

The Selection of a Departmental Textbook for General Psychology: An Objective Process

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INTRODUCTION

- At Broome Community College a large number of adjunct instructors covers many sections of general psychology. To ensure equivalent content we use a departmental text.
- The selection of a departmental textbook for general psychology is a challenging task. Several criteria must be satisfied:
 - Coverage of required topics;
 - Diverse teaching styles of many instructors;
 - Diverse student learning styles and abilities;
 - SUNY general education requirements;
 - Profusion of available texts; and
 - Limited faculty time.
- Problems with previous selection processes:**
 - The department chair would amass several texts for faculty members to evaluate, though very few full-time faculty took advantage of this opportunity, and adjunct faculty were often left out of the process entirely.
 - Publishers' representatives presented their materials to individual instructors to try to influence the department's choice.
 - A few professors might have evidenced a preference for certain books – often based on "gut feelings" or the recommendations of particularly persuasive publishers' representatives.
 - The chair reviewed the available books and selected a text for the faculty to ratify at a department meeting – though many faculty might never have evaluated any of the texts.
 - Once selected, a book would be used for several years, until dissatisfaction mounted, and the process would be repeated.
 - This process was generally accepted, though it did not truly satisfy anyone. There were no department-wide selection criteria nor processes for real, objective comparisons.
- A NEW WAY:**
 - In fall 2003, a committee formed to develop and implement a more objective procedure.

METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURE

- Developed objective criteria:**
 - Selection criteria were solicited from full-time and adjunct faculty via email.
 - Criteria were synthesized and the list was distributed to full-time and adjunct faculty.
 - Faculty met to finalize the list of selection criteria.
- Developed instruments based on criteria:**
 - Rating instrument for faculty review (Fig. 1).
 - Rating instrument for student review (Fig. 2).
- Identified and procured sample texts:**
 - Obtained listings of texts from The Faculty Center Network online (<http://facultycenter.net/>).
 - Held meetings with publishers' representatives.
 - Solicited ideas from full-time & adjunct faculty.
- Committee rated texts using the criteria-based instrument.**
- Initial cut from over 40 texts to four for final selection.**
- Classroom testing of the textbooks and student ancillaries:**
 - Four sections of general psychology were identified for testing in the spring of 2004.
 - All sections were taught by the lead author, using identical syllabi, demonstrations, lectures, and objective-based examinations.
 - Each section used a different one of the four books identified as finalists.
 - Books & ancillaries were provided to students free, on loan from publishers.
 - Students in each section rated their books and materials at the end of the semester using the criteria-based instrument and publishers' ratings questionnaires.
- Faculty evaluation of instructor ancillaries.**
- Final selection by faculty committee.**
- Negotiation with publisher.**
- Presentation of selected text to faculty.**

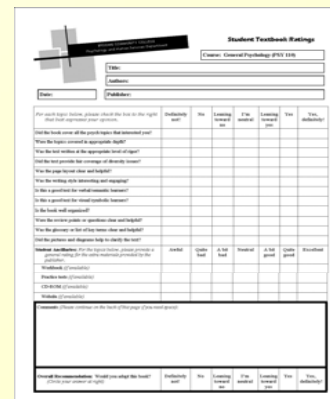
RESULTS

- Comparison of students' grades by section showed no significant differences.**
- Students using two of the texts required less assistance to understand the material.**
- All supplied comparable student ancillaries.**
- Student ratings and comments:**
 - General level of satisfaction was high with all books – no significant differences.
 - "Features" were too distracting in two texts.
 - Organization and graphic layout were more helpful in two of the texts than the others.
 - Graphical ancillary materials for one text were particularly good.
- Analysis of instructors' ancillary materials:**
 - Two sets of manuals and lecture supplements were clearly superior.
 - Videos and demonstration software from two publishers were clearly superior.
 - Website support was equivalent for all.
 - One test bank was clearly superior, but another had a superior interface program.
- All results were shared with the publishers.**
- Final selection:**
 - We chose two texts, to address different semantic and symbolic strengths.
 - Faculty members may choose either text, to match their own teaching styles best.
 - Both test banks were converted to the better interface by publishers.
 - Negotiated comparable prices on each.

Figure 1. Faculty Rating Instrument



Figure 2. Student Rating Instrument



DISCUSSION

- Faculty and publishers reported that the process was thorough, objective, and fair.**
- Students were pleased with the ability to have some impact on this decision.**
- Next step: survey to determine faculty satisfaction with the selected packages.**
- The process was extremely effective. It is highly recommended for future text selections and use in other courses.**