likely they were to perceive that the instructor had a negative impression of them. By contrast, the more students held to an incremental theory outlook (the belief that abilities are malleable and can be changed) the less they were likely to feel this way. This finding suggests that instructors should help students to understand the purpose of and prepare them for feedback so that they do not take comments personally. These results are preliminary and part of an ongoing stream of research.

References Available upon Request