Chapter 7
Understanding Students’ Instructional Delivery Preferences and Other Classroom Logistics

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ABSTRACT
Students who enjoy the instructional techniques used by their instructors are more likely to graduate, but little has been done to identify student instructional preferences in higher education. Students in a mid-sized public university in the United States were surveyed to establish their preference for the various instructional delivery methods, classroom seating arrangements, levels of students’ engagement, the use of guest-speakers and video shows, different test types, and continuous assessment methods. A comparison of the mean responses and correlation analyses showed that overall students preferred to be given access to class reading materials and chapter summaries ahead of the class session, a forward-facing seating arrangement with the instructor at the front, constant encouragement to ask questions, use of guest speakers and video shows, the multiple-choice type of tests, and take-home continuous assessment tests. Results for other classroom logistics are reported, their implications discussed, and recommendations provided. The future research direction is also suggested.

INTRODUCTION
Students who enjoy the instructional techniques, the testing methods and the general classroom set-up are more likely to go through the rigors of college education and remain until they graduate (Cassidy & Eachus, 2000; Chiou, 2008; Naimie, et al., 2010), but little effort has been made to isolate students’ preferences from the existing array of instructional techniques and testing methods in higher education. This is against the backdrop of a generation of students who are said to be, on
average, “overconfident, have high expectations, report higher narcissism… and are less inclined to read long passages of text” (Twenge, 2013, p. 66). These assertions are an important indicator of the fast-changing times on college campuses with respect to students’ inclinations. The situation is compounded by the phenomenon of multiple generations in the same classroom as more and more adults return to complete their college education (Kitko, 2011). Existing studies have shown that academic achievement can be predicted by adherence to the student’s instructional preference (Cassidy & Eachus, 2000; Chiou, 2008; Li-fang, 2008) and preferences vary from natural sciences to social sciences (Bohlscheid & Davis, 2012).

Although this study highlights, among other things, instructional delivery and teaching preferences, it is difficult to talk about teaching preferences in isolation of learning styles. The distinction between the two is not always clear as they tend to describe the same phenomenon, albeit from different perspectives. However, while instructional delivery and teaching methods refer to the modality of disseminating information, learning style essentially denotes the pattern of processing and assimilating the information. It has been observed that learning in college is affected in part by student perception of ideals (Hill & Christian, 2012), and that many students have a single strong preference while others have multiple learning preferences (Metallidou & Platsidou, 2008; Breckler, et al., 2009). According to one of the most cited paradigms of learning styles – Kolb’s “learning style inventory” of 1985 – learning is a process that is grounded in experience, as opposed to a one-time outcome. Kolb’s four basic categories of learning styles include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Various combinations of these styles produce the four concrete learner types that Kolb described as accommodators, assimilators, divergers, and convergers (see Kolb, 1985). Subsequent classifications of learning styles have yielded four learning dimensions that in effect categorize learners as active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and sequential/global (see Tobias, 1990; Felder, 1993; and Filippidis & Tsoukalas, 2009).

Student success can be significantly elevated if the students’ learning styles are taken into account when considering instructional delivery (Williams, 1994; Dunn, et al., 1995; Breckler, et al., 2009; Naimie, et al., 2010). However, it must be recognized that matching individual learning styles with classroom instructional delivery can be a daunting task because there are routinely multiple learner types in the same classroom (Cook, et al., 2007; Klien, et al., 2007). Under such circumstances, the instructor’s ability to secure workable concessions becomes critical. While learning styles and learner types are outside of the purview of this study, it was essential to briefly review them because a student’s instructional preferences may be influenced by the student’s learning style. In this study, we attempt to establish instructional and testing preferences among students under the premise that congruity between students’ preferred methods and actual delivery methods predict student success.

With reference to testing and assessments, a student’s preference for a particular method is often based in part on the stakes involved, with students often preferring open formats when the stakes are high (Parkes & Stefanou, 2010). It has been demonstrated that preference for the various testing methods is a function of the type of learner the student is (Weinstein & Wu, 2009). In their study of the readiness assessment tests versus frequent quizzes, Weinstein & Wu (2009) found that “majority of students preferred readiness assessment tests to frequent quizzes [but] whereas global and/or intuitive learners preferred the readiness assessment tests, sequential and/or sensing learners preferred the quizzes” (p.181). Learner types also influence assessment and testing preferences (Birenbaum, 1997; Furnham, et al., 2008). According to Furnham, et al., (2008), “Learning style was consistently associated with