Continuous Improvement in Teaching: Using SEI Scores Effectively

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Instructional Innovation Grant Proposal for Summer 2012

I have reviewed the proposal, and I support the request for a course release/cost reimbursement for the project.

[Signature]
Head of Academic Unit (Managerial Sciences) Date

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Head of Academic Unit (Finance) Date
Continuous Improvement in Teaching: Using SEI Scores Effectively

Problem Statement:

This proposal has been developed to use Student Evaluations of Instructors (SEI) to enable instructors to engage themselves in continuous improvement of teaching effectiveness so as to engender steady improvement in student learning over time.

The SEI scores, primarily Q34 (overall effectiveness of instructor), are used to evaluate faculty at RCB. However, very little effort has been made to investigate if the SEIs in fact help to improve teaching effectiveness over time.

Over 20 years ago, Brightman et al (1989) showed that the instrument used by RCB is valid, and the six factors that make up our instrument are important in providing feedback for teaching improvement. The instrument has been recently revalidated (XXX, 2012 – Names of authors withheld to avoid identifying authors of this proposal), showing that the six factors account for more than 70% of the variation in Q34. However, the authors find that the relative importance of these factors has changed from what it was two decades ago, indicating a generational shift among student perceptions and needs. Given this finding, a study needs to be conducted to examine what teaching strategies in the classroom would result in consistent improvement in teaching effectiveness over the subsequent semesters.

It is important to ensure student learning so we look at best practices among instructors that have shown continuous improvement in their SEI scores over several semesters in recent years. These best practices can then be shared with faculty across the college.

Proposal Objectives:

The primary objective is to improve student learning, through better teaching strategies and practices in the classroom. To do so, the specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the factors that are important to this generation of students.
2. Learn from a sample of instructors that has shown consistent improvement in teaching effectiveness across different departments.
3. Synthesize teaching strategies to enable instructors in continually improving teaching effectiveness along factors identified as important for student learning.

Method:

We have collected data on SEIs for all RCB classes from 2005-2009. This constitutes a sample of 100,000 students in about 6000 sections. The data represents all departments in RCB, and includes undergraduate and graduate classes, core and non-core.

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Brightman et al (1989) studied the relative importance of factors and reported that the two most important factors that impacted the overall effectiveness score were Organization/Clarity and Presentation Ability. Subsequently, XXX (2012) found that with the new generation of students, Student Motivation (Instructor’s ability to motivate students) replaced Presentation Ability as the second most important factor. Other research about this generation of students also indicates that Motivation is of greater importance to their learning than an instructor’s presentation ability.

Research also shows that SEI scores are correlated with student learning. Feldman (1989) showed that some of the most important factors that affect student learning include Organization, Presentation Ability, Grading, Student Interactions and others. These factors map well onto the factors in our SEI instrument.

We will examine the data across 12 semesters over the 4 years to look for steady improvements in overall SEI scores among faculty. We will look at average SEIs for an instructor to identify a sample of instructors that have shown consistent improvements over a minimum of three semesters. We will then examine the changes in the six factor scores over time for such instructors to see which factors showed the most change over time. The most important step will be to interview these instructors to develop a set of teaching strategies and best practices. The interviews with these faculty members will be conducted in Summer 2012 and/or early Fall 2012, depending on their availability during the Summer and Fall semesters.

Evaluation:
The project will be successful if we can synthesize a set of meaningful teaching strategies that can be disseminated to the RCB faculty at large. These strategies must be sufficiently generalizable for use across disciplines and course levels.

Budget: We request a summer course release for conducting this study.

Media/Classroom: None required.

References
