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TEACHING BUSINESS POLICY UTILIZING MASS LECTURE AND INDIVIDUAL CASE LABS

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Business Policy has been taught utilizing small classes (25-30 students). The alternate method investigated by the authors utilized the traditional smaller classes for case analysis, as well as mass (large section with 100-150 students) lecture for coverage of the theory material. This approach provides a uniform and efficient way to cover the growing body of theory in Policy, while allowing the usual small-class approach for case analysis instruction. Statistical treatment produced conflicting results as to the benefit of the administration of an exam over the theory portion to increase students' case analysis skills.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is two-fold. First the authors wish to present an alternative method of teaching the Business Policy course. Second, the authors wish to determine whether class time is better spent administering an exam covering the growing body of theory material or whether that time would be better spent in developing the students' analytical tools for case analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, discussions have been held among the Business Policy instructors at Southwest Missouri State University regarding how the Policy course should be taught. During a recent discussion, the point was raised that maybe better case analysis would result if the theory portion were stressed more, culminating with an exam over the material.

METHODOLOGY

The decision was made to experiment with a different approach to teaching the Policy course. Specifically, the theory portion would be taught via a mass lecture (large section) for the first six weeks of the semester, while case analysis would be taught in smaller case lab classes for the remaining ten weeks of the semester.

At the conclusion of the mass lecture, student feedback was secured through the administration of a student evaluation form. Results indicated that 70 percent preferred the mass lecture approach, while 30 percent indicated they would prefer the traditional small class approach for the entire semester.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To evaluate the effectiveness of the exam and its impact on case analysis, correlation analysis was used to determine if a relationship exists between the exam scores and the first case scores. The resulting correlation coefficient (.325) was judged significant at the .05 level. In other words,

the higher the exam score, the higher the first case score.

To further determine the impact of the exam, first case scores of policy students who were required to take a written exam and students (from a previous semester) who were not required to do so were analyzed. The data were subjected to analysis of variance; the resulting F (1.241) was not judged significant. In other words, the case scores did not differ between the two groups (those taking an exam versus those who did not).

To control for potential teacher differences and possible contamination of results, data was limited to scores of those students who had the same instructor for both the mass lecture and case lab.

DISCUSSION

There is a lack of research literature regarding alternate methods of teaching policy. The authors have presented one possible alternative to the traditional teaching approach. The alternative method presented by the authors does provide some noteworthy advantages. For one, the large mass section for the first six weeks frees up other instructors for performing research. This method also provides an assurance that all Policy students receive the same instruction in the theory portion. For disadvantages, there is some concern regarding the impact the large mass section has on student evaluations, the results of which are utilized to help make decisions regarding merit pay, tenure, reappointment, and promotion. There is a fear that if students do not like the large mass lectures, faculty teaching the case lab sections may receive unfavorable student evaluations. Additionally, faculty only teaching case labs for the last ten weeks of the semester will not be evaluated for the whole Semester. Faculty may argue that the shorter duration will not allow them the opportunity to build rapport with the students that they might otherwise be able to accomplish during the full 16 weeks.

Another concern some faculty have relates to the coverage or treatment of topics in the mass lectures. The person teaching the large section may not emphasize some material which individual case lab instructors may feel is particularly relevant to his/her case analysis style.

The issue of whether examinations over the theory portion of Policy is beneficial is still unresolved. Future research could further examine the contradiction identified in this study.

The impact of the individual teacher should also be explored. Do some teachers do a better job imparting theoretical information or linking the theory and case analysis? Are some teachers better suited to small classes, regardless of the subject matter being taught? Students and teachers of Business Policy will be better served when there are answers to some of these questions.