Instructional Innovation Grant Proposal for Summer 2012

Final Report

Continuous Improvement in Teaching: Using SEI Scores Effectively

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Study Results

The primary objective of the proposal was to improve student learning, through better teaching strategies and practices in the classroom. To do so, we addressed the following specific objectives:

1. Identify the factors that are important to this generation of students.

We conducted an empirical study (Nargundkar & Shrikhande, 2012) of over 100,000 SEI from RCB for the four years between 2005 and 2009. The RCB instrument was validated over two decades ago, and was designed to capture six factors related to teaching, with 33 question items. Our factor analysis of the 33 question items on the instrument showed that these items yielded the same six factors as expected, with minor differences in factor loadings compared to the original study. This helped us conclude that the instrument is still valid.

Our next step was to conduct a regression of the overall effectiveness score (Q34) against the six factors. We found that the relative importance of the six factors had changed over time. Brightman et al (1989) had found that Organization/Clarity was the most important factor followed by Presentation Ability, Grading, Motivation, Interaction, and Intellectual Ability, in that order. Our study found that while Organization/Clarity was still the most important predictor of overall rating, Motivation (ability to motivate students) was now ranked second, and Presentation Ability was fourth or fifth in rank depending on the type and level (e.g. Undergraduate Core) of course taught.

2. Learn from a sample of instructors across different departments that have shown consistent performance over time.

We examined the entire set of over 100,000 SEIs to search for instructors who taught classes during each of those four years (2005-2009) and obtained an overall effectiveness score of over 4.50 on average during that period. We narrowed the list by considering the average class size, and only included those instructors with class sizes greater than 15. We identified these names and then randomly selected faculty to represent as many departments as possible. We then interviewed the 12 short listed instructors, who represented the best of RCB’s teachers. The interview was structured around a questionnaire that we provided them with ahead of time so they could reflect on it adequately.

The questionnaire we used is attached.
3. Synthesize teaching strategies to continually improve effectiveness along the factors identified.

What we learned from these top instructors was presented at the FDC workshop in November 2012. The presentation is attached with the relevant results, which are briefly discussed below. There was a strong agreement between the rank ordering of factors done by these instructors and the results of our empirical study based on SEIs. All these instructors indicated that it was critical to know how to motivate students to learn the subject in order to be an effective teacher. When asked for specific strategies they used in the class to achieve effective learning, some key points emerged in common.

First, in the introduction to a lecture, most of them suggested that the topic must be made relevant to the students’ lives, as well as to business at large. Also, they emphasized the need for a roadmap to the entire course and lecture before getting into the details.

They all saw themselves in the class as facilitators of learning, and not always as experts. They favored active learning strategies, choosing to engage students in discussion and in doing something participative, rather than passive listening to a lecture. They all tried a variety of techniques to keep students motivated.

Students were asked to summarize what they learned during a class period, rather than the instructor doing it for them. The instructors would ensure that students could connect the ideas of a class period to those previously discussed and with the world of practice.

Several instructors shared interesting innovative strategies to enhance learning. One of the instructors pointed out how she includes in the syllabus the practical applications of the course objectives. So rather than merely state what students must learn, there is a mapping to some business application that the students would become more adept at, as a result of meeting that objective. Yet another instructor indicated that he did not consider himself particularly good at teaching, but that he was sincere about his efforts in helping students learn.

References