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Graduate Academic Symposium Oral Presentation Submission

Multiple-Choice and Short-Answer Exams in A College Classroom: A look at Students Expectations and Outcomes

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Jessica is a first-year master's degree candidate in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. Her clinical interests include severe mental illness and the impact on family dynamics, as well as the intersection of counseling, law, and policy. She plans to pursue a doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision after graduation. She attended Judson University ('15) and majored in Psychology and Sociology. Currently, she belongs to Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society, Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society, National Honor Society, and the American Counseling Association. Her co-authors are her faculty mentor, Amanda Zelechoski, and CMHC alumnus, Rose Leuhrs (MA '16).

Abstract:

This project aims to understand the expectations and outcomes of students in an introductory-level Lifespan Development course at Valparaiso University as they completed multiple-choice format versus short-answer format examinations. Many colleges and universities are using multiple-choice examinations as a way to test their students' knowledge, due to their perceived efficiency and increase in content retention (Bleske-Rechek, Zeug, & Webb, 2007). However, is that really the most effective way to test students' knowledge of the course material? Nield and Wintre (2003) discovered that having a sense of control over the test decreases the amount of test-taking anxiety that is felt by the student. Wallace and Williams

(2003) found that asking students to provide comments explaining their reasoning behind choosing certain multiple-choice answers helped improve scores on subsequent exams. This is, in part, because the professor is able to respond to students' faulty reasoning on incorrect answer choices. Contrarily, many students also find short-answer exams to be frustrating and anxiety-provoking due to the increased effort in preparation and writing during the test (Nield & Wintre, 1986; Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005). Research shows that both multiple-choice and short-answer tests have pros and cons; so, what is the true contributing factor to a student feeling successful on their exams?

A commonality amongst the research is the concept of perceived fairness that the student feels or procedural justice. Procedural justice refers to how fair students find assessments and assignments to be when considering their outcome, or final grade, in a course (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory, 2007). Procedural justice ratings are often higher for professors who demonstrate care and investment in their students' grades. This perceived fairness of a course can be a motivating factor in the student's study habits, especially when they feel as though their professor's expectations of them are valid and justified (Chory, 2007; Duplaga & Astani, 2010; Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010). Overall, students are more motivated to study and learn material when they feel there is a standard of procedural justice being upheld within their classroom (Chory-Assad, 2002; Duplaga & Astani, 2010).

In the present study, we sought to examine two main questions. First, we investigated whether students preferred multiple-choice exams or short-answer exams. Secondly, we looked at self-reported exam performance expectations compared to actual performance on the two exam formats. We anticipated that students would perform lower on multiple-choice tests than they predicted, and higher on short-answer tests than they expected. We also predicted a higher

level of perceived procedural justice associated with short-answer exams, as well as better retention several months after completion of the course. This presentation will discuss the study's preliminary results and their pedagogical implications.

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