

Undergraduate Explanations of Instructional Behaviors

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Academia relies on instruction by graduate teaching assistants (GTAs); in fact, surveys indicate that over 70% of institutions use GTAs for undergraduate instruction, often for laboratory and discussion sessions. When asked to compare instruction by GTAs and faculty members, undergraduates can articulate differences, but often use single words such as “boring,” “enthusiastic,” or “organized.” This study utilized interviews (n = 24) and an online survey (n = 42) to identify underlying instructional behaviors associated with thirteen words commonly used to describe instructors. Undergraduate participants were enrolled in introductory biology lecture courses with associated laboratories (taught by GTAs) at a large Southern research institution. Instructional behaviors described by undergraduates spanned personal (instructor interactions with students) and classroom (knowledge and teaching of content) contexts. Once identified, positive instructional behaviors were grouped into three themes (relationship, delivery technique, and content knowledge) which were used to generate a schema depicting instructional behaviors which students articulated would lead to student respect for an instructor. The identified instructional behaviors, as well as the schema generated from this study, can be utilized by GTAs and other instructors to foster instructional behaviors which undergraduates indicate are supportive of teaching effectiveness and student learning.

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