

# A STUDY OF BUSINESS FACULTY PREFERENCES FOR TEACHING METHODS USED AND WHY

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## ABSTRACT

*This study was undertaken to determine what teaching methods faculty use and why they use these methods. Business faculty at three universities in three different regions of the United States were surveyed. The findings of the study indicate the continued reliance of faculty on the lecture. Faculty are influenced most in their choice of what teaching method to use by the demands of their subject matter, class size, and the amount of material to be covered.*

**Keywords:** Teaching methods, instructional strategies, effective teaching, student preferences, lecture method.

## INTRODUCTION

There continues to be a growing trend to focus greater attention on teaching in institutions of higher education. Researchers, authors, and various reform reports have all indicated that teaching, particularly effective teaching, is not as much a priority in American colleges and universities as it should be (3; 5). Boyer (5) believes it is necessary for the higher education community to accept teaching as authentic scholarship. He explains the need to emphasize teaching and provide greater support for the improvement of teaching at the postsecondary level. Cross indicates there is more debate at the postsecondary level “about what is taught than about how to teach” (8, p. 496). More importantly, Cross asks the questions, “Why is it, then, that we are so hesitant to address the reform of instruction, and why is it that the classroom is so rarely the locus of our reform efforts?” (8, p. 496).

## NEED FOR THE STUDY

“Research on teaching involves at least three major questions... How do teachers behave? Why do they behave as they do? and What are the effects of their behavior?” (12, p. 241). Boyer (5) explains that those who teach must be knowledgeable about their fields, but it is the successful use of pedagogical procedures that not only transmits, but extends the knowledge to students.

### How do Teachers Behave

Bonwell and Eison explain faculty’s reliance on the lecture method as a serious gap “between how faculty typically teach (i.e., relying largely on the lecture method) and how they know they should teach (i.e., employing active learning to facilitate students’ mastery of subject matter, develop intellectual skills, and form personal attitudes and values) (4, p. 4).

### **Why do Teachers Behave as They do?**

Historically, research has supported the belief that a teacher's preferred instructional style will reflect the way they were taught and/or the way they learn best. Particularly true at the postsecondary level, teachers have not been expected to adjust their teaching style to the way their students' learn. "If the student could not adapt [to the teacher's style], the fault was the student's (10, p. 31). More recent research also indicates that faculty continue to use the method they are most comfortable with, regardless of the evidence of better ways of teaching (2).

### **What are the Effects of the Teacher's Behavior**

Research on learning and instructional styles indicates the increased importance of the teacher adjusting their teaching style to what is most appropriate for students, regardless of their own teaching preferences (11). The quality of student learning has been linked to effective classroom teaching, above and beyond the teacher's content knowledge. Teaching methods that go beyond the mere transmission of information, focusing on the students, emphasizing the development of skills, with students taking an active role in the learning process is considered to be crucial to effective teaching (8,14).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The primary purpose in this study was to determine the method of instruction used most by business faculty teaching undergraduate business courses. Faculty were also asked the following questions: (1) what factors influence what teaching methods faculty choose to utilize most in the classroom; and (2) do faculty feel they utilize teaching methods *other* than the lecture method as much as they would like, and if not, what factors prevent them from doing so.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Cross characterizes higher education faculty as "strong on subject matter and weak on getting it across to students" (8, p. 497). Much of the data on how faculty teach indicates the continued dominance of the lecture method in postsecondary classrooms. As recent as 1990, Cashin (6) reported that some form of the lecture method was used in nearly 80 percent of all U.S. college classrooms. An extensive survey of U.S. university professors in the 1980s found 89 percent of faculty used lecture as their primary mode of instruction (15). An earlier study found between 73 and 83 percent of faculty reported their primary method of instruction to be lecture (2). Thielen's 1981 study found 80 percent of the 820 faculty respondents teaching undergraduate courses "had lectured throughout all or most of the class period" (15, p. 2).

There are still times where the lecture method is the most appropriate teaching method (i.e., for disseminating information). However, "research has shown that after 10 to 20 minutes of continuous lecture, assimilation falls off rapidly" (9). Lecture used in conjunction with other instructional strategies to enhance the oral presentation of material can be effective (13). Further trends in college teaching and learning indicate the use of a variety of instructional strategies, (especially those that actively involve students in the learning process) improve and enhance student learning (13; 4; 8).

According to studies sponsored by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and Educational Benchmarking Inc.(EBI), the single best predictor of undergraduate business students' overall satisfaction with the quality of instruction in major classes, by a large factor, was "satisfaction with the quality of instruction in major classes". The second most important predictor as identified by students was "quality of faculty and teaching for required courses" (1, p. 18).

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at three universities in three different geographical regions of the United States. University "A" is a Division I comprehensive public university, located in the central region of the U.S. with undergraduate enrollments of more than 16,000. University "B" is a Division III comprehensive private university located in the western region of the U.S. with undergraduate enrollments of approximately 3,000. University "C" is a Division II comprehensive public university located in the mid-west region of the U.S. with undergraduate enrollments of more than 9,000. Three schools with varying characteristics were used for the sample to allow evaluation as to whether or not the findings were unique to a particular institutional setting.

Faculty teaching undergraduate business courses were surveyed using a descriptive survey method. The population consisted of 155 faculty. Table 1 shows the number of faculty surveys, by university and overall, that were distributed during the fall semester of 1999. Of the 155 faculty surveyed, 89 responded, for a return rate of 57 percent. The data were analyzed to determine frequency counts and percentages for each question.

**Table 1. Number and Percentage of Faculty Responses by University**

	University "A" # Responses/ Sample Size	University "B" # Responses/ Sample Size	University "C" # Responses/ Sample Size	Total Responses/ Total Sample Size
Faculty	56/103	8/12	25/40	89/155
Return Rate	54%	67%	63%	57%

## FINDINGS

Of the 89 business faculty responses in this study, 66 percent were male and 34 percent were female. The employment status of the majority of the faculty respondents was either tenured or in tenure track positions, with 47 percent tenured and 20 percent tenure track. Sixty-six percent of the faculty respondents' highest degree earned was a Ph.D., with 42 percent having more than 20 years teaching experience. The majority of faculty surveyed (78 percent) taught one to three classes per semester.

Faculty at the three schools in the sample were compared across various characteristics to determine whether the three groups were similar or dissimilar. Based on crosstabulations and

Chi-square tests the school at which the faculty taught was found to be independent of the following ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ): Primary Method Used in Teaching, Gender, Full vs. Part Time Employment, Type of Terminal Degree, whether the faculty had Any Degree in Education, Years of Teaching Experience, Number of Classes Taught, whether the faculty Felt They Used Teaching Methods Other Than Lecture, and Factors That May Deter Faculty From Using Methods Other Than Lecture. The school at which faculty taught was found to be not independent of the Department in which they were housed and the Factors That Influence the Teaching Methods They Use ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The main differences on these two characteristics were found between the smaller school (B) and the other two larger schools (A and C). The differences can be attributed to differing class sizes and the departmental structure of the schools.

Faculty were asked what the primary teaching method is they use in the first undergraduate class they teach each week. They were then given the following list of teaching methods to choose from: (a) case study; (b) discussion; (c) group work; (d) individualized; (e) lecture; (f) combination of two of the above methods; or (g) other. Table 2 illustrates the number of responses by faculty for each method and the percentages for each method by university for this question (“Other” is deleted from this table since we did not know what the “Other” may have represented). The majority of faculty (65.5 percent) reported their primary teaching method as “combination”. The primary teaching method reported by 26.2 percent of the faculty respondents was “lecture”.

**Table 2. Primary Teaching Method used by Faculty Crosstabulation**

School	University “A”	University “B”	University “C”	
Primary Method Used	# Responses/ % Within School	# Responses/ % Within School	# Responses/ % Within School	Total/ Overall %
Case Study	4 7.5%	0 -	0 -	4 4.8%
Discussion	1 1.9%	1 14.3%	0 -	2 2.4%
Group Work	0 -	0 -	1 4.2%	1 1.2%
Lecture	15 28.3%	2 28.6%	5 20.8%	22 26.2%
Combination	33 62.3%	4 57.1%	18 75.0%	55 65.5%
Total	53 100.0%	24 100.0%	7 100.0%	84 100.0

Table 3 summarizes the number of faculty responses by gender for the primary teaching method they use (“Other” is again deleted from this table since we did not know what the “Other” may have represented). The method used most by female faculty was “combination” with 21 responses (72.4 percent). Lecture method was used by 5 female faculty (17.2 percent). The method used most by male faculty was also “combination” with 34 responses (61.8 percent). Lecture method was used by 17 male faculty (30.9 percent).

**Table 3. Primary Teaching Method Used by Faculty by Gender Crosstabulation**

	Female	Male	Totals by Method
Primary Method Used	# Responses/ % Within Gender	# Responses/ % Within Gender	Total/ Overall %
Case Study	2 6.9%	2 3.6%	4 4.8%
Discussion	0 -	2 3.6%	2 2.4%
Group Work	1 3.4%	0 -	1 1.2%
Lecture	5 17.2%	17 30.9%	22 26.2%
Combination	21 72.4%	34 61.8%	55 65.5%
Totals by Gender	29 100.0%	55 100.0%	84 100.0%

Faculty were also asked to identify what factor(s) most influence why they use the method they identified as their primary teaching method. They were instructed to identify no more than two of the following factors: (a) amount of material to cover; (b) class size; (c) subject matter; (d) student interest; (e) time constraints; and (f) other. The largest percentage of faculty (30 percent) reported their choice of teaching method used was influenced by “subject matter,” 21 percent were influenced by “class size,” 19 percent were influenced by “amount of material to cover,” and 12 percent were influenced by “student interest”.

Faculty were asked if they feel they utilize teaching methods other than the lecture method in their undergraduate classes as much as they would like. The majority of faculty (56 percent) responded “yes” to this question. The remaining 44 percent of the faculty who responded “no” were then asked to identify no more than two factors that deter them from utilizing teaching methods other than the lecture method in the undergraduate classes they teach. Forty-eight percent of these faculty identified “amount of material to cover” and 22 percent identified “class size”.

### SUMMARY AND ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

The majority of business faculty surveyed are using a combination of teaching methods and are not relying solely on the lecture method. These faculty are combining lecture with other instructional strategies such as discussion and group work. However, when this group of faculty is combined with those faculty reporting the lecture method exclusively as their primary teaching method, it can be said that a very significant proportion of the 89 faculty surveyed are utilizing lecture, be it all or part of the time, in their undergraduate classes.

Faculty are most influenced by the subject matter in choosing the teaching method they utilize in their classrooms. Class size and the amount of material to be covered also influence the teaching methods faculty use. This suggests the continued belief by faculty that lecture is the most

effective and efficient means of communicating information. It may also reflect the existence of pressures perceived by faculty related to these same factors. It is important to note, that only a very small number of faculty stated that they were influenced by any factors directly related to students, such as student interest.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the three major questions involved with research on teaching... how do teachers behave, why do they behave this way, and what are the effects of their behavior. The findings of the study indicate the continued reliance of faculty on the lecture method in teaching undergraduate courses. Faculty are influenced in their choice of what teaching method to use by the demands of their profession and institution more so than by their students' preferences.

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