Enhancing Student-learning in Cohort-based programs

Milind M. Shrikhande
Department of Finance
J. Mack Robinson College of Business
(404) 413-7334
Grant Proposal for Summer 2011
March 12, 2011

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

Head of Academic Unit

March 14, 2011
Date
Enhancing Student-learning in Cohort-based programs

Problem Statement:
The Robinson College of Business has now launched several cohort-based programs which include the EMBA, Fast-track Specialized MS, PMBA-MHA, and the Global Partners’ MBA. In these programs the students take courses in a lock-step fashion completing all requirements of the program working together in teams or singly. Cohort-based programs provide opportunities for enhanced student-learning in these specialized settings if we can transmit what we learn about the cohort in a systematic fashion to instructors in subsequent semesters. One way of such systematic communication is to study the impact of the learning styles of the students and the impact of their perception of our teaching styles on the students’ learning and effective performance in class. The Felder-Solomon learning style survey offers a valid and reliable instrument for collecting data on the students’ learning styles.\(^1\) Since the Grasha-Riechman teaching style survey allows us to identify effective teaching styles and map effective teaching styles onto effective teaching methods in the classroom, we can transmit these findings to instructors in subsequent semesters since cohort-based programs have the unique advantage that the same audience repeats itself in lock-step courses.

The problem or challenge is to implement a pilot study in at least one of the cohort-based programs across semesters to test how the framework above can be successfully used to provide a template to instructors in the various programs for implementation. During the Fall 2010 semester I initiated the data collection phase of such a pilot study while teaching Corporate finance in the initial semester of the Global Partners’ MBA (GPMBB) Program. I wish to complete the study during the summer semester so that I can provide a template to instructors in the various cohort-based programs for implementation during the subsequent semesters.

Proposal Objectives:
The objectives are summarized below:

- To study the impact of learning styles on students’ learning and in-class performance

- To identify the teaching methods that are most effective based on the findings about effective teaching-styles given learning styles of the cohort in the classroom.

- To recommend teaching methods found most effective for students who adapt to the teaching style of instructors and for students who do not adapt to the teaching styles.

---

In implementing this agenda, a higher level goal will be to create a template for how similar instructional innovation can be achieved in other cohort-based programs that are currently offered at the Robinson College of Business. Since the objectives of the proposal are easily extended across programs, the template will be an efficient way to ensure enhanced student-learning in cohort-based programs. As a consequence, the benefits of this proposal encompass the larger community of teachers and students at the Robinson College of Business (RCB) who will increasingly become a part of our cohort-based programs:

- Benefits to instructors (and program-administrators)
  - Teaching plans that ensure enhanced learning by the students
  - Fine-tuning of teaching methods for different courses offered in cohort-based programs

- Benefits to students (across all cohort-based programs)
  - Learning enhanced to ensure better overall student performance
  - Appropriate variety of classroom teaching methods

**Method:**

The approach is to establish the determinants of students’ learning and performance in cohort-based classrooms by conducting an analysis of the independent variables that impact students’ learning as reflected in their performance on different assignments during early semesters in the cohort-based program. Towards this end, in the initial semester of the GPMBA program, the following data has been collected:

- teaching styles of instructors (using the Grasha-Riechman teaching-style survey),
- learning styles of students (using the Felder-Solomon index of learning styles survey),
- GPA of students in the GPMBA program (to be used as a control variable)

To gauge the dimensions of learning styles of the students that are most effective, a factor analysis will be conducted and the learning style factors that emerge will be used as an independent variable. To enable the mapping of teaching styles onto appropriate teaching methods, teaching clusters as established in Grasha (1996) will be used as another independent variable (see Table-1 for details of the mapping between teaching clusters and teaching methods). Finally, GPA is used as an independent variable indicative of native ability of the student in a new learning environment. The dependent variables are the mid-term exam score, team assignment scores, and final exam score.

**Evaluation:** I will retest this pilot study based model using similar data collected from other GPMBA Fall2010 courses. Based on the extensive pilot study, a template will be developed for use by other cohort-based programs within the Robinson College of Business.
**Budget:** I request a course release for Summer 2011 to develop and implement this project for instructional innovation.

**Media/Classroom:** No departmental expenditure on technology will be required.

**References**


**Table 1: Grasha’s (1996) teaching method clusters and appropriate teaching styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Teaching Style</th>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expert/Formal Authority</td>
<td>Personal Model/Expert / Formal Authority</td>
<td>Facilitator / Personal Model / Expert</td>
<td>Delegator / Facilitator / Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Teaching Style</td>
<td>Personal Model / Facilitator / Delegator</td>
<td>Facilitator / Delegator</td>
<td>Formal Authority / Delegator</td>
<td>Formal Authority / Personal Model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teaching Methods**

- Lectures (Technology based), Guest speakers, Term papers, Teacher-centered questioning and discussion, Tutorials
- a. Role modeling i) by illustration: discussing alternate approaches, sharing thought processes, personal experiences; ii) by direct action: demonstrating ways of doing things, having students emulate teachers. B. Coaching/guiding students.
- Case-studies, Fishbowl discussions, Laboratory projects, Role plays / Simulations, Student Teacher of the day.
- Debate formats, Independent study/research, Panel discussion, Small group work teams, Students journals, Learning pairs, Practicum, Self-discovery activities.