Mar 12th, 4:00 PM - 5:45 PM

A Measure of Student-Instructor Relationships (Sirs)

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Recommended Citation
Creasey, Gary; Jarvis, Patricia; and Faigao, Denise, "A Measure of Student-Instructor Relationships (Sirs)" (2009). SoTL Commons Conference. 71.
http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/sotlcommons/SoTL/2009/71

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Although some scholars view achievement motivation as a disposition, it has been documented across all grade levels that achievement orientations (e.g., effort regulation; self-efficacy) are amenable to change in individual classroom settings. In the present study, we monitored changes in achievement orientations based on achievement messages communicated by instructors to students, teacher immediacy, and the development of the student-instructor relationship. Although this model is supported by theory, it is difficult to locate longitudinal studies that specify this process. It was our prediction that highly immediate instructors, and instructors who emulate positive achievement messages (e.g., mastery objectives) would possess students who would eventually develop connected, non-threatening relationships with them and such students would ultimately develop positive achievement orientations. These predictions were tested via the assessment of achievement messages, teacher immediacy, student-instructor relationships and emerging achievement orientations in a single, randomly determined class over the course of a semester involving a college sample.

Students were recruited and asked to provide a list of their class schedule. Next, we randomly selected a tradition collegiate class and designated this class as their “target class” for the semester. Thus, the students completed measures throughout the semester for this target class (chosen by us; students were not allowed to rate any courses that we taught). The first week of class, students completed an achievement orientation measure to establish a baseline measure for how they normally approach learning situations (e.g., self-efficacy). Next, over the course of the semester, they completed the same achievement measure for their targeted class, and also provided ratings of their instructor and relationship with this instructor.

Participants: Seventy students completed the following measures throughout the semester pertaining to their “targeted” class.

Instructor Achievement Messages: Students completed the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley et al., 2000) and were asked to consider the classroom mastery goal structure emulated by their instructor. High ratings would be indicative of an instructor who stressed mastery of the course material as a central course goal, and includes items as such as, “In our class, really understanding the material is the main goal”, or, “In our class, it’s OK to make mistakes as long as you are learning”.

Teacher Immediacy: The Teacher Immediacy Scale (Gorman, 1988; Thomas, 2001), contains items that assess verbal (e.g., “Talks to students before class”; “Asks questions or encourages student to talk”) and nonverbal (e.g., “Looks at class while talking”) features of instructor, communicative behavior.

Student-Instructor Relationships: We have developed a 36-item measure that assesses relationships between students and instructors. The instrument contains 2 major scales: Connectedness (“I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor”; “I could tell this instructor just about anything”), and Anxiety (“This instructor makes me feel nervous”; “I am nervous around this instructor”).

Positive Achievement Orientations: Self-directed learners are autonomous, confident students; thus, student confidence and perceptions of control over the learning environment are central elements of learner autonomy. To assess these constructs, students completed that Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, 1991). This instrument contains 2 scales relevant for the study questions: 1) Perceptions of control over the learning environment (e.g., “If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in this course”) and 2) Self-efficacy (“I’m confident I can understand the basic concepts taught in this course”). At the beginning of the semester, students completed this measure in terms of how they approach learning situations and classes in general; this assessment provided a baseline measure for these appraisals.