

UTILIZING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS  
TO FACILITATE  
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FOR  
ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

THESIS

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by

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By

Julia Pirani

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## DEDICATION

To my father, Dr. B.B.K. Pirani  
who taught me the value of education

and

To my mentor, Dr. Cecilia Temponi  
who assisted me to reach my potential.

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ABSTRACT

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Business colleges are faced with funding crises, rising tuition and associated fees, and criticism towards curricula, teaching methods, and academic research. Business colleges could benefit from a continuous improvement approach in order to provide graduates with a *quality* education which would enable them to compete for the best job opportunities. Student perspectives were collected through a clustering technique and presented in frequency counts. Student perceptions on a “good student” and a “good professor” provide extensive profiles of a capable student and a professor who can facilitate a learning environment which is conducive to student success. Such an approach may inform students and professors of attributes which are keys to success in the classroom. Thus, students can provide business colleges with invaluable insight to ensure high quality and ongoing improvement in academic programs.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

The Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy was conceived to respond to increased worldwide competition which led to the development of higher quality products and services designed to adhere more closely to customer specifications. Initially, TQM was applied to firms, but now its principles are being applied to academic institutions, specifically business colleges. These business colleges are faced with major funding crises, rising tuition and associated fees, and criticism directed at curricula, teaching methods, and academic research (LeBlanc and Nguyen). Business colleges will benefit from a continuous improvement approach in order to better prepare graduates to compete for the best job opportunities. TQM can be applied to higher education by first acquiring customer knowledge. Since a customer's "perceived" service value is seen as a major form of a customer's assessment of quality, a determination of how students perceive the value of a business education is thus needed.



Although there are a number of institutional customers, namely the faculty, the student, the accreditation agencies, the board of regents, and the members of the community at large, this study focuses on one of these customers: the student.

The basic principles of TQM define a new philosophy for business and include the following:

- A focus on customer satisfaction;
- A commitment to continuous improvement techniques; and
- The institution of an organizational culture founded on quality.

Students can provide business colleges with invaluable insights to ensure high quality and ongoing improvement in academic programs. Such a *quality* education would equip students with the abilities required to fulfill the expectations of American businesses (Motwani and Kumar and Mohamed 1996). In other words, students can help colleges ensure that the customer is satisfied. Feedback, if used effectively, and on an ongoing basis, will demonstrate the academy's commitment to improvement and help establish an organizational culture based on quality education.

To provide a working foundation for such a culture, central Texas business students from five universities were surveyed regarding their opinions on what a "good student" and a "good professor" meant to them. Students were surveyed over a period of seven semesters in four years and no summer sessions were used. These perceptions enable to identify the characteristics

that students believe define students capable of excelling in the classroom (hereafter termed a “good student”), and the characteristics that define a professor capable of facilitating a dynamic classroom environment (hereafter termed a “good professor”).

### **Objectives**

The focus of this study is to determine what students themselves believe are the characteristics of a “good student” and the characteristics of a “good professor.” The comprehensive responses of surveyed students regarding a “good student” and a “good professor” create extensive profiles of an ideal student and an ideal professor. These profiles may well inform immature students of attributes that may enable them to succeed academically and help more capable students envision a clearer path toward their career goals. This research was designed, then, to ascertain the particular traits of students and professors which students believe are important to their education.

The focus of this study is to provide a foundation for TQM implementation in business colleges. In order to do so, the study objectives are as follows:

- Examine literature that has examined the uses of student perceptions, the Total Quality Management approach, and the continuous improvement philosophy.
- Provide a methodology for establishing profiles of a “good student” and a “good professor.”
- Analyze data to create profiles of a “good student” and a “good professor.”
- Suggest ways in which the data may be utilized to establish a culture more sensitive to improvement and higher quality standards.

- Finally, this paper will close with possibilities for future research.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

By necessity, assumptions have been made to facilitate the analysis of data; some of these assumptions include the following:

- Students provided honest opinions.
- Students had independent sets of expectations.

Limitations of this study are related to the sample:

- The sample population was comprised of college students from central Texas.
- Data were collected from five business colleges over a four-year period between 1997 and 2001.

Limitations of this study are also related to the measurement tool:

- The sample population provided subjective responses.
- The sample population had a limited time to complete the survey.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW of LITERATURE

The review of literature considers the need of a continuous improvement methodology in educational institutions, specifically business colleges. The consideration of student input may well provide for collaborative efforts between students and faculty to develop a *quality* curriculum which better prepares students for the workforce. The growing number of college graduates entering the work environment has created fierce competition for limited jobs (Nabi and Bagley 1999) and hence created a need for enhanced education.

The questions posed in previous research consider these matters:

- Using student perceptions as a means of continuous improvement in academia;
- The value of a Total Quality Management approach and its adaptation for success in educational institutions; and
- The face and shape of continuous improvement measures in academia.

### **Student Perceptions**

Research indicates that although student perceptions in the form of feedback have been previously used, resulting improvements have been limited to administrative areas rather than academic areas (Barnard 1999), the latter which are those thought to more greatly affect teaching and learning. Student feedback has been used primarily to assist administrators in making pay, promotion, and tenure decisions (McKone 1999, Ahmadi and Helms and Raiszadeh 2001, Simpson and Siguaw 2000), but in general it has not been utilized to make improvements to curricula or learning environments. Student responses may be the only measure of quality teaching and thus plays a critical role in the evaluation of faculty effectiveness at universities and colleges (Wiklund and Wiklund 1999).

In general, there has been a lack of research conducted on exploring the student's perception as the customer of business education (LeBlanc and Nguyen 1999, Wiklund and Wiklund 1999). Since students pay for their education and experience various aspects of the academy's service delivery system on an ongoing basis, it logically follows that students' perceptions of value could be insightful. In addition, college study has become a precursor to employment after business students graduate. Accordingly, assessing the outcomes of a college education has become an area of increasing interest to students, parents and college administrators (Kretovics 1999).

Feedback from students on their expectations of students and professors may, thus be instrumental in the continuous improvement of business colleges (Byer 2001, Ahmadi and Helms and Raiszadeh 2001, Phillips 1999). It may also be the only way that the student is able to communicate what she or he

has learned in any given course (Duke 1999). To reiterate, what students take away from their college education can be considered an “outcome.” This “outcome” reflects on the college department and shapes former student and employer views of the university. Feedback is thus essential to improving educational outcomes and perceptions of those outcomes.

As customers of business colleges, students can provide business colleges with invaluable insight to ensure quality and improvement in their programs (Motwani and Kumar and Mohamed 1996, Long and Ticker and Rangercroft and Gilroy 1999). In particular student feedback can be utilized to design academic programs which more closely mirror student’s goals. Student involvement in course design is imperative.

Students believe that a “quality” business education will prepare them to get jobs and perform successfully (Brown and Koenig 1993). If students believe that they have not received a quality education, their alma maters may find that enrollment in programs will decrease, hence funding may decrease accordingly.

Education is not the only offering being evaluated by students; the university also offers a myriad of support services. Students’ opinions of the quality of these services are influenced by the college’s ability to satisfy student needs and perceptions (Delene and Bunda 1991). It would seem remiss for business college administration and faculty to overlook the interests and preferences that attending students have about their current objectives.

Research suggests that college students place a great deal of importance on the relevancy and value of a course (Young and Shaw 1999). The importance a student places on these two factors may be based on whether or not course content can be directly practiced or applied to a real-life working environment

(O'Brien and Hart 1999). Business students want to leave college having mastered skills that will be required of them in the workforce.

Soutar and Turner (2002) found that business students rate highly the following four criteria in selecting a college: course suitability, academic reputation, job placement, and teaching quality. It would seem imperative for university administrators to obtain information on prospective as well as current students so that they might orient their programs accordingly.

The institution of TQM will provide faculty with recommendations on how to improve the students' perception of their overall effectiveness as instructors (McKone 1999). The input of students can be used so that the classroom environment can mirror students' views towards a more efficient, accountable, productive, and quality learning experience. Such a classroom experience will also provide students with the abilities to fulfill the needs of the workplace by preparing students for a real-life working environment and creating an individual who is able to develop tools to better serve her or his needs during and after education. This feedback may institute positive changes to help prospective students be more adequately prepared in the future, allowing students to choose courses appropriate to their career objectives, and increasing the job placement opportunities.

### **Total Quality Management**

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a managerial approach that emphasizes continuous quality improvement processes in institutional operations (Brown and Koenig 1993). TQM involves three core values: a focus on the customer, continuous improvement techniques, and the institution of teams committed to quality (Evans and Lindsay 1999, Barrier 1993). Its overall goal is to assist businesses in meeting the challenge of increasing customer satisfaction over time while lowering overall cost.

The practice of TQM was initially implemented in business organizations. Its principles are now being adapted for educational institutions. TQM is considered a viable quality assurance measure for an increasingly dynamic work environment. The application of TQM to academic institutions can be justified on the basis of the following changes:

- Constant technological advances which affect all individuals entering the workforce.
- An increased demand for workers with at least a minimal degree of computer skills; including email, word processing, spreadsheet, and even database applications for entry level positions.
- Increased competition that requires individuals to continually upgrade their technical and personal skills (Wiedmaier and Echternacht 2000).
- Complexities of today's business organizations which demand a team-oriented workforce, easy-to-embrace empowerment opportunities, and the acknowledgement of the importance and role



of the customer at large (Temponi 1997, Barrier 1993, Crosby 1979).

Few universities have plans for adopting TQM principles in the classroom (Bass and Dellana and Herbert 1996). Institutions that are slow to adapt a TQM methodology risk their graduates entering the workforce with less preparation than students belonging to institutions that have adapted its principles. In order to better prepare students for the twenty-first century, the college coursework must provide students with skills and abilities such as analytical thinking, problem solving, improved interpersonal skills and the ability to use a computer (Motwani and Kumar and Mohamed 1996). American businesses should be able to hire employees who have developed a number of specific competencies at the college level. Over time the minimum level of desired college coursework has increased. Employers desire more qualifications for entry level jobs.

The process of implementation focuses on learning and adaptation to continual change as keys to achieving organizational success. These underlying principles of TQM stress an approach that organizations would design for their own particular purposes (Evans and Lindsay 1999).

The application of TQM in higher education should also be addressed by acquiring customer knowledge. For the purposes of this research, the primary goal of the student customer is to leave college having mastered skills which will be required of her or him in the workplace. The workplace has become a competitive environment with fewer jobs for those individuals who have not polished a specific set of skills (Wiedmaier and Echternacht 2000); thus there is

increased demand for individuals who have specific career objectives and a skill set in line with an organization's needs.

The institution of quality is another principle of TQM (Evans and Lindsey 1999). Students, faculty and employers believe that students should be better prepared for the workforce. Business students lacking in practical skills such as writing ability, critical thinking, and computer use competencies are at a direct disadvantage compared with those who do have these skills. In addition, students who have the aptitude for and interest in continually gaining knowledge and upgrading their skills will be more marketable in the workplace. A *quality* business education should thus prepare students to obtain jobs and to perform successfully (Brown and Koenig 1993). The implementation of continuous improvement requires identifying possible areas of improvement in the quality of education, based on student perceptions about themselves and the classroom environment.

### **Continuous Improvement Approach**

A major principle of the continuous improvement methodology is the institution of constant self-assessment techniques. The purpose of self-assessment techniques is to regularly evaluate key systems, processes, and outcomes by adhering to an established framework and methodology in order to create a basis for the strategic and continual improvement of the organization's performance (Stahl 1998); such a strategy ensures a realistic, proactive and measurable approach to quality.

Initially this model was oriented towards measuring the productivity of manufacturing firms. However, its principles can be applied to other

organizations, including business colleges. The following procedures are keys to implementing the approach in business colleges (Brewer and Brewer and Hawksley 2000):

- Planning and development consists of recruiting and organizing stakeholders of business colleges, creating a vision for the partnership to collaboratively initiate the vision and goals for student, college, and stakeholder success. Such an enterprise will involve the establishment of baseline measures and the creation of teams to guide, manage, monitor and prioritize short-term and long-term objectives (OSEP Monitoring Manual 2000).
- Partnership implementation and management entails the organization of priorities on a structured timeline. Goals might include student development, self-assessment evaluations for faculty and students, and reporting (OSEP Monitoring Manual 2000).
- Partnership monitoring / evaluation and future planning encompass measuring the progress of objectives, reviewing annual results, and planning for the future. Decisions should be based on results (OSEP Monitoring Manual 2000).

A number of self-evaluation techniques can be employed by professors to consider improvements to the classroom environment, such as classroom assessment techniques (CAT) (Angelo and Cross 1993, Glasman and Cibulka and Ashby 2002). In addition, small student groups can be developed to examine the quality of a specific course and its instructor. These teams can

attempt to improve learning by analyzing the current learning process and considering methods for improving the specific class (Moore 1998).

Another critical step for the application of the continuous improvement approach in business colleges is to accurately identify the customer for the purposes of this research: the student (Baldwin 1994, Motwani and Kumar and Mohamed 1996, Shupe 1999). Customer values must be determined, which requires an exploration of the student's needs and goals for education.

Business students must identify what they want to get out of their education. Students must realize that their university education is a marketing tool that will secure them a place in the job market. Students should determine an area of career interest and develop skills required for its success. The primary goal of the student is to leave college having mastered skills that will be required of her or him in the workplace. Students thus, need to be actively involved in their classes to identify possible areas where their own skills and the learning environment can be improved.

A number of strategies that have been instituted to help students orient their education towards a career include encouraging student motivation and involvement, and staff involvement. In addition, business colleges should develop relationships with the community and governmental organizations for the purposes of career planning and placement (Hohberg 1985). Such programs are opportunities for success since students can build relationships with faculty and the community at large.

Business colleges will also benefit from introducing competent and skilled individuals into the workforce, since students will also develop abilities required to fulfill the expectations of American businesses (Motwani and Kumar and

Mohamed 1996). The academy's focus on continuous improvements will result in several positive outcomes which include the following:

- Satisfied customers in the form of employed students who have attained a quality education;
- The formation of strong relationships between community employers and the business schools, which supplies the product: employable workers;
- Employer satisfaction;
- Improved reputations for business college academic programs and their graduates;
- An increase in program funding which will attract desirable faculty and prospective students; and
- The institution of an organizational culture which is not a stand-alone enterprise but one sensitive to changes in the external working environment.

### **Implications for a Customer-Driven Approach**

There are varying perspectives on whether a student-centered approach to continuous improvement would be beneficial to academic institutions. Some faculty and administrators believe that the use of traditional teaching practices, which may include information gathering, concept memorization, a theory-centered approach rather than practical application, and a sermon-like lecture with little class interaction, has no place in academia (Baldwin 1994). These are methods which do not necessarily prepare students for “real-life” working environments or familiarize business college students with the building blocks to be competitive or employable candidates in the workforce. Brown and Koenig (1993) also found that students wanted business colleges to improve students’ practical and professional preparation. Thus, the re-evaluation of current learning practices in college classrooms is an area which could be targeted for improvement.

Questions posed in earlier research (Baldwin 1994, Brown and Koenig 1993, Manley and Manley 1996, Aliff 1998) addressed the implementation of continuous improvement in businesses and how such an improvement process might be adapted for success in educational institutions. This research presents an approach to make continuous improvement in business colleges a feasible option.

Student’s expectations of their program of study and the learning environment should be incorporated into the business college ideology. Such an approach may institute collaborative efforts between students and faculty for the development of a curriculum which might better prepare students for the workforce. However, a number of concerns have been identified regarding the

application of continuous improvement techniques in business colleges (Driskoll and Wicks 1998). Some of these concerns include the perception of the student as a customer, professors' lack of complete control over course content, faculty perspectives on the continuous improvement in education, and students' readiness for the challenge of a collaborative effort to improve the learning experience.

Driskoll and Wicks (1998) for example, found that some individuals believe that a customer-driven approach to education may orient the goals of the business programs towards pleasing the student. Furthermore, students may have too much influence over the organization and structure of a course. Professors without total control over course content may be subject to too many checks and balances imposed by students and other university constituents who *require* students to be satisfied less enrollment standards decline. Should enrollment objectives fall short of expectation, university funding based on enrollment will be reduced. Brown and Koenig (1993) indicated that faculty members have resisted a customer-driven approach due to concern over threats to their teaching methods and academic freedom. This resistance is not unfounded since faculty could be accountable to a number of institutional customers namely the faculty members, students, the accreditation agencies, the board of regents, and the members of the community (Shupe 1999). Fulfilling the interests of all of these customers would seem a daunting and unrealistic task.

An additional concern is whether student needs and wants should necessarily be satisfied. Immature students or those without specific academic goals might be unable to distinguish between their wants and their needs as

future employees. How valuable is directing the course material to such a student? Students may have too much persuasive power to determine the material and structure of the course (Aliff 1998).

Driscoll and Wicks (1998) reported that an educational environment which is responsive to change is beneficial to the students, although some consideration should be given to the following questions: Is the student actually able to identify and communicate her or his needs? Will students take a passive approach to learning, perceiving a sense of entitlement, since “the customer is always right”? Will a professor’s knowledge and experience be of any value to the student? If not, the value of the professor as an expert or authority on a subject will be compromised.

Students who have not considered a course of study geared towards a specific career path, and therefore cannot identify his or her expectations cannot offer much value in terms of feedback to the business college. Professors may cater to passive students by providing materials which are overly easy to assimilate, thereby providing for “instant learning.” Student success in such a course may involve studying materials provided by the instructor which require no additional development of thought and do not challenge the student. At the same time professors may suffer by taking less interest in the subject, as there may be no room for creativity and expression in the content or delivery of material (Aliff 1998).



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Sample Population**

The data were collected from business college students at two major public universities and three private universities from the central Texas region. The colleges surveyed included Southwest Texas State University (San Marcos), The University of Texas (San Antonio) Southwestern University (Georgetown), St. Edward's University (Austin) and St. Mary's University (San Antonio). There were 275 students from Public University 1 (PU1) and 100 students from Public University 2 (PU2). From Private Universities there were 66, 130, and 40 students from PrU1, PrU2, and PrU3, respectively. The classes at each academic institution were randomly selected from Principles of Accounting, Production and Operations Management, Business Communications, Principles of Economics, and Principles of Marketing classes. The total number of participants was 611.

### Collection of Data

A creative writing technique called **clustering** was used to gather students' perceptions about the meaning of a "good student" and about the meaning of a "good professor." The clustering technique employs the free-association of ideas, creating a "structure" that allows the connection of the word or phrase stemming from first triggered thoughts (Salisbury-Glennon and Gorrell and Sanders and Boyd and Kamen 1999). Students were introduced to the clustering technique by the use of the same example in every class and by the same proctors in each case. Proctors addressed any questions that the students had about the technique. Students who had already performed the exercise in other classes were asked to abstain from participating again. After the students understood the technique, they were asked to form groups of five to six students and develop a cluster for what they considered was meant by a "good student" and as a "good professor." The use of groups effectively resolved any outlying responses that may have been presented by immature students, thereby creating greater specificity and focus in the data collected. They were allowed a maximum of 15 minutes to develop these clusters. Data collected represent business students' perceptions on the most valuable traits and characteristics of students and professors. An illustration of the results from the implementation of the survey is captured in Figure 1.

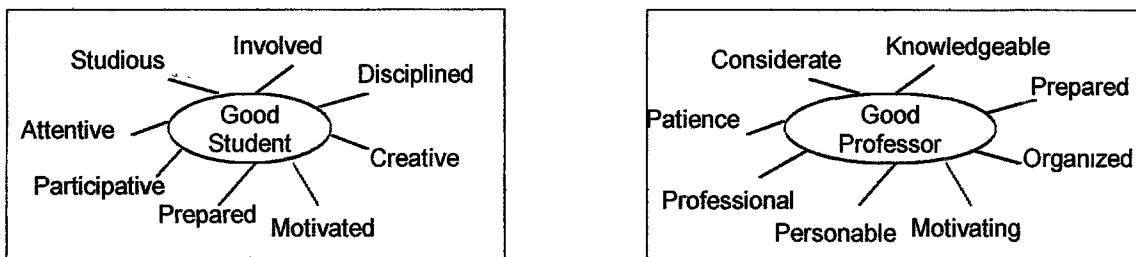


Figure 1. A Sample of student responses from the clustering technique.

### **Method of Analysis**

Data collected were prepared for analysis by documenting each trait the student groups indicated for a “good student” and a “good professor” and adding the frequency counts of each trait. This process resulted in a comprehensive list of approximately 1000 traits presented by students for a “good student” and a “good professor.” Responses were placed into smaller groupings based on definitions of common words or phrases, according to *Webster’s New World Dictionary/Thesaurus™* software program. This secondary clustering process created a less exhaustive list of qualities. It is possible that one cluster contained two words with a similar meaning. For example, a group may have decided that a student should be studious and that a student should study for tests. In such a situation the term is counted twice. The smaller groupings were then cross-referenced across each school to identify the overlapping characteristics for each quality over time between a “good student” and a “good professor.”

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Student Traits Table Analysis**

Student perspectives on the most valuable characteristics of a “good student” are varied, but students in general believe that they should be attentive, studious, participative, communicative, involved, honest, motivated, disciplined, creative, organized, and prepared. Students also believe they should attend classes regularly and manage their time appropriately. These results are presented in Table 1, page 23.

Students from all five schools agreed that these 13 attributes defined a good student. Some student populations decided that certain qualities were more important than others as indicated by the variability of frequency counts. This variance may be attributable to population and cultural differences in each institution.

Of the five schools, students from PrU1, PrU3, and PU2 decided that a student should be “studious” which was indicated by the greatest number of counts among all the clusters, or 18.5%, 17.8%, and 28.1%, respectively. Students at PU1 decided that above all students should be motivated, while

students at PrU2 believed that being disciplined was the most important trait of a “good student.”

An examination of the second highest frequency counts revealed the following:

- PU1 and PrU2 agreed that studiousness was imperative, 9.3% and 12.2% respectively;
- Students at PrU1 and PrU3 agreed that a motivated student was important, 16.1% and 11.0%, respectively;
- Student populations from PrU2 and PU2 agreed that a student must be involved, (12.2%) and (13.5%), respectively,
- Students at PrU2 exhibited the same count within three clusters: studious, involved and honest (12.2%);
- PrU3 believed that attentive and motivated students were equally important (11.0%);
- Students at PrU3 also agreed that the ability of a student to communicate is nearly as important as attentiveness and motivation, 9.6% versus 11.0% each, respectively.

Table 1. The Student Traits table details a complete list of responses by college.

College	PU1		PrU1		PrU2		PrU3		PU2		Total	Total
Qualifier	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Attentive	26	5.8	7	5.6	29	10.4	8	11.0	5	5.2	75	7.3
Studious	42	9.3	<b>23</b>	<b>18.5</b>	34	12.2	<b>13</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>13.6</b>
Participative	39	8.6	9	7.3	23	8.3	6	8.2	9	9.4	86	8.4
Communicative	40	8.9	7	5.6	7	2.5	7	9.6	4	4.2	65	6.4
In Attendance	20	4.4	6	4.8	14	5.0	3	4.1	5	5.2	48	4.7
Involved	38	8.4	12	9.7	34	12.2	6	8.2	13	13.5	103	10.1
Honest	26	5.8	6	4.8	34	12.2	4	5.5	4	4.2	74	7.2
Motivated	<b>90</b>	<b>20.0</b>	20	16.1	15	5.4	8	11.0	6	6.3	<b>139</b>	<b>13.6</b>
Disciplined	33	7.3	12	9.7	<b>43</b>	<b>15.5</b>	4	5.5	9	9.3	101	9.9
Creative	16	5.1	4	3.2	10	3.6	4	11.0	6	6.3	40	3.9
Organized	23	5.1	10	8.1	14	5.0	2	5.5	3	3.1	52	5.1
Time Manager	32	7.1	6	4.8	14	5.0	4	2.7	3	3.1	59	5.8
Prepared	26	5.8	2	1.6	7	2.5	4	5.5	2	2.1	41	4.0
Total Counts	451	44.1	124	12.1	278	27.2	73	7.1	96	9.4	1022	100.0

\* Bolded figures indicate the highest count for each college.

The student traits can be ranked from the greatest number of responses to the fewest responses among all schools. The order of importance of traits is as follows: studious and motivated are the most important qualities (13.6% each), and involved is the second most important (10.1%), followed closely by disciplined (9.9%), participative (8.4%), attentive (7.3%), honest (7.2%),

communicative (6.4%), capable time manager (5.8%), organized (5.1%), in attendance (4.7%), prepared (4.0%) and creative (3.9%).

An analysis of the Student Traits table also reveals the following:

- Students at PrU2 (10.4%) and PrU3 (11.0%) believed that attentiveness was more important than the remaining three schools.
- The two public universities varied widely in their perception of the importance of studiousness: PU1 (9.3%) and PU2 (28.1%).
- Students at PU1 and PrU3 believed that a communicative student was more important than the remaining schools, 8.9% and 9.6%, respectively, versus 5.6%, 2.5% and 4.1% at PrU1, PrU2 and PU2, respectively.
- PU1 believed a motivated student was essential (20.0%), while PrU2 and PU2 believed it to be less important, (5.4%) and (6.3%) respectively.
- PrU1 (9,7%) and PU2 (9.3%) believed that a disciplined student was substantially more important than PU1 (7.3%) and PrU3 (5.5%).

Analysis of the Student Traits table reveals the numbers of responses per college: PU1 (44.1%), PrU1 (12.1%), PrU2 (27.2%), PrU3 (7.1%), and PU2 (9.4%). The percentage of responses collected from public universities is 53.5%, and the percentage of responses collected from private institutions is 46.4%.

Each college ranked the highest and lowest preferred student traits as follows:

- PU1 – motivated (20.0%) and creative (3.5%);
- PrU1 – studious (18.5%) and prepared (1.6%);
- PrU2 – disciplined (15.5%) and communicative and prepared (2.5%);

- PrU3 – studious (17.8%) organized (2.7%); and
- PU2 – studious (28.1%) and prepared (2.1%).

### **Professor Traits Table Analysis**

Professor qualities are also varied and presented in Table 2, page 26.

Student responses were somewhat less consistent over the five schools surveyed; students believe that a “good professor” should be communicative, interesting, considerate, personable, dedicated, disciplined, motivating, organized, prepared, knowledgeable, experienced and professional. They also believe that delivery effectiveness is essential. One school believed that a creative professor was unimportant and another school decided that a disciplined professor was irrelevant.

Students all five schools agreed that 12 of the 14 traits defined a good professor. Some student populations felt that certain qualities were more important than others, indicated by the variability of frequency counts. Of the five schools, students in PrU1, PrU2, and PU2 felt that a personable professor was the most important; 29.2%, 25.1%, 26.1%, respectively, and students at the remaining two schools, PU1 and PrU3, believed that professors should be disciplined, 35.3%, 18.3%, respectively.

An examination of the second highest frequency counts revealed the following:

- Student populations in PU1 and PrU1 agreed that the second most definitive trait was a knowledgeable professor, 10.1%, 15.2%, respectively.
- Students at PU1 and PrU1 also believed that the ability to communicate was almost as important as a knowledgeable professor, 9.9%, 14.0%, respectively.



- Students in the other three schools, PrU2, PrU3 and PU2, differed in their assessment of the second most significant characteristic, stating that a professor should be communicative, motivating, and professional: 17.7%, 17.8%, and 16.9%, respectively.
- It is important to note that the most significant and the second most significant professor qualities in PrU3 differ by only one point; a professor who is motivating (32 counts) is as important as one who is disciplined (33 counts).

Professor traits can be ranked from the greatest number of responses to the fewest responses among all schools as follows: discipline is the most important quality (16.2%), followed closely by personable (14.9%), communicative (12.2%), knowledgeable (9.5%), professional (10.4%), dedicated (6.3%), considerate (5.6%), delivery effectiveness (5.3%), motivating (4.8%), organized (3.6%), interesting and prepared (3.2% each), experienced (2.8%), and creative (2.1%).

Students at PrU1, PrU2, and PU2 dismissed discipline as a required trait at 0.0%, 1.0%, and 0.8%, respectively. Students felt it was either: the most significant, of little importance, or not considered. PU2 and PrU1 also dismissed interesting as an essential trait at 0.8% and 1.8%, respectively. PrU3 decided that creative (0.0%) was the least important characteristic of a good professor. Dedication was unimportant to PrU1; (2.3%). An organized and motivating professor was least important to PU1 at 1.3% and 1.7%, respectively. PrU2 also believed that experience was unimportant at 1.3%.

Table 3. The Professor Traits table details a list of responses by college.

College	PU1		PrU1		PrU2		PrU3		PU2		Total	Total
Qualifier	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Creative	15	3.2	6	3.5	3	1.0	0	0.0	2	1.5	26	2.1
Communicative	47	9.9	24	14.0	55	17.7	11	6.1	18	13.8	155	12.2
Interesting	10	2.1	3	1.8	12	3.9	15	8.3	1	0.8	41	3.2
Delivery Effectiveness	32	6.7	10	5.8	10	3.2	8	4.4	7	5.4	67	5.3
Considerate	21	4.4	13	7.6	11	3.5	13	7.2	13	10.0	71	5.6
Personable	13	2.7	<b>50</b>	<b>29.2</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>25.1</b>	14	7.8	<b>34</b>	<b>26.2</b>	189	14.9
Dedicated	38	8.0	4	2.3	21	6.8	10	5.6	7	5.4	80	6.3
Disciplined	<b>168</b>	<b>35.3</b>	0	0.0	3	1.0	<b>33</b>	<b>18.3</b>	1	0.8	<b>205</b>	<b>16.2</b>
Motivating	8	1.7	4	2.3	12	3.9	32	17.8	5	3.8	61	4.8
Organized	6	1.3	10	5.8	13	4.2	10	5.6	7	5.4	46	3.6
Prepared	20	4.2	2	1.2	10	3.2	6	3.3	2	1.5	40	3.2
Knowledgeable	48	10.1	26	15.2	31	10.0	7	3.9	8	6.2	120	9.5
Experienced	14	2.9	5	2.9	4	1.3	9	5.0	3	2.3	35	2.8
Professional	36	7.6	14	8.2	48	15.4	12	6.7	22	16.9	132	10.4
Total Counts	476	37.5	171	13.5	311	24.5	180	14.2	130	10.3	1268	100

\* Bolded figures indicate the highest count for each college.

An analysis of the Professor Traits table also reveals that the greatest numbers of responses were as follows: PU1 (37.5%), PrU1 (13.5%), PrU2 (24.5%), PrU3 (14.2%), and PU2 (10.3%). The percentage of responses collected from public universities is 47.8%, and the percentage of responses collected from private institutions is 52.2%.

Each college ranked the highest and lowest preferred professor qualifiers as follows:

- PU1 – disciplined (35.3%) and organized (1.3%);
- PrU1 – personable (29.2%) and disciplined (0.0%);
- PrU2 – personable (25.1%), creative and disciplined (1.0% each);
- PrU3 – disciplined and motivating (18.3%) creative (0.0%); and
- PU2 – personable (26.1%), and interesting and disciplined (0.8% each).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Study Summary**

The data collected is can be used towards the continuing evaluation of learning and the development of a classroom environment that must respond to an increasingly competitive work environment. Student perspectives can be applied to the continuous improvement methodology since they present the needs and expectations of customers of the business college. The comprehensive responses of surveyed students regarding a “good student” and a “good professor” create extensive profiles of an ideal student and an ideal professor. Utilization of these profiles should improve customer satisfaction, thereby instituting a means of TQM in business colleges. These profiles may well inform immature students of attributes that may enable them to succeed academically and help more capable students to envision a clearer path towards their career goals.

According to a comparison of Table 1 and Table 2, the Student and Professor Traits, students are more decisive about desired student qualities than desired professor qualities which are indicated by the more varied professor counts. Student counts were more balanced across all colleges. Students at all five

schools agreed on the student traits, however they did not agree on the professor traits. For example, students at PU1 and PrU3, believed that professors should be disciplined, 35.3%, 18.3%, and students at PrU1, PrU2, and PU2 decided discipline was unimportant at 0.0%, 1.0%, and 0.8%, respectively. This contrast may pose a challenge to the clustering technique employed in this study. Students who participated in groups where they were shy or unfamiliar with their peers may have been reluctant to contribute to the research; outspoken students may have monopolized the activity. Student responses may have been limited to the restrictive time allowed for the study. These elements may cause a variation in trait counts among the schools and explain why students at several schools may have found a trait to be important while other students found the same trait unimportant.

In addition, students believe that students and professors should be communicative, organized and prepared for class. Also, students should be motivated and professors motivating. Although a student must be motivated to complete any course, a professor's ability to motivate the student may instill an interest in the course material which may enhance the individual's performance and thereby prepare her or him for the future. That is, a motivating professor may make a student more motivated. The student and professor share the responsibility of the student's performance in the course (Wiklund and Wiklund 1999).

Professors may also benefit from this research. They may be able to consider areas of possible development for their teaching approach and/or personal skills. Professors may also be able to direct their course content to meet the current challenges of the work environment.

The findings indicate that the effective utilization of student feedback may result in increased customer satisfaction. The data indicate agreement among students that there are a number of student and professor qualities that can facilitate an improved, dynamic classroom environment.

To reiterate, student feedback has been used in a limited fashion and could be utilized in a more effective manner. These profiles indicate the value of these TQM strategies, since they provide customer expectations and needs. Because business students agree on the attributes that define a “good student” and a “good professor”, it can be inferred that the use of student perspectives are in line with a TQM philosophy.

Business college administrators can present these findings to faculty, and department chairs who in turn can determine how best to focus on satisfying the “customer” while at the same time upholding the importance of academic autonomy. In this way, the college can make a commitment to continuous improvement and further develop an organizational culture that is accountable to a number of stakeholders and sensitive to change in the future. Should these data collected from central Texas be compared with student perspectives from other public or private business colleges across the country, student values both within and across regions could be assessed and their needs better served.

An excellent starting point to implement these strategies is to interpret the business student’s idea of quality based on their wants and needs before, during and after her or his program of study (Young and Shaw 1999).

The perception of a student as a paying customer, whose wants and needs *must* be satisfied while other goals of the academic institution become

secondary, may well compromise the values of academia. Traditional teaching methods still have merit and should be complemented with an openness to change based on the information provided by students' perspectives. The student and the professor share a very valuable interaction in the learning process. Business students at five institutions agree that a number of student and professor qualities will enhance the learning experience. Each individual professor and learning environment shapes a student's performance and consequently success. Student success can only reflect positively on the academy.

### **Future Research & Recommendations**

The opportunity for future research is substantial. Continuous improvement efforts could also involve the following:

- The students can employ the clustering technique a second time to evaluate the consistency of the responses which were previously collected. Students could also be provided with the profiles which were developed in this study, thereby confirming or dismissing the importance of traits.
- The feedback of *all* customers of business colleges, including students, faculty, administrators, accreditation agencies, the board of regents, future employers, and the members of the community at large.
- The use of professor's self-evaluation strategies such as Angelo and Cross's classroom assessment techniques (CAT) (Angelo and Cross 1993, Glasman and Cibulka and Ashby 2002).

- The development of small student groups, as student quality teams. that can examine the quality of a specific course and its instructor. The teams attempt to improve learning by analyzing the current process and considering methods for improvement in the specific class (Moore 1998).
- Administrators may wish to incorporate these findings into university entrance standards, thereby evaluating prospective students and accepting those who are more in tune to each program's objectives.
- Research addressing the varying perspectives of students from private and public universities.
- Research addressing the varying perspectives of students from other regions in Texas.
- Research addressing the varying perspectives of students from other areas of the country.



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