

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.

Faculty Rating Instrument



The Faculty Rating Instrument is a form titled "Faculty Rating Instrument" with a sub-header "Textbook Rating Sheet". It includes fields for "Textbook Title", "Author", "Edition", "Publisher", and "Year". Below these fields is a table with columns for "Coverage", "Quality", "Cost", "Supplements", "Organization", "Graphics", "Ancillaries", and "Overall". The table contains a list of criteria for evaluation, such as "Coverage of required topics", "Quality of coverage", "Cost of text", "Supplements for manual available", "Organization of manual available", "Graphics and illustrations", "Ancillaries", "Overall", and "Supplements".

Figure 1

Student Rating Instrument



The Student Rating Instrument is a form titled "Student Textbook Rating" with a sub-header "General Psychology (PH1 001)". It includes fields for "Textbook Title", "Author", "Edition", and "Publisher". Below these fields is a table with columns for "Coverage", "Quality", "Cost", "Supplements", "Organization", "Graphics", "Ancillaries", and "Overall". The table contains a list of criteria for evaluation, such as "Coverage of required topics", "Quality of coverage", "Cost of text", "Supplements for manual available", "Organization of manual available", "Graphics and illustrations", "Ancillaries", and "Overall".

Figure 2

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.**