

College Students' Desire to Take a Course

Teaching Methods and Course Characteristics Related to College Students' Desire to Take a Course

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Abstract

Teaching methods and course characteristics related to college students' desire to take a course from a specific instructor were examined. Multiple regression analyses were performed on archival instructor and student data from 366,597 classes that participated in The IDEA Center Student Ratings system. Students reported the strongest desire to take a course when the instructor stimulated interest, established rapport, used a variety of methods to evaluate student progress, and used educational technology to promote learning. Motivation to take a course was also higher among instructors who expected students to take their share of responsibility for learning and set high achievement standards. These findings indicate instructors have control over a number of instructional methods and course circumstances that are related to students' desire to enroll in a class.

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Institutions of higher education invest great efforts and resources in helping students to make good decisions about which courses to take (Babad & Tayeb, 2003). Prior to each semester, students make course selection decisions that affect their lives financially, socially, and intellectually. The choices they make may limit or expand their future educational and occupational opportunities more than they realize at the time, because early decisions can affect later choices and reduce career possibilities (Babad & Tayeb, p. 374).

College students cannot afford to make bad course selection decisions, because they face rising tuitions and the possible end of lender-based guaranteed loan programs (Lederman, 2009). Consequently, students are becoming more cost conscious (Redden, 2009), which has perhaps driven up interest in services such as "Rate My Professor" and student ratings of instruction (McGuire, 2008). Instructors may, therefore, be facing increasing scrutiny about what students find desirable in a course. What might college and university instructors do to make their courses more attractive to students? Which teaching methods are most strongly related to a student's desire to take a course? Does course workload (e.g., amount of reading, number of assignments, subject-matter difficulty) matter? Do college students favor instructors who are "easy," or are they drawn to instructors who hold them accountable and set high achievement standards? These questions guided the current study.

When students select courses, they often hold high expectations and expect positive evaluations as the result of working hard on a subject or activity (Dickhauser, Reuter, & Hilling, 2005). However, they sometimes make "sloppy and non-systematic" decisions, in part because institutions do not provide students with enough appropriate and/or adequate information (Babad

& Tayeb, 2003, p. 374). Babad and Tayeb (2003) mentioned two issues students should consider: “(1) Academic considerations, focused on course and instructor characteristics; and (2) personal/contextual considerations of the selecting student” (p. 375). This study focuses on instructor and course characteristics related to students' desire to take a course. More specifically, we examined whether college students' average course ratings of the (a) instructor's teaching methods, (b) course characteristics, (c) course workload requirements, and (d) expectations for students are related to students' motivation to take a course.

Teaching Methods

Stimulating student interest. Educators and psychologists have long held that teaching methods designed to stimulate student interest direct attention, enhance learning (Dewey, 1913; James, 1890; Thorndike, 1935) and lead to more focused, prolonged effort (Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger, 1992). Psychologists typically distinguish between two types of interest. *Situational interest* is associated with a specific event or something in the environment that captures one's interest (Hidi, 1990). For example, instructors might do something innovative to direct students' attention. Students with inadequate background knowledge about a topic especially benefit from an instructor's attempt to pique interest (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Shulze, 1994). *Personal or individual interest* stems from a history of involvement with an activity or a topic (Hidi, 1990). An instructor might stimulate personal interest, for example, by connecting course content with topics and current events students find interesting. Younger and less-knowledgeable students can even outperform older and more knowledgeable students when the former have high personal interest in a subject (Benton, Corkill, Sharp, Downey, & Khramtsova, 1995). In this study, we hypothesized that students' desire to take a course would be positively correlated with their perception of how frequently the instructor stimulated student interest by (a) demonstrating the

importance and significance of the subject matter, (b) stimulating student effort, (c) introducing stimulating ideas, and (d) inspiring students to set challenging goals.

Fostering student collaboration. Because social relationships are important to most students (Dowson & McInerney, 2001), instructors sometimes create group activities in and outside of the classroom to foster student collaboration. Johnson and Johnson (1999) defined collaborative learning as group interactions that lead to a shared understanding, a deeper learning level, critical thinking skills, and long-term retention of the course material. Collaborative learning creates social and communication skills, positive attitudes towards class members and course material, and social rapport and group structure (Kreijns, Kirschner, & Jochems, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Because of these potential benefits, we expected students' desire to take a course would increase with their perception of how frequently the instructor fostered collaborative learning opportunities by forming teams or discussion groups, asking students to share ideas and experiences, and asking them to help each other understand ideas or concepts.

Establishing rapport. Students' relationships with instructors are also vitally important (Ormrod, 2008). The kinds of interactions an instructor has with students can affect their level of involvement in a course. For example, student perceptions of harsh or aggressive verbal interactions can have negative effects (Edwards, Martin, Myers, & Wahl, 2007). College students report the greatest satisfaction and motivation to learn from highly supportive teachers and less satisfaction and motivation from moderately and non-supportive teachers (Jones, 2008). Instructors can express support by taking an interest in students' activities, providing extra help on academic tasks, and praising judiciously (Ormrod, 2008). In this study, we hypothesized that students' desire to take a course would be positively correlated with their perception of how frequently the instructor applied the following rapport-building strategies: displaying a personal

interest in students and their learning, finding ways to help students answer their own questions, explaining reasons for criticisms of students' performance, and encouraging student-faculty interactions outside of class.

Encouraging student involvement. Encouraging students' involvement in a class can have positive effects on their commitment to excellence and their contributions to the learning experience (Astin, 1999). Faculty-student interactions (e.g. interactions outside the classroom, email communications, collaborations on research projects, discussions of coursework) are one of the most important variables that influence student participation within the classroom (Qi & Weaver, 2005). Beyond collaborative learning activities, instructors can increase student involvement through online assignments, research projects, and hands-on/practice activities that require them to do something with the knowledge and/or skills they are learning. Students also become more engaged in academic learning when assigned *authentic activities* that require them to solve real-world problems. Examples include writing for authentic audiences (e.g., newspaper readers, blog readers) and constructing maps rather than simply solving workbook exercises on how to interpret maps (Gregg & Leinhardt, 1994). In this study, students' perceptions of the frequency of several teaching methods were hypothesized to correlate positively with students' desire to take a course: (a) encouraging students to use multiple resources (e.g., data banks, library holding, outside experts) to improve understanding; (b) involving students in "hands-on" projects such as research, case studies, or "real life" activities; (c) giving projects, tests, or assignments that require original or creative thinking; and (d) relating course material to real-life situations.

Structuring the classroom experience. A worthwhile instructional goal for students is that they engage in the course material at a level that leaves them with a significant understanding

(Lyke & Young, 2006). Many factors come into play, such as the instructional practices and course procedures around which a course is structured and implemented. When an instructor states course objectives, provides a syllabus, and plans meaningful activities, students know where to focus their studying and how to monitor their progress (Gronlund, 2003). In this study, several strategies for structuring the classroom were examined: explaining the course material clearly and concisely; making it clear how each topic fits into the course; giving tests, projects, and so forth that cover the most important points in the course; scheduling course work in ways which encourage students to stay up-to-date in their work; and providing timely and frequent feedback on tests and reports to help students improve. We hypothesized that students' desire to take a course would be positively correlated with how frequently they perceived that the instructor applied these teaching methods.

Course Characteristics

Using a variety of assessment methods. One course characteristic that could affect students' motivation is whether or not the instructor uses a variety of assessment methods. Students hold strong views about different types of assessment formats, and their opinions significantly influence the approaches they take to learning and studying (Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005). One reason for varying assessment methods is that college students have different preferences for different kinds of assessment (Birenbaum, 1997). Some prefer essay examinations, others objective tests (e.g., multiple choice, true-false, short answer) or authentic assessments (e.g., keeping a portfolio, managing a mock business). Students in the proposed study indicated to what extent their instructor used a variety of assessment methods—not only tests—to assess their progress on relevant learning objectives. We hypothesized a positive

relationship between students' desire to take a course and their perception of how frequently the instructor used a variety of assessment methods.

Using technology in course delivery. The quantity and diversity of educational technologies in college classrooms has increased dramatically over the past two decades. For example, PowerPoint presentations have become a primary means for course delivery (Burke, James, & Ahmadi, 2009). Burke et al. found that both students and instructors believe PowerPoint technology has a favorable impact on note-taking quality, content recall during exams, emphasis on key lecture points, and holding students' attention during class. Furthermore, students find media presentations with cognitively and emotionally relevant materials motivating (Park & Lim, 2007). Therefore, we hypothesized that students' perceptions of how frequently the instructor used technology would be positively correlated with their desire to take the course.

Expectations for Students

As members of learning communities, students have certain privileges and responsibilities (Davis & Murrell, 1993); among these is the personal responsibility to learn, a belief held by many first-year college students (Devlin, 2002). Instructors can make students responsible for learning by holding them accountable for completing assignments, preparing for class, and fulfilling course requirements. Students whose instructors set high expectations for student achievement tend to outperform other students (Marks, Doane, & Secada, 1998). When students achieve high performance standards, their self-efficacy increases and they are more motivated to pursue additional learning (Bandura, 1977). In this study, we examined relationships between students' desire to take a course and their perceptions of how much the

instructor expected them to take responsibility for their own learning and to what extent he/she set high achievement standards.

Student Workload

Student workload has probably been a concern for curriculum designers since formal education started (Kember & Leung, 1998). Kember (2004) defined workload as the student's opinion of the quantity of work required in a course (Kember, 2004); it is also the "pressure placed on students in terms of demands of the syllabus and assessment tasks" (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983, p. 124). Centra (2003) added that workload is comprised of students' ratings of course difficulty, workload, and rate (speed) of the course. Courses students consider either too difficult or too elementary tend to have low student rating ratings, whereas those they consider in between or "just right" receive the highest ratings (Centra, 2003). In this study, three indicants of course workload were correlated with students' desire to take a course: perceived amount of reading, amount of work in other (nonreading) assignments, and difficulty of subject matter. We examined correlations between these variables and students' desire to take the course but offered no research hypotheses. Because of Centra's findings, we recognized the possibility that we might discover nonlinear relationships.

In summary, then, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. Do college students' ratings of how frequently their instructor applies certain teaching methods (i.e., stimulating student interest, fostering student collaboration, establishing rapport, encouraging student involvement, and structuring the classroom experience) correlate with their desire to take the course?

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2. Do college students' ratings of course characteristics (i.e., using a variety of assessment methods, using educational technology to promote learning,) correlate with their desire to take the course?
3. Are students' ratings of course workload (i.e., difficulty of subject-matter, amount of reading, and amount of work in non-reading assignments) related to their desire to take the course?
4. Does students' desire to take a course correlate with their perception of the instructor's expectations of them (i.e., expecting students to take their share of responsibility for learning and setting high achievement standards)?

METHOD

Participants

From 2002 to 2007, 366,597 classes of university/college students from 290 institutions completed The IDEA Center *Student Ratings Diagnostic Form*. The average enrollment in those classes was 22 students, with class sizes ranging from 1 to 909. Most classes completed ratings using the paper-and-pencil response format (93.9%), whereas 6.1% used the online format. The type of institutions included in the IDEA student ratings database varies as follows: 22% two-year, 14% Baccalaureate, 28% Masters, 23% Doctoral, and 13% other. The approximate U.S. regional distribution includes 21% from the East/Northeast, 12% from the Southeast, 39% from the Midwest, 13% from the Rockies/West, and 16% from the Southwest.

Table 1 presents frequencies and percentages of various course characteristics the instructors reported on the *Faculty Information Form*. Among faculty who responded, the greatest percentage of classes (26.3%) came from freshman/sophomores taking a course to meet a general education requirement or distribution requirement. This was followed by 25.2% of

classes with upper-level majors seeking competence or expertise in their academic/professional specialization. Because all student ratings were anonymous and confidential, no other demographic information was available. For 47.4% of respondents, the instructor's primary approach to instruction was lecture. The most frequently identified secondary approach, representing 26.3% of respondents, was discussion/recitation.

Instrumentation

Faculty Information Form (FIF). The FIF is designed to solicit the instructor's perspective about the course. Faculty were allowed to complete the FIF (see Appendix A) at any time during the course. They were asked to rate each of 12 learning objectives as either "Essential," "Important," or of "Minor or No Importance." They also indicated the week day(s) the class meets, the time the class meets, the course number, the number of students enrolled, and a department discipline code. Faculty were also asked several contextual questions about the primary and secondary instructional approaches to the course (e.g., lecture, discussion/recitation, seminar), course requirements (e.g., writing, oral communication, group work), whether any of several factors may have had a positive negative, or neutral impact on students' learning (e.g., physical facilities, student enthusiasm to take the course, technical/instructional support), and finally the primary type of student enrolled (e.g., freshmen/sophomore meeting general education requirements, upperclassmen non-majors, graduate or professional students). Instructors also indicated whether the course was team taught and whether it was taught through distance learning.

Student Ratings Diagnostic Form. The IDEA Center recommends that students complete the *Student Ratings Diagnostic Form* any time after they have completed the first half of the course. It is also recommended that students not complete the ratings the last day of class.

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Students were asked to indicate how frequently their instructor used each of 20 teaching methods, using a scale of 1 = Hardly Ever, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, and 5 = Almost Always.

Students indicated their progress on same 12 learning objectives their instructor rated for importance on the FIF. Students used the scale of 1 = No apparent progress; 2 = Slight progress; I made small gains on this objective; 3 = Moderate progress; I made some gains on this objective; 4 = Substantial progress- I made large gains on this objective; and 5 = Exceptional progress; I made outstanding gains on this objective.

Students responded to additional questions about the amount of reading required, the relative amount of work in (non-reading) assignments, and the relative difficulty of the subject matter, using the scale of 1 = Much less than most courses, 2 = Less than most courses, 3 = About average, 4 = More than most courses, and 5 = Much more than most courses. They also described whether they really wanted to take the course “from this instructor” and whether the instructor used a variety of methods to evaluate student progress, expected students to take their share of responsibility for learning, had high achievement standards, and used educational technology to promote learning. For all these items, students responded by 1 = Definitely false, 2 = More false than true, 3 = In between, 4 = More true than false, or 5 = Definitely true.

Data Sources

Archival data were obtained from files stored at The IDEA Center in Manhattan, Kansas. All data were aggregated by instructor. Hoyt and Lee (2002) performed several analyses on The IDEA student ratings data to examine the reliability of individual items. Courses that contained 13-17 respondents were used for computing split-half reliabilities for each of the survey items. The classes were randomly divided into two groups, and the means were computed and

correlated using each half. The Spearman-Brown Prophecy Formula was then used to estimate the reliabilities for class averages of 12.5, 24.5, 42.5, and 60 (which corresponded to class sizes of 10-14, 15-34, 35-49, and 50+). In addition, standard deviations were computed for each item, along with reliability estimates, to calculate standard errors of measurement (SEM). Average reliability coefficients for individual items ranged from .78 for class sizes of 10-14 students to .94 for class sizes of 50 or more. Standard errors (SE) ranged from .27 to .14. These statistics provide support for the dependability of individual items.

Table 2 presents the 20 teaching methods organized into five subscales. These subscales were developed based on similar ones contained in The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which were designed to assess features of the college environment that promote student learning (Hoyt & Lee, 2002a). Hoyt and Lee (2002a) found that subscale Cronbach internal consistency coefficients ranged from .84 to .94. The authors also demonstrated that each of the five subscales was positively related to students' self-ratings of progress on the 12 objectives Hoyt and Lee (2002b). When the subscales were entered simultaneously into regression models, the percent of variance explained varied from 43.2% to 75.6% with an average of 61.1%. Hoyt (2003) also found that the combination of five subscales explained each of three global measures of teaching effectiveness: "excellence of the teacher" ($R^2 = .85$), "increased positive feelings about the course" ($R^2 = .64$), and "excellence of the course" ($R^2 = .73$). These statistics provide support for the dependability and validity of the five subscales.

Hoyt and Lee (2002b) provided additional support for the validity of the IDEA student ratings. They correlated students' self-ratings of progress on the learning objectives with their ratings of how frequently the instructor emphasized specific teaching methods. For example, the teaching method most highly correlated with progress on the learning objective of "Team skills"

was “Formed teams of “discussion groups” to facilitate learning.” Similarly, progress on “Learning to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems” was most highly correlated with the method of “Encouraged students to use multiple resources to improve understanding.” These kinds of relationships consistently revealed that how frequently an instructor emphasized a specific teaching method correlates positively with students’ self-reported progress on an objective conceptually related to that method.

Another source of validity evidence is found in students’ ratings of their desire to take the course from the instructor. In general, students give much higher “desire” ratings to courses that prepare them for a specific profession than they do for those aimed at general or liberal education. In the current sample, student mean ratings of the desire to take the course “from this instructor” ranged from 3.29 ($SD = .64$) for lower division/general education courses to 3.74 ($SD = .67$) for graduate/professional courses.

RESULTS

Stepwise multiple regression analyses, using backward elimination, were applied to test all hypotheses related to the research questions. This method is well suited for exploratory model building when there is no theoretical justification for ordering explanatory variables by their importance. The procedure first enters all explanatory variables simultaneously into the model; then variables that do not make a statistically a significant contribution when the remaining variables in the model are included are removed one by one. For each model, we computed standardized residuals and Cook’s distance statistics to identify potential outliers, and tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIF) to assess multicollinearity. Cases having Cook’s distance values greater than 1 were considered to overly influence the model’s ability to predict all cases; tolerance values greater than 10 and VIF values less than .1 were considered evidence of

substantial multicollinearity. Values for all regression models were below these criterion thresholds. We also produced scatterplots for the criterion variable with all explanatory variables in order to assess the assumption of linearity. All relationships appeared to be linear.

Research Question 1: Do college students' ratings of how frequently their instructor applies certain teaching methods correlate with their desire to take the course?

Which of the five approaches to teaching is most important in explaining students' desire to take a course from a specific instructor? To investigate this question, means were computed for each of the five a priori subscales described previously. Descriptive statistics, inter-correlations, and Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients for those subscales are presented in Table 3. As indicated in Table 3, all five subscales had positive correlations with the dependent variable. Students had a stronger desire to take the course when they perceived the instructor practiced all five teaching methods frequently.

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis for Model 1. The full model with all variables entered simultaneously was significant, $F(5, 366591) = 93,607.79$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .561$, indicating the set of five approaches to teaching explained approximately 56% of the variance in students' desire to take the course. No variables were removed, which means all five teaching methods contributed significantly to the model.

The standardized beta coefficients and semi-partial correlations presented in Table 4 reveal the relative strengths of the relationships between the subscales and the dependent variable. Stimulating Student Interest ($\beta = .514$) and Establishing Rapport ($\beta = .363$) were the strongest explanatory variables. Students were especially more motivated to take the course when they perceived the instructor stimulated student interest and established rapport.

Research Question 2: Are students' ratings of course characteristics related to their

desire to take the course?

For Model 2, two course characteristics were examined for their influence on students' desire to take the course: "Used a variety of methods to evaluate student progress" and "Used educational technology to promote learning." As indicated in Table 5, both variables were positively correlated with desire to take the course. Entering both explanatory variables simultaneously produced a statistically significant model, $F(2, 365888) = 70937.79, p < .001, R^2 = .28$, indicating the set of two course characteristics explained approximately 28% of the variance in the dependent variable. Neither variable was removed, which indicates both contributed significantly to the model.

Examining the standardized beta coefficients in Table 6 reveals the relative strengths of the relationships. Using a variety of methods—not only tests—to evaluate student progress on course objectives ($\beta = .483$) had the strongest relationship with the criterion variable. So, students who perceived the instructor varied assessment methods were especially more motivated to take the course.

Research Question 3: Are students' ratings of course workload requirements related to their desire to take the course?

For Model 3, the influence of workload requirements was examined by entering the following explanatory variables: "Amount of reading", "Amount of work in other (non-reading assignments)," and "Difficulty of subject matter." As indicated in Table 6, all three explanatory variables had low positive correlations with desire to take the course. Therefore, as students' perceptions of workload increased, their desire to take the course increased slightly. The full model was significant, $F(3, 366593) = 5833.27, p < .001, R^2 = .046$, indicating the set of three course requirements explained approximately 4.6% of the variance in students' desire to take the

course from the instructor. No variables were removed, which means all three contributed significantly to the model.

Examining the standardized beta coefficients in Table 6 reveals “Amount of work in other (non-reading) assignments” had the strongest relationship with the dependent variable. Therefore, as students’ perceptions of the amount of work in non-reading assignments increased, their desire to take the course from the instructor increased slightly. However, this relationship was weak.

Research Question 4: Do students have a stronger desire to take a course when they perceive the instructor sets high expectations for performance?

We entered two explanatory variables concerning instructor expectations into a fourth model: students’ perceptions of whether the instructor expected them to take their share of responsibility for learning and whether the instructor had high achievement standards. As indicated in Table 6, mean scores on these items were relatively high, indicating most instructors were perceived as having high expectations. Both explanatory variables were positively correlated with students’ desire to take the course. So, contrary to what some might expect, students do not necessarily prefer “easy” instructors.

The full model was significant, $F(2, 366030) = 28819.47, p < .001, R^2 = .32$; neither explanatory variable was removed, and in combination they accounted for 32% of the variance in students’ desire to take the course. The standardized beta coefficients in Table 6 indicate that setting high achievements standard was most strongly related to the criterion.

Discussion

The major findings of the study are as follows. First, students report a stronger desire to take a course when the instructor frequently practices methods designed to stimulate interest,

foster student collaboration, establish rapport, encourage involvement, and provide structure.

When students perceive that the instructor frequently stimulates interest and establishes rapport, they report the strongest desire to take the course. Second, students are more motivated to take a course when they perceive that the instructor uses a variety of assessment methods and uses technology to promote learning. Varying assessment methods has the strongest influence. Third, when instructors are perceived as having high expectations for students, desire to take the course increases. Expecting students to assume responsibility for learning and setting high achievement standards are important instructor qualities. The implications of these findings are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

The desire to take a course increases the more the instructor does things to pique student interest. Instructors can stimulate student interest by demonstrating the importance of the subject matter (Zakrajsek, 2004), connecting it with students' personal experiences (Lee, 2004; Theall, 2004), and helping students to set their own objectives (Palardy, 1999). These methods are consistent with Hidi's (1990) concept of personal interest, because they tap into students' related knowledge and experiences. Instructors can also introduce stimulating ideas, events, or activities related to the subject matter, which is consistent with Hidi's (1990) concept of situational interest.

Students also find it more desirable when an instructor makes frequent attempts to establish rapport. Instructors can establish rapport by learning students' names, being available during posted office hours, encouraging various forms of communication (e-mail, phone calls, etc.), responding to student feedback, and establishing positive relationships with students (Lee, 2004). Jones (2008) also found that out-of-class support from the instructor increases student

satisfaction and motivation to learn. The current results indicate students prefer an instructor who tries to build harmonious relationships with them.

The motivation to take a course also increases when the instructor varies assessment methods. Students hold different attitudes about open-ended and multiple-choice questions (Birenbaum & Feldman, 1998), and those attitudes are correlated with the approaches they take to learning and studying (Birenbaum, 1997; Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005). By varying assessment methods, instructors give students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in different formats, such as recall (e.g., short answer or brief essay) recognition (e.g., true-false, matching, multiple choice), writing (e.g., lengthy essay), and performance (e.g., speaking, organizing a portfolio, designing a Web site). The instructor can then assemble the results from several assessments, under different conditions, to make more valid decisions about grades.

Contrary to what some might expect, students do not prefer an “easy” instructor who fails to hold them accountable. They express greater preference for an instructor who sets high achievement standards and expects them to take their share of responsibility for learning. This supports Centra's (2003) finding that students give lower ratings to courses they consider too elementary. The belief, then, that students give higher ratings to instructors who have low standards finds no support in the current study.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample was one of convenience. The population of student ratings came from The IDEA Center's clients during the years 2002 to 2007. Any statistical generalizations beyond this sample would be unwarranted. However, a case could be made for non-statistical generalization, given the geographical and institutional diversity of the sample. Second, because all data came from the IDEA student ratings system the researcher had no influence on the nature or format of the questions posed to students. The

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research questions for this study were therefore limited to the response items used in the IDEA system. Additional questions related to other issues that might correlate with students' desire to take a course from a specific instructor will have to be addressed in future research. Third, the study was conducted under the assumption that students respond honestly to ratings of instruction and that such ratings are valid and reliable. Much research has been conducted examining factors that influence student ratings of instruction. These factors include, for example, gender of the instructor, class size, expected grade, academic field, course difficulty, course workload, type of institution (two year vs. four year), teaching experience, and reasons for taking a course (required vs. non-required) (Centra, 2003). This study does not propose to argue for or against the validity or reliability of student ratings. However, evidence was provided regarding the reliability and validity of IDEA student ratings. Nonetheless, the researcher recognizes that conclusions and generalizations made from evidence collected from any measurement instrument are limited by that instrument's psychometric properties. Fourth, because students responded to all questions at the same point in time, all relationships hypothesized were correlational. No attempt should be made to posit cause-effect relationships between instructor behaviors, course characteristics, workload requirements, instructor expectations, and students' desire to take a course. Fifth, information was not available about which point in time during the course the instructor administered the IDEA instrument. Therefore, the study provides no information about how variance in the administration date might have affected the results. Finally, students who completed the IDEA instrument most likely completed their respective course. Therefore, this study provides no information about students who dropped out of the course prior to completing the instrument.

We focused exclusively on course and instructor characteristics that influence students' desire to take a course. Future research should address the relative importance of personal and contextual issues students face in making course selection decisions. For example, are job

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opportunities, preferences for certain careers, and expected future compensation levels more important than course and instructor characteristics? Is student interest in the course topic and the applicability of course material to one's major relatively more important than instructional methods? Do student preferences for teaching approaches and course characteristics vary by student gender, age, and culture? Moreover, what role do peers play in helping students to decide which courses to take? Given increasing cost consciousness on the part of students and the opportunity costs of making bad course selection decisions, research in this area is becoming increasingly important to institutions of higher education.

Instructors play an important role in students' decisions regarding course selection. Students are especially drawn to instructors who stimulate interest, establish rapport, use a variety of assessment methods, expect students to share responsibility for learning, and have high achievement standards. These instructor and course characteristics are consistent with good instructional practices and could easily be adopted by most instructors.

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Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Course Characteristics

Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
Student Type		
Freshman/sophomore general ¹	81,091	26.3
Freshman/sophomore specific ²	56,762	18.4
Upperclassmen non-majors ³	20,165	6.5
Upperclassmen majors ⁴	77,662	25.2
Graduate or professional school	37,893	12.3
Combination of two or more types	34,607	11.2
Total	308,180	100.0
Missing	58,417	15.9
Primary Approach to Instruction		
Lecture	171,535	47.4
Discussion/recitation	43,454	12.0
Seminar	21,721	6.0
Skill/activity	42,130	11.6
Laboratory	15,181	4.2
Field experience	3,448	1.0
Studio	10,405	2.9
Multi-media	4,024	1.1
Practicum/clinic	3,434	0.9
Other	46,625	12.9
Total	361,957	100.0
Missing	4,640	1.3

Table continues

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Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
Secondary Approach to Instruction		
Lecture	54,587	15.2
Discussion/recitation	94,756	26.3
Seminar	12,348	3.4
Skill/activity	50,288	14.0
Laboratory	27,088	7.5
Field experience	7,493	2.1
Studio	3,737	1.0
Multi-media	10,741	3.0
Practicum/clinic	4,584	1.3
Other	94,163	26.2
Total	359,785	100.0
Missing	6,812	1.9

Table 2

IDEA Teaching Method Subscales

Subscale/Items

Stimulating Student Interest

- Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter
- Stimulated students to intellectual effort beyond that required by most courses
- Introduced stimulating ideas about the subject
- Inspired students to set and achieve goals which really challenged them

Fostering Student Collaboration

- Formed “teams” or “discussion groups” to facilitate learning
- Asked students to share ideas and experiences with others whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own
- Asked students to help each other understand ideas or concepts

Establishing Rapport

- Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning
- Found ways to help students answer their own questions
- Explained the reasons for criticisms of students' academic performance
- Encourage student-faculty interactions outside of class (office visits, phone calls, e-mail, etc.)

Encouraging Student Involvement

- Encouraged students to use multiple resources (e.g. data banks, library holdings, outside experts) to improve understanding
- Related course material to real life situations
- Involved students' in “hands-on” projects such as research, case studies, or “real-life” activities
- Gave projects, tests, or assignments that required original or creative thinking

Table continues

Subscale/Items

Structuring Classroom Experience

Scheduled course work (class activities, test, and projects) in ways which encouraged students' to stay up-to-date in their work

Made it clear how each topic fit into the course

Explained course material clearly and concisely

Gave tests, projects, etc. that covered the most important points of the course

Provided timely and frequent feedback on tests, reports, projects, etc. to help students improve

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Model 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	α
1. Course desire	3.54	.71	.73	.59	.72	.61	.65	
2. Scale SSI	4.13	.54		.78	.91	.84	.87	.94
3. Scale FSC	3.96	.63			.78	.82	.71	.87
4. Scale ER	4.15	.52				.79	.86	.92
5. Scale ESI	4.05	.59					.73	.88
6. Scale SCE	4.27	.50						.93

Note. All correlations significant at the $p < .001$ level. Scale means are means of course means, each based on differing number of items. SSI = Stimulating Student Interest; FSC = Facilitating Student Collaboration; ER = Establishing Rapport; ESI = Encouraging Student Involvement; SCE = Structuring Classroom Experience.

Table 4

Inferential Statistics for Variables in Model 1

Variable	Standardized β	t	p	<i>Semi-partial r</i>
Scale SSI	.514	152.21	.001	.17
Scale FSC	-.008	-3.693	.001	-.004
Scale ER	.363	123.19	.001	.13
Scale ESI	-.056	-23.85	.001	-.03
Scale SCE	-.064	-26.47	.001	-.03

Note. SSI = Stimulating Student Interest; FSC = Facilitating Student Collaboration; ER = Establishing Rapport; ESI = Encouraging Student Involvement; SCE = Structuring Classroom Experience.

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Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Individual Items

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Course desire	3.54	.71	.52	.33	.06	.18	.14	.51	.55
2. Variety of assessment	3.93	.59		.51	.08	.36	-.02	.60	.58
3. Educational technology	3.92	.72			.17	.22	.06	.37	.38
4. Amount of reading	3.22	.74				.22	.41	.20	.24
5. Amount of work	3.48	.58					.54	.35	.44
6. Difficulty	3.46	.58						.25	.36
7. Responsibility for learning	4.34	.35							.78
8. Standards	4.18	.43							

Note. All correlations significant at the $p < .001$ level.

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Table 6

Inferential Statistics for Variables in Models 2 Through 4

Model/Variable	Standardized β	t	p	<i>Semi-partial r</i>
Model 2				
Variety of assessment	.483	295.39	.001	.42
Educational technology	.080	48.81	.001	.07
Model 3				
Amount of reading	.017	9.59	.001	.02
Amount of work	.159	81.56	.001	.13
Difficulty	.070	33.59	.001	.05
Model 4				
Responsibility for learning	.224	102.50	.001	.14
Achievement standards	.369	168.59	.001	.23

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