THE EFFECT OF STUDENT CULTURAL VALUES ON GOALS,
GENERIC SKILLS AND GOOD TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between Victoria University’s Master of Business students’ cultural values and their perceptions of goals, generic skills and good teaching. A total sample of 548 students was taken from Victoria University Melbourne, Australia. Students’ cultural values were obtained through Robertson and Hoffman’s (2000) Cultural Values Scale derived from the work of Hofstede (1980; 1991; 1998). The Course Experience Questionnaire developed by Ramsden (1991) was used to measure students’ course experiences through the Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching dimensions. Some of the major findings of this study were that high Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism cultural values are the key determinants of Generic Skills and Good Teaching. High Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity ratings are the predictors of the Goals dimension.

Keywords: Students Cultural Values, CEQ, University, Australia

INTRODUCTION

How international students perceive the quality of their tertiary education experience is becoming increasingly important to Australia. International student enrolments within Australia’s higher education sector in the two years ending in 2004 has shown these enrolments have grown by 29,136 (Australian Government, 2005). It has been predicted that Australia’s international student enrolments will be worth in excess of $38 billion by 2025 with over one million international student enrolments (Roach, 2003). Nevertheless there seems to be little research focusing on the effects of students’ cultural values on their perceptions of goals, generic skills and good teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ramsden (1991) defined effective teaching normatively within a higher education context through six principles. These were: maintaining student interest through explanation, respecting and caring for students and student learning, providing contextually based assessments and detailed feedback, present clear goals/outcomes and appropriate intellectual stimulation, promote independent learning, and engage students as well as learning from students. The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) was developed from Ramsden’s (1991) definition of effective teaching with the aim to be used as performance indicators for educators.
The CEQ has been found to be both valid and useful for differentiating between performances of educators in different academic subjects. It also claims to be applicable to all students, free from manipulation, and have economy administration (Downie & Moller, 2002; Ramsden, 1991; Richardson, 1994; Wilson & Lizzio, 1997). The CEQ’s reliability has been reinforced through other studies conducted by Downie et al. (2002), Richardson (1994) and Wilson et al. (1997).

The CEQ nevertheless has been criticised conceptually and methodologically. High quality teaching does not simply equate to high quality presentations or high quality teaching skills (Martens & Prosser, 1998). Definition flexibility is needed according to Martens et al. (1998), to allow for discipline differences, course stage differences and differences between core and elective subjects. Therefore the concept of effective teaching goes beyond how individual educators are performing and should focus on relationships between students and the subject materials.

The items within the CEQ have not remained the same over time. Nevertheless its structure as outlined by Ainley and Johnson (2000) has remained stable allowing links to be made between the corresponding items. Despite the CEQ’s shortcomings the instrument has been used since 1993 by the Graduate Career Council of Australia to obtain graduates’ perceptions of course quality (Hillman & Johnson, 2000). Many Australian universities have adopted policies at either faculty or departmental levels which require students’ opinions to be measured (Hillman et al., 2000). The CEQ is also being used for strategic planning in some Australian universities including: RMIT, The University of Melbourne and Victoria University. Though Ramsden’s CEQ has had a number of iterations, this paper focuses on three of the CEQ dimensions (Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching). Goals deals with the establishing of clear aims and objectives of a course, and clear explanations of the level of work expected. Generic Skills focuses on students’ perceptions of whether their studies have fostered the development of the necessary generic skills universities recognise as being valuable. The Good Teaching scale focuses on teaching practices. All items used are those recommended for use by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (Ainley et al., 2000).
As the CEQ is being used for quite diverse applications it is of great importance to investigate whether it does have general applicability to all students regardless of their cultural predispositions. Biggs and Watkins (2001) suggest that culture plays a role in the learning/teaching process. They also state that students need to be engaged with the learning task at the appropriate level, within a comfortable classroom climate. Ballard and Clanchy (1997) state that different student cultural profiles equate to different attitudes towards knowledge acquisition. Therefore this suggests that student cultural predispositions affect their learning process and what constitutes effective teaching.

There are number of models of culture that provide different ways of understanding different national cultures. Common models are Hall’s (1977) high context and low context cultural framework, Trompenaars’ (1993) dimensions of culture and Hofstede’s (1980) five cultural dimensions. Each model is useful and can be misapplied if used to stereotype national cultures. One of the most recognised frameworks for detecting cultural differences and one whose dimensions were used in the Globe study of leadership in 62 countries (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) is Hofstede’s model. Hofstede’s (1980; 1991) framework has also been used to create a scale to measure culturally-anchored values in tertiary students (Robertson, 2000). Hofstede’s (1980; 1991) Cross-Cultural Framework initially consisted of four dimensions: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism and Masculinity/Femininity, with a fifth dimension added later: Short-Term/Long-Term Orientation (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Hofstede (1991) and Hofstede et al. (2005) describe the Power Distance dimension as whether the less powerful members within a society have an expectancy and acceptance that power is distributed unequally. Societies with a low power distance approach to power are more democratic. How threatened a culture feels by ambiguous or unknown situations describes the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2005). A society’s acceptance of change and innovation signifies a low uncertainty avoidance culture. Thus within an educational context students with low uncertainty avoidance scores may indeed be more open to and comfortable with innovations in a learning/teaching context. The Individualism/Collectivism dimension offers a continuum with
Individualism at one pole and Collectivism at the other. Individualism represents societies in which individual ties are loose, where as collectivism signifies societies which have strong, cohesive ties (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2005). Anglo-Saxon cultures top the list on the individualism dimension with the USA in first place followed closely by other European countries (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2005).

Hofstede’s (1980; 1991) Masculinity/Femininity dimension is a continuum with Masculinity and Femininity at opposite poles. Masculinity stands for a society that sees males as being highly assertive, tough and focused on material successes, and females being more concerned with quality of life (Hofstede et al., 2005). The opposite pole Femininity stands for a society in which gender roles overlap with the main concern being life balance and quality of life issues (Hofstede et al., 2005). Anglo-Saxon societies tend to score high on the masculinity pole and with the exception of Japan, Asian countries score high on the femininity pole (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2005).

Hofstede’s Short-Term/Long-Term Orientation dimension is also similar to his Individualism/Collectivism and Masculinity/Femininity dimensions, in the sense of also being represented as two opposite poles (Hofstede et al., 1988; Hofstede et al., 2005). The Short-Term Orientation relates to respect for tradition, preservation of face and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede et al., 2005), where Long-Term Orientation represents the fostering of virtues, future rewards, perseverance and thrift (Hofstede et al., 2005). Anglo-Saxon societies fall towards the short-term orientation, where China and other far eastern societies tend to be more long-term focused (Hofstede et al., 2005). Hofstede (1980; 1991) uses configurations of values as a way of illustrating differences between countries. The group of countries made up of Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA have very similar scores on the Hostede framework. He has called this group Anglo-Saxon. They tend to have low Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Femininity and Power Distance (Hofstede et al., 1988; Hofstede et al., 2005). Therefore this preceding discussion gives rise to the following proposition.
Higher education business students’ cultural values are significantly associated with and explain unique variation in Ramsden’s (1991) Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) Dimensions: Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching.

METHODOLOGY
An opportunity sample of 548 higher education students studying a Master of Business course at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia participated in this research, which equated to a 73 percent return rate. Robertson and Hoffman’s (2000) Cultural Values Scale derived from Hofstede’s cultural dimensions was used to collect students’ cultural values. Hofstede’s (1991) short-term/long-term orientation dimension was not used in this research due to being problematic in this setting (Mitsis & Foley, 2005). The cultural values were coded: 1= strongly disagree through to 7 = strongly agree. Ramsden’s (1991) Course Experience Questionnaire was used to gauge students’ course experiences along three of his dimensions: Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching. His Appropriate Workload and Appropriate Assessment dimensions were not used in this research due to not being stable measures (Mitsis & Foley, 2004). The Course Experience Questionnaire items were also coded: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The SPSS v.11 statistical program was used to conduct the statistical analysis. The proposition was operationalised as six hypotheses:

\[ H_{1-3}\]: Student Cultural Values: are significantly positively correlated at the zero-order level with the Course Experience Questionnaire dimensions: Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching.

\[ H_{4-6}\]: Student Cultural Values: High Collectivism, High Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity and High Power Distance will all uniquely explain variation in the Course Experience Questionnaire dimensions: Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching.

RESULTS
This section is divided into two parts. Part one provides an examination of the correlations between the cultural values and the course experience questionnaire dimensions within this study to test Hypotheses 1 to 3. The second section presents the results from the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions conducted to test Hypotheses 4 to 6. The cultural values within this study had adequate Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities and the variable name in parentheses is a reflection of the direction of the variable: Individualism/Collectivism (Collect) 0.80, Uncertainty Avoidance (Uncert_H) 0.85, Masculinity/Femininity (Masculin) 0.88, and Power Distance (Power_H) 0.83. The dependent
variables from the Course Experience Questionnaire also had reasonable to strong Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities: Goals (Goals_T) 0.56, Generic Skills (Gen_Sk_T) 0.80 and Good Teaching (Gd_Tea_T) 0.86. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the Goals dimension was uncharacteristically low compared to other studies conducted within a similar setting (see: Downie et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 1997). As previous studies have found the Goals construct to be a stable measure with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in excess of 0.70 it was deemed appropriate to continue the analysis with this dimension. The Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching dimension items are readily accessible through the Graduate Careers Council of Australia.

The correlation coefficients for the Cultural Values: Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity, and Power Distance and the Course Experience Questionnaire dimensions: Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching are presented in Table 1 below and the following discussion relates to that table. The CEQ dimensions: Goals, Generic Skills, and Good Teaching have significant positive correlations with the Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance cultural values, their strength is weak, $r = 0.085, 0.278, 0.195, 0.175, 0.247$ and $0.189$ respectively. The Masculinity and Power Distance cultural values have significant positive correlations with the Generic Skills and Good Teaching dimensions, their strength is weak, $r = 0.132, 0.087, 0.091$ and $0.101$ respectively, as highlighted in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 is therefore partially supported as only the Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance cultural values were significantly correlated at the zero-order level with the Goals dimension. As its $r$ value suggests there is only a small variation explained between the variables Collectivism and Goals (0.2%), and Uncertainty Avoidance and Goals (3.1%).

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were fully supported as all the cultural values: Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity and Power Distance were significantly correlated to the CEQ dimensions: Generic Skills and Good Teaching at the zero-order level. As their $r$ values suggest, there is only a small variation explained between the variables: Collectivism and Generic Skills (7.7%), Uncertainty Avoidance and Generic Skills (0.2%), Masculinity and Generic Skills (1.7%), Power Distance and Generic Skills (0.8%), Collectivism and Good Teaching (3.8%), Uncertainty Avoidance and Good
Teaching (3.6%), Masculinity and Good Teaching (0.8%) and Power Distance and Good Teaching (1%).

**TABLE 1: Correlation Coefficients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. COLLECT</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. UNCERT_H</td>
<td>0.423**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. MASCULIN</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. POWER_H</td>
<td>0.212**</td>
<td>-0.111**</td>
<td>0.599**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. GOALS_T</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.175**</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. GEN_SK_T</td>
<td>0.278**</td>
<td>0.247**</td>
<td>0.132**</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.371**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. GD_TEA_T</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td>0.189**</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.502**</td>
<td>0.571**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); **Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); N = 548

Part two discusses the three OLS regressions that were conducted to test Hypotheses 4 to 6. The independent variables were the cultural values: Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity and Power Distance. The dependent variables were the CEQ dimensions in turn: Goals, Generic Skills and Good Teaching. Table 1 highlights that the cultural values: Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism were significantly correlated at the zero-order level with the CEQ Goals dimension. A multiple regression analysis was conducted between the Goals dimension and the independent cultural values: Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity and Power Distance. The multiple $R$ (0.195) for the regression was significantly different from zero, ($F(4,543) = 5.349$, $p<0.001$). In total 3.8% (3.1% adjusted) of variation in the Goals dimension was accounted for by the cultural values ($R^2 = 0.038$, $adj. R^2 = 0.031$). Tables 2 and 3 below indicate that the standardized regression coefficient (Beta) for two cultural values: Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity were significant. Of the 3.8% explained variance, the squared semi-partial correlations ($part r^2$) show that Uncertainty Avoidance explained 2.1% and Masculinity explained 0.7% of the variance when all other variables in the equation were controlled for. Collectivism was also highly correlated with the Goals dimension, however when the variables were controlled for it was insignificant even at a semi-partial level. Hypothesis 4 was also partially supported as two of the variables were significant. High Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity cultural values are significant predictors of and explain unique variation in the Goals dimension (see Table 3).
Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity and Power Distance were all significantly correlated with the Generic Skills dimension. Another multiple regression analysis was conducted between the Generic Skills dimension and the independent cultural values: and the multiple $R$ (0.325) was significant ($F(4,543) = 16.022, p<0.001$). In total 10.6% (9.9% adjusted) of variation in the Generic Skills dimension was accounted for by the cultural values ($R^2 = 0.106, \text{adj. } R^2 = 0.099$). Only two cultural values were significant: Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism (see Tables 4 and 5 below). Of the 10.6% explained variance, the squared semi-partial ($part r^2$) correlations show that Uncertainty Avoidance explained 2.4% and Collectivism explained 2.3% of the variance. Even though the Masculinity and Power Distance cultural values were also highly correlated to Generic Skills they were not significant when controlled for. Hypothesis 5 was also partially supported as two of the cultural values variables were significant. High Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism are significant predictors of and explain unique variation in Generic Skills (see Table 5).

**TABLE 3: Goals OLS Regression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R$ Square</th>
<th>Adjusted $R$ Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.195a</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a. Predictors: (Constant), POWER_H, UNCERT_H, COLLECT, MASCULIN*

**TABLE 4: Generic Skills Model Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R$ Square</th>
<th>Adjusted $R$ Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.325a</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>1.0149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a. Predictors: (Constant), POWER_H, UNCERT_H, COLLECT, MASCULIN*
Similar to Generic Skills, all of the cultural values: Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity and Power Distance are also significantly correlated at the zero-order level with Good Teaching. A third multiple regression analysis was conducted between the Good Teaching dimension and the independent cultural values and the multiple $R$ (0.245) for the regression was also significant ($F(4,543) = 8.665, p<0.001$). In total 6% (5.3% adjusted) of variation was accounted for by the cultural values ($R^2 = 0.060, \text{adj. } R^2 = 0.053$). Two cultural values had significant Betas: Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism (see Tables 6 and 7 below). Of the 6% explained variance, the squared semi-partial correlations ($part r^2$) show that Uncertainty Avoidance explained 1.8% and Collectivism explained 0.8%. Though the cultural values Masculinity and Power Distance were also highly correlated to Good Teaching at the zero-order level they were not significant when controlled for. Hypothesis 6 was also partially supported and two cultural values, High Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism, explain significant unique variation in the Good Teaching dimension (see Table 7).

### TABLE 6: Good Teaching Model Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), POWER_H, UNCERT_H, COLLECT, MASCULIN
TABLE 7: Good Teaching OLS Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zero-order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.390</td>
<td>.333</td>
<td>7.178</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COLLECT</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>2.222</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNCERT_H</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>3.257</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MASCULIN</td>
<td>6.039E-03</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.082</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POWER_H</td>
<td>8.627E-02</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>1.719</td>
<td>.086</td>
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</table>

a. Dependent Variable: GD_TEA_T

DISCUSSION

High Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity cultural values explained variation in Goals, and high Uncertainty Avoidance and Collectivism cultural values explain variation in Generic Skills and Good Teaching within this sample. This research has found that Master of Business students’ cultural values do indeed affect their overall perceptions of their course experience as measured by the CEQ goals, generic skills and good teaching dimensions. These findings indicate that Ramsden’s (1991) Course Experience Questionnaire is not as uniformly applicable to all students as has been previously argued. An understanding by universities of this cultural variation in perception of their university experience within the student population can be used to improve the relationships between students with different cultural values and the university. By being sensitive to variation in cultural values within the student population a greater range of course experiences might be developed to better meet the educational needs of students with high Uncertainty Avoidance, Collectivism and Masculinity cultural values.

This study is an exploratory cross-sectional one and is unable to measure any changes in Master of Business students’ CEQ ratings over time. The focus of this research was one Australian based university with on-shore campuses. Longitudinal studies and multi-campus studies are also needed. Hopefully this study had identified some variables worthy of further examination.

These findings suggest that students’ cultural values, especially amongst international students, do shape their evaluations of their course experiences and that this area is worthy of more careful examination. This study by using culturally anchored values as one possible approach to
understanding this relationship has hopefully advanced our understanding of how the process identified by Biggs et al. (2001) and Ballard and Clanchy (1997) might be examined empirically. These initial findings suggest that degree to which student’s collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and masculine culturally anchored values contribute to variation in different CEQ dimensions scores. High uncertainty avoidance and collectivism culturally anchored values are more common within Australia’s international student cohort. Understanding these cultural value predispositions may help educators create a more satisfying classroom climate for students and be more sensitive in their teaching styles particularly when working with different student sub-populations. This will hopefully improve all student sub-populations satisfaction with their course experiences and their perceived quality of their Australian business education.

**REFERENCE LIST**


