

## **Introduction**

While teaching a course in classroom management I was not surprised to hear the same comments coming from other teachers that I myself have expressed time and time again – “my students are always coming late to class.” There were many other similar sentiments that displayed the fact that, at least from the teachers’ standpoints, students weren’t living up to their responsibilities as students. One aspect of classroom management is the clear indication of rules from the start so students can understand what their responsibilities are and what the expectations of the teacher are. However, most students know that coming late, in using this one example, is incorrect behavior for a university classroom. Therefore, we can generally say that they are not being responsible students. I need not comment on the fact that the teacher is very likely failing to manage the classroom and hold the students accountable.

If accountability is to be meaningful, assessments of responsibility must be done that are in line with standards. And what these assessments and standards about accountability in students are should be based on a consensus about what students are in fact responsible for (Ysseldyke et al., 1998). Responsibility and accountability, therefore, go hand-in-hand and, in fact, many people consider them the same thing. But differentiating accountability as standards or duties that a person can be held liable for, it is not feasible to hold students accountable for things that are not their perceived or understood responsibility. This encompasses the realm of expectations – from teachers, institutions, and from students themselves. Responsibilities may be well stated; however, they may not in fact be clearly stated and may, in many cases are, be assumed and taken for granted as “common sense.” The question then arises whether there are different perceptions of what responsibilities a student actually has if these responsibilities are not explicitly stated. Consider further, even if the responsibilities of students are well stated, whether students accept these responsibilities as their own in light of such factors as not being held accountable for them.

This study begins an examination of the questions given by use of a self-report survey of participants (students) to arrive at a foundational basis for student perceptions of their responsibilities. By uncovering attitudes and opinions of students, the study paves the way for further study into comparative validity of student perceptions with actual student behaviors and traits.

## **Research Methodology**

The analysis of a survey is best served by descriptive research methodology, which involves the collection of information for the purposes of assessing attitudes, opinions,

and conditions. This type of research methodology can only determine what already exists. Using the information gathered the researcher can make logical inferences based thereupon. According to Gay (1987) in order for inferences to be as valid as possible several considerations unique to surveys must be followed.

The first is the selection of subjects by the researcher. Subjects should be selected using an appropriate sampling technique to insure a proper population sample. Appropriate demographics for the population must be considered to assure a proper cross-section of the relevant sub-groups in that population.

In this study a total of forty-eight university level students were approached to take part in an anonymous self-report survey concerning accountability during the latter half of a Spring semester in Southern Taiwan. Out of the forty-eight, forty agreed to the publication of the results. The students varied in age from twenty to twenty-five years in age and were spread between two grade levels; that of juniors and seniors. There were twenty-eight females and twelve males. The students were all English majors but from three different subject classes. The sample size represented approximately thirty percent of the total population of the two grade levels in the English department.

The second consideration is that of the construction of the survey. The survey should be easy to read and understand (extremely important to non-native speakers), the questions should not be lengthy, and alternative responses should be provided with the differing responses being clearly different. Structured responses help to facilitate the scoring or comparison in later analysis. The choices available to the participants were both general and specific. Though some key choices seem ambiguous, they encompass generally understood behaviors that the participants could easily read and understand in the second language.

The survey prepared and used in this study consisted of three sections. The first section presented sixteen behaviors or traits and asked the participant to check the ones that were the responsibility of the student in a college course. The participant was asked to check all those that applied. The second section gave fourteen behaviors or traits and asked the participant to check all the ones that were the responsibility of the college instructor. Some behaviors or traits were quite general and open to interpretation by the participants while others were more specific and more objective as to meaning. The third section consisted of eight questions that sought preferences, factual information, and participant perceptions about the learning environment as well as their own performance.

All questions required only a check (✓), were brief, and each response was clearly differentiated from the others. All sections of the survey were given at one time. A third consideration that Gay indicates that should not be overlooked but is too often neglected is that of validating the questionnaire. The survey should be validated to determine if its questions measure what it is intended to measure. For example, in regard to behaviors,

subjects might be observed to determine if their actions are consistent with their self-reported behaviors or traits (Ysseldyke et al., 1998; Gay, 1987).

One of the objectives of this study is to uncover contradictions in the student perceptions. Observing the actual behavior characteristics of students to validate the survey results represents the next step for this research methodology and moves from a self-reported method to an observational research methodology. Therefore, the validation of the survey results, in regard to actual behavior or student characteristics comparison, is not important at this stage and for the purposes of this particular study.

In analyzing the data provided by the survey I use relative frequency concentrating on percentages and proportions to demonstrate the degree of attitude or opinion within the subject group. Using the questions and choices as variables (to be utilized more effectively in the later study), the frequency of each response is compared with other responses to determine the percentage breakdown of that variable in the subject group (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). These results are then used to show contradictions and/ or confirmations in student perceptions concerning responsibility and, therefore, accountability in students and instructors.

## Results and Observations

The following table indicates a tally for the number of affirmative responses for each behavior or trait in section one of the survey relating to responsibility of the student in a college class.

9	2	Desire to learn	4	1	Complete work before an absence
9	1	Seek help outside class	0	2	Be motivated
1	2	Be enthusiastic	3	2	Meet due dates for homework
8	1	Have good study habits	5	1	Notify instructor of absences beforehand
2	2	Work cooperatively	6	2	Have a good attitude
2	3	Show respect for teachers	3	1	Ask questions
1	1	Follow directions	6	2	Show respect for classmates
	2	Be open-minded		2	Never cheat

5		2	
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Table 1: Total positive (responsible) response for each respective student behavior or trait.

Selecting key behaviors and traits, for space purposes as well as higher relevancy to the study purposes, a visual comparison can be made of the proportion of participants who feel that each are or are not the responsibility of the student in a college class.

Figure 1: Proportions of positive (responsible) responses to negative (not responsible) responses for student behaviors and traits.

Legend: R = responsible      NR = not responsible  
SOH = seek outside help      GSH = good study habits

FD = follow directions      CWBA = complete work before absence  
DD = due dates      NI = notify instructor  
NC = never cheat

Tallying the responses for participant opinions concerning the responsibilities of instructors provides the following chart.

3	Provide valuable information	2	Teach relevant material
0		9	
2	Be enthusiastic	2	Be friendly
3		2	
1	Allow in-class work to be made up	1	Be flexible in grading
4		7	
3	Have knowledge of the teaching	6	Offer extra credit

6	area		
2	Apply same standards to all	1	Notify students of absence
3		1	
1	Be entertaining	1	Be consistent in grading
8		4	
3	Respect students	4	Force students to participate
4			

Table 2: Total positive (responsible) response for each respective instructor behavior or trait.

Again, selecting key behaviors and traits, for space purposes as well as higher relevancy to the study purposes, a visual comparison can be made of the proportion of participants who feel that each are or are not the responsibility of the instructor in a college class.

Figure 2: Proportions of positive (responsible) responses to negative (not responsible) responses for instructor behaviors and traits

Legend: R = responsible NR = not responsible

PVI = provide valuable instruction

FG = flexibility in grading

ICWM = in-class work made up

OEC = offer extra credit

KTE = knowledge of teaching area

CG = consistent grading

ASSTA = apply same standards to all

TRM = teach relevant material

NSA = notify students of absence

FSP = force students to participate

The third section of the survey consisted of eight questions that sought preferences, factual information, and participant perceptions about the learning environment as well as their own performance. The questions along with the total tallied responses are as follows:

1. Are you more comfortable with a teacher lecturing all class or having students work together with each other in groups?  
28 lecture 10 group 2 invalid
2. How many times have you been absent from a class this semester?  
6 (0) 19 (1-2) 5 (3-4) 3 (5-6) 7 (7 or more)
3. What percentage of your college grades do you feel you are responsible for. (In other words, how hard you work equals this much of your grade.)  
3 (90-100) 9 (80-90) 6 (70-80) 9 (60-70)  
10 (50-60) 3 (40-50) 0 (30-40) 0 (30 and below)
4. What percentage of your college grades do you feel your instructor is responsible for giving you regardless of your performance?  
2 (90-100) 5 (80-90) 1 (70-80) 1 (60-70)  
5 (50-60) 7 (40-50) 4 (30-40) 6 (20-30)  
4 (10-20) 5 (0-10)
5. Would you describe yourself as a responsible or irresponsible student?  
32 responsible 8 irresponsible
6. On average, how many hours do you study a week for each three-credit college course?  
6 (less than 1 hour) 15 (1-2 hours)  
13 (3-4 hours)  
6 (5-6 hours) 0 (over 6 hours)
7. Do you think attendance should be included in your grade?  
24 yes 16 no
8. What is your average grade point? Are you a:  
11 "A" student 24 "B" student  
4 "C" student  
0 "D" student

## Implications and Discussion

Moorehead and Griffin state that "Responsibility is an obligation to do something with the expectation that some act or outcome will result (1998, p. 460). The emphasis here is not necessarily on accountability as much as gain. Students will gain from their responsibilities. Although I feel that this is a major tenet of education it should still be

noted that accountability assures compliance and sometimes people must be forced to do what is good for them.

The participants surveyed displayed some interesting perceptions of themselves and their expectations. Eighty percent of the surveyed participants described themselves as “responsible” students. And eighty-eight percent described themselves as “B” students or better. This clearly indicates that more than two-thirds of the participants have high opinions of their expectations in regard to the outcomes of their classroom experiences. They perceive themselves as responsible students receiving high marks. As in Ysseldyke’s et al study, students consistently rate themselves higher in the area of responsibility as compared with teacher ratings (1998, p. 12).

But looking at other results in the present survey displays the inherent contradictions in the information given by the participants. It can be seen that fifty-three percent of the students study two hours or less per week for each three-credit college course. That’s less than one hour outside of class for each hour in class. Most university faculty would agree that two to three hours outside studying should be done for each hour spent in class (Hassel, 2005). Eighty-five percent of the participants had missed one or more classes by the twelfth week of the semester. Twenty-five percent had missed five or more classes.

Interestingly, the outcomes that students perceive from their efforts in class display a strong belief in teacher control of these outcomes. Thirty-three percent of the participants believed that their efforts in class result in sixty percent of their grade or lower. Fifty-five percent of the participants believe that their personal efforts amount to only 70 percent or less of their grade. Ignoring the total of 100%, sixty-three percent of participants also indicated in a separate question that teachers are responsible for thirty percent or more of their grade with thirty-five percent indicating fifty percent or more of their final grade in a class is dependant upon the teacher and not upon their own performance or work.

In light of this perception of teacher importance is the result of seventy percent of the participants preferring classroom lecture by the teacher over group activities which center on the students themselves in a more communicative methodology. Students appear to prefer the non-active role of receptor. I think an obvious interpretation or implication of this preference would be the desire for less responsibility in the teaching-learning process. But as Scott and Ballard indicated, “interpretation of this [type of] study must involve some caution” (1986, p. 251). Interpreting or drawing inferences from statistical data representing attitudes or opinions from a questionnaire only have validity if the data is validated. And here that validation, i.e. the comparison with actual behavior, is left for the subject matter of a later study using a subsequent survey and test participants. But for the purposes of this paper on responsibility, the initial inference, though certainly not

verifiable, has a preponderance of support from accompanying question responses. A stark example to support the foregoing inference is the sixty percent of participants that do not think attendance should be included in grades. For implications on responsibility and accountability this certainly appears to be a direct request for less.

If the student perceptions of their grade levels are accurate but such a sizeable percentage miss classes, don't want to actively participate in classes, and don't study more than a few hours for each class then these contradictions seem to say that students are not required to work very hard to obtain better than average grades. Salmon states that being a student means being judged (p. 63), but students seem to say that they don't want to be judged (1995). It is my own experience that students don't even want tests. They want to hand over all responsibility for grades to the teacher. One of the apparent reasons is the obvious grade inflation and the difficulty for teachers to flunk students in our society. Natalie Hess in her book *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes* (2001) suggests making "learning contracts" with students to make students responsible for their own learning. This, again, seems to indicate that specific well articulated standards are required giving students a foundation to ground their perceptions as well as their grades in.

But without the well articulated standards or even with them, what obligations do the participants believe exist and to whom do these obligations attach? Moving to the first two sections of the survey, the results show that the participants stress obligations on the parts of both the student and the instructor. However, there were some surprising contradictions in participant perceptions of responsibility. Closely supporting the earlier inference that students don't want to participate is the ninety percent of participants that don't believe it is the responsibility of the teacher to force students to participate. Teachers should, however, be friendly to and respect students as well as be knowledgeable of the subject taught and that that subject must be relevant and valuable. Students, on the other hand, have very little active responsibility, as shown by the sixty-eight percent of participants who stated that students have no responsibility for asking questions in class or the seventy-three percent that said that students have no responsibility for following directions!

Again, participants seem to be saying what they want to believe. They don't want to feel that they are "required" to ask questions or follow directions that they don't like. Only fifty-eight percent stated that they had the responsibility of turning in homework on time and only thirty-eight percent believed they needed to tell a teacher they would be absent from a future class. Though, as stated, the validity of these perceptions (the survey answers) rely on actual behavior observations, seldom do I remember students telling me that they will have to miss next week's class. Usually, I just find them gone. Fortunately, I've never had the problem of students not following directions. However



Taiwanese students seldom ask questions in class. Anxiety is certainly one reason for this (Stipek, 1998). But anxiety can be seen as a desire to reduce responsibilities or a desire to avoid them. So whether these perceptions are wishful thinking, desires, or actual valid opinions that find their validity in student behaviors, they definitely seem to demonstrate a strong contradiction with the idea of being a “responsible, above-average student.”

All of these student perceptions can be inferred to lead back to society, teachers, and the teaching institution. If responsibility and accountability, if they are different, are standards that are not completely open to individual determination then those standards must be stated and enforced in some manner. Grades have traditionally been the method to assess performance (Kuethe, 1968; Davies, 1984; Pai, 1990). Performance has been traditionally tied to personal effort. Where grade inflation and the power of students’ preferences takes precedence over or becomes a “doppelganger” for personal achievement and true learning, responsibility for everyone from students to institutions become contradicted and blurred. Perceptions of responsibility have no true standards to find foundation and consistency in.

## Conclusion

Having solicited the perceptions of the forty student participants, the results demonstrated existing contradictions in the answers to the survey questions. A large percentage of the participants viewed themselves as responsible students with high grade averages but at the same time a noticeable percentage displayed stated behaviors and attitudes that indicate irresponsibility and a desire to limit student responsibility in the teaching-learning process.

If responsibility is defined as an obligation that results in an outcome, participants indicated that a sizeable percentage of themselves believe that outcomes result from the teacher and not from their own performance or work. Looking at the conflicting answers in the survey, I cannot help but feel that a majority of students do not connect personal effort with result in regard to grades and learning. This survey, though a very basic step in a chain of descriptive research, highlights the contradictions found in the opinions and attitudes of university students, even if limited to a certain school or program. These opinions and attitudes, if valid, display a vivid problem underlying institutional instruction in regard to accountability and student responsibility that is underscored by the apparent trend in grade inflation. If students are not being responsible, this study suggests that it may be partially due to the fact that they have conflicting perceptions of what is and is not their responsibility and that the present teaching environment contributes to these contradictions.

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