



HOLDING UP THE MIRROR

**Raising awareness of behaviours that impede good
tutor-student relationships**



Project Report

ADAM SMITH COLLEGE
INSPIRING LEARNING



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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
1 Introduction	3
2 Context	3
3 Rationale	4
4 Aim and Outcome of the Research	6
5 Design of the Study	7
5.1 Ethical Considerations	7
5.2 Methodology	7
5.3 Limitations	8
5.4 Participants	8
5.5 Data Collection	8
5.6 Data Analysis	9
6 Findings	10
6.1 Study 1: Learner Perceptions of Tutor Behaviours	10
6.2 Study 2: Tutor Perceptions of Learner Behaviours	12
7 Conclusions	13
7.1 Student Perceptions	13
7.2 Tutor Perceptions	13
7.3 Student/Tutor Comparison	14
7.4 Comparison with Other Studies	14
8 Applications of this Study	15
9 Discussion	15
9.1 Correspondence and Dissonance	15
9.2 Connections	16
9.3 Learning Community	17
9.4 Moving Forward	17
Bibliography	18
Appendix 1: Pilot Study 1 Survey Instrument	20
Appendix 2: Profile of Pilot Study 1 Participants	22
Appendix 3: Pilot Study 2 Survey Instrument	24
Appendix 4: Profile of Pilot Study 2 Participants	26
Appendix 5: Main Study 1 Survey Instrument	29
Appendix 6: Profile of Main Study 1 Participants	34
Appendix 7: Main Study 2 Survey Instrument	37
Appendix 8: Profile of Main Study 2 Participants	42
Appendix 9: Comparison with Other Studies	44

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us

(Robert Burns, *To a Louse*)

1 INTRODUCTION

Much of the contemporary discourse concerning the work of Scotland's colleges is underpinned by a social constructivist concept of learning and teaching as a dynamic and interactive process, with learners and tutors engaged in shared knowledge building. This shift away from traditional, transmission-type models towards more learner-centred ones involves us in "re-imagining relationships, ownership and practice" (Bovill, 2010).

The success, or otherwise, of learning approached as a joint endeavour depends to no small extent on the quality of the learner-tutor relationship (Cornelius-White, 2007). There is, therefore, a need for educator and learner to understand the learning and teaching experience from each other's perspective. This study, which was initiated and sponsored by the Further Education Regional Research Network (FERRN), seeks to provide such insights and to generate evidence which will help colleges to take forward strategic objectives related to learner engagement, staff self-evaluation, and effective learning and teaching processes.

It draws on work undertaken in university settings in the USA, which aimed to raise awareness of behaviours that impede tutor-student relationships and thus effective learning. In Study 1, learners identified the things that tutors do that irritate them and the things that help them to learn. In Study 2, tutors were asked to do the same with regard to learner behaviours. The responses were analysed and are being disseminated throughout the sector, providing a vehicle both for individual reflection and also for discussion within initial and continuing professional learning programmes. The results may also be shared with students, as part of their college induction or in class discussion, encouraging them to be our partners in the learning/teaching endeavour.

2 CONTEXT

The changing role of Scotland's colleges, and the people who work and study in them, has been recognised by those who make and implement policy. It is accompanied by a new emphasis on learner-engagement and on the lecturer as a self-evaluative practitioner.

Drivers include the Scottish Government's Review of Scotland's Colleges, a key strand of which is improving the overall learning experience for learners. The report stresses the importance of reflective practice and the continuing professional development of college lecturers, as well as the need to hear the varied voices of learners (Scottish Government, 2007). This is reinforced in the Scottish Funding Council's latest Corporate Plan which gives a commitment to the development of a lifelong learning system in Scotland that is focused on the continuous enhancement of students' experiences of learning (Scottish Funding Council, 2009). An HMIE study of learning in Scottish colleges stressed the importance of social interaction and communication among learners and tutors, and reported that "the quality of relationships is seen as a central influence on the quality of the learning" (HMIE, 2004, p.8). This is reflected in the new HMIE Quality Framework for colleges which encourages more self-evaluation and improvement activity and has Learner

Engagement as one of its Key Principles (HMIE, 2008). Colleges are posed questions in relation to how well learners are engaged in enhancing their own learning, and also the extent to which staff participate in, and reflect on, professional discussion to enhance learning and teaching.

These themes have been explored by the sector's agency for lecturers' professional development. The 2008 Scotland's Colleges publication, "What's Next For Learning and Teaching in Scotland's Colleges?" identifies Learning and Learning Relationships as one of the key aspects of progressing next practice. The sector is urged to "strengthen staff professional learning opportunities by building on the growing appetite for knowledge and understanding of the learning process and in recognition of the significance of the relationship between learner and college" (Scotland's Colleges, 2008, p.2).

Learners, too, are driving moves towards activity, rather than passivity, in learning encounters. Through its work with learners, student associations and staff, SPARQS (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) supports quality enhancement by encouraging effective student engagement in all aspects of the life and work of Scotland's colleges and universities, including the learning and teaching process. Increasingly, younger learners bring with them, to further and higher education, school experiences and expectations which reflect this concept of learners and teachers as co-creators of knowledge. Many have experienced co-operative/collaborative learning approaches at school and, as the Curriculum for Excellence becomes embedded, this will increasingly be the case.

Scotland's colleges are therefore operating in an environment which strongly encourages both the professional development of college lecturers as self-evaluative practitioners, and greater learner involvement in shaping the learning experience. This study seeks to help us further these twin aims.

3 RATIONALE

This study is underpinned by a number of assumptions:

- (i) The learning/teaching endeavour has a profound social dimension; the quality of the tutor-student relationship has a significant effect on learning outcomes.
- (ii) Good tutor-student relationships are therefore desirable, but these can be damaged by tutor behaviours that are perceived negatively by students and by student behaviours that are perceived negatively by tutors.
- (iii) Tutors and students may be quite unaware of behaviours which compromise the learning partnership. Addressing this ignorance may lead to a reduction in such behaviours which, in turn, may help to improve the working relationship and thus learning.
- (iv) There is a need to create more opportunities to listen to learners and involve them in the learning process.
- (v) Continual improvement and self-evaluation enhance not just the effectiveness of tutors, but also their levels of professional satisfaction and self-esteem.

A number of studies have sought to identify behaviours that impede the creation and maintenance of tutor-student rapport in the classroom (Appleby, 1990; Garko et al, 1994; Ludewig, 1994; Malikow, 2007; Miley & Gonsalves, 2003; Penman & McCann, 1998; Rallis, 1994; Walsh & Maffei, 1994). Most have concentrated on teacher

behaviours, though Appleby (1990) explored both professor and student perceptions, and produced two lists of behaviours that are most antithetical to the teaching-learning enterprise. However, these studies have been undertaken in university settings in the United States. To our knowledge, no similar work has been undertaken (a) in Scotland or (b) in the context of a further/higher education college.

There is strong evidence that relationships between tutors and learners in Scotland's colleges are already generally very positive. HMIE reviews frequently commend colleges' positive staff-learner relationships, while Scotland's Colleges has identified as a key characteristic of colleges "the nature and quality of the nurturing learning relationships that they have with their learners" (Scotland's Colleges, 2008, p.6).

However, there may be differences between how staff and students perceive the quality of the working relationship. Given that college staff are getting older, and the student demographic continues to change (Scottish Government, 2006, 2007), there is potential for misperceptions on both sides of the tutor-student relationship. If they do not ask, staff may be unaware of how students perceive their teaching, and may continue to hold erroneous beliefs about what students deem important, which may undermine the relationship (Garko et al, 1994; Miley & Gonsalves, 2003). The same may be said of student perceptions of staff behaviours.

Although college faculty and students are inextricably involved in the teaching/learning process, they form two distinct societies. They are generally from different generations, may possess opposing value systems, and often hold divergent opinions about the appropriateness of behaviors ... When the values, opinions, and behaviors of teachers and students match, the classroom is in relative harmony. When they do not, the teaching/learning process is likely to suffer (Appleby, 1990, p.41).

Previous work suggests that a study such as this has a number of potential benefits:

- (a) learners feel heard and appreciated (Penman & McCann, 1998);
- (b) learners can comment freely on any aspect of the tutor-student relationship and may remark on behaviours that would not have been anticipated (Miley & Gonsalves, 2003);
- (c) the whole community of Scotland's colleges can see and benefit from the findings;
- (d) easily-remedied, but hitherto unknown, problems can be immediately addressed (in Penman and McCann's study, these included arriving to class earlier, having greater sensitivity to scheduling assignments, giving more clarity in grading criteria and taking extra care to review previous lessons);
- (e) the fact that participants name behaviours, and not individuals, means that lecturers and learners can make adjustments to their behaviours without feeling they are being criticised (Miley & Gonsalves, 2003; Penman & McCann, 1998).

By raising awareness of the impact of particular behaviours, this study seeks to improve the quality of the learning/teaching environment and thus enhance the learning process. Ultimately, better learning experiences for both students and staff should have a positive effect on retention, achievement and job satisfaction.

4 AIM AND OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH

The main aim of the research is to provide college lecturers and students with information that will allow us to reflect on our behaviours and improve our relationships.

The intended overall outcome for the research is a greater ability for tutors and students to see the classroom experience from the other's perspective. Amending our behaviours in the light of new insights and sensitivity to one another's needs should improve the learning/teaching process.

This aim and intended outcome give rise to the following research questions:

- 1 What tutor behaviours do students believe are most detrimental to the learning and teaching process?
- 2 What tutor behaviours do students believe are most helpful to the learning and teaching process?
- 3 What student behaviours do tutors believe are most detrimental to the learning and teaching process?
- 4 What student behaviours do tutors believe are most helpful to the learning process?

5 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

5.1 Ethical considerations

When participants were invited to take part, they were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and of their right to choose not to participate.

Although participants were asked to name behaviours, not individuals, sensitivities around naming irritating behaviours were acknowledged, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity given and honoured. All records were stored in a locked cupboard in an office which is accessed by a coded entry system.

The co-ordinator in each participating college has been sent a copy of the findings for internal dissemination.

As a token of thanks for their co-operation, both student and staff participants were invited to enter a prize draw for a £20 high street voucher which has since taken place.

It is worth noting that where a similar approach has been used in earlier studies, the researchers anticipated that they might receive a number of mean-spirited, angry or unhelpful responses, but that this did not happen (Miley & Gonsalves, 2003). This also held true for our study.

5.2 Methodology

The research questions suggested a survey approach; the practicalities of reaching a large number of people in different organisations, and analysing their responses fairly easily and cheaply, pointed to questionnaires. Given that the study is rooted in a social constructivist view of learning, and a belief that college tutors and students construct knowledge through their interactions, a pilot study was carried out so that we could develop questionnaire items grounded in the experiences of our students and tutors. The pilot study was undertaken between January and March 2010 and the main study between April and June 2010.

The pilot study

In the pilot study, two short surveys were administered (Appendices 1 and 3) – one of learners and one of tutors – which allowed participants to construct and communicate their own accounts of barriers and facilitators of good staff-student relationships. Participants were simply asked to list three behaviours which help, and three behaviours which impede the learning process. This might have been challenging for some students and so a few general headings were suggested as a stimulus for reflection.

Participants were purposely selected to represent a range of subject areas at both NC and HN levels. The Pilot Study 1 sample comprised one NC and one HN group of learners from each of the six participating colleges, a total sample of 174 (see Appendix 2 for profile of participants). The Pilot Study 2 sample comprised 55 tutors from the six colleges, representing both genders and a range of subject areas and experience (see Appendix 4 for profile of participants).

Three raters analysed the responses to the open-ended pilot study surveys and, independently, developed categories. They then came together in order to reach

inter-rater agreement and to develop the data-gathering tools for the main studies. The two resultant questionnaires (Appendices 5 and 7) were subsequently trialled with 15 students (7 NC and 8 HN) and with 11 tutors from the lead college, none of whom took part in the main survey. No difficulties or ambiguities were uncovered.

The main study

5.3 Limitations

The study was limited to the experiences of staff and students working in the participating colleges. Participation was voluntary and the co-operation of class tutors was required, so a degree of pragmatism was necessary with regard to the groups of staff and learners that could be reached and recruited. The sample was not a standard random sample and responses are based on participants' subjective judgements, viewed through the lenses of their own experiences.

It follows that the findings will not necessarily apply to other contexts, though they may help illuminate the landscape.

5.4 Participants

Six colleges, active in the FERRN partnership, participated in the pilot study¹. One college was unable to participate in the subsequent main study which was undertaken in the other five colleges. FERRN Steering Group members took on the role of co-ordinators for the research in their own colleges, and the Research Unit of Adam Smith College was responsible for leading and managing the study.

5.4.1 Student Participants

Participation was voluntary. The co-ordinator in each college identified NC and HN full-time groups, which broadly reflected the college's NC/HN balance and range of subject areas, and liaised with course tutors to invite learners to participate (see Appendix 6 for profile of participants).

5.4.2 Tutor Participants

Again, participation was voluntary. Staff delivering to participating student groups were informed of the purpose and nature of the study and invited to participate (see Appendix 8 for profile of participants).

5.5 Data Collection

In Study 1, the questionnaire developed from the pilot study responses was administered to NC and HN students in the five colleges, representing a range of subject areas. The co-ordinator read the instruction and students were given adequate time to complete the questionnaire. They were told that the purpose of the study was to help staff improve their teaching, and assurances of student and staff anonymity were stressed. Across the five colleges, a total of 547 questionnaires were returned.

¹ Adam Smith College, Carnegie College, Jewel & Esk College, Perth College UHI, Stevenson College and West Lothian College

In Study 2, co-ordinators invited staff, who delivered to the participating student groups, to participate. Across the five colleges, a total of 106 completed questionnaires were returned.

In both cases, electronic means of data collection were rejected in favour of printed questionnaires. This allowed all options to be presented on one side of A4 and it was emphasised to participants that they should read all of them before selecting their 'top 5'.

5.6 Data Analysis

SPSS software was used to analyse the frequency of responses in each category, giving us four 'league tables': the most helpful and irritating behaviours displayed by tutors, and the most helpful and irritating behaviours displayed by learners. These are presented in the following section.

Use of the software also gives us the capacity to produce results for each individual participating college as well as the whole study, and to compare responses by variables such as gender or vocational area.

6 Findings

6.1 Study 1 Learner Perceptions of Tutor Behaviours

	Irritating Behaviours	Frequency
Top 10	Talks too much/for too long	169
	Assumes we already know things we don't know	143
	Treats students differently (has favourites/picks on individuals)	130
	Is patronising or condescending	126
	Doesn't give clear information about course/unit requirements	109
	Doesn't explain topics clearly	101
	Repeats the same things over and over	101
	(Learners indicated tutors had no irritating behaviours)	99
	Goes off at tangents on irrelevant things	95
	Crams in a lot of work just before an assessment	88
	Is serious/lacking in humour	86
	Doesn't listen to me or respond to my questions	84
	Is unhelpful	82
	Puts down students or their work in front of others	81
	Doesn't give notes or handouts to support learning	81
	Is slow to mark or return work	81
	Treats me like a child	80
	Is moody or grumpy	75
	Is arrogant or rude	73
	Doesn't give adequate feedback on progress	73
	Gives short notice of assessment	63
	Doesn't do what they say they'll do	61
	Fails to control disruptive students	60
	Speaks in a monotonous voice	57
	Is too strict	55
	Doesn't include practical activity	51
	Comes late to class	51
	Leaves the class for spells or has long breaks	51
	Is disorganised	50
	Makes jokes that are not funny	49
	Compares us unfavourably with other classes	42
	Has poor personal hygiene	41
	Is absent and nobody tells us	41
	Doesn't include discussion or interaction in teaching	30
	Comes unprepared to class	29
	Over-uses technology (e.g. DVDs, PowerPoint, Internet)	18
	Has to ask other tutors for guidance	18
	Comes too close when talking to me	10
	Other	1
	Total responses	2735

	Helpful Behaviours	Frequency
Top 10	Is friendly and approachable	240
	Treats me with respect/like an adult	198
	Gives us good notes/handouts to support our learning	186
	Has a sense of humour	167
	Gives helpful feedback	159
	Prepares us well for assessment	154
	Uses humour and fun in teaching	151
	Shows enthusiasm for the subject and makes it interesting	127
	Is helpful and supportive	119
	Explains topics fully and clearly	114
	Treats everyone fairly	98
	Gives clear information about the course/unit requirements	96
	Gives one-to-one teaching when required	79
	Encourages me	77
	Takes time to make sure everyone understands	73
	Listens to me and shows understanding	65
	Uses a variety of teaching methods	56
	Responds to questions	55
	Interacts with class, gets everyone involved	55
	Includes practical activities/demonstrations	55
	Relates learning to personal experiences	51
	Comes to class prepared	41
	Uses technology for learning (e.g. PowerPoint, VLE, Internet)	38
	Includes class discussion about topics	37
	Provides opportunities for revision	37
	Comes to class on time	32
	Keeps good class order	28
	Gives study time	27
	Uses quizzes/games to test learning	24
	Includes group activities/tasks	23
	Shows good personal organisation	22
	Stays focused on the topic	19
	Gives homework exercises	11
	(No helpful behaviours selected)	6
	Has a classroom helper	1
	Other	1
	Total responses	2722

6.2 Study 2 Tutor Perceptions of Learner Behaviours

	Irritating Behaviours	Frequency
Top 10	Has poor or irregular attendance	49
	Expects to gain unit without putting effort into developing skills/knowledge	49
	Disrupts teaching (e.g. chatting/laughing)	42
	Is rude or disrespectful towards me or fellow students	36
	Comes unprepared to class (e.g. without pen/folder/kit)	34
	Uses a mobile phone in class	27
	Distracts other students from their work	26
	Doesn't take responsibility for own learning or actions	26
	Doesn't focus on tasks in class	25
	Talks over me or other students	25
	Doesn't work independently – expects to be 'spoon-fed' by tutor	22
	Gives up/says something is too hard without listening or trying	19
	Doesn't listen when course work is being covered	19
	Has an arrogant attitude	18
	Arrives late to class	17
	Doesn't pay attention to instructions	17
	Ignores advice, feedback	15
	Verbally expresses disinterest, not wanting to be here	14
	Doesn't participate in class activities/discussions	14
	Doesn't do work assigned outside class	13
	Physically expresses disinterest (e.g. head on desk, feet on chair)	12
	Doesn't meet deadlines for handing in work	8
	Is argumentative	3
	Total responses	530

	Helpful Behaviours	Frequency
Top 10	Is motivated/enthusiastic/willing to work	84
	Has good attendance at classes	66
	Takes responsibility for own learning	51
	Comes to class prepared/equipped	43
	Pays attention/listens in class	43
	Shows respect for fellow students and staff	43
	Asks for help when needed	42
	Participates in class discussions/activities	40
	Comes to class on time	22
	Submits work on time	21
	Takes opportunities to extend learning outside class	18
	Asks questions	17
	Keep their work organised	11
	Gives me feedback/suggestions for improvement	10
	Is polite/well-mannered	9
	Completes homework tasks	6
	Supports fellow students in their learning	3
	(Nothing selected)	1
	Total responses	530

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Student Perceptions

From the student responses, a number of factors can be identified that contribute to positive relationships with tutors: communication, organisation, pedagogy, social interaction and integrity.

Communication

Learners want to have topics explained to them clearly, in a context of clarity, about the requirements of the course they are following. Barriers arise when tutors do not check learners' prior knowledge and assume they already know things they don't know.

Organisation

Relations are undermined when tutors arrive late to class, are unprepared, or are slow to mark or return work. They are further hindered when assessments are crammed in at the end of the course or are given at short notice.

Pedagogy

Students appreciate tutors who use a variety of methods and who include practical activities or demonstrations. They want interaction in the classroom with a tutor who stays focused on the topic, and supports learning with helpful notes and handouts. They also appreciate constructive feedback.

Social interaction

The students in this study give primacy to this aspect of the classroom experience. They want the student-tutor relationship to be a mutually-respectful, adult-to-adult one in which they feel safe to ask questions and sometimes "have a laugh", in the knowledge that any disruptive behaviour will be managed.

Integrity

It is very important to students to have tutors who are helpful and supportive, who encourage and take extra time and effort to help their students succeed. They respond to tutors who demonstrate genuine commitment and enthusiasm for their subject and their work. But more than that, they need tutors to be trustworthy: to do what they say they will do, and to deal fairly and honestly with them.

It is worth noting that a number of student respondents indicated, either by explicit text or by leaving all categories unticked, that their tutors had no irritating behaviours. This suggests that many learners enjoy very positive relations with their tutors, though it may be that some were reluctant to indicate these, despite assurances of anonymity.

7.2 Tutor Perceptions

As for the tutors, their pilot responses produced a narrower range of items which might be categorised under the general heading of Partnership. Their responses hint at an unspoken 'learning contract' and the notion that the learner has to fulfil their

side of the bargain for fruitful tutor-student relations to flourish. The terms of this 'learning contract' include respect, responsibility and commitment.

Respect

What appear to tutors to be disrespectful, rude or disruptive behaviours towards them, or other students, hinder the creation of an environment within which effective learning can occur.

Responsibility

After poor attendance, an attitude of expecting to gain a unit without putting in any effort was the factor most tutors found disruptive to the tutor-student relationship. Tutors want students to share the responsibility for their learning, and to demonstrate this by participating in class activities, asking questions, completing assigned work, paying attention to feedback and working independently.

Commitment

Tutors can be frustrated by students who seem to give up at the first difficulty, who say that something is too hard without really listening or trying. For tutors, commitment is demonstrated by students who turn up regularly and on time, with the right equipment, prepared to work both in class and outside class time.

7.3 Student/Tutor Comparison

Comparing the two studies, it appears, as suggested by Miley and Gonsalves (2003), that students and tutors do not necessarily see the teaching enterprise in the same light. Our findings, like theirs, show that the social dimensions of the student-tutor relationship are very important to students, less so to tutors who focus more on the procedural aspects of teaching. It seems, then, that Ivers is right when he claims that "by improving a classroom's affective environment we can enhance the students' learning and overall college experience" (Ivers, 2007, p.57).

7.4 Comparison with Other Studies

Section 3 made reference to seven other studies. These were all undertaken in university settings in the USA. Five investigated student perceptions of irritating tutor behaviours only. Appleby also looked at tutor perceptions of irritating student behaviours. One (Garko et al) considered the factors of a positive student-tutor relationship. The various 'league tables' are attached at Appendix 9 alongside those of this study.

These previous studies are not strictly comparable with this study because they concern different populations (university as opposed to college), occupying different countries and cultures. The methodologies, sample sizes and category labels also vary. Many of the responses in the other studies are comments on the formal lecture delivery style and testing regimes common in universities, while our responses reflect the different expectations and experiences of (mainly) younger learners in relatively small college classes. Nonetheless, when the university-specific responses are set aside, the degree of overlap is striking. It seems that university students, too, feel that the tutor-student relationship is enhanced when tutors demonstrate respect, approachability, effective pedagogy, good organisation and clear communication. In turn, university staff crave commitment and respectful behaviours on the part of

learners. Fundamentally, then, good classroom relations are rooted in good human interaction, regardless of the context.

8 APPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Individual lecturers can read the results of this study and use them as a stimulus for reflecting on their own practice and, where appropriate, making changes. They may even choose to imitate the model and gather data from their own students (Appleby, 1990; Malikow, 2007, Rallis, 1994).

I have found that just asking these questions encouraged students to be my partners in teaching and learning in an atmosphere of mutual respect (Rallis, 1994, p.258)

The results may inform elements of initial training programmes for college lecturers (Malikow, 2007). As part of a continuing professional learning programme, they can also be used as a stimulus for discussion among colleagues about what adjustments they have made over the years to improve their relationships with learners (Appleby, 1990; Rallis, 1994).

The findings can certainly be shared with students as a springboard for discussion about helpful and unhelpful behaviours, either at induction or at other times, thus helping them to become reflective, critical thinkers in a learning environment of mutual respect and trust (Appleby, 1990).

9 DISCUSSION

9.1 Correspondence and Dissonance

Despite their differences, a number of correspondences emerge in student and tutor perceptions of helpful and unhelpful behaviours, suggesting that students and tutors are not dissimilar in terms of what triggers positive and negative reactions. For example:

- Tutors are irritated by students who come late to class
- Students are irritated by tutors who come late to class

- Tutors are irritated by students who come unprepared to class
- Students are irritated by tutors who come unprepared to class

- Tutors are irritated by students who appear arrogant or rude
- Students are irritated by tutors who appear arrogant or rude

- Tutors want students to show enthusiasm/motivation
- Students want tutors to show enthusiasm/motivation

- Tutors want students to show them and others respect
- Students want tutors to show them and others respect

- Tutors want students to honour deadlines for handing in work
- Students want tutors to honour deadlines for returning work

- Tutors want students to listen to them
- Students want tutors to listen to them

But there is dissonance too. Pilot study responses suggested that students resent what they perceive to be ‘double standards’ exhibited by tutors, for example:

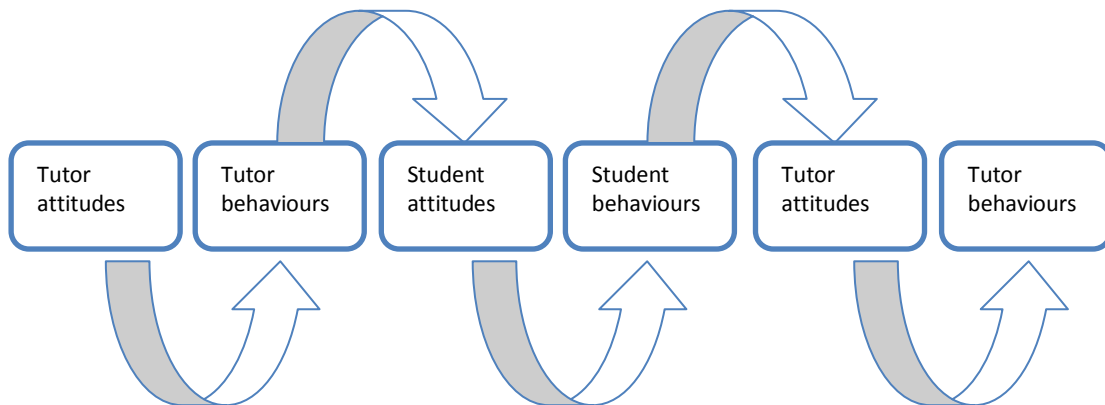
“telling you to be on time when they are late themselves” (NC student, College B).

The ‘important telephone call’, which made the tutor late, may not be considered a valid reason for a student’s lateness. Appleby refers to this as “the creeping egocentricism that often develops insidiously as they [teachers] leave their student years farther and farther behind” (Appleby, 1990, p.45), while Rallis lays down the challenge:

If we believe in empowering students and respecting their diversity, in challenging them to be reflective, critical thinkers, then we need to rethink approaches that put ourselves on pedestals (Rallis, 1994, p.261).

9.2 Connections

It may be that there are vicious/virtuous spirals at play here, with negative or positive behaviours on the part of one stimulating negative or positive behaviours on the part of the other. This is not to suggest simple causality, but to acknowledge that in the complex interactions of the classroom, attitudes are manifested in behaviours, and that tutors and students interpret and respond to the behaviours they observe in others.



Students may interpret tutors’ turning up late/unprepared for lessons as demonstrating lack of respect for them and their learning, which may provoke disrespectful behaviours on their part. And are students likely to ask questions if they perceive the tutor as unapproachable, or have heard her/him ‘put down’ other learners? When it comes to delivery, students say they dislike tutors who talk too much/speak in a monotonous voice/repeat the same things over and over/go off at tangents. It may be that such behaviours can sometimes be linked to irritating student behaviours cited by tutors, such as poor attendance/not paying attention/distracting other students/expressing disinterest. These in turn may lead tutors to become grumpy/lacking in humour/patronising/too strict, thus further eroding the classroom climate.

On the other hand, students say they respond positively to tutors whose classes are organised, varied and interesting, and may be influenced to attend, pay attention and participate, which in turn may make the tutor more disposed to be friendly, helpful and good humoured.

It seems reasonable to suppose that honest discussion of the impact of these behaviours might lead to new understandings and thus improve the quality of the learning environment.

9.3 Learning Community

The notion of building a learning community in which such open discussion can take place has implications for how tutors perceive their roles, and for their initial and continuing training. Many of the students' negative responses – too much tutor talk, repetition, lack of discussion/interaction, etc – suggest experiences of a traditional, 'chalk and talk' classroom environment, with the tutor-as-expert transmitting knowledge to relatively passive learners. There may well be points on the learning journey when such transmission-type approaches are entirely appropriate. However, as already noted, in both schools and colleges, students are increasingly experiencing the classroom as a learning community in which they are encouraged to think creatively and work with others to find solutions to problems. Their expectations are changing, and this is reflected in their appreciation of tutors who interact with the class and get everyone involved, incorporate group tasks and include practical activities. Staff who are able to adopt such approaches and who understand the benefits of paying attention to community-building in the classroom are likely to be at ease with open discussion with students. Others, still rooted in more didactic approaches, may find this more challenging and be more susceptible to involvement in the vicious spiral previously referred to.

9.4 Moving Forward

Building and maintaining a sense of a genuine learning partnership is therefore the challenge facing college lecturers (and their students), but it can seem a daunting one. As a first step, tutors can use these findings to raise their own awareness of student interpretations of their behaviours, and subsequently make efforts to minimise the unhelpful behaviours and maximise the helpful ones. Certainly, positive actions, such as returning work more promptly or making appropriate use of technology in teaching, are likely to improve the classroom climate. But a 'tick-box', atomistic review of behaviours will not generate the deeper understandings that help tutors to maximise their teaching potential - and may not be sustainable.

More fundamentally, the findings provide a basis for tutors to critically reflect on not just the behaviours, but also the attitudes and beliefs that drive them. Such critical self-reflection, especially if carried out collaboratively with colleagues, has the potential to be transformative professional development that enriches both the professional lives of staff and the learning experiences of students.

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[Accessed: 2 October 2009]



HOLDING UP THE MIRROR

Pilot Study 1

The tutors in this college are interested in improving their teaching. To help them do this, they want to learn about the things they do that irritate you or get in the way of your learning and also the things they do that help you to learn.

Please take a few minutes to think back over all the classes and tutors you have had during all your time at this college. “Classes” means wherever teaching is delivered to you in college: classroom, workshop, kitchen, gym, salon, etc. It doesn’t include learning that happens outside college such as on work placement.

Now write down the three most irritating teaching behaviours and the three most helpful teaching behaviours – you can add more if you wish. Aspects you might want to reflect on are: teaching style; testing, assessments; general classroom policies/rules; personal mannerisms, habits, attitudes.

All responses will be anonymous.

Irritating teaching behaviours

1

2

3

Helpful teaching behaviours

1

2

3

Your responses are anonymous, but we do need to know a few things about you, so please provide the information asked for overleaf.

Your college

- Adam Smith Carnegie Jewel & Esk
Perth UHI Stevenson West Lothian

Your main area of study

- Business/Management/Administration
Child Care/Social Care/Health Studies.....
Computing.....
Construction
Creative Arts
Creative Technologies.....
Engineering
Hair/Beauty/Complementary Therapies
Hospitality/Catering
Science/Technology
Social Sciences/Education
Sport.....
Tourism/Languages

Other (please state)

Your gender

- M F

Your age

- 16-19 20-24 25-29 30-39 40+

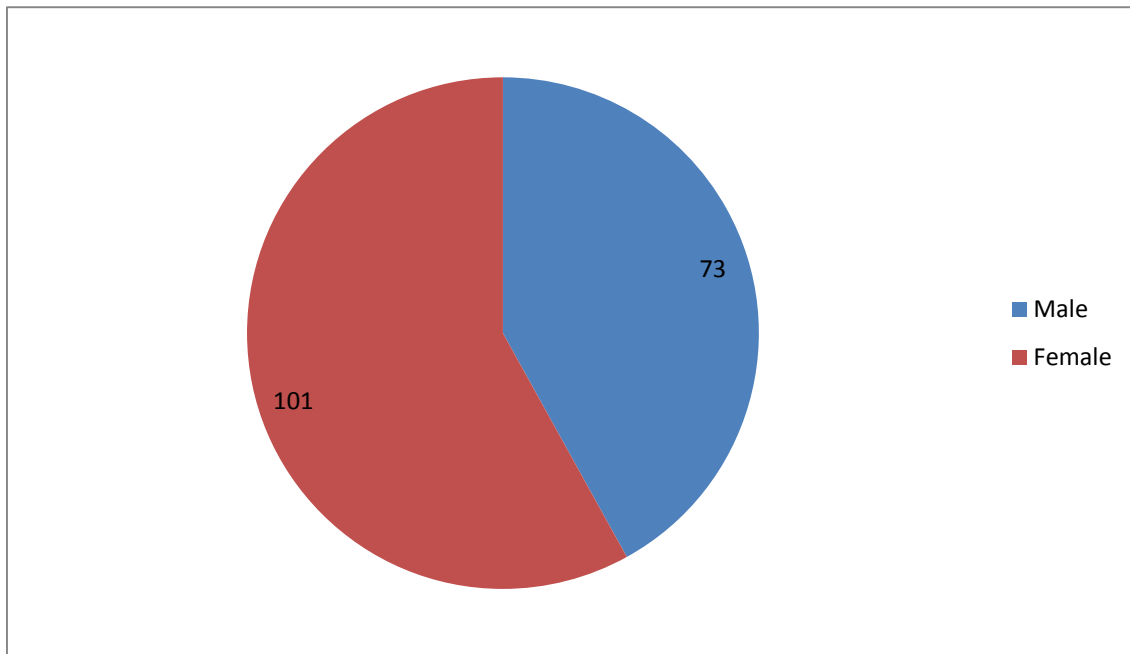
As a token of our appreciation, we're offering a prize of a £20 high street voucher for one lucky student who has participated in this survey. If you'd like to be entered in the draw, please write your mobile or home phone number below.

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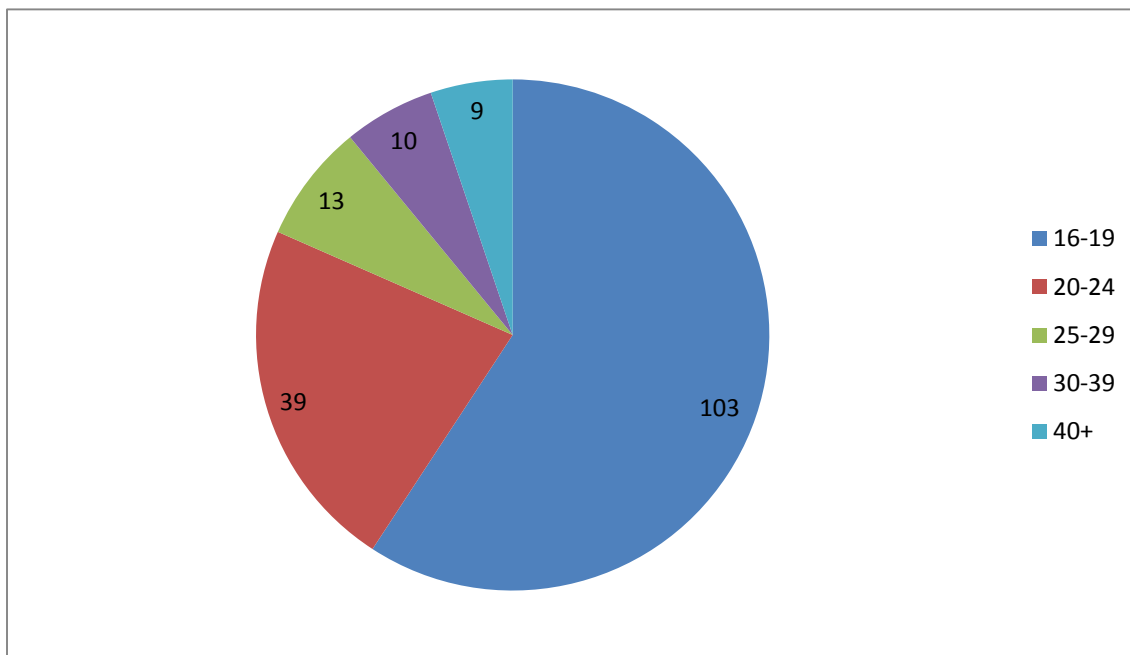
Thank you.

APPENDIX 2: Profile of Pilot Study 1 Learner Participants

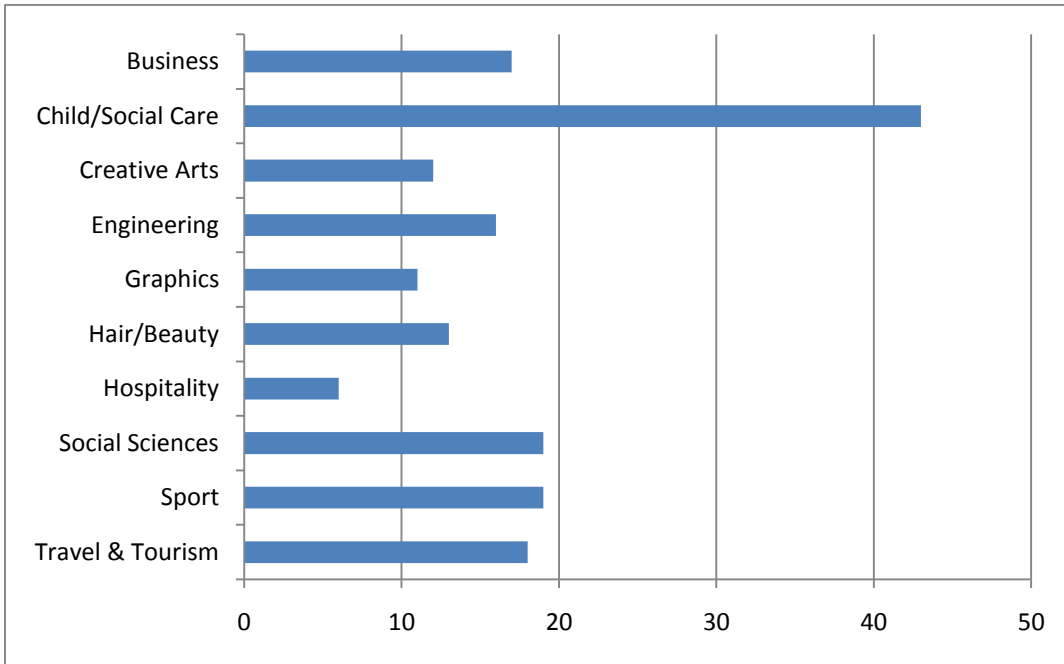
by gender



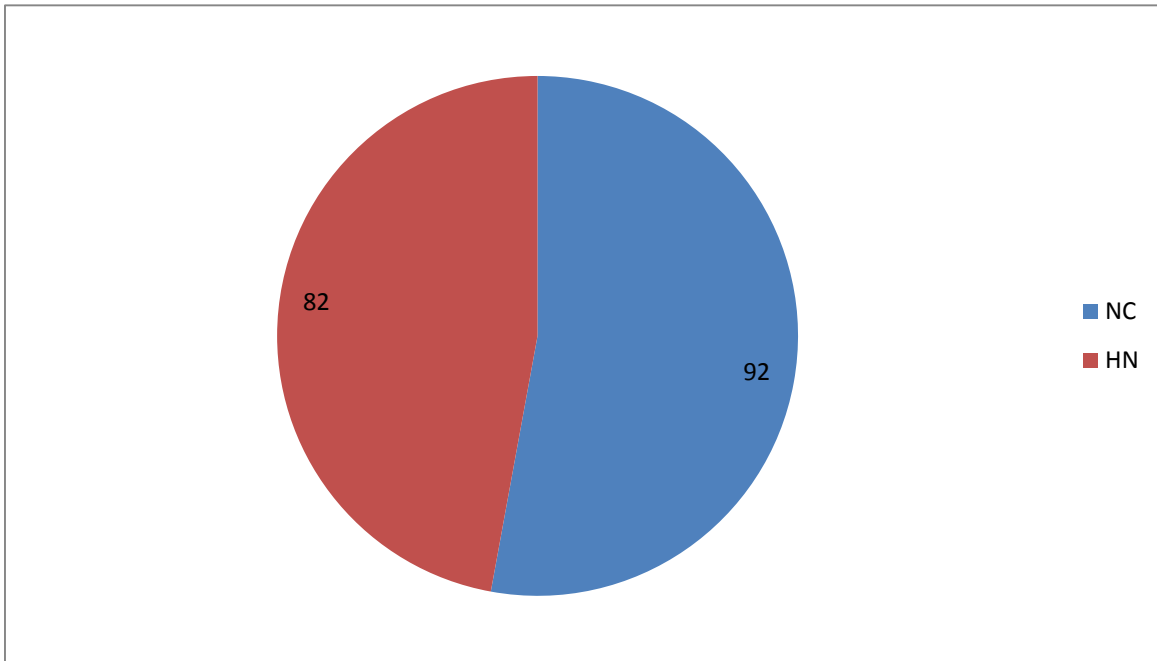
by age band



by subject area



by level





HOLDING UP THE MIRROR

Pilot Study 2

Along with a number of other colleges, we are carrying out a piece of research which has two stages. In stage 1, learners are asked to identify tutors' most irritating and most helpful teaching behaviours. In stage 2, we are asking tutors to tell us what learner behaviours they find most irritating and most helpful.

By identifying perceptions of irritating and helpful behaviours and making tutors and learners more aware of them, it may be that the quality of the learning and teaching environment can be significantly improved.

So, please take a few minutes to think back over the classes you have taught during your time at this college. Then write down the three most irritating learner behaviours and the three most helpful learner behaviours. You can add more if you wish.

All responses will be anonymous.

Irritating learner behaviours

- 1
- 2
- 3

Helpful learner behaviours

- 1
- 2
- 3

Your responses are anonymous, but we do need to know a few things about you, so please provide the information asked for overleaf.

Your college

- Adam Smith Carnegie Jewel & Esk
- Perth UHI Stevenson West Lothian

Your main area of teaching

- Business/Management/Administration
- Child Care/Social Care/Health Studies.....
- Computing.....
- Construction
- Creative Arts
- Creative Technologies.....
- Engineering
- Hair/Beauty/Complementary Therapies
- Hospitality/Catering
- Science/Technology
- Social Sciences/Education
- Sport.....
- Tourism/Languages

- Other (please state)

Your gender

- M F

Years of college teaching experience

- 1-5 6-12 13-19 20+

(please include part-time as well as full-time years and work in other colleges)

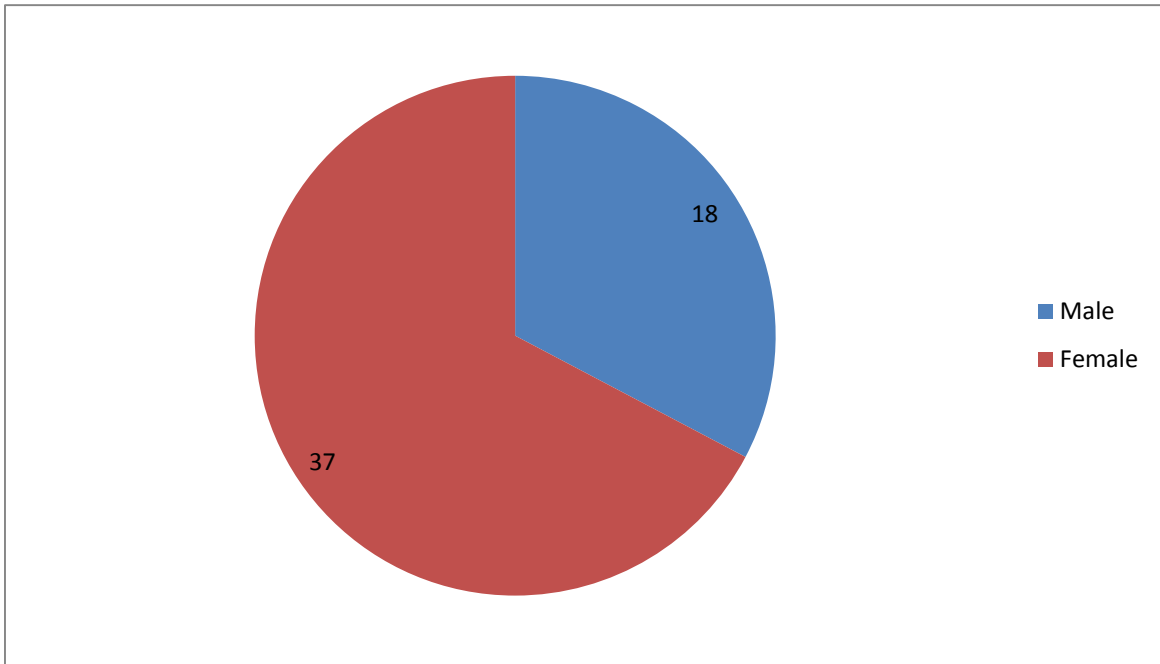
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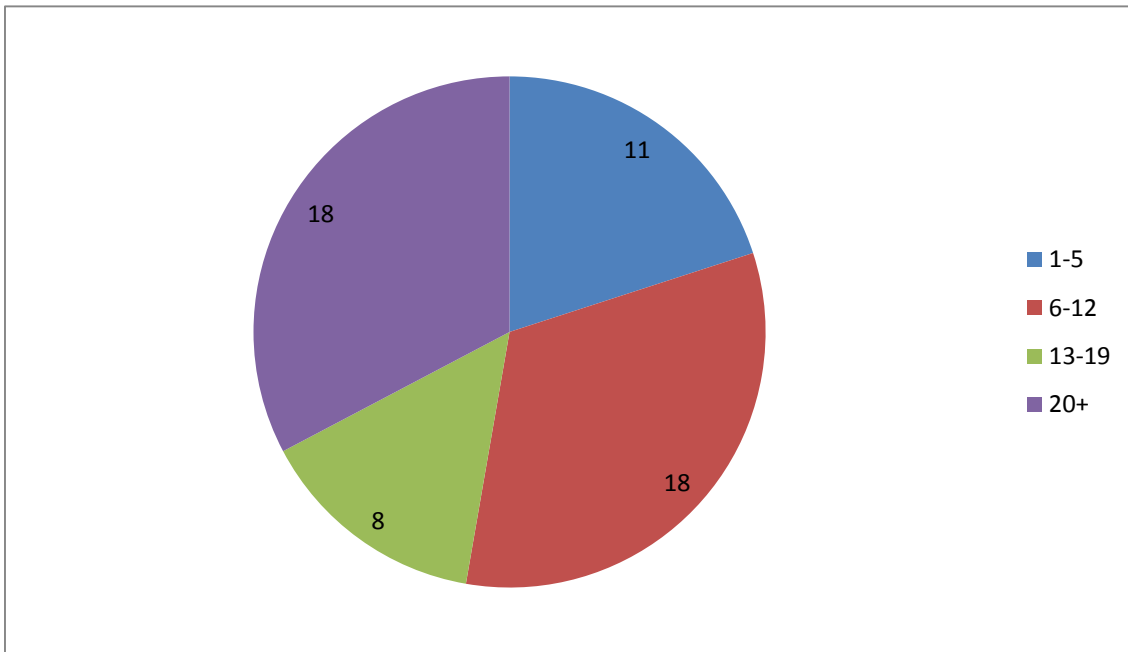
Thank you.

APPENDIX 4: Profile of Pilot Study 2 Staff Participants

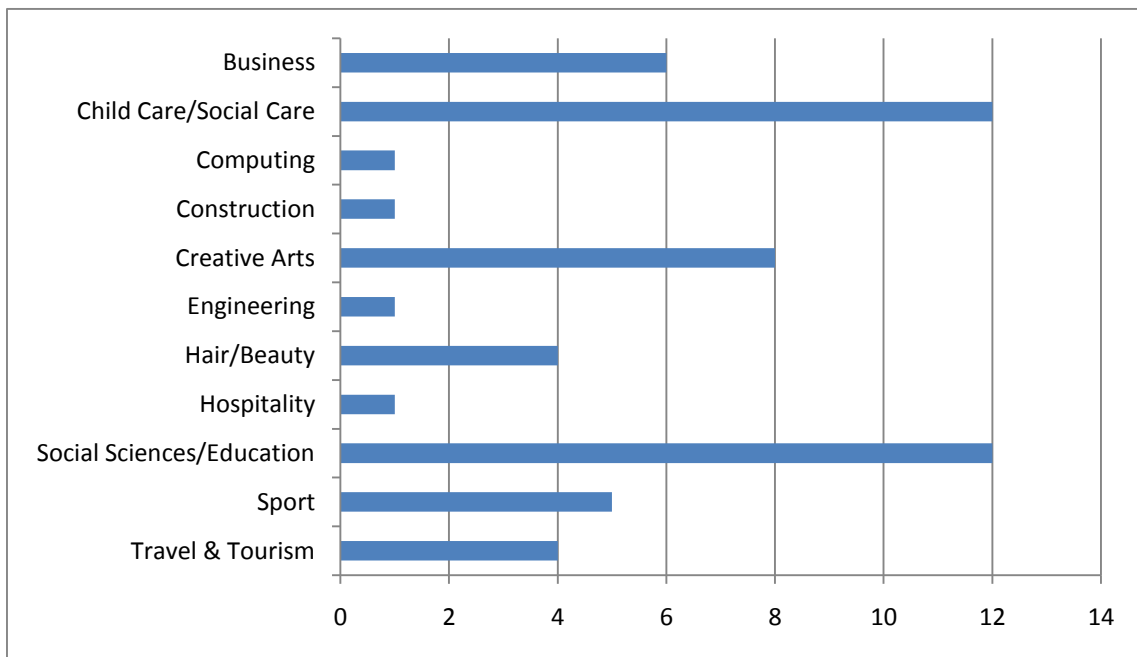
by gender



by years of college teaching experience



by subject area





HOLDING UP THE MIRROR

Raising awareness of behaviours that impede good
tutor-student relationships



Student Questionnaire

April 2010

The tutors in this college are interested in improving their teaching. To help them do this, they want to know more about the things they do that help you to learn and also the things they do that irritate you or get in the way of your learning.

Please take a few minutes to think back over all the classes and tutors you have had during all your time at this college. "Classes" means wherever teaching is delivered to you in college: classroom, workshop, kitchen, gym, salon, etc. It doesn't include learning that happens outside college such as on work placement.

This survey has two parts. In Part 1, you are asked to identify five *helpful* tutor behaviours. In Part 2, you are asked to identify five *irritating* tutor behaviours. Please complete both parts.

The possible responses listed were given by other learners who took part in an earlier pilot survey.

Please be assured all responses will remain anonymous. We are only interested in naming behaviours – no learners or tutors will be identified. However, we do need to know a few things about you, so please provide the information requested at the end.

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

PART 1

From the behaviours listed below, please **tick** the five that you find most **helpful**.

The possible responses are not listed in any order of importance. Please read all of them before selecting five.

It helps me when a tutor:

		√			√
1	Treats me with respect/like an adult		19	Gives us good notes/handouts to support our learning	
2	Is friendly and approachable		20	Uses technology for learning (e.g. PowerPoint, VLE, Internet)	
3	Has a sense of humour		21	Relates learning to personal experiences	
4	Listens to me and shows understanding		22	Includes class discussions about topics	
5	Treats everyone fairly		23	Includes group activities/tasks	
6	Gives clear information about the course/unit requirements		24	Uses quizzes/games to test learning	
7	Shows enthusiasm for the subject and makes it interesting		25	Gives one-to-one teaching when required	
8	Is helpful and supportive		26	Provides opportunities for revision	
9	Responds to questions		27	Gives homework exercises	
10	Gives helpful feedback		28	Gives study time	
11	Encourages me		29	Has a classroom helper	
12	Explains topics fully and clearly		30	Prepares us well for assessment	
13	Takes time to make sure everyone understands		31	Gives constructive feedback	
14	Stays focused on the topic		32	Comes to class on time	
15	Uses humour and fun in teaching		33	Comes to class prepared	
16	Interacts with class, gets everyone involved		34	Shows good personal organisation	
17	Uses a variety of teaching methods		35	Keeps good class order	
18	Includes practical activities/demonstrations				

PART 2

From the behaviours listed below, please **tick** the five that you find most *irritating*.
The possible responses are not listed in any order of importance. Please read all of them before selecting five.

It irritates me when a tutor:

		√			√
1	Makes jokes that are not funny		20	Talks too much/for too long	
2	Treats me like a child		21	Doesn't include discussion or interaction in teaching	
3	Is patronising or condescending		22	Doesn't include practical activity	
4	Is unhelpful		23	Over-uses technology (e.g. DVDs, PowerPoint, Internet)	
5	Doesn't do what they say they'll do		24	Repeats the same things over and over	
6	Is arrogant or rude		25	Goes off at tangents on irrelevant things	
7	Doesn't listen to me or respond to my questions		26	Has to ask other tutors for guidance	
8	Is too strict		27	Doesn't give notes or handouts to support learning	
9	Is serious, lacking in humour		28	Is slow to mark or return work	
10	Comes too close when talking to me		29	Doesn't give adequate feedback on progress	
11	Has poor personal hygiene		30	Is absent and nobody tells us	
12	Is moody or grumpy		31	Comes late to class	
13	Puts students or their work down in front of others		32	Leaves the class for spells or has long breaks	
14	Treats students differently (has favourites/picks on individuals)		33	Comes unprepared to class	
15	Compares us unfavourably with other classes		34	Is disorganised	
16	Doesn't give clear information about course/unit requirements		35	Gives short notice of assessments	
17	Assumes we already know things we don't know		36	Crams in a lot of work just before an assessment	
18	Speaks in a monotonous voice		37	Fails to control disruptive students	
19	Doesn't explain topics clearly				

Please tick the appropriate boxes below.

Your college: Adam Smith Carnegie Jewel & Esk
Perth UHI Stevenson West Lothian

Your main area of study:

- Business/Management/Administration
- Child Care/Social Care/Health Studies.....
- Computing.....
- Construction
- Creative Arts
- Creative Technologies.....
- Engineering
- Hair/Beauty/Complementary Therapies
- Hospitality/Catering
- Science/Technology.....
- Social Sciences/Education
- Sport.....
- Tourism/Languages
- Other (please state)

Your level NC HNC/D
Your gender M F
Your age¹ 16-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36+

As a token of our appreciation, we're offering a prize of a £20 high street voucher for one lucky student who has participated in this survey. If you'd like to be entered in the draw, please write your mobile or home phone number below.

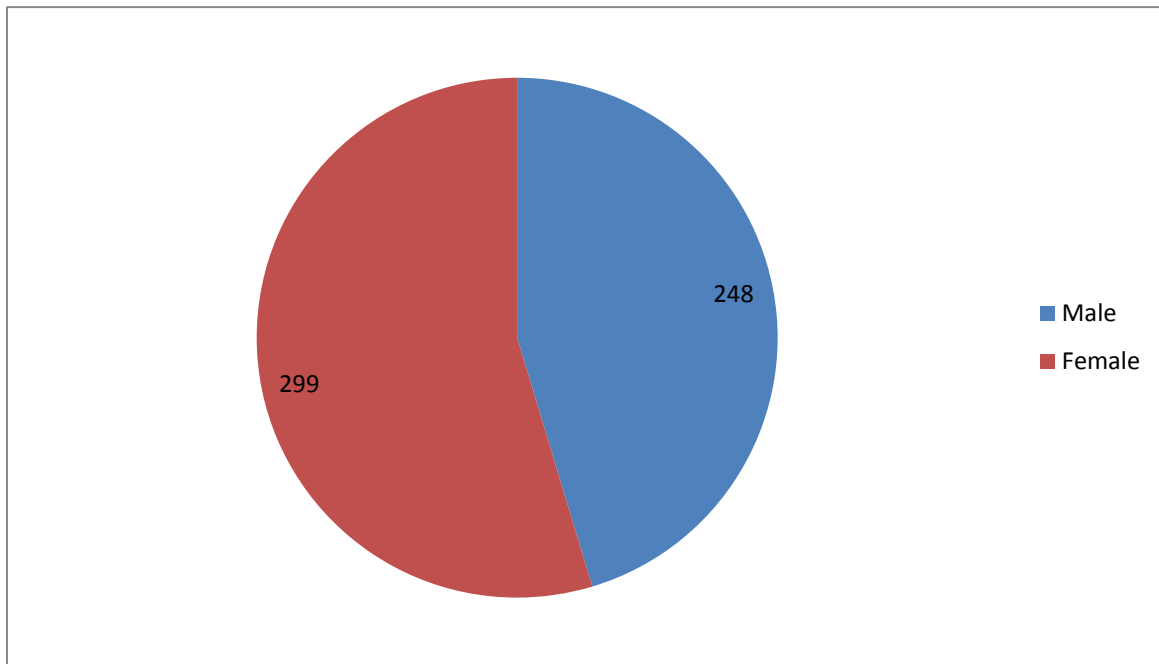
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Thank you.

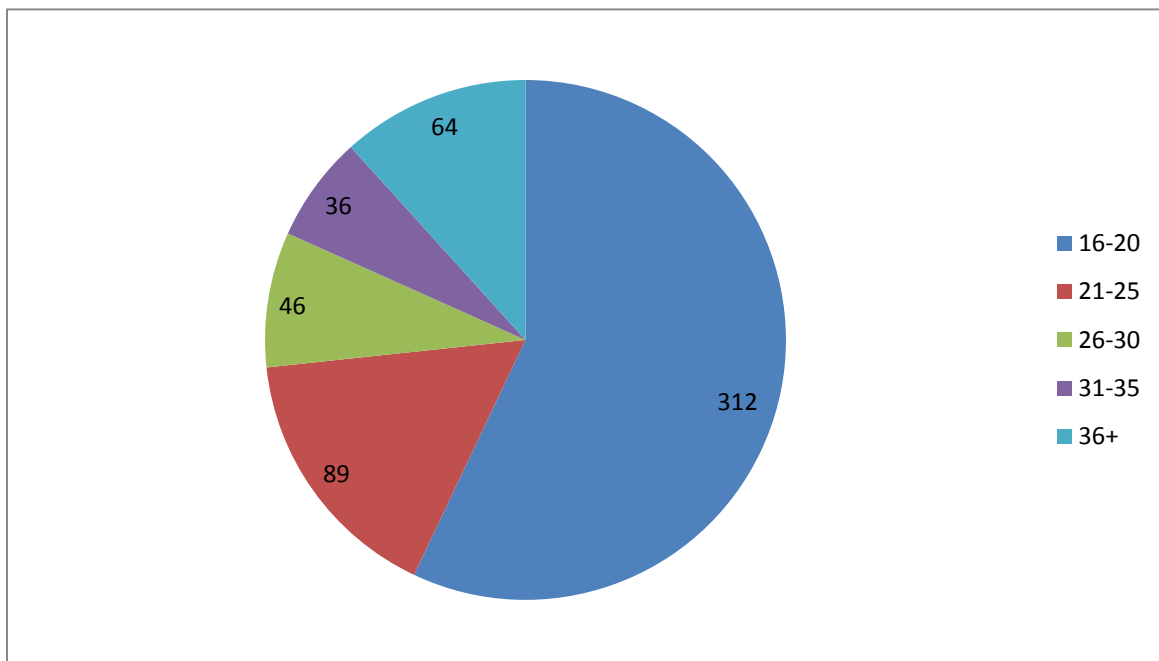
¹ Changed from pilot study to create bands of equal ranges

APPENDIX 6: Profile of Main Study 1 Student Participants

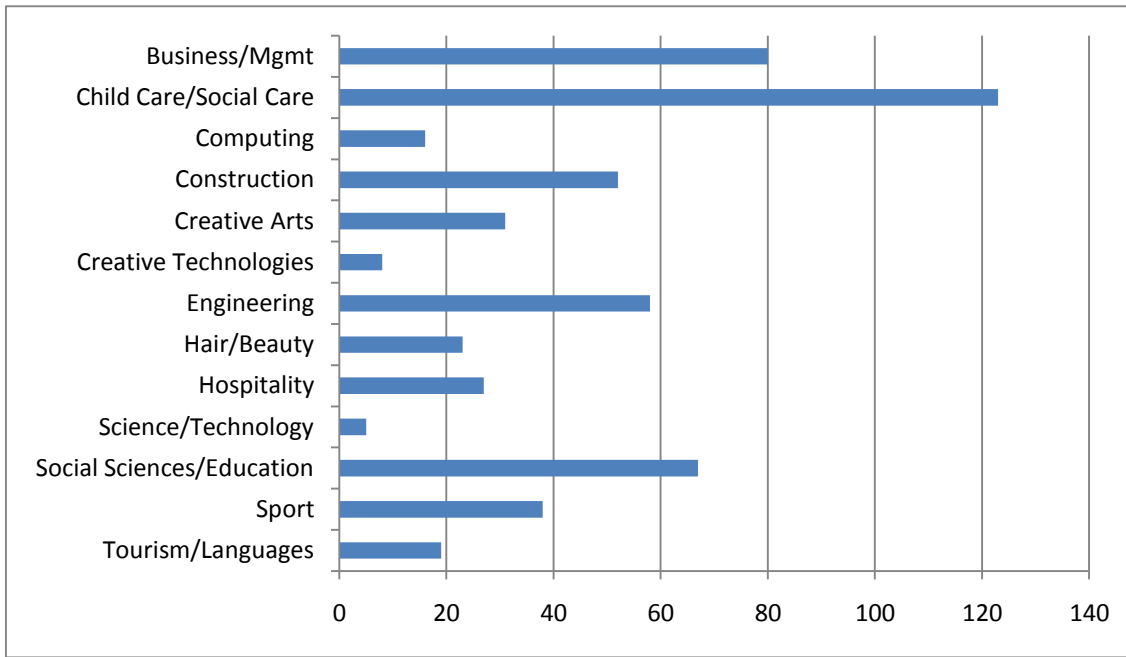
by gender



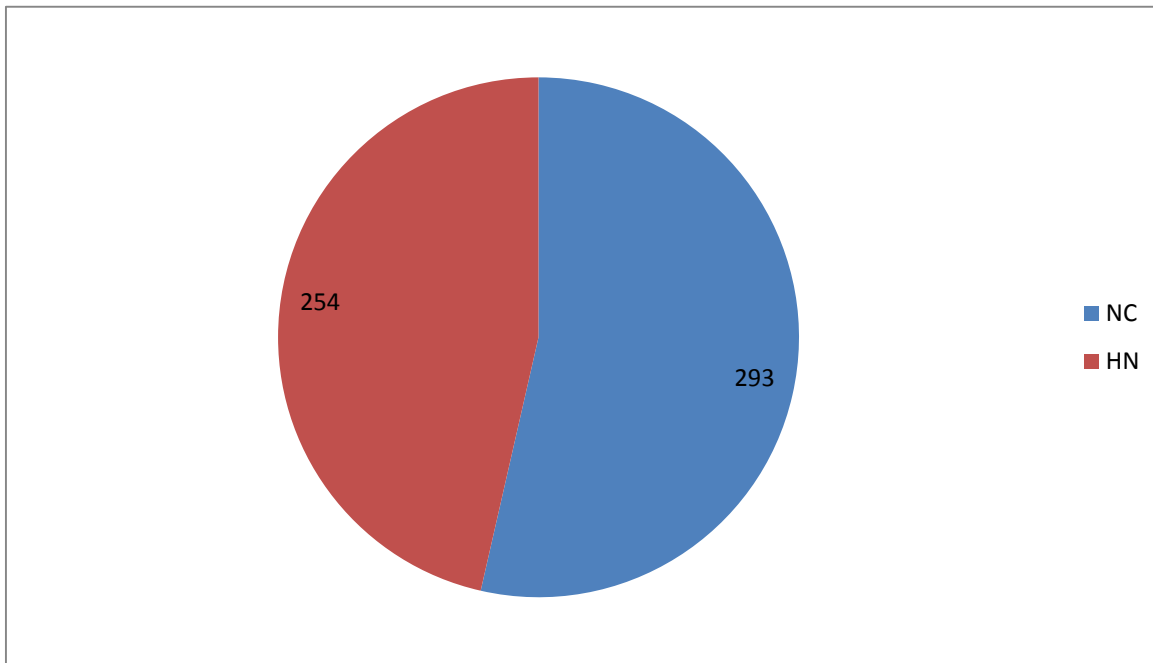
by age band



by subject area



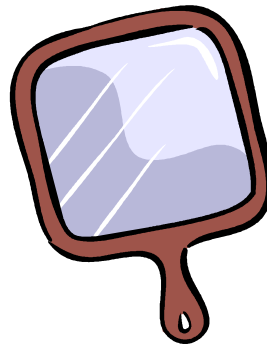
by level





HOLDING UP THE MIRROR

Raising awareness of behaviours that impede good
tutor-student relationships



Staff Questionnaire

April 2010

Along with a number of other colleges, we are carrying out a piece of research which has two stages. In stage 1, learners are asked to identify tutors' most helpful and most irritating teaching behaviours. In stage 2, we are asking tutors to tell us what learner behaviours they find most helpful and most irritating.

By identifying perceptions of helpful and irritating behaviours and making tutors and learners more aware of them, it may be that the quality of the learning and teaching environment can be significantly improved.

So, please take a few minutes to think back over the classes you have taught during your time at this college.

This survey has two parts. In Part 1, you are asked to identify five *helpful* learner behaviours. In Part 2, you are asked to identify five *irritating* learner behaviours. Please complete both parts.

The possible responses listed were given by other tutors who took part in an earlier pilot survey.

Please be assured all responses will remain anonymous. We are only interested in naming behaviours – no learners or tutors will be identified. However, we do need to know a few things about you, so please provide the information requested at the end.

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

PART 1

From the behaviours listed below, please tick the five that you find most *helpful*.

The possible responses are not listed in any order of importance. Please read all of them before selecting five.

It helps me when a learner:

		√			√
1	Has good attendance at classes		10	Asks for help when needed	
2	Comes to class on time		11	Submits work on time	
3	Comes to class prepared/equipped		12	Completes homework tasks	
4	Keeps their work organised		13	Participates in class discussions/activities	
5	Is motivated, enthusiastic, willing to work		14	Supports fellow students in their learning	
6	Pays attention/listens in class		15	Gives me feedback/suggestions for improvement	
7	Takes responsibility for their own learning		16	Is polite/well-mannered	
8	Takes opportunities to extend their learning outside class		17	Shows respect for fellow-students and staff	
9	Asks questions				

PART 2

From the behaviours listed below, please **tick** the five that you find most *irritating*.
The possible responses are not listed in any order of importance. Please read all of them before selecting five.

It irritates me when a learner:

		√			√
1	Uses a mobile phone in class		13	Disrupts teaching (e.g. chatting, laughing)	
2	Has poor or irregular attendance		14	Distracts other students from their work	
3	Arrives late to class		15	Is argumentative	
4	Comes unprepared to class (e.g. without pen/folder/kit)		16	Is rude or disrespectful towards me or fellow students	
5	Doesn't do work assigned outside class		17	Verbally expresses disinterest, not wanting to be here	
6	Doesn't focus on tasks in class		18	Physically displays disinterest (e.g. head on desk, feet on chair)	
7	Has an arrogant attitude		19	Doesn't take responsibility for own learning or actions	
8	Gives up/says something is too hard without listening or trying		20	Doesn't work independently – expects to be 'spoon-fed' by tutor	
9	Talks over me or other students		21	Doesn't participate in class activities/discussions	
10	Doesn't listen when course work is being covered		22	Doesn't meet deadlines for handing in work	
11	Doesn't pay attention to instructions		23	Ignores advice, feedback	
12	Expects to gain unit without putting effort into developing skills/knowledge				

Please tick the appropriate boxes below.

Your college Adam Smith Carnegie Jewel & Esk
Perth UHI Stevenson West Lothian

Your main area of teaching

- Business/Management/Administration
- Child Care/Social Care/Health Studies.....
- Computing.....
- Construction
- Creative Arts
- Creative Technologies.....
- Engineering
- Hair/Beauty/Complementary Therapies
- Hospitality/Catering
- Science/Technology
- Social Sciences/Education
- Sport.....
- Tourism/Languages
- Other (please state)

Your gender M F

Years of college teaching experience¹ 1-5 6-10 11-15 16+
(please include part-time as well as full-time years and work in other colleges)

As a token of our appreciation, we're offering a prize of a £20 high street voucher for one lucky tutor who has participated in this survey. If you'd like to be entered in the draw, please write your mobile or home phone number below.

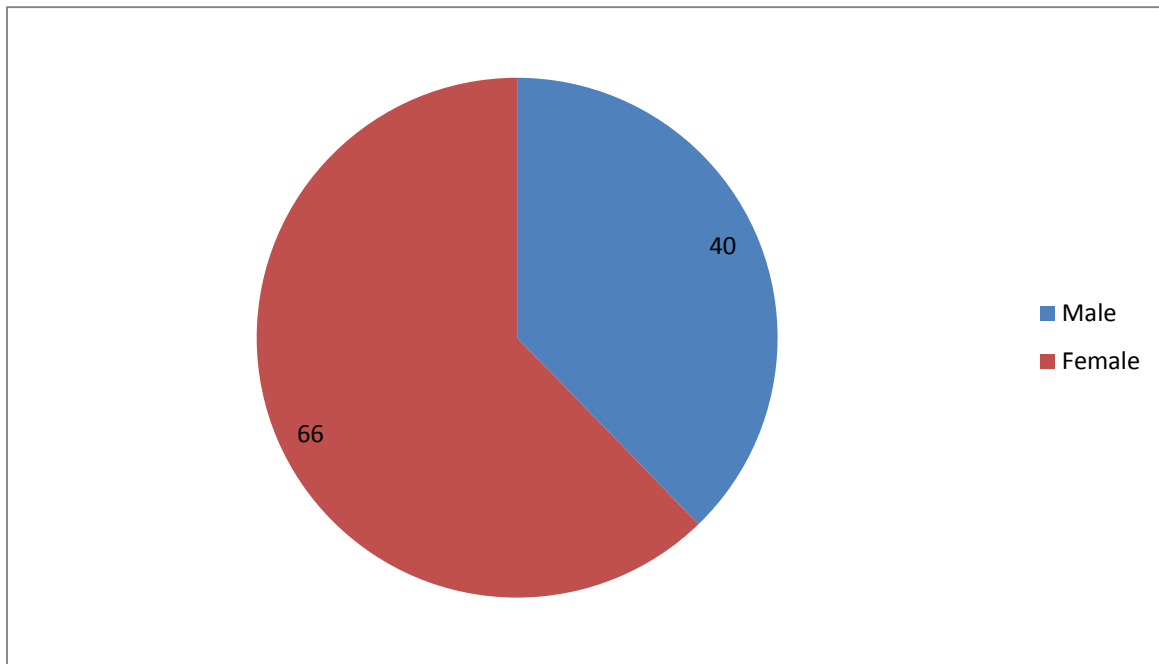
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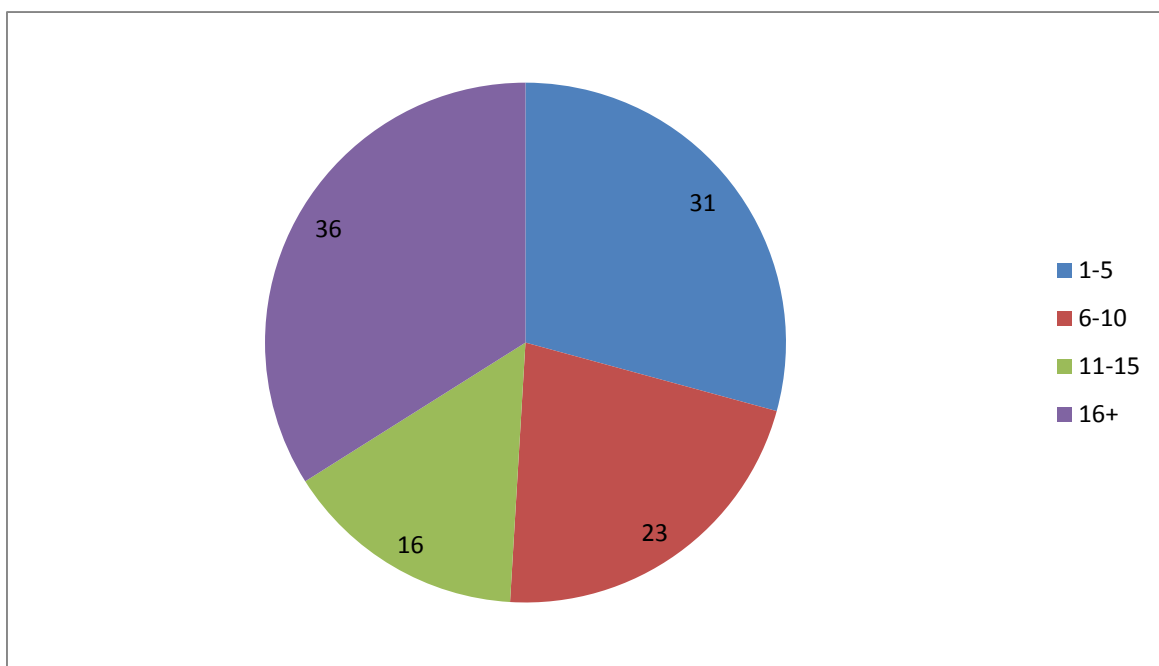
¹ Changed from pilot study to create bands of equal ranges

APPENDIX 8: Profile of Main Study 2 Staff Participants

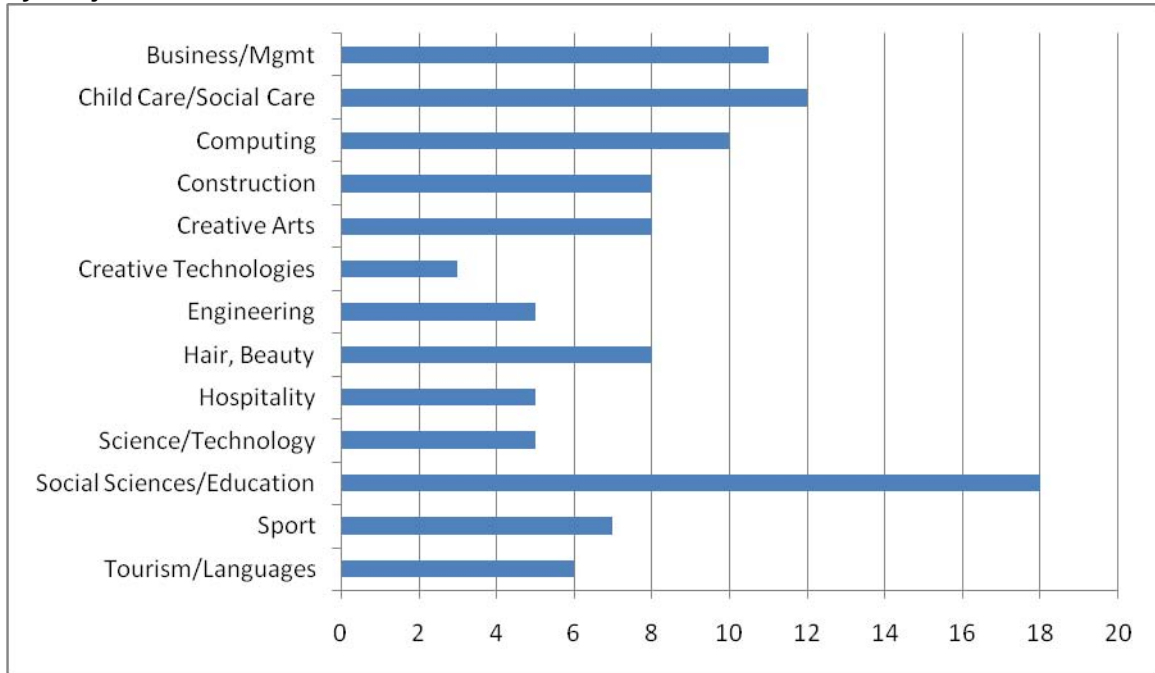
by gender



by years of college teaching experience



by subject area



COMPARISON WITH OTHER STUDIES (AREAS OF OVERLAP WITH FERRN FINDINGS INDICATED BY SHADING)

1 Student Perceptions of Irritating Behaviours Identified in FERRN and Six Other Studies

FERRN	Ludewig	Appleby	Penman & McCann	Rallis	Miley & Gonsalves	Malikow
Talks too much/too long	Assign work as if theirs is the only or most important class	Present poor lectures (unprepared, monotone, digress, too fast, ramble, repetitious, unorganised) ✓	Poor teaching mechanics (e.g. speak too fast/slow/softly, poor use of board)	Poor organisation/ planning/teaching ✓	Disorganised ✓	Require a textbook and fail to use it
Assumes prior knowledge	Lecture too fast and fail to slow down when requested	Keep class past end of period	Lecture style and technique ✓	Intellectual arrogance, talk down ✓	Talking too fast	Assign work as if theirs is the only or most important class
Treats students differently	Make students feel inferior when they ask a question ✓	Arrive late for class ✓	Poor testing procedures/ exams	Not approachable ✓	Monotone voice ✓	Continue lecturing after the class is supposed to end
Is patronising/ condescending	Are not specific on what the test will cover ✓	Have obvious favourites (i.e. teacher's pets) ✓	Negative mannerisms (e.g. attire, vocal, non-verbal) ✓	Insensitive to students' time constraints (life beyond class)	Degrading students ✓	Make students feel inferior when they ask a question ✓
Doesn't give clear information about course	Create "trick" questions	Have a condescending attitude towards students (i.e. treat students like children) ✓	Monotone voice ✓	Lecture too much, too boring ✓	Lack of interaction ✓	Are not specific on what the test will cover ✓
Doesn't explain topics clearly	Deliver their lecture in a monotone manner ✓	Act as if their class is the only one students are taking	Poor use of class time (coming late, stopping early) ✓	Don't respect students	Lack of enthusiasm	Give tests that don't correspond to lectures
Repeats the same things over and over	Give tests that don't correspond to lectures	Feel that their point of view is always correct (e.g. close-minded and inflexible)	Grading process	Grading expectations unclear	Unfair grading and testing practices	Make students stay the whole class period unnecessarily
Goes off at tangents	Get behind and then cram their lectures into the remaining time ✓	Embarrass students in class (e.g. criticise, pick on, or make an example) ✓	Intellectual arrogance/ talk down ✓	Go over class time	Not available to students	Don't speak English adequately

Crams in work before assessment	Assume students already have base knowledge for the course ✓	Cannot explain concepts clearly ✓	Don't respect students	Not in office/hard to get hold of	Keeping class over time	Do not present an organised lecture ✓
Is serious/lacks humour	Require a textbook and then fail to use it	Use subjective, too strict, unfair, inconsistent or picky grading criteria	Not approachable, unhelpful ✓	Lack of interest in subject/teaching	Reading from book or notes	Misinform students about the assignment
Doesn't listen to me or answer questions		Cannot or will not answer student questions ✓	Lack of interest/competence/depth, lack of course content	None	Opinionated	Deliver lecture in a monotone manner ✓
Is unhelpful		Include material in test that has not been covered or assigned	Not in office/hard to find	Feel need to control/impose views	Negative mannerisms	Treat students as idiots
Puts down students or their work		Take lectures straight from the textbook	Poor syllabus	Don't relate material to real life ✓	Not clarifying ✓	Have little or no enthusiasm for what they teach
Doesn't give notes/handouts		Take a long time to return tests and papers ✓	Forced class participation	Too much "busy work"	Monotone voice ✓	Lecture too fast and fail to slow down when asked
Is slow to mark or return work		Tell jokes that are not funny, use inappropriate humour, laugh at their own jokes ✓	Insensitive to students' time constraints	Unfair grading	Poor use of class time ✓	Fail to provide full explanations or practical examples ✓
Treats me like a child		Assign "busy work" that is either not collected or not graded	Unfair grading	Intolerant of students' questions ✓	Too much overlap with book	Assume students have a base knowledge for the course ✓
Is moody or grumpy		Write illegibly on the blackboard	Too much work	Bias/sexism	Lack of real life stories ✓	Are not organised or prepared for class ✓
Is arrogant or rude		Pace constantly during lecture	Control/impose views	No eye contact		Get off the subject, lose place, or fail to return to the subject ✓
Doesn't give adequate feedback on progress		Show no enthusiasm	Inappropriate humour ✓	Don't understand students' learning styles		Create "trick" questions
Gives short notice of assessment		Eat, drink or chew gum during lecture	Don't relate material to real life ✓	Do as I say, not as I do		Demand student promptness but are slow to return papers or tests ✓

Doesn't do what they say they'll do		Say "ah" or "uhm" frequently	Intolerant of questions			Fail to provide chapter outlines or study guides for tests ✓
Fails to control disruptive students		Teach in a disorganised, unorganised or unstructured way ✓	Bias/sexism/racism			Use attendance records in figuring final grades
Speaks in a monotonous voice		Do not follow their own syllabi				Think they are always right
Is too strict		Blow nose or clear throat excessively				Get behind and then cram their lecture into the remaining time ✓
Doesn't include practical activity		Appear not to understand their own subject matter				Project arrogance ✓
Comes late to class		Use jargon without sufficient explanation				
Leaves the class for long spells/has long breaks		Read straight from the textbook or notes				
Is disorganised		Take attendance				
Makes jokes that are not funny		Give unannounced "pop" quizzes				
Compares us unfavourably with other classes		Cancel or do not show up for classes frequently ✓				
Has poor personal hygiene		Do not allow questions or class participation				
Is absent and nobody tells us		Dress in an unprofessional or shabby manner				
Doesn't include discussion or interaction		Ignore students' suggestions or opinions ✓				
Comes unprepared to class		Are unavailable to help students				
Over-uses technology						
Has to ask other tutors for guidance						
Comes too close						

2. Tutor Perceptions of Irritating Student Behaviours Identified in FERRN and Appleby Study

FERRN	APPLEBY
Has poor or irregular attendance	Talking during lectures ✓
Expects to gain unit without putting effort into developing skills/knowledge	Sleeping during class ✓
Disrupts teaching (e.g. chatting, laughing)	Chewing gum, eating or drinking noisily
Is rude or disrespectful toward me or fellow students	Being late ✓
Comes unprepared to class (e.g. without pen/folder/kit)	Cutting class ✓
Uses mobile phone in class	Acting bored or apathetic ✓
Distracts other students	Not paying attention ✓
Doesn't take responsibility for own learning or actions	Being unprepared ✓
Doesn't focus on tasks in class	Creating disturbances ✓
Talks over me or other students	Wearing hats
Doesn't work independently – expects to be 'spoon-fed' by tutor	Packing up books and materials before class is over
Gives up/says something is too hard without listening or trying	Cheating
Doesn't listen when course work is being covered	Asking already answered questions
Has an arrogant attitude	Sitting in the back rows when there are empty seats at the front
Arrives late to class	Obvious yawning ✓
Doesn't pay attention to instructions	Slouching in seats ✓
Ignores advice, feedback	Asking, "Did we do anything important?" after missing class
Verbally expresses disinterest, not wanting to be here	Putting feet on desks or tables ✓
Doesn't participate in class activities, discussions	Asking, "Will it be on the test?"
Doesn't do work assigned outside class	Being insincere or 'brown-nosing'
Physically expresses disinterest (e.g. head on desk, feet on chair)	Complaining about workload
Doesn't meet deadlines for handing in work	Acting like a know-it-all ✓
Is argumentative	Not asking for help or asking for help when it is too late
	Not asking questions
	Doing work for other classes in class
	Reading the school newspaper in class
	Being more interested in grades than in learning
	Pretending to understand
	Blaming teachers for bad grades ✓
	Giving unbelievable excuses

3. Student Perceptions of Helpful Tutor Behaviours Identified in FERRN and Garko et al Study

FERRN	GARKO ET AL
Is friendly and approachable	Friendship/friendly relationship ✓
Treats me with respect/like an adult	Familiarity with students ✓
Gives us good notes/handouts to support our learning	Respect ✓
Has a sense of humour	Availability ✓
Gives helpful feedback	Approachability ✓
Prepares us well for assessment	Relaxation/comfort
Uses humour and fun in teaching	Equality
Shows enthusiasm for the subject and makes it interesting	Caring and concern ✓
Is helpful and supportive	Connection to the student
Explains topics fully and clearly	Good lecture styles
Treats everyone fairly	Open discussion ✓
Gives clear information about the course/unit requirements	Open communication
Gives one-to-one teaching when required	Reciprocal relationship
Encourages me	Informality/first name basis
Takes time to make sure everyone understands	Knowledge
Listens to me and shows understanding	Trust and honesty
Uses a variety of teaching methods	Guidance/counsellor role
Responds to questions	Humour and fun ✓
Interacts with class, gets everyone involved	Enjoyment of teaching ✓
Includes practical activities/demonstrations	Listening ability ✓
Relates learning to personal experiences	Flexibility
Comes to class prepared	Understanding ✓
Uses technology for learning (e.g. PowerPoint, VLE, Internet)	Prepares for tests ✓
Includes class discussion about topics	Fairness ✓
Provides opportunities for revision	Feedback ✓
Comes to class on time	Encourages independent thinking
Keeps good class order	Helpfulness ✓
Gives study time	Attention to learning process
Uses quizzes/games to test learning	Encourages student attendance and attention
Includes group activities/tasks	Positivity
Shows good personal organisation	Objectivity
Stays focused on the topic	Commitment
Gives homework exercises	Motivation
None	Confidence
Has a classroom helper	First impression