College student views (via ratemyprofessors.com) of teaching methods during COVID-19

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Introduction

- In the spring of 2020, due to COVID-19, professors transitioned in-person courses to online

- Quantitative research suggests that students had a range of positive and negative experiences with the transition (Lederman, 2020)

- However, there has yet to be a qualitative study on this topic

- As such, we conducted a qualitative analysis of ratemyprofessors.com (RMP) to explore student views of their professors' teaching methods during COVID-19

Introduction

- RMP is the most popular website for student ratings of professors…
    - >19 million ratings
    - 1.7 million professors
    - 7,500 colleges in the USA, Canada, and UK
    - >4 million students use RMP each month (Rate My Professors, 2020)

Introduction

- Researchers have critiqued RMP's rating system for:
  - Not measuring actual teaching effectiveness (Davison & Price, 2009)
  - Student rating bias due to factors of…
    - professor easiness (Felton et al., 2004, 2008)
    - professor attractiveness (Felton et al., 2004, 2008)
    - professor race (Reid, 2010)
    - professor accent (Subtirelu, 2015)
    - self-selection of those who post on RMP (Legg & Wilson, 2012)

Introduction

- Other studies have found…
  - Correlation of RMP and formal course evaluations (Coladarci & Kornfield, 2007; Sanders et al., 2011; Sonntag et al., 2009)
  - Correlation of RMP criteria of clarity and helpfulness (Otto et al., 2005; 2008)
  - RMP can impact professors' attitudes/strategies for teaching (Boswell, 2016)
  - Students perceive RMP as valid (Brown et al., 2009; Davison & Price, 2009)
  - Students critically read RMP ratings (Hayes & Prus, 2014; Hartman & Hunt, 2013; Kindred & Mohammed, 2005)

Methods

- In April of 2020, we performed an advanced, systematic, exhaustive search of ratemyprofessors.com using the search terms "COVID" and "coronavirus"

- The search retrieved 321 student comments specifically about teaching methods during COVID-19 about 272 professors across disciplines

- The data was analyzed using common qualitative research methods

- We read the data several times both during and after data collection (i.e., "immersion") (Borkan, 1999)

- We then identified and defined major themes that emerged from the data (i.e., "crystallization") (Borkan, 1999)

Results

- Five major themes emerged from the data:

- 1. Flexibility

- 2. Expressions of care

- 3. Prompt communication

- 4. Modification of curriculum

- 5. Effective use of technology

Results – Flexibility (positive)

- Students appreciated professors who were flexible during COVID-19 regarding due dates and optional assignments. However, students did not appreciate professors who were not flexible.

- *"With COVID-19 going on and everyone required to move off-campus, _____ gave us a HUGE extension on our needs assessment and a bunch of other classwork. She even pushed back our exam so we would have time to have everything settled. SUPER SUPER UNDERSTANDING!!! I AM IMPRESSED!!!!"* [C23]

- *"She was very understanding of the situation we were in due to COVID-19, pushed the exam back a couple days."* [C148]

Results – Flexibility (negative)

- However, students did not appreciate professors who were not flexible.

- *"Not accommodating for any students with poor internet connection to complete the final exam during COVID-19. She simply told us to buy better internet."* [C108]

- *"With everything happening with COVID-19 you'd think she'd be more lenient and understanding with everything going on but NO, there are no exceptions for late assignments or tests which I think is absurd given that some people make be sick or are essential employees."* [C156]

Results – Expressions of Care (positive)

- Students perceived that professors cared about them by being flexible, checking in on students, or asking if students needed anything (e.g., food, supplies).

- *"Im in his class right now and due to covid-19 everything has been transitioned online. I missed a quiz and he was willing to open it back up for me. Hes a caring professor"* [C53]

- *"Even now during the coronavirus outbreak, Professor _____ emails the class to reassure us everything will be okay!!! She takes the time out of her day to think about us. Amazing"* [C321]

- *"This prof goes above and beyond for students. … This was his announcement during COVID-19 'If you need food to get you through a few days, let me know what you need and where & when I can drop it off. No questions asked; no need for discussion or repayment'. Really shows what kind of person he is."* [C236]

Results – Expressions of Care (negative)

- However, students perceived professors as non-caring if they were not flexible.

- *"I took a class with professor _____ during the COVID-19 crisis. I called to clarify a few things. He told me he would not accept late work under any circumstances (sir, there is a global pandemic going on) and then told me 'Good luck' as I was hanging up the phone. I've met many teachers who genuinely care, this one obviously does not."* [C222]

- *"She is the only professor who has not given any slack due to COVID. All my other professors have been more than understanding and caring. _____ literally seems to think that we are all just on vacation instead of actually unemployed and worrying about how to live. The most unsympathetic prof. I've ever encountered here."* [C238]

Results – Prompt Communication (positive)

- Students appreciated it when professors answered emails and updated students with course changes and assignments.

- *"During the COVID-19 outbreak, _____ had to move to online classes. Professor _____ handled the situation very well. She gave us daily updates via zoom and email. All of the assigned work was clearly stated and she offered extensions when students felt it necessary. She responds to emails quickly and is more than happy to help during office hours."* [C58]

- *"With all this COVID-19 stuff and classes going online, she kept it structured and gave us a clear schedule of how to complete the work. Never took an online class but she was super helpful."* [C111]

Results – Prompt Communication (negative)

- However, students did not appreciate a lack of communication from their professors.

- *"Currently in the middle of the COVID-19 fiasco and have received a total of 1 email from her over the past 10 days. We may have a draft paper and presentation due tomorrow, but no one really knows because she ignores the forum she's set up for questions."* [C81]

- *"However, he has done the absolute bare minimum during covid-19. No extra guidance, won't answer his emails, zero feedback on past assignments. Other profs have put in extra effort, but _____ barely even communicates."* [C193]

Results – Modification of Curriculum (positive)

- Students appreciated it when professors decreased the amount of coursework (i.e., cancelling exams and/or assignments) after COVID-19

- *"… due to COVID-19 we transition to remote learning. He is very understanding and is willing to help his students succeed. Dropped a lot of course work so we can focus on our final project."* [C26]

- *"In order to ensure our mental health was being taken care of, he canceled our final (because of COVID-19) and still sent out emails with updates and reminders to take care."* [C116]

Results – Modification of Curriculum (negative)

- However, students did not appreciate it when professors increased the amount of work after COVID-19 (i.e., adding additional assignments and/or exams).

- *"Great class before COVID-19. Not hard or anything. But once it got online ... man. Dude has assigned more readings and responses than ever before. He went from short couple page readings to 35 page readings."* [C88]

- *"This course got switched to online because of COVID-19 and the amount of work has doubled."* [C154]

Results – Effective use of Technology (positive)

- Students appreciated it when professors used technology effectively.

- *"During the covid lockdown she was amazing. She pre-recorded all lectures and was available for Qs"* [C244]

- *"With the coronavirus pandemic occurring, she records all of her lectures online, causing me to retain the information SIGNIFICANTLY better than in a 10 am class."* [C256]

Results – Effective use of Technology (negative)

- However, students did not appreciate it when professors did not use technology effectively.

- *"With COVID-19 going on right now, everyone's having to adjust to the restrictions of quarantine. That said, Prof. _____'s lecture videos are not helpful. The audio is not very clear…"* [C13]

- *"Now with the coronavirus, he makes it mandatory to log into webex where his connection is not steady and STILL reads off of PowerPoints, the same ones posted online"* [C275]

Conclusion

- There are limitations to our study:
  - Cross-sectional data
  - Qualitative data
- Given the potential of multiple waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, professors may be required to teach online in the spring of 2021
- Professors should consider students' perspectives of
  - Flexibility
  - Expressions of care
  - Prompt communication
  - Modification of curriculum
  - Effective use of technology

Activity

- In the spring of 2020, how did your teaching change when in-person courses switched to online?

- How did your students react to changes of your teaching during COVID-19?

- Considering the results of our research presented today, what changes do you plan for online teaching in the future?

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