

# Students' Perceptions of Teacher Behaviors As Motivating and Demotivating Factors in College Classes

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*This study coded and categorized 2404 motivators and demotivators freely listed by 308 college students prior to and following their being prompted to consider teacher behaviors as contributing to motivation level. Twenty categories of motivators and 20 categories of demotivators emerged; four of each reflected context factors, six of each structure/format factors, and ten of each teacher behavior factors. While teacher behaviors accounted for approximately 44% of both motivators and demotivators, negative teacher behaviors were perceived as more central to students' demotivation (i.e., were listed without prompting) than positive teacher behaviors were perceived as central to motivation. Structure/format factors were more frequently mentioned as demotivators and context factors, such as desire to know the material, grade or credit motivation, and personal desire for accomplishment, as motivators. It was concluded that motivation is perceived by students as a student-owned state, while lack of motivation is perceived as a teacher-owned problem.*

**KEY CONCEPTS** Motivation, teacher behaviors, context, structure, demotivators

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Investigations focusing on the relationships of various teacher behaviors to student learning outcomes are not new to those interested in understanding communicative relationships between teachers and students. For example, the ongoing lines of research concerned with compliance gaining in the classroom (c.f., Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984; Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1985; Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Plax & Kearney, 1990; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986) and with teacher immediacy (c.f., Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Gorham & Zakahi, 1990; Kelley & Gorham, 1988; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) have identified sets of specific teacher behaviors which "persuade" and/or "attract" students to engage in on-task behaviors, with subsequent learning gains.

One of the assumptions which has grounded instructional communication studies such as those noted above is that the behavior of the teacher influences the behavior of the student. An equally important assumption in educational psychology literature is that student motivation is one of the most important of the elements which contribute to learning (Brophy, 1987; Hall, 1966; Logan, 1970; Wlodkowski, 1978). Brophy (1983) distinguishes between motivation as a trait, or general predisposition to strive for content

knowledge and skill mastery, and motivation as a situation specific, or state, element. It seems logical to speculate that teacher behaviors might influence student state motivation, and that the enhanced learning outcomes associated with a teacher's use of prosocial compliance gaining messages and immediacy behaviors might occur because those behaviors affect students' motivation in that teacher's classroom; however, research concerned with linking specific teacher behaviors to motivational outcomes and existing instructional communication models has been sparse.

Christophel's (1990) study of the relationships among teacher immediacy behaviors, motivation, and student learning concluded that: (1) trait motivation has little impact on learning outcomes, and then only when combined with state motivation; (2) state motivation levels are modifiable within the classroom environment; (3) state motivation has a strong impact on learning; and (4) immediacy's effect on learning is indirect, operating through its direct impact on state motivation. It is tempting to extend Christophel's findings to provide explanations incorporating student motivation into previously developed models which suggest explanations of how teacher behavior acts to modify learning. For example, Plax, et al. (1986) supported a model in which the influence of compliance gaining strategies is indirectly associated with affective learning based on students' perceptions of teacher immediacy. It would follow that immediate teachers who use prosocial, reward-oriented compliance gaining strategies would be more likely to increase learning among their students, and that this would happen because those teachers stimulated students' motivation to learn.

Kelley and Gorham (1988) drew from studies in behavioral psychology in proposing a model in which immediacy causes arousal, which directs attention, which is required for retention, or learning, an explanation which supports a direct immediacy—learning relationship (i.e., one not dependent on immediacy's influence on affect). Wlodkowski (1978) characterizes the path of motivation to learning as a sequential process in which a student who is able to act (student energy) makes a choice (volition) that includes a certain purpose (direction) followed by continuation (involvement). The juxtaposition of these two models leads to easy speculation that "arousal" in the Kelley-Gorham model is synonymous with motivation, particularly if one considers other synonyms for motivation: to incite, impel, set in motion, urge to action, stimulate, stir up, rouse, push, drive, propel.<sup>1</sup>

It was our concern that student motivation would be so easily "absorbed" by models generated by previous research dealing with the effects of teacher behaviors on learning that prompted the present study. The educational psychology literature dealing with motivation to learn does suggest that teacher behavior is at least in part directly related to students' motivation; however, other factors which may or may not be classified as or related to teacher behavior are also identified. For example, Brophy (1983, 1987) notes that educational psychologists believe most students are capable of developing a motivation to learn, and that this motivation is related to predispositions resulting from conditioning and previous experiences as well as various forms of modeling, communication of expectations, and "direct instruction or socialization by significant others (especially parents and teachers)" (1987, p. 40). Ashton (1984) holds that classroom variety, instructional activities, student involvement, and direct feedback are central to stimulation, or motivation. These factors reflect teachers' methodological and course design decisions more than their daily behaviors, although it is likely that certain choices will be associated with perceptions of more immediate behavior than will other choices.

In a similar vein, Buchanan (1962) and Hawley and Hawley (1979) draw on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, suggesting that physiological, safety, love or belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs must be addressed in order, and that students' innate need to

belong, to be accepted by their peers and their instructor, is central to motivation. Others report that students' actions are influenced by attitudes toward the subject or type of learning environment (Logan, 1970; Wlodkowski, 1978); by achievement motivation, the student's concern for academic excellence and his/her desire to become competent in a specific subject, skill, or task (Vernon, 1969); and by self-perceptions, including expectancies of the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes in a given situation (Brophy, 1983; McColskey & Learly, 1985; Purkey, 1970; Schunk, 1985; Spache, 1976). Bandura (1981, 1982) and Schunk (1985) point to the deleterious effect of failure on subsequent motivation, and to the importance of providing evaluative information on how students are doing throughout the course to sustain motivation. Thus, while we do not distrust or question the logic of Christophel's (1990) findings, we find it prudent to triangulate data collected using different approaches to investigate the influence of teacher behavior on motivation.

Christophel's study was designed as an extension of the line of research on teacher immediacy and student learning. Based on that research, and on the literature on motivation, she hypothesized that both teacher immediacy and motivation would be related to learning outcomes and went on to analyze the extent to which teacher immediacy and motivation are colinear predictors of learning. Her research design presented students with measures of state and trait motivation, learning, and their teachers' use of previously defined immediacy behaviors. As noted above, her results indicated that immediacy modified state motivation, which in turn influenced learning; i.e. students of teachers who more frequently used verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors reported higher state motivation and more learning while students of teachers who infrequently used immediacy behaviors reported lower state motivation and less learning. Our purpose in the present study was to step back to elicit inductively students' perceptions of factors they perceive as motivating them to do their best in college classes. Our intent was to have students generate responses without being restricted to or prompted by any indication of our particular interest in teacher behaviors which influence motivation. Thus, our first research question was left very broad:

RQ<sub>1</sub> What factors do students perceive as motivators in college classes?

We were also interested in ascertaining whether lack of motivation is related simply to the absence of motivational factors or whether separate demotivating factors contribute to decreasing students' motivation to try hard to do their best in a given class. This concern grew out of our observation that a common design for correlational studies with motivation as the dependent variable involves the use of a measure of the presence or absence of something presumed to contribute to motivation as the independent variable. Conclusions drawn regarding lack of motivation are thus limited. Our second research question specifically addressed demotivating factors:

RQ<sub>2</sub> What factors do students perceive as demotivators in college classes?

In spite of our desire not to restrict students to focusing on teacher behaviors as motivators/demotivators, our instructional communication perspective dictated particular interest in identifying low inference teacher behavior variables similar in nature to the descriptive and prescriptive variables previously identified as contributing to classroom compliance and immediacy. We therefore provided a set of prompts, midway through the questionnaire and after students had responded to open questions regarding motivators and demotivators, asking them first to consider specifically what *the teacher* of the class being referenced did that affected the student's level of motivation, and again asking about motivators and demotivators in general after exposure to the teacher immediacy scale items (Gorham, 1988; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) used in Christophel's study. This

procedure allowed us to separate teacher behaviors perceived as primary influences on motivation/demotivation (those generated without prompting) from those generated via focusing students' attention on teacher behaviors. Our third and fourth research questions were concerned with the degree to which teacher behaviors were perceived as contributing to student motivation:

- RQ<sub>3</sub> What teacher behaviors do students identify as motivators and/or demotivators in college classes?
- RQ<sub>4</sub> What teacher behaviors do students identify as primary influences on motivation and/or demotivation in college classes?

These two questions directed us to look at the overall range of teacher behaviors students saw as motivating and demotivating influences (RQ<sub>3</sub>) and also to analyze separately those listed prior to our suggesting that the teacher's behavior might be a salient consideration (RQ<sub>4</sub>).

## Method

Participants in the study were 308 undergraduate students (193 female and 115 male) enrolled in sections of introductory communication courses at a southwestern university. Forty-seven of the participants were freshmen, 102 sophomores, 82 juniors, and 76 seniors; one participant did not indicate class rank. Approximately one-third of the sample indicated that they were or intended to be communication majors, with the other two-thirds reporting a diversity of majors across the university.

The instructions for the questionnaire distributed to the students assured them that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would be anonymous and confidential. Students were asked to respond to all questions in terms of the class they attended most recently prior to the class in which data were collected. They were also instructed to complete the questions in order and not to go back to add to a response after they had gone on to the next question. This instruction was highlighted both in print and during the verbal explanation of directions. The remainder of the first page of the questionnaire allowed space for responses to two open-ended questions: "We are interested in knowing the kinds of things that affect your motivation in the class you take immediately before this class. (A) What things *motivate* you to try hard to do your best in that class?" and "(B) What things *decrease your motivation* to try hard to do your best in that class?" Space was provided after each of the two questions for student responses.

The next part of the questionnaire solicited information about the course being referenced in completing the instrument and requested demographic data on the participants. Students were then prompted to focus on teacher behaviors and to list specific things *the teacher* of the class being referenced did or said that influenced how the student felt (e.g., motivated, stimulated, interested, enthused—or their opposites) about that class. After completing their response to the question related specifically to teacher behaviors and motivation/demotivation, participants were presented with a list of the 34 descriptions of "things some teachers have been observed doing or saying in some classes" used in previous studies to measure teacher immediacy (Gorham, 1988; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) and asked to rate the frequency of their teacher's use of each behavior. Following this additional prompt regarding teacher behavior, a final open-ended question asked "Are there any additional things you've thought of that influence *your motivation* in the class that you referenced?"

The 2404 responses to the open-ended questions were unitized and transcribed, with the unit of analysis each phrase, sentence, or paragraph which described a separate

observation related to the student's motivation. For example: "The subject of the class is interesting" was transcribed as one unit; "The teacher is friendly and knowledgeable" was transcribed as two units because "friendly" and "knowledgeable" describe conceptually different observations; "The professor has been available and very willing to discuss ideas and applications about the material. Before, during, and on office hours he is always willing to discuss material and just ideas about the theory discussed in class" was transcribed as one unit because, although a lengthy statement, the overall observation is one of availability; and "He does use interesting illustrations and concrete examples to make subject clearer, he fails to keep the actual content of the course on a personal (non-textbook) level" was regarded as two units because, while the entire statement appears to be related to the use of illustrations and examples, the first part suggests a motivating factor and the second part a perceived demotivating factor.

The unitizer/transcriber recorded each participant's responses on a separate page, separating the responses to the four open-ended questions, and providing a blank for coding in front of each descriptive unit. A second individual then cross-checked the unitization and examined the data for overall patterns across the responses. Consistent with the literature on motivation, motivating and demotivating factors listed by the students who participated in the study included items referring to teacher behaviors, items referring to the structure or format of the class, and items referring to the context in which course enrollment existed. Behaviors in the first category were likely to be perceived as under the teacher's direct control (speaking clearly, showing an interest in students, not having office hours, or failing to show up for class). Factors in the second category were likely to be seen as things over which a teacher has some degree of influence (general organization of class material, textbook choice, grading and assignments) but which might also be affected by administrative dictates, class size, and similar constraints. Factors in the third category were likely to be regarded as antecedent to the teacher's influence (need a good grade to get accepted into XYZ, dislike subject, general desire to do well, personal laziness).

The data were then divided equally among three coders who had not been involved in the study prior to this point. These coders used a constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop categories for coding. Using this approach, a coder would read the first item in her packet, classify it as a motivator or demotivator (this was necessary only for the responses to the third and fourth questions), classify it as related to context, structure/format, or teacher behavior, and record it in the appropriate category. Each subsequent item was compared with items already recorded; if it had not been listed on a previous questionnaire, the item was either classified as conceptually similar to a previously listed item and incorporated with that item in an existing category or listed as representative of a new category. The three coders then met to compare their categories and to reconcile differences among them. They agreed upon a coding system representing 20 categories of motivators (four context categories, six structure/format categories, and ten teacher behavior categories) and 20 categories of demotivators, with the same distribution. Two of the four motivator and demotivator categories classified under context were "matched" in that they reflected the presence or absence of similar forces; a third was partially matched. All of the motivating and demotivating structure/format categories could be matched, as could nine of the ten teacher behavior categories.

The various motivating and demotivating categories were arranged to reflect the conceptual matches (see Figure 1) and assigned code designations. Two of the coders and one of the researchers then coded each unit in a sample set of data. All three coders agreed on codes assigned to 89% of the items, with two of the three agreeing on an additional 4%. The 2-1 splits in agreement consistently involved the classification of one particular type of

**FIGURE 1**  
**Categories For Coding**

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|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>CONTEXT</b>  |   |
| C1  | Need credit; need/want good grade (N = 182)   |
| C2  | Not required; pass/fail (N = 17)  |
| C3  | Need or desire to know material; interest in material; seen as relevant to future needs (N = 203)   |
| C4  | Dislike subject area; subject is boring or redundant; subject too difficult; not seen as relevant (N = 100)   |
| C5  | Challenge; personal growth; general desire to do well; want accomplishment feeling (N = 85)   |
| C6  | Time of day; length of class; sick of school; personal laziness; no challenge; poor health; don't feel I belong in college (N = 58)   |
| C7  | Desire to please teacher or someone else (N = 35)   |
| C8  | Too many demands besides class (N = 22)   |
| <b>STRUCTURE/FORMAT</b>                                     |   |
| S1  | Physical classroom atmosphere—positive (N = 4)  |
| S2  | Physical classroom atmosphere—negative (size of class, poor equipment; unattractive room) (N = 19)  |
| S3  | General organization of class/material—positive (videos, speakers, advance organizers, relaxed atmosphere) (N = 100)  |
| S4  | General organization of material—negative (text and lectures same, no relationship between text and lectures, too much reliance on videos/speakers, too rigid, makes material hard to grasp) (N = 129)  |
| S5  | Satisfaction with grading and assignments; clear instructions; relevant assignments; fair grading (N = 50)  |
| S6  | Dissatisfaction with grading and assignments; unclear instructions; irrelevant assignments; grading too hard or too easy; failure to perform well (N = 137)   |
| S7  | Opportunity to participate; feedback & comments from instructor (N = 87)  |
| S8  | No opportunity to participate; no feedback or constructive criticism (N = 19)   |
| S9  | Textbook—positive (N = 7)   |
| S10   | Textbook—negative (N = 5)   |
| S11   | Behavior of other students—positive (N = 17)  |
| S12   | Behavior of other students—negative (N = 21)  |
| <b>TEACHER</b>  |   |
| T1  | Competent; knowledgeable (N = 70)   |
| T2  | Not knowledgeable; not in control of classroom; low credibility (N = 23)  |
| T3  | Sense of humor (N = 52)   |
| T4  | No sense of humor; loses temper; is a pessimist (N = 6)   |
| T5  | Effective lecturer/presenter; inspirational; excited (N = 186)  |
| T6  | Boring; not dynamic; teacher is bored with class; unorganized lectures; unprepared (monotone coded here) (N = 147)  |
| T7  | Speaks clearly; clarity; detailed explanations (N = 23)   |
| T8  | Language barriers; vocabulary barriers; hard to understand speech (N = 25)  |
| T9  | Interest in students; patient; concern with student interests and problems; knows student names; includes students in lecture/discussion; calls on students in class; shows respect toward students; polite; encourages student ideas; approachable (N = 165) |
| T10   | Unapproachable; self-centered; egotistical; does not answer student questions; demonstrates favoritism; rigid; condescending; nagging; insults students; treats students like children (N = 103)  |
| T11   | Has office hours; available outside of class; works with students on individual basis (N = 29)  |
| T12   | No office hours; not available for individual help (N = 12)   |
| T13   | Immediate nonverbal behaviors (N = 26)  |
| T14   | Nonimmediate nonverbal behaviors (monotone coded in T6) (N = 8)   |
| T15   | Relates discussion to own experiences; personal touch; discloses (N = 33)   |
| T16   | Digresses; too many stories; overkills points with examples (N = 23)  |
| T17   | Responsible (returns tests/papers on time) (N = 9)  |
| T18   | Irresponsible (does not show up for class; class runs short) (N = 18)   |
| T19   | General "nice guy"; "good personality" assessments (N = 52)   |
| T20   | Negative physical appearance (N = 34)   |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS (NOT ABLE TO CODE IN ABOVE CATEGORIES)</b> |   |
| M1  | Positive (N = 11)   |
| M2  | Negative (N = 17)   |

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item into one of two categories. Through subsequent discussion, the coders came to a consensus decision regarding the appropriate code for that situation. The remainder of the data were then coded.

## Results

The classes referenced by students who participated in this study were primarily (284 of 308) Arts and Sciences classes; the other 24 classes were in Business, Education, and Engineering. Fifty-six (18%) of the classes were offered by the communication studies department, 22 were offered by the psychology department and 22 by the English department (@7%), with the remainder distributed fairly evenly among other departments in the College. The data reflect 103 small classes (1–25 students), 58 medium-sized classes (26–50 students), and 147 large classes (51+ students). Students classified 225 of the classes as using a lecture format, 23 as small group format, 32 as discussion format, 10 as lab format, and the remaining 18 as “other.” Two hundred four classes were in the student’s major and 104 were non-major courses; 136 were elective and 172 required. One hundred eighteen of the instructors were female and 190 were male.

The first research question was concerned with factors students perceived as motivators in college classes. As summarized in Tables 1 and 2, students generated 1450 motivator descriptions which were coded into 20 categories. The most frequently listed motivator was interest in and perceived relevance of the material (C3; N = 203), followed by: the teacher’s effectiveness and enthusiasm in lecturing (T5; N = 186); grade or credit motivation (C1; N = 182); the teacher’s use of student-centered behaviors (T9; N = 165); positive responses to the organization of the course and material (S3; N = 100); opportunity to participate and feedback from the instructor (S7; N = 87); personal achievement motivation (C5; N = 85); and teacher competence/knowledge (T1; N = 70). These eight categories accounted for 74% of the motivator descriptions. Other motivator categories referenced by at least 10% of the study’s participants, in order of the frequency of their mention, included the teacher’s sense of humor, general assessments of the teacher as a “nice guy,” satisfaction with assignments and grading, desire to please the teacher or

**TABLE 1**  
**Frequencies and Distributions of Motivators and Demotivators by Coding Category**

|                     | N    | %    | N1 <sup>1</sup> | %1  | N2                         | %2  |
|---------------------|------|------|-----------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| <b>Motivators</b>   |      |      |                 |     |                            |     |
| Total               | 1450 | 100% | 743             | 51% | 707 (514/193) <sup>2</sup> | 49% |
| Context             | 540  | 37%  | 470             | 32% | 70 (20/50)                 | 5%  |
| Structure/Format    | 265  | 18%  | 131             | 9%  | 134 (90/44)                | 9%  |
| Teacher             | 645  | 44%  | 142             | 10% | 503 (404/99)               | 35% |
| <b>Demotivators</b> |      |      |                 |     |                            |     |
| Total               | 926  | 100% | 583             | 63% | 343 (282/61)               | 37% |
| Context             | 197  | 21%  | 168             | 18% | 29 (18/11)                 | 3%  |
| Structure/Format    | 330  | 36%  | 216             | 23% | 114 (95/19)                | 12% |
| Teacher             | 399  | 43%  | 199             | 21% | 200 (169/31)               | 22% |

<sup>1</sup>N1 = Responses prior to teacher behavior prompt

<sup>1</sup>N2 = Responses following teacher behavior prompt

<sup>2</sup>First number in parenthesis is number of responses following teacher behavior prompt but prior to immediacy scale; second number is number of items following immediacy scale

Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

**TABLE 2**  
**Frequencies and Rank Order of Motivators**

| Motivator Code | Rank | N   | R1 <sup>1</sup> | N1  | R2   | N2                     |
|----------------|------|-----|-----------------|-----|------|------------------------|
| C1             | 3    | 182 | 2               | 163 | 14   | 17 (0/17) <sup>2</sup> |
| C3             | 1    | 203 | 1               | 172 | 8    | 31 (10/21)             |
| C5             | 7    | 85  | 3               | 69  | 15   | 16 (9/7)               |
| C7             | 12   | 35  | 8.5             | 29  | 17   | 6 (1/5)                |
| S1             | 20   | 4   | 18.5            | 1   | 20   | 3 (1/2)                |
| S3             | 5    | 100 | 7               | 37  | 3    | 63 (45/18)             |
| S5             | 11   | 50  | 8.5             | 29  | 11   | 21 (15/6)              |
| S7             | 6    | 87  | 5               | 54  | 7    | 33 (27/6)              |
| S9             | 19   | 7   | 17              | 2   | 18.5 | 5 (2/3)                |
| S11            | 17   | 17  | 12.5            | 8   | 16   | 9 (0/9)                |
| T1             | 8    | 70  | 10              | 14  | 4    | 56 (45/11)             |
| T3             | 9.5  | 52  | 12.5            | 8   | 6    | 44 (42/2)              |
| T5             | 2    | 186 | 4               | 61  | 2    | 125 (100/25)           |
| T7             | 16   | 23  | 14.5            | 4   | 13   | 19 (16/3)              |
| T9             | 4    | 165 | 6               | 38  | 1    | 127 (100/27)           |
| T11            | 14   | 29  | 11              | 9   | 12   | 20 (14/6)              |
| T13            | 15   | 26  | 18.5            | 1   | 10   | 25 (16/9)              |
| T15            | 13   | 33  | 16              | 3   | 9    | 30 (28/2)              |
| T17            | 18   | 9   | 14.5            | 4   | 18.5 | 5 (4/1)                |
| T19            | 9.5  | 52  | 20              | 0   | 5    | 52 (39/13)             |

<sup>1</sup>R1 = Responses prior to teacher behavior prompt

<sup>1</sup>R2 = Responses following teacher behavior prompt

<sup>2</sup>First number in parenthesis is number of responses following teacher behavior prompt but prior to immediacy scale; second number is number of responses following immediacy scale.

someone else (e.g., "My boyfriend will never let me live it down if I don't do as well as he did."), and the teacher's self disclosure and personal anecdotes.

As illustrated in Table 1, 37% of the motivators were "context" motivators which are primarily antecedent to the teacher's influence; 18% were "structure/format" motivators, reflecting instructional planning and classroom management over which the teacher might be expected to have varying degrees of control depending on, for example, the size of the class or whether the class is one section of a multi-section course; and 44% of the motivators were related to teacher behaviors.

The second research question was concerned with factors students perceived as demotivators in college classes. As summarized in Tables 1 and 3, students generated 926 demotivator descriptions which were coded into 20 categories. The most frequently listed demotivator was the teacher's boring or confusing students (T6; N = 147), followed by: dissatisfaction with grading and assignments (S6; N = 137); negative responses to the organization of the course and material (S4; N = 129); the teacher's attitude toward students (T10; N = 103); dislike and perceived lack of relevance of the subject area (C4; N = 100); time of day, length of class, and personal factors (C6; N = 58); and the teacher's physical appearance (T20; N = 34). These seven categories accounted for 76% of the demotivator descriptions and were also the only categories referenced by at least 10% of the study's participants.

As illustrated in Table 1, 21% of the demotivators were "context" demotivators which are primarily antecedent to the teacher's influence; 36% were "structure/format" demotivators, over which the teacher might have varying degrees of control; and 43% were related to teacher behaviors. Context factors thus emerged as relatively more important to

**TABLE 3**  
**Frequencies and Rank Order of Demotivators**

| <i>Demotivator Code</i> | <i>Rank</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>R1<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>N1</i> | <i>R2</i> | <i>N2</i>            |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|
| C2                      | 16          | 17       | 12                    | 13        | 15        | 4 (1/3) <sup>2</sup> |
| C4                      | 5           | 100      | 3                     | 79        | 6         | 21 (15/6)            |
| C6                      | 6           | 58       | 6                     | 54        | 15        | 4 (2/2)              |
| C8                      | 11          | 22       | 7                     | 22        | 19.5      | 0                    |
| S2                      | 13.5        | 19       | 10.5                  | 15        | 15        | 4 (1/3)              |
| S4                      | 3           | 129      | 4                     | 70        | 2         | 59 (55/4)            |
| S6                      | 2           | 137      | 1                     | 94        | 4         | 43 (35/8)            |
| S8                      | 13.5        | 19       | 8.5                   | 16        | 17        | 3 (1/2)              |
| S10                     | 20          | 5        | 18                    | 5         | 19.5      | 0                    |
| S12                     | 12          | 21       | 8.5                   | 16        | 13        | 5 (3/2)              |
| T2                      | 9.5         | 23       | 10.5                  | 15        | 9.5       | 8 (5/3)              |
| T4                      | 19          | 6        | 17                    | 5         | 18        | 1 (1/0)              |
| T6                      | 1           | 147      | 2                     | 82        | 1         | 65 (57/8)            |
| T8                      | 8           | 25       | 14                    | 11        | 8         | 14 (12/2)            |
| T10                     | 4           | 103      | 5                     | 55        | 3         | 48 (39/9)            |
| T12                     | 17          | 12       | 18                    | 5         | 11        | 7 (2/5)              |
| T14                     | 18          | 8        | 20                    | 0         | 9.5       | 8 (7/1)              |
| T16                     | 9.5         | 23       | 15                    | 8         | 7         | 15 (15/0)            |
| T18                     | 15          | 18       | 13                    | 12        | 12        | 6 (5/1)              |
| T20                     | 7           | 34       | 16                    | 6         | 5         | 28 (26/2)            |

<sup>1</sup>R1 = Responses prior to teacher behavior prompt

<sup>1</sup>R2 = Responses following teacher behavior prompt

<sup>2</sup>First number in parenthesis is number of responses following teacher behavior prompt but prior to immediacy scale; second number is number of responses following immediacy scale.

motivation and structure/format factors to demotivation, with teacher behavior contributing equally to motivation and demotivation in terms of the data as a whole.

Four matched category sets ranked highly as both motivators and demotivators. The teacher's effectiveness and enthusiasm in lecturing ranked second as a motivator, while lack of the same ranked first as a demotivator. The teacher's positive or negative attitude toward students, and the behaviors communicating that attitude, ranked fourth as both a motivator and a demotivator. Negative responses to the organization of the course and materials ranked third as a demotivator, while positive responses to the same ranked fifth as a motivator. Interest in and perceived relevance of course material ranked first as a motivator and dislike and perceived lack of relevance of the subject area ranked fifth as a demotivator.

In addition to these categories, dissatisfaction with grading and assignments, time/length of class and other personal factors, and negative teacher appearance figured strongly as demotivators; however their opposites were not as important (in the case of the former) or mentioned at all (in the case of the latter) as motivators. Conversely, credit or grade motivation, instructor feedback and opportunity to participate, personal achievement motivation, and teacher knowledge were mentioned frequently as motivators but not as demotivators.

The third and fourth research questions were concerned specifically with how teacher behaviors contribute to motivation and demotivation. The questionnaire was designed to allow us to separate teacher behaviors generated without prompting students to consider teachers' contribution to motivation from those freely generated after the student's focus was drawn to the teacher. As previously noted, ten motivator and ten demotivator categories identified by the coders specifically referenced teacher behaviors. Five of the 13

motivator categories and three of the seven demotivator categories noted by at least 10% of the participants related to teacher behaviors. Overall, 44% of the motivators and 43% of the demotivators listed referred to teacher behaviors.

Of the 743 motivators listed prior to the teacher behavior prompt, 470 (32% of all motivators; 63% of the subset prior to the prompt) were context factors, 131 (18% of the subset) were structure/format factors, and 142 (only 19% of the subset) were teacher behavior factors. Of the total 645 teacher behavior items listed as motivators, 503, or 78% appeared *after* the teacher behavior prompt. In contrast, of the 583 demotivators listed prior to the teacher behavior prompt, 168 (18% of all demotivators; 29% of the subset prior to the prompt) were context factors, 216 (37% of the subset) were structure/format factors, and 199 (34% of the subset) were teacher behavior factors. Of the total 399 teacher behavior items listed as demotivators, half were listed prior to and half after the teacher behavior prompt (Table 1).

Within the individual motivator and demotivator categories (Table 4), there was also a pattern in which teacher behavior was likely to be perceived as more central (i.e., to be listed without prompting) to demotivation than to motivation. Five of the ten teacher behavior demotivators (lack of knowledge/competence, no sense of humor/bad temper, boring or confusing students, behaviors indicating negative attitude toward students, and irresponsibility) appeared more often *before* than after the prompt while all of the teacher behavior motivators appeared more often *after* the prompt.

The list of teacher immediacy behaviors which appeared midway through the teacher prompt section of the questionnaire did not have any particular effect on prompting students to list specific kinds of teacher behaviors. In fact, only half of the responses to the last question referred to teacher behaviors; the other half were afterthoughts referencing context factors (24%) and structure/format factors (25%), with context factors more frequently mentioned as motivators and structure/format factors as demotivators.

**TABLE 4**  
**Percentages of Teacher Behaviors Generated Before and After Prompting**

| <i>Motivators</i>   | <i>N</i> | <i>N/% Before Prompt</i> | <i>N/% After Prompt</i> |
|---------------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| T1                  | 70       | 14/20%                   | 56/80%                  |
| T3                  | 52       | 8/15%                    | 44/85%                  |
| T5                  | 186      | 61/33%                   | 125/67%                 |
| T7                  | 23       | 4/17%                    | 19/83%                  |
| T9                  | 168      | 38/23%                   | 127/77%                 |
| T11                 | 29       | 9/31%                    | 20/69%                  |
| T13                 | 26       | 1/4%                     | 25/97%                  |
| T15                 | 33       | 3/9%                     | 30/91%                  |
| T17                 | 9        | 4/44%                    | 5/55%                   |
| T19                 | 52       | —                        | 52/100%                 |
| <i>Demotivators</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>N/% Before Prompt</i> | <i>N/% After Prompt</i> |
| T2                  | 23       | 15/65%                   | 8/35%                   |
| T4                  | 6        | 5/83%                    | 1/17%                   |
| T6                  | 147      | 82/56%                   | 65/44%                  |
| T8                  | 25       | 11/44%                   | 14/56%                  |
| T10                 | 103      | 55/53%                   | 48/47%                  |
| T12                 | 12       | 5/42%                    | 7/59%                   |
| T14                 | 8        | —                        | 8/100%                  |
| T16                 | 23       | 8/35%                    | 30/65%                  |
| T18                 | 18       | 12/66%                   | 6/35%                   |
| T20                 | 34       | 6/19%                    | 28/82%                  |

## Discussion

On the whole, the results of this study indicate that students perceive teacher behaviors as one factor, but only one factor, contributing to their overall motivation to do their best in college courses, and that negative teacher behaviors are perceived as more central to students' demotivation than positive behaviors are perceived as central to their motivation.

Context factors, which refer to attitudes and conditions largely (if not completely) antecedent to what the teacher does, accounted for 37% of the motivators listed by students, and 63% of the motivators listed prior to students' being prompted to consider the contribution of teacher behaviors to their level of motivation. Structure/format factors, which might be considered at least partly under the teacher's control, consistently accounted for approximately only 18% of motivators overall, before, and after the teacher behavior prompt. Teacher behaviors accounted for 44% of the overall motivators; however, only 19% of the motivators listed prior to the teacher behavior prompt referenced those behaviors. Teacher immediacy behaviors (T3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 15) accounted for 34% of the overall motivators listed and 16% of the motivators identified prior to the prompt.

In contrast, context factors accounted for only 21% of the overall demotivators listed by students, and 29% of the demotivators listed prior to the teacher behavior prompt. Structure/format factors accounted for twice as great a proportion of demotivators (36%, again relatively consistently accounting for 37% of the before and 33% of the after teacher behavior prompt entries). Teacher behavior accounted for 43% of the overall demotivators, including 34% of those listed prior to the teacher behavior prompt. Nonimmediate teacher behaviors (T4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 16) accounted for 32% of the overall demotivators and 26% of those listed prior to the prompt.

The pattern illustrated by the figures above can be further illustrated in looking at "matched" motivator-demotivator category sets. It is interesting, in itself, that so many of the motivator categories could be matched with demotivator categories which reflected conceptually similar areas, and that there were more mentions of the positive-motivating side of matched context and teacher behavior sets and more mentions of the negative-demotivating side of structure/format sets. When students, who were referencing a particular class and teacher as they completed the questionnaire, felt the teacher was knowledgeable they were more likely to note that as a motivator only after being prompted to consider teacher behaviors; when they felt the teacher was *not* knowledgeable, they more often thought of that up front as a demotivator. Similarly, when they perceived the teacher as having a good sense of humor, or as an inspirational lecturer, or as student-centered, or as available they were more likely to think about listing these motivational behaviors only after being prompted; when they perceived the teacher as humorless, boring, self-centered, or unavailable these observations were listed up front.

When thinking about structure/format factors, which would probably be considered to be at least partially related to teacher choice, students who liked the organization of the class and materials, the assignments and grading, the instructor's feedback, the behavior of other students, and even the textbook mentioned it later in the survey; students who *disliked* these things and found them demotivating mentioned them up front.

Thus, we can examine these data from a variety of perspectives and reach the same conclusion: students are more likely to attribute their lack of motivation in a college class to what the teacher does and to attribute their being motivated to more personal factors such as interest in the subject, general achievement motivation, or desire/need to earn the credit and/or a good grade. In their study of students' techniques for resisting compliance, Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs (1991) identified selection of resistance strategies as related to

perceptions of the problem being "teacher-owned" or "student-owned." Using the same terminology, we might conclude that motivation is perceived by students as a student-owned state, while lack of motivation is perceived as a teacher-owned problem.

In a related study which has been reported since the present study was conducted, Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) categorized 254 students' responses to their request to "think back over their college career and to recall specific instances where teachers had said or done something that had irritated, demotivated, or substantially distracted them in an adverse way during a course." Students were prompted with examples such as: not showing up for class, using sarcasm to get even with a student, making fun of a student, and teaching the wrong thing. Twenty-eight teacher misbehavior categories were derived from 1762 descriptions provided by the student participants. Of these 28 categories, only three were not represented among the demotivators listed by students in the current study (keeps students overtime, sexual harassment, and bad grammar/spelling). Of the 10 demotivator categories related to teacher behavior which emerged in the present study, only two (teacher lacks sense of humor/loses temper and nonimmediate nonverbal behaviors, neither of which was mentioned frequently) were not represented in the Kearney, et. al. data; in addition, two of the structure/format demotivator categories—relating to organization of material and to assignments and grading—were reflected by parallel teacher misbehavior categories.

Taken together, these two studies present similar portraits of inductively elicited "teacher misbehaviors" which students perceive as central to their lack of motivation in college classes. We would thus recommend with reasonable confidence that these are behaviors in which teachers should not engage because they are likely to adversely affect student motivation.

The degree to which the converse of these misbehaviors actually serve to motivate students is less clear. Previous research (Christophel, 1990) has concluded that students' state motivation (i.e., their desire to do their best in a particular class) is modifiable and that teacher immediacy is related to differences in student motivation. It is possible that teacher immediacy works subtly in this equation and that students do not consciously recognize the degree to which their motivation responds to behaviors which increase their teacher's approach/approachability. Given the recognition of teacher behaviors as demotivators, however, we cannot conclude that students are not aware of teacher behaviors or that they do not perceive what the teacher does as meaningful in the overall context of their own motivation.

What remains interesting is the students' perception that teacher behaviors *demotivate* more than they *motivate* and that motivation is so highly attributed to context factors such as interest in or perceived relevance of the subject, desire or need to earn a good grade or course credit, and personal challenge or general desire for accomplishment. Experience in the classroom suggests that some students do come to class motivated to do well in that class (i.e., with high initial state motivation) and find that motivation eroded by ineffective teaching. Experience also suggests that other students with low initial state motivation become motivated during the course of their experience in a particular class, and that some students of "bad" teachers remain motivated while some students of "good" teachers do not become motivated. Previous research suggests that compliance-seeking approaches and teacher immediacy behaviors can "persuade" and/or "attract" students to engage in on-task behaviors with subsequent learning gains. The results of the present study indicate a need to explore the interactions of these behaviors with student-owned state motivation factors before drawing conclusions regarding their impact on motivation outcomes.

Future research might also examine whether factors such as class size, previous experience with a teacher, whether the course is required or an elective, the student's previous academic performance, year in school, and so forth influence motivational attributions and levels. These are studies we foresee as we continue this line of research, with data drawn from samples designed to focus on one or more of these individual factors while controlling the variability in the others (for example, using intact-class data sets). Given the attention to motivational concerns that appears in both the educational psychology literature and in popular press discussions of educational outcomes, we are convinced that continuing to explore the relationship of teachers' communicative behaviors to student motivation has both pedagogical and practical salience.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Webster's *New World Dictionary of the American Language*. (1968). Cleveland: World Publishing Co.

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