

DO STUDENTS TRUST US?

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ABSTRACT

A certain percentage of students indicate a relative lack of trust in their instructors. The major areas of concern seem to be related to the assignment of grades and the difficulty/rigor of courses. Findings indicate that female students exhibited less trust than males about receiving the grades they believed they "deserved." Finally, this study examines the implication of lack of trust in the classroom and the impact this has on students successfully entering the workplace.

This exploratory study attempted to begin a systematic study of relationship regarding student/instructor trust. Three questions were addressed. 1) Can the difference between expected and deserved grades be replicated? 2) Do students trust instructors? 3) What are some characteristics of classes that students trust more than others? 4) Are class peers trusted more than instructors?

DISCUSSION

Almost two thirds of the students said they deserved to get a grade they did not expect to get. About half of the students indicated that they would get a grade lower than they deserved. Almost 50% of the students indicated that they would trust a former student more than the instructor if told by each that they would get a fair grade in a class. Only about a quarter of the students indicated that they would clearly trust the instructor more than a former student if told the same thing. The data indicates that a large percent of students perceive a disconnection between their own grade expectations and the scores given to them by their instructors. It appears that about half of the students don't expect to receive a "fair" grade from their instructors, if "fair" is defined by deserved expectations and trust. The reason for this is unknown, but it may be related to student expectations that are evolving faster than those of the instructors. The most plausible explanation would be grade inflation. Although 46% of the students are getting a lower grade than they

"deserve," only 10% of the students thought that instructors were purposely giving them lower grades.

There is considerable evidence that students expect inflated grades for average work (see Edwards 2000, Gose 1997, and Kamber and Biggs 2002 for a short review of grade inflation). Students who identified their own academic work as average, still expected to receive a grade of B or A (Landrum and Dillinger 2000). Large proportions of students doing B and C work expect As, and almost half of students report doing average C work, still expect to receive a B (Landrum 1999). At the same time the number of hours students spend studying has been declining rapidly (Young 2002). No studies of the effect of grade inflation could be found in the marketing education literature, except for one warning about the inflated grades given by teaching assistants (Sonner and Sharland 1993).

The general level of trust appears to be quite high with only about a quarter of the students indicating a neutral or negative amount of trust when asked directly. Specifically, however, trust begins to decline in the areas of grades and class difficulty. About three quarters of the students would trust a student more than the instructor with any statement regarding the difficulty of the course.

If students enter the workforce expecting greater rewards than they have earned, their experience is likely to be negative. They would be expected to become disenchanted with the business world, and experience difficulty with retention and advancement. In addition, as employers require increasingly greater flexibility and accountability from their new hires, they are unlikely to be "understanding" when instructions are initially ignored and employees ask for additional time to resubmit their work.

The question of the relationship of trust between students and faculty is more than an academic one as it likely will reflect the student's ability to successfully navigate the workplace. It is an issue that is deserving of our time and study.