

Students' Academic Climate Perception Of The School Of Business Of A Mexican University

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses student perception of the academic climate of the School of Business in a private university in Tijuana, México. With the participation of 257 students out of 348 enrolled in five academic programs, the survey results show that students perceive that the criteria that make up the academic climate occur "Always" in 18%; 78% of the criteria occur "Frequently" 2% of the aspects takes place "Sometimes" and another 2% of the criteria occurs "Never". There was a significant difference among the results of the nine semesters, while no significant differences were found between the results of the five academic programs and gender analysis. This paper provides information to higher education academic leaders for the design of educational quality improvement strategic actions.

Keywords: Academic quality; Students perception; Academic climate

INTRODUCTION

Mexican universities emphasize the complement of their educational mission while satisfying the students' needs and making efforts to maintain a dynamic circle of improvement, not only in activities related to the services they offer, but in the academic climate in which the teaching and learning process takes place, because of their interest in quality education and competitiveness.

Quality is the absence of deficiencies (Juran, 1990). Farro describes academic quality as the value added to an educational process or product, in comparative terms, resulting from the relationship between the academic institution's basic internal and external components (Castro and Pérez, 2007).

Hernández Pina, García Sanz and Maquilón Sánchez (2007) point out that learning quality varies or differs as a result of the university students' perception of the academic context and the climate in which the teaching and learning process takes place.

For the purposes of this paper, we will make no distinction between the terms learning quality and academic quality.

Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (1999) and Robbins (2004), describe perception as a psychological process in which people gather information from the environment in order to make sense to the world they live in. Gordon, Mondy, Sharplin and Premeaux (1990) describe perception as the way individuals understand or see things in their world.

For individuals, perception is reality (Shepard, 1998), and because of this, it is not important whether perception is accurate or not; after all, perception is what individuals understand and feel as real (Keller, 1999).

Landázuri Ortiz, Terán Álvarez del Rey, Hernández Cortés and Mercado Doménech (2007) describe the organizational climate as an environmental factor that promotes certain social interactions or organizational dynamics creating an “athomosphere” in a determined situation.

The organizational academic climate is the multidimensional social space conformed by a very complex net of social and psychological interactions among members of an academic community, where processes of educational institutions take place (Landázuri Ortiz, Terán Álvarez del Rey, Hernández Cortés and Mercado Doménech, 2007).

Because of the influence of students’ perception of the academic climate on their learning quality (Entwistle, 1987), it becomes the main factor of study in our research that took place in the School of Business of a private university in Tijuana, México.

The purpose of this paper is to advise leaders of higher education institutions by providing information that may contribute to the establishment of strategies oriented to the improvement of quality of the learning process, while creating an academic climate that may satisfy the students’ needs.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The study was held with the participation of 74% of the student population of the School of Business in a private university in Tijuana, México. There were 257 respondents, out of 348 students registered in Accounting (A), Business Administration (BA), International Business (IB), Marketing (M), and Service Administration (SA) programs offered by the institution. The remaining 26% of the students did not participate because of their absence during the process.

Forty-three percent of the responders were male and 57% female.

Nine percent of the participants were Accounting students, 17% were enrolled in the Business Administration program, 41% were enrolled in the International Business major, 29% were Marketing students, and 4% were enrolled in the Service Administration program.

Instrument

The Charles F. Kettering School Climate Profile (CFK), an adaptation process to be used in higher education institutions, was applied (González Montesinos, Gallegos Moreno, and Santiago Hernández, 2007).

A 40-item electronic questionnaire in Likert’s scale was used in this study. It has four given values - 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Frequently, and 4=Always - to measure the students’ perception of the academic climate with a maximum of 160 points.

Procedure

Through the implementation of .NET Technologies, a data entry system was developed to evaluate the students’ perception of the academic climate.

The system consists of a web application using Active Server Page components (ASP) and a Structured Query Language (SQL) Server data bases for capturing each one of the items selected by the students. The student selects one option for each item. Each option has an assigned value in the designed database.

The system allows only one response to assure the responders’ veracity.

Once the application is completed and supported by a database searching (Query), the information was concentrated and classified. Using an external application (EXCEL and SPSS), the data were analyzed.

Once the instructions were given and the questions regarding the instrument were answered, groups of 20 students responded to the survey electronically in the computer lab.

For the inferencial data analysis, Z and X² tests were applied, with p=.01 significance level.

RESULTS

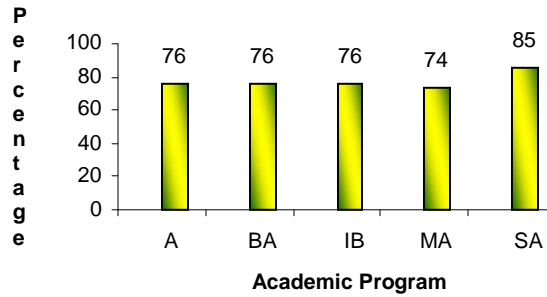


Chart 1: Percentage of Students' Academic Climate Perception by Program

Chart 1 expresses the percentage of the students' perception of the academic climate by program. Accounting, Business Administration and International Business students perceive that the academic climate reaches 76% of their expectations, while the Marketing Administration program students perceive it happens at 74%, and the Service Administration program students perceive it at 85%.

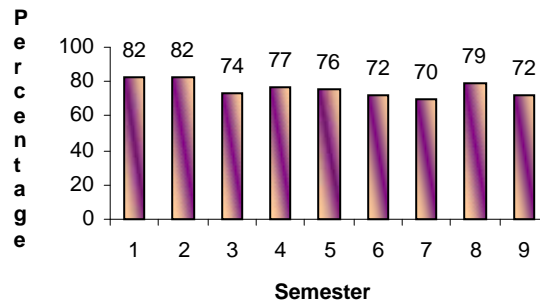


Chart 2: Percentage of Students' Academic Climate Perception by Semester

Chart 2 expresses the percentage of the students' perception of the academic climate by semester. Students enrolled in the first and second semesters perceive that the academic climate reaches 82% of their expectations; third semester students perceive it occurs at 74%; fourth semester students perceive it at 77%; fifth semester students perceive it at 76%, sixth and ninth semester students perceive it at 72%; seventh semester students perceive it at 72%, and eight semester students perceive it at 79%.

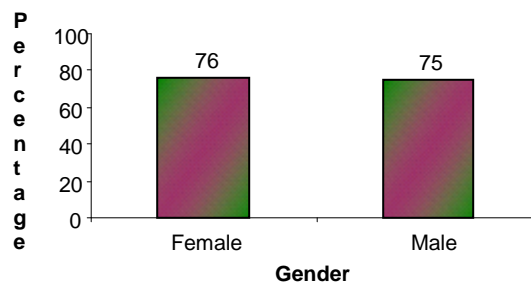


Chart 3: Percentage of Students' Academic Climate Perception by Gender

Chart 3 expresses the percentage of the students' perception of the academic climate by gender. Female students perceive that the academic climate reaches 76% of their expectations, while male students perceive it at 75%.

'Always' and 'Frequently' are the most common responses, which represent 18% and 78%, respectively, in terms of the students' perception of the academic climate.

The students perceive that one aspect occurs only 'Sometimes', and another aspect - 'Never' - occurs, which represents 2% for each situation.

The statistical analysis reflects a significant difference ($p=.01$) between the results among the nine semesters, while no significant differences were found among the results of the five programs and gender analysis.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In general terms, the results of the study show that students perceive the criteria that make up the academic climate for the programs offered by the School of Business to take place 'Always' or 'Frequently'.

The students enrolled in Accounting, Business Administration and International Business programs show similar appreciations of the school's academic climate; the perception slightly decreases with Marketing Administration students and shows a significant growth in Administration of Service students.

Female and male students had a similar perception of the school's academic climate.

First and second semester students of all programs have a more positive perception of the school's academic climate than students from the rest of the semesters.

Apparently, while the students move forward in their academic program, ups and downs occur in academic climate perception.

It is worth mentioning that the best performing criteria were those related to professors' greater interest in attending classes promptly in relation to the students. The students prefer to be enrolled in their school more than any other one and they perceive most people in their school to be kind.

On the other hand, the criteria that were rated the poorest were those involving decision-making participation; that is, the aspects that have to do with the fact that students are aware of important school matters that affect them and feel they should be included in the discussions before such decisions are made, making sure that students, faculty and administrative personnel input is taken into account.

Evidence of academic climate perception research is scarce in Mexican higher education institutions, which is why it is difficult to establish a benchmark. However, while this study does not present the effective climate as such, it does approach aspects related to the role of faculty, which López Bravo, Vivanco Skarneo y Mandiola Cerda (2006) report, finding that the majority of the subjects in their study were satisfied with the effective climate, even though they noticed some problems related with professors' attitudes toward "less qualified" students who perceive them as "distant" or "less human than expected". Fernández Rodríguez (2007) found in his evaluation of some elements that faculty and administrative personnel perceived themselves being part of the university and that the participants achieved a lower level of satisfaction than expected. The perception of comfort in the university was as expected. In a similar vein, the results of the present study partially confirm his initial hypothesis that students express high expectations, which tend to become lower during their first academic year.

CONCLUSIONS

Relevant information is provided by the students in regard to the academic climate they perceive in their school. We can highlight the fact that students perceive that only sometimes the most important decisions in the

school are made in agreement among students, faculty and administrative personnel and that they never become aware of issues and participate in the discussions when important decisions are to be made regarding the performance of the school.

The results provide information to allow the leadership of higher education institutions to determine strengths and weaknesses in the academic climate of their institution, information that facilitates strategy formulation and the establishment of criteria for future improvement programs.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Patricia Valdes Flores. Professor and Coordinator of Business Administration Program, CETYS University. PhD in Psychology and Master Degree in International Administration, CETYS University, Tijuana, Mexico. Lecturer in various conferences throughout Latin America and Europe. Has published on topics such as leadership, job satisfaction and productivity and teamwork. Third place in Research category of 2009 FIMPES Award, with paper “Students’ Perception of the academic climate in business programs in a private university”. Best Paper Award in The European Applied Business Research Conference 2007. Academic Certification since 2003 to date, by The National Association of Accounting and Administration Schools (ANFECA), Mexico. Member of **Phi Beta Delta Honor Society**.

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