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**How the Use of Humour by College Instructors Affects  
Their Perceived Effectiveness by their Students**

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by  
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## Abstract

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There are few expressions more reassuring than a shared laugh or smile. The rapt attention, feeling of camaraderie, reassurance of "getting it", and euphoria of amusement can signal interaction at its easiest. It is for reasons such as these that humour can be such a powerful tool for those whose work depends on communication. Without humour, this type of task can become that much less fun and that much more challenging.

Humour has been a focus of study for thousands of years, from its roots in Greek philosophy to the influence of sitcoms on popular culture. For such a basic communicative tool, humour has proven to be a worthy adversary to those who have attempted to understand its mechanics and effects. One frequent setting of humour studies is the post-secondary instructional environment, which is rich in both communication and research possibilities. Guided by the work of Jennings Bryant et al. in the 1980 paper *Relationship between college teachers' use of humor in the classroom and students' evaluations of their teachers*, this paper narrows its focus to the use of humour by college instructors during instruction, and how students in these courses perceive the effectiveness of their instructors as a result. By utilizing both quantitative surveys and qualitative participation and interviews, the researcher discovered positive student attitudes towards the use of humour by their instructors, and also the means and purpose they felt are systematic to its effectiveness.

Although there are many theories of how humour actually operates, the views here revealed that the perceived benefits of an instructor using humour in the college classroom arise from the pleasant experience of co-creating a shared reality through a cheerful atmosphere. This shared reality was alleged by the students to be conducive of simple amusement, administration

of the lesson, or memorization of facts, with a potential penalty of appearing to waste the students' time and tuition with frivolity.

Future instructors may wish to use this shared knowledge to shape their developing pedagogical style, current instructors may reflect on their instructional presentation and determine how their humour usage may be impacting their effectiveness on their students, and non-instructors can take the opportunity to reflect on how humour has influenced their educational experiences.

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## Introduction

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It seems that there is little to laugh about when examining the state of post secondary education early in the new millennium. Funding cuts, personnel reductions, increased tuitions, claims of "watered down" grades and graduates with reduced skills entering the workforce seem to be as frequent in the headlines as those stories championing the exploits of the researchers and instructors in their quests for knowledge and training. The roles of institutions, its staff and its students are all changing.

Yet, as things change, they also stay the same. Institutions still attempt to meet the needs of the learner and society, and the instructor is (usually) still found at the front of the classroom filled with expectant learners. Factors such as distance education and class sizes have provided some added dimensions to these qualities, but the essence of the student-teacher-institution relationship remains. Ultimately, the student-teacher bond can be examined as a specialized interpersonal or group communication issue, where the parties must exchange information as effectively and efficiently as possible. The instructor may demand regular attendance, completed assignments and/or class participation. The student may desire practical experience, prompt feedback and personal recognition. To meet these goals, and to realize that these goals are being met in some form, communication must take place between the student and the instructor.

With this relationship being, literally, right under our noses, it should come as no surprise that much academic research has been done on the student-teacher dyad. From soccer coaches to clinical nurse training, recorded examinations have attempted to reveal the inner workings of hierarchical learning (as opposed to self learning) since the time of Greek philosophy, and it is very likely that there was speculation on teaching and learning methods even before this. The Greek philosophy of education, *paideia*, was developed to enable the privileged learner to rise

socially based on their increasing wisdom and mastery over the uneducated (Kahn, 2003). This, according to Kahn, evolved into the Roman philosophy of *humanitas*, a basic education for all and an advanced education for the privileged.

While the focus here is not on class distinctions, it is important to remember that the roles of the student and instructor arose from a system of inequalities. Thus, in modeling the society, the instructor and student take on the roles of the wise minority and the uneducated masses. The deferential roles establish the types of communication possible, and probable, given the perception of how education actually works.

It would be far too difficult to try to examine the entire relationship between instructor and learner for the purposes of this type of project, so specificity is required. The level of instruction chosen for study was post secondary, providing subjects whose communicative and emotional development are relatively closely matched, as opposed to those of younger – and vastly divergent – generations found in elementary or secondary educational settings. Next, the relationship needed to be narrowed down to a specific type of interaction. The traditional lecture format was chosen due to its prevalence at this level of education, and that it is possibly the only type of interaction at this level that has almost 100% participation of available subjects. The lecture provided a simplistic (and therefore easier to study) mode of communication, as opposed to the myriad of possibilities that interpersonal or small group communication would present. There are fewer opportunities to inject personal nuances aimed for a specific target in a lecture, and therefore the assumption that what is observed was intended for educational purposes (or defeats educational goals) is easier to make. As well, by examining the lecture, we will see an interface of education that is common to many post secondary institutions.

A specific aspect of the communicative action was selected to compare its impact to the effect it had on its subject. This helped to eliminate false conclusions, or at least helped to provide clarity on any causal relationships discovered. The role of humour as used by college instructors during their lectures was selected for study. Finally, the student opinion was specifically chosen for their unique perspective on whether their instructor was "effective" at their job. Students will have their own opinions as to what being an effective instructor really means, but this is not the focus of our study. Instead, we will examine if, and how, an instructor using humour in a lecture contributes to the feeling of the students that they are receiving effective instruction, and if the use of humour is mentioned as a variable that influences effectiveness.

### **Student Evaluations of Instructors**

Whether it is done as an institutional policy, or simply as a good pedagogical practice, student evaluation of their instructors is found on nearly every post secondary campus in North America. Despite its importance and popularity, instructor evaluation by students is an area full of uncertainty and trepidation for all involved. The instructor may feel their position or reputation at the institution is at stake, the students may feel uncomfortable evaluating instructors who may not have yet awarded them their final grades, and institutions must decide how to deal with the results, which may take a good deal of resources to administer and evaluate properly. Every student would love to have an exceptional teacher, every teacher would gladly receive an exceptional rating from their students, and certainly administration would encourage activities to increase student satisfaction while attending their institutions. There is no tried-and-true formula for guaranteeing positive student reviews of classroom experiences, nor is there a consensus



among researchers that there possibly could be such a formula. Still, while there may not be an all-encompassing method to guarantee student approval, certain research appears to reveal characteristics that exemplary teachers and their classroom environment have in common.

## **Problem**

The focus of this research will be on the instructor's use of humour, in this case as it would appear in a college classroom setting. More specifically, the question this review addresses is: How does the perception of a college instructor's use of humour affect resulting evaluations of the instructor by their students? This question will be examined from an ethnomethodological perspective, through a symbolic convergence theory lens. This should prove to be the least obtrusive and most revealing in regard to the surrounding classroom climate that the humour arises from, the setting of Lethbridge Community College (LCC) in the spring of the 2002-2003 school year.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Grounding Research

Inspiration for this topic comes partly from my own pedagogical style – which is quite reliant on humour – partly from the recent experience of reading my first set of evaluations of my instructional style by students at the college level, and partly from a 1979 study by Jennings Bryant et al. entitled "Relationship between college teachers' use of humour in the classroom and students' evaluations of their teachers" (1980). This research was published in two different papers, *Teachers' humor in the college classroom* (1979) by Bryant, Comisky and Zillmann, and *Relationship between college teachers' use of humor in the classroom and students' evaluations of their teachers* (1980) by Bryant, Crane, Comisky and Zillmann. The former article strictly dealt with the classroom tape recordings, whereas the latter developed a full project, including a quantitative survey and literature review.

In the Bryant et al. studies, the researchers use both qualitative and quantitative means to explore the stated topic. The initial focus of the researchers was on the humour used during instruction. Their observations and discoveries were made through ethnomethodological means, although there is no mention of any specific theoretical lens that was employed. There is, however, a description of how humorous occurrences, also known as *indexical expressions* (Lindlof, 1995) were identified and used to provide insight into the mutual context that was being shared. These expressions can quite easily be compared to the 'fantasy themes' of the symbolic convergence theory, and thus that is the communication theory used here (Cragan & Shields, 1998, pp. 93-121).

In the 1980 study, randomly selected communication studies students in non-communication undergraduate courses made audio recordings of instructor lectures.

Immediately following these recording sessions, the students would complete a bi-polar quantitative survey designed to measure instructor performance. The students were then informed of the nature of the research, and were asked to evaluate the recording for humorous content. To increase reliability, another participating student would then listen to the same recording and determine that all that was humorous had actually been recorded. Any differences in a description of a humorous incident were reviewed by one of the primary researchers, who would make a final judgement on the true intent found on the recording.

### **The Philosophy of Humour**

Examining humour sociologically would seem to be a natural fit, yet examining previous research reveals it may not be as simple, or prevalent, as expected. In fact, Fine (1983) declares that humour research is difficult to undertake sociologically because much humour is based on the breakdown of sociological order. We cannot study a sociological issue if the method we want to study breaks apart the sociological evidence through its use. Instead, it seems we are left asking more questions.

For something that we are faced with a multitude of times every day, humour remains an elusive subject on which to state our proficiency. Given that humour is a difficult subject to define, it is still worthy of our time to attempt to understand the theories of humour in order to try to establish a connection between them and how we evaluate the presenter of the humour, in our case the college instructor. Humour may be studied through one of the three theoretical lenses, as presented in *The philosophy of laughter and humor*, edited by John Morreall (1987); the Superiority Theory, the Relief Theory, and the Incongruity Theory (p. 6).

The editor uses the philosophers' own works to build a framework of humour theory through several millennia. Morreall, in his preface, states that humour has been neglected for so long by academics because early philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle saw it as reflecting the scorn that the humorist felt for their subject. Their 'Superiority Theory' (p. 3) stated that humour was actually an unwelcome manifestation of feelings of perceived dominance. The Greek poet Horace integrated this belief with pedagogy when he stated, "For that which we deride teaches us more quickly and delightfully than what we approve and revere does." (p. 39). Little in the way of contradictory philosophy was developed through the next several decades, based on this fact that the subject matter was believed unworthy of serious thought (p. 2). As late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, noted thinker Thomas Hobbes was supporting this theory by concluding that the work of satirists, for example, was simply humour found in the misfortunes or ineptitude of others (Holland, 1982, p. 44).

It was not until after the early 18<sup>th</sup> century that two other theories of humour were developed. The first theory was based on the early belief that there were four essential bodily fluids, or humours, that were found in balanced amounts the body. If any one of the four humours became unbalanced with the others, the character of the person would change accordingly. If you were in good humour, it meant your body fluids were in good balance, and thus so was your temperament. It was this system that led to Herbert Spencer's idea that laughter releases pent-up energy (Suls, 1983, p.40, McGhee, 1983, p. 13), and Freud's Hydraulic Theory, which concludes that laughter was the release of repressed energy (McGhee, 1983, p.13). Therefore, humour was actually a physical reaction based on the attempts to regulate and balance nervous energy in the body.

The other theory, based on incongruities, is perhaps the most easily understood, although it is not perfect in its explanation of what we find funny. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Francis Hucheson provided the basis for the Incongruity Theory of humour by critiquing the superiority views of Hobbes (Morreall, 1989, p.35), while Joseph Addison attempted to enlighten the prevailing attitude towards humour in his observations of style and wit (Holland, 1982, p. 45). Both men argued that it may be in the nature of the person using the humour to attempt superiority, but there were many other instances where humour was not mean spirited. They proposed that humour was found in instances where the unexpected was substituted for the ordinary. The more jarring the juxtaposition, the more enjoyable the audience found the humour to be. Addison (1888) provides an example from the life of Socrates himself, who also championed the Superiority theory, stating,

"I have often observed a passage in Socrates's behaviour at his death in a light wherein none of the critics have considered it. That excellent man entertaining his friends a little before he drank the bowl of poison, with a discourse on the immortality of the soul, at his entering upon it says that he does not believe any the most comic genius can censure him for talking upon such a subject at such a time."

## **Functionalism and Humour**

If we examine humour from a sociological perspective as discussed above, we should examine it from a functional point of view as well. The social functionalism of humour can vary greatly, but can generally be regarded as promoting bonds amongst group members, providing a means for social regulation, and starting conflict within and without a group (Fine, 1983, p. 173). First, cohesiveness can occur any time the humour reminds the participants that they belong to a select group. In our research project, 'insider' humour based on previous events generally received plentiful laughs from the class and placed the instructor within this group of students who only a few months before were perfect strangers. In the same way, instructors might joke

about their latest pay raise or a lazy student, knowing that those they are sharing the laugh with have shared in the experience that is now funny.

The latter two functions of humour, control and conflict, may be best understood as being linked together in social situations. Fine (p. 174) states that both of these are aggressive forms that humour takes that attempt to define the boundaries of the groups involved. Control humour attempts inclusion by referencing norms of the group in a less direct manner than simply stating them out loud. An example of this type of humour would be the satirical joking that occurs amongst friends, which might sound far more sharp to outsiders than it does within the social circle of the friends. Conflict humour, on the other hand, attempts to separate the group from the outside world, as is often heard in satirical and ironic humour. The point of this humour is to bring attention to the differences and to pay special attention to what are seen as the weaknesses of the outsiders and the strengths of the insiders (Fine, p. 174).

While it is not specifically the topic of research in this project, exploration of the use of humour in a consultational sense may turn to discussion of appropriateness (Struthers, 1998). For example, much of what is found to be humorous at the gym would not be suitable in the classroom (perhaps revealing the importance of the social context of humour). Ronald de Sousa (1987) makes the assertion that,

"...the common sense ethics of laughter goes something like this: Laugh when its funny, grow up and stop snickering at dirty jokes, don't laugh at cripples (unless you are one yourself), and *show respect*. To show respect means not to laugh, snicker, titter, chortle, giggle or even chuckle when it's Too Sad, when it would be Unkind to, when it would Offend a Sacred Memory, and when it might be taken to Insult a Mother, a Country, or a Religion." (p. 228)

This all makes perfect sense, except that it cannot be true, argues de Sousa. He states that laughter is most often involuntary, and therefore betrays character. In this case, unless you take pleasure in revealing the low standards of your audience, it would be best to not make use of low humour. If the laughter is not involuntary, then it must be no more than trivial, as it would then

simply become another form of etiquette, and would most likely not be worth the time taken to study it.

Without closely studying humour itself, any conclusions drawn from our research may be lessened in their importance. It is very easy to take humour for granted, or simply lump it together with a multitude of other personality traits or social functions. In examining the possible motivations and effects humour usage has, it may now be possible to understand better the events and reactions that will later be noted in our classroom observations and interviews.

### **Humour Studies in Education**

There exists a small but revealing collection of studies in the area of humour within educational settings. I directed my attention to studies examining the use of humour by the instructor in the classroom, and not among the students or the instructor's peers, which further narrowed the field. Opinions like that of Hill (1988) that humour can be used to liven up a class, increase the feeling of camaraderie and lighten the seriousness of difficult lessons are common (Kaplan 1977; Reinsmith, 1992; Lundgren 1994; Shade, 1996). Scharz (1989) also concluded that the instructor using humour creates a climate of creativity. Hill (1988) makes the point that the commonly held stereotypes of instructors reveal the best teachers displaying a warm sense of humour, and the worst examples displaying little or inappropriate humour. Reinsmith (1992), in his studies of *Archetypal forms in teaching*, also made the connection between playfulness and education. The playful atmosphere, often established through kind-hearted humour, builds trust and interpersonal relationships even when delivered to a large group. More specific educational studies of humour have been done in nursing education (Moses, 1986; Struthers, 1994; Watson, 1988; Talbot, 2000) and business education (Lundgren, 1994). In *School humour* (1995),

Canadian researchers Wilfred Martin and Ishmael Baksh ran a series of observational studies and interviews with teens attending high schools in the Atlantic Provinces with the intention of examining attitudes towards humour in their schools. While they collected all manner of humorous occurrences amongst participants' school lives, the sections regarding instructor humour revealed some consistent beliefs. One of the most pervasive was that not only were teachers who were regarded as humorous also regarded as more fun and entertaining, but that these same teachers also seemed to care more about their students. As soon as serious teachers (being the opposite of humorous teachers) was brought up, the overall tone became much more negative.

Supporting the opinion that humour makes for a more enjoyable learning experience, many sources provide suggestions for using humour as a part of a plan to promote a more positive classroom atmosphere (Shade, 1996; Hill, 1988; Lundgren, 1994; Welker, 1977; Watson, 1988; Parsons, 1977). Humour or qualities associated with humour consistently appear high on the lists of desirable classroom atmospheres and instructor personalities, yet the precise effect of this humour on the primary goal of information retention remains unclear (Kaplan, 1977; Parrot, 1994), though it would appear that most instructors who use humour successfully use it in ways that link to the core content of the course and not for frivolous reasons (Downs, Javidi & Nussbaum, 1988). Researchers Lippman and Dunn (2000) found a positive relationship between the use of puns and the retention of facts as measured through testing on the material the pun was based on. As well, Wanzer and Frymier (1999) concluded that instructors with high humour orientation (a scale developed to measure the frequency and perceived effectiveness of humour usage) had students who reported they learned more in courses taught by these high humour-oriented instructors.



For the purposes of this research project, however, actual information retention itself is not important. It is the perception of the instructor's use of humour and how that perception influences the evaluation of that instructor that is being studied. It was with a similar approach that Gorham and Christophel (1990) utilized to conclude that high-inference behaviours such as immediacy, warmth and clarity (as opposed to the more oft studied low-inference behaviours such as maintaining eye contact, moving about the classroom and gesturing) were vital to college students' perception of learning, and that these same high-inference qualities were directly influenced by the use of humour, especially when researching male students and male instructors. Their conclusions revealed that teachers who utilize high-inference behaviours often do so through the use of humour, especially when the humour is achieved naturally through methods such as anecdotes and stories. Interestingly, student perceptions were more negative in classes where the instructors used a high quantity of humour that was either self-deprecating or biased, indicating that it is not simply using humour, but using it for positive social gains that helps to build the immediacy that apparently students enjoy.

### **Instructor Evaluation and Humour**

Although Bryant's (1980) study provides a rare example of utilizing ethnomethodological methods to examine instructors' use of humour and students' evaluation of those instructors, there are many other studies of instructor evaluation, although few specifically address humour as a factor. One study, completed by Grisaffe, Blom & Burke (2003), examined the relationship between how soccer players evaluated their coaches and how humorous the coaches were observed to be by their players. It was found that there was a strong correlation between liking the coach and the perception that the coach had a good sense of humour, especially by female players.

For this study, I did not examine all of the possible evaluation methods I could use, and instead chose to utilize a similar methodology as Bryant et al. The method is quantitative, bipolar test, coincidentally similar to the one already used by LCC. It may seem to be advantageous to examine instructor evaluation by strictly qualitative means, but as the current test has been accepted by the college as an efficient means of instructor assessment, it is the form of evaluation that carries meaning in that particular culture, and may therefore resonate with both student and staff participants as a valid method of evaluating instruction.

Work by Cooper (1972) revealed that Alberta post-secondary institutions are increasingly using instructor evaluation to improve instruction, and certain institutions use the results to determine everything from salary to administrative rank (Doyle, 1972). Other studies of post-secondary instructor evaluation have focussed on many topics, such as the influence of gender and gender role of the instructor on their evaluations (Freeman, 1992; Freeman, 1994) and the frequency of evaluations as either twice per semester (Cohen, 1980) or daily (Buis, 2000). Using students as evaluators as opposed to other instructors, self-evaluation or administration review, was supported by Feldman (1976), who showed students could be very accurate evaluators. It was discovered that instructors who evaluated themselves or their peers used a very narrow band of the evaluative spectrum, usually awarding no values less than the equivalent of a 60%, and rarely mentioning anything negative. The students gave not only a much larger sample based on sheer numbers, but also used most of the rating scale, adding validity while also being the intended target for the actual instruction instead of a peer of the subject to be evaluated. Feldman also determined that student perceptions of certain personality traits had quite a high correlation with positive evaluations of their instructors (as opposed to the measured personality traits of the same instructors using various psychological and sociological tests). Following Feldman's lead,

Freeman (1988) also studied this phenomenon, equating teaching and counselling as "social influence processes... where the 'more knowing' person attempts to help the less knowing person to change beliefs, behaviours or values" (p. 158). The perception of positive teacher characteristics, where we can assume a positive sense of humour would reside, had a very high correlation with the written affirmation of instructor effectiveness.

The final variable to be determined in this study was the actual age level of students to study. Although there have been studies of humour and education at all levels of education, the conclusions from these studies are not at all identical. In Bryant and Zillman's *Using humor to promote learning in the classroom* (1989), this very subject is addressed. It appears that the consensus of studies indicates a greater importance for humour, with a greater student acceptance of the same, at earlier grade levels. Paradoxically, it is at these grade levels where the least amount of research has been done on students perceptions of the effectiveness of learning, with research being difficult based mostly on the simple fact that these students are not as aware of their actual learning at their early years of development. Instead, secondary and college students are by far the most frequently studied groups (especially the latter) in examining the impact of humour at school. Examining these college and university studies reveals many negative results of using humour to go along with the expected positive qualities as well. This is an area of pedagogical study that Bryant and Zillman recommend generalizations do not belong, as most of their research of previously completed projects seems to reveal contradictory results between studies. This paper encapsulates much of the humour in education research up to 1989, and is an excellent reminder of how difficult it is to make blanket recommendations based on any research in this area.

Despite Bryant and Zillman's warnings of making generalizations, some common ideas have been uncovered that may help us understand the data collected for the purposes of this project. First, humour itself seems to exist as one of many methods to integrate socially into a classroom situation, imposing certain qualities of the individual's personality by introducing the humour onto the social setting the humorist occupies. This humour is very sensitive to the social context, and both the humorist and the subject of the humour become the focus of social scrutiny for the duration of the humour incident.

Most humour can be summarized as being funny, and therefore beneficial, if it manages to present a slight incongruity to the audience in a moderately bracing way. If it is too absurd or shocking for the social situation, the humour immediately loses its benefits and quickly becomes a social liability for the presenter and subject. In an educational setting, humour may be used directly to help with the integration and memorization of facts, but often is also used to build the relationship between instructor and students. This can prove to be difficult, however, based on the unique social situation that exists within the classroom. Humour woven into the lessons as anecdotes and stories often work better than jokes, riddles or self-deprecating comments, and care must be taken by instructors to appear impartial in the presentation of their humour. It would appear that, based on this literature, that it will be difficult to ever make a blanket statement regarding all humour in education. Instead, using the lessons provided by these researchers, this research will attempt to investigate how students perceive their instructor's use of humour as influencing the effectiveness of the course they are participating in together.

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## METHODOLOGY

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The primary form of constructive feedback and professional competency for instructors in the field of post secondary education is the student evaluation. Usually administered once during an instructional term, in a standardized quantitative questionnaire provided by the institution, the anonymous evaluation attempts to capture the student's perception of the quality of education they have received from a particular instructor in a specific course. In my experience, these evaluations are then used in a performance review with the program coordinator. Therefore, research into instructor effectiveness at this type of institution should have a quantitative method of data collection. The benefits of qualitative research can also be found in research such that performed by Bryant et al. (1980) and Mehan (1979).

Thus, combining these methods, I hoped to determine the effect of instructors' use of humour on the evaluation of these same instructors by their students. Underlying my entire design, I stressed the significance of the research process I was undertaking. As described by Rubin, Rubin & Piele (2000), research must be "an objective, systematic, empirical and cumulative process by which we seek to solve theoretical and applied problems" (p. 193).

### **Objective**

Objectivity in qualitative research was a very first-person predicament in my research. I used an ethnomethodological style of observation to determine the effects of the humour used by instructors. I was suited for this type of observation as I was an instructor in the institution of the courses I studied, and I use a humorous style of instruction, which hopefully provided me with insight into the various types of humour used, as well as into the variety of responses from students within the class and later during their interviews. As I paid more attention to the examples of humour I saw exhibited at the college, I realized that these humour incidents were actually attempts at co-creating a common reality through mutually recognizable symbolism, albeit often used in an incongruous fashion, to provide light-hearted entertainment. Summarized, this may also be compared to what Mehan (1979) labelled "constitutive ethnography" (p. 17),

where observations are made to discover the constituents of social order. From this perspective, reality is seen as chaotic to the participants, who attempt to recognize and utilize familiar patterns in their social world. To observe this, therefore, the researcher must attempt to comprehend the creation of reality through these "indexical expressions" (Lindlof, 1995), and understand the relevant importance of each. This is an important benefit to remember about using the ethnomethodological process for a slippery subject like humour, which is incredibly context-reliant.

If previous research is used as a measure, humour has proven to be unpredictable and difficult to assess. The 1980 study by Bryant, Comisky, Crane & Zillman that I am modelling my project after specifically mentions the wide range of results of other studies of humour use in the classroom, from humour being a detriment to being at least moderately beneficial to the educational environment. In addition, many of the observations made in that 1980 study were statistically tenuous, with only a few really strong correlations between humour occurrences and evaluated effectiveness. Combined with the prevalent attitude from students that humour is an important part of effective instruction, these inconclusive results raise the possibility that further research in this area may reveal previously undiscovered connections.

Some studies (Lippman and Dunn, 2000; Wanzer and Frymier, 1999) have focused on the relationship between the retention of facts and the use of humour in presenting those facts. This area interests me as well, but I have instead focused on the effects on the perception of instructor effectiveness.

## **Systematic**

A second potential issue was solved by designing a system to define incidents of instructor humour. This was accomplished by recording and classifying these incidents to discover if the predominance of certain types of humour also effects the evaluation of instructors, or is specifically mentioned by students as being effective or detrimental to the classroom experience. Using the guide presented by Bryant, Comisky, Crane & Zillman (1980), I categorized the **presentation** of humour I observed as *jokes*, *riddles*, *puns*, *funny stories*,

*humorous comments*, or *other*. Notations were also made on the apparent **planning** of the humour as being *spontaneous*, *opportunistic*, *prepared* or *unknown*. Further to this, the **theme** of each humour expression was recorded based on being *hostile* or *non-hostile*, *gender* or *non-gender*, *nonsense* or *other*. The **characters** involved were noted as *instructor*, *students*, a combination of the two or *other*. The **target** of each humour incident was noted as *self-disparagement*, *student-disparagement* or *other*. The final observations were the **relevancy** of the humour on the apparent educational goal of the lesson, with the incident either *distracting* from the lesson, *neither distracting nor contributing* or *contributing*, along with the **relation** of the incident being *not related*, *moderately related* or *strongly related* to the curriculum content of that day (appendix A, Form III). This system of classification allowed for possible inferences about the nature of the humour, and not just the presence of humour, when compared to the instructor evaluations (appendix A, form II). This categorization allowed for themes to emerge as humorous incidents were compared to a positive evaluation of instructional style.

### **Empirical and Cumulative**

The next question revolves around the actual collection of data over a period of time using a variety of methods. Using the ethnomethodological approach, I collected data via three different means. First, by using a video camera, I captured the classroom instructional conditions where the subject was interpersonal communication. The use of video allowed me to return to the moment of each humour incident and classify them based on the previously mentioned criteria (appendix A, Form III). Since the video was reviewed by the researcher, who was present and can recall the context of the lesson, the observations should be quite accurate. There were, however, potential drawbacks to this method. First, the presence of a video camera may have distracted the students and the instructor and might have influenced the use of, and reaction to, humour. Second, as we have already established, humour means different things to different people. One person may observe a humour incident in a different way than someone else. Bryant et al. (1980) worked around this issue by having two different observers from the same class use the same question form to compare observations. If there was a discrepancy

between the two, the researcher's observations (using the same form) would "break the tie". My methodology did not incorporate a fail-safe such as this. Instead, I felt student interviews would better focus on the evaluative aspect of humour usage, while the categorization of the humour used was simply an added method from which I may determine if other research supported the theory that storytelling and anecdotes were more effective than puns, jokes and riddles.

The second method of data collection consisted of measuring student satisfaction with their instructor. I had three options when it came to collecting this satisfaction data, of which I utilized two. The first, quantitative surveys, was similar to that used by Bryant et al. (1980). Immediately following the class, but before being informed of the nature of their qualitative observation, all of the students were asked to fill out a general satisfaction questionnaire, based on a bipolar scale (appendix A, form II). Thus, the results of both collection methods (the video and the evaluation) had the same context. A full set of surveys (approximately 40) was collected at the end of the visit. A positive evaluation, combined with a certain combination of humour incidents, could reveal a positive correlation if noted in several students' observations over a period of time.

I then continued by using semi-structured interviews with students in the class. I also included instructor interviews, pre- and post- class, to determine personal beliefs and opinions on humour in general, how effectively they and their colleagues feel they use humour, and if their humour actually effects the instructor evaluations. In all audio taped interviews I was looking for evidence revealing a shared reality – specifically indexical expressions - between student and instructor, and the possibility that humour is used to on different levels to create and maintain this reality.

## **Qualitative Research**

The project design as I have described it thus far did not appeal naturally to my quantitative mind at first. Yet, I now believe I can see the advantages of this study having a qualitative section, and in fact I feel much more can be revealed by this type of study on a topic



such as humour. As I finalized this design, and reflected back upon its completion, I slowly realized that many of the same principles of research apply to both quantitative and qualitative study. Minimize doubt, maximize observational ability, work from previous themes and learn from my environment as I proceed.

While the methodology of most educational humour studies has been quantitative (Kaplan, 1977; Carroll, 1989, Lundgren, 1994; Struthers, 1994; Ziv, 1986; Zillman, 1983; Talbot, 2000; Berk, 2000) there is also a smaller representation of qualitative study. Far from being irrelevant to my area of interest, the quantitative analyses reveal a wealth of possible exploratory angles for my qualitative focus. While providing information about the setting of my study, these studies also justified the use of qualitative means to examine humour in this area to explain the situation with much more exploratory depth. The direction I followed, ethnomethodology, appears to be a relatively uncommon means by which to examine the social constructs around which humour is used, but worthwhile in the fact that I did not dwell on what makes something funny, but instead on what is found to be funny and how that effects the perception of the instructor by their students.

Some qualitative researchers suggest rookie researchers should stay away from their own worksite (Bogdan, 1992, p. 60). I chose to study a familiar location for the previously mentioned ethnographic benefits, yet I was partly removed from the context by the time of the research (I was no longer an employee, but still had contact with students and staff there).

The study I am using as a basis for my project, by Bryant et al. (1980), utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting information. As mentioned earlier, Bryant used an ethnomethodological method by having students in the study record and analyse audio taped lectures of their own classes. The key to this study being ethnomethodological is that the

students were analyzing their own instructors using humour inside of a context they were an actual part of. This will be discussed further, but at this point it bears mentioning that this is a key factor in choosing this methodology for this topic.

There has been other relevant research that may also provide me with guidance in constructing a qualitative study. A study by Moses (1986) examined the reaction of nursing students to the use of humour during practical testing of difficult medical procedures by conducting an interview after the test. A 1983 study by Harry Murray was semi-ethnomethodological in that volunteers from outside of the class (but within the student culture) were used to observe the instructional style used in several university classrooms. The quantitative study performed by Cohen (1980), using a category observation system based on the work of Flanders (1970), utilized video to study the behaviours within the classrooms of 28 different instructors. Although its methodology is not what I used, Cohen's study employed the observational technique I utilized in my qualitative study, which is the use of videotape. This method also provides the capability to review after the fact, and the superior ability to capture all that occurs (albeit only directly in front of the lens for visuals). My primary concern was the intrusiveness of having a camera in the room affecting the normal rhythm of the lesson. My options for observation included; live in the classroom (quite disruptive, very accurate, limited by time), via audio recording (very unobtrusive, less accurate unless examined by a member of the classroom culture) or via video recording.

I also attempted to avoid the pitfalls mentioned by Mehan (1979) in using video equipment in qualitative research, in that short segments may be over-analyzed and therefore are given importance much greater than they deserve as a small part of the instructional time (p. 16). "Constitutive ethnography", as Mehan likes to call his ethnomethodological process of

researching, specifically uses videotape as the medium of choice for preserving instructional time (p. 19).

## **Ethnomethodology**

Given the previously mentioned concern of remaining inconspicuous, the elusive question of what really is funny, the unclear links as to why humour actually is important for instructors to use and how all of this might relate to student evaluation of those instructors, I felt that ethnomethodology was the theoretical lens to best examine my main question.

The choice to use qualitative methods was easy, as humour measured in qualitative terms reveals a rich view of the actual situation. In fact, the main strength of ethnomethodology is that it specializes in revealing the effects of some quality by simply observing the context that the quality has helped to create, usually through verbal/non-verbal communication. As we have established in the literature review, many types of humour are very contextual. As an immediate benefit of using humour is to create a better classroom atmosphere, this methodology worked perfectly. This atmosphere revealed a shared vocabulary (and in a more complete contextual form, the indexical expressions), which carried through the term and were used to aid in the memorization of course content (Parrott, 1994) or simply to establish and maintain certain classroom decorum. Fine (1983) refers to this fact by stating that jokes are based on a social response, and mentions the work of Lafave (1976) to support this stance.

Mehan (1979) in his seminal work *Learning Lessons* provides an excellent example of how to approach an ethnomethodological study within the classroom. Even though Mehan's observations were made within an elementary school classroom, the same concepts of instructor-directed lessons, turn taking and protocol through interpersonal and small group communication

are present in the college setting. It may be argued that the importance of these qualities in the college is less, due to learner independence and external motivations, but the fact that these same learners evaluate the instructor at the end of the course is enough of a reason to study any and all communicative impacts that help to construct classroom reality, and therefore are reflected on the results of their evaluations.

### **Symbolic Convergence Theory**

For examining the "how" and "why" of humour usage by instructors, the symbolic converge theory (SCT) of communication was used, specifically through the previously mentioned indexical expressions. Although there are many different styles of humour an instructor can use, most instances fit nicely into Ernest Borrman's (Cragan, J. & Shields, D., 1998) theory of fantasy themes and rhetorical visions. By using SCT, it was possible to dissect any instance of humour and attempt to determine what makes it funny and/or important to the instructor and students. That purpose, however, is not what this research was about. Instead of researching "what is funny" (and in the process potentially removing all humour via the thorough examination), we instead used the SCT perspective to help explain why certain instances or categories of humour appear have a greater impact than others when students evaluate their instructor. It is an assumption, then, that humour is actually important in creating *fantasy themes*, Borrman's description of the fundamental unit of SCT. As a method of presenting material or themselves in a familiar and light-hearted way, instructors use humour to introduce, explain or conclude their lessons. Borrman calls these humorous incidents "triggers", which lead into appropriate fantasy themes (1985). In this project, we called them indexical expressions.

Thus the two pieces of work which provided me with the most relevant material for my project were Mehan's *Learning Lessons* and Bryant's study of humour and its relationship to instructor evaluation. Both of these utilize the ethnomethodological style I wish to use in a setting similar to the one I studied, and both are concerned with the effects interactions in the student-instructor role have on the perceived social structure of that instructor's classroom. Other than the expected challenges of organizing the study, perhaps my greatest trial was in faithfully following the style suggested by this revealing mode of study. Simply put, I attempted to observe the degree of creation and maintenance of a commonality between instructor and students through the use of humour, and then reflect upon the quantified results of the same students' evaluation of the instructor near the termination of that particular classroom social order – the end of the semester – all viewed through the lens of symbolic convergence theory post-collection of data.

### **Specific Methodology**

As the theoretical aspects and general design of my research have been addressed, I then further developed the practical methodology employed in this exploration. Well-planned theory will be for naught if evidence was not collected by the most accurate of means and with the best of communicated intentions. In qualitative studies, those means must be designed to provide and report a depth of experience through methodical inspection, ethically, over a suitable period of time with the ability to respond to change in respect to the direct context and indirect social setting in which the observations are made. Whether done through direct or indirect observation, participant or third party research, or interviews, understanding how the smallest details influence the study is vital to the collection of quality data.

## **Observation of the classroom/ Viewing videotapes**

The interpersonal communications course (a required course in the first year in the two-year communication arts/media program) was held in a medium-sized lecture hall on the Lethbridge Community College (LCC) campus. In traditional theatre style, the instructor stood at the bottom of an upward sloping collection of seats, each of which had attached a small desktop for the taking of notes. A walkway runs around the entire theatre. Two doors provided entry down either side aisle from the top, and one double set of doors did the same on stage right at the lower end of the room. Seating was limited to approximately 150 participants. Due to program enrolment limitations, this particular section contained approximately 75 students, with approximately 40 present on the day of my research.

As the purpose of my observation was to view the evidence of a co-created reality between instructor and students, I needed to be close enough to both to see and hear reactions both verbally and non-verbally – at least, I needed the video camera to be this close. During my scouting of the space during the previous school term, I concluded that positioning near the bottom, facing the front of the class where the instructor stood, would be the best viewing site. I hoped to remain relatively anonymous during the lectures, even though I would be making incidental non-verbal contact with several of the students as I observed them, which indeed happened. Humorous situations, and their effects, are not always based on visual information and may well reveal themselves audibly, such as with a pun that elicits no response. Marginality would be difficult to establish if I was also interacting with the class as the lessons progressed, but since the style of instruction I observed was lecture, I was able to observe without drawing much attention to myself, or the recording equipment. As I was a former member of the college culture, incidents that might escape the notice of an outsider may have revealed themselves more easily to me. I was a participant without having direct contact with the subjects – these students will not have had me as an instructor at any time in the past – save one who was a former high school student I had taught.

As a former instructor in the culture of the communication arts area at LCC, I had partial insights into the situations, characters and shared reality of those present. This closeness allowed

the potential for greater depth in the observations I made in this role, though not as deeply as if I was a primary participant. Observations were recorded via video camcorder with directional microphone. This equipment resided with me, and remained pointed at the instructor for the duration of the lesson. Adjustments on position were not necessary, even though the instructor moved freely about the front of the theatre. Humorous incidents outside of the camera's field of view (involving student-student humour or reaction to the instructor's humour) were unavailable for subsequent viewing, although audio responses and notes taken during the lecture allowed for more in-depth scrutiny during later observations by the researcher.

Observations were made based on my perceptions of the incidents of humour used by the instructor during the presentation of a normal lesson in the course. Humour incidents were classified by type, planning, theme, characters, target, relation and relevancy to the subject matter. Every humour incident was notated as such using the speech analysis software Transana, allowing for very accurate, repeated viewings. These tapes were digitized, viewed and categorized after the completion of a semi-structured interview exactly one week after that particular class period.

## **Survey**

Although this part of the research was not qualitative, it provided a global perspective compared to the more limited interviews and observations, insights that parallel the true instructor evaluations that the College administers, and means by which to compare results with similar studies also completed in this field. Perhaps most importantly, this method I used of data collection was the closest to the actual paper-and-pencil method used by the college itself.

Essentially, according to my research question, this information served the same purpose as the control variable in a quantitative study; comparisons were made between these results and the observations and interviews tabulated later. The scale presented to the students (appendix A, form II) attempts to list many qualities of effective instruction, with a final question referring to overall effectiveness. The sampling size consisted of the entire class on that day (approximately 40 students). Time was taken to explain the general meaning of each category to the students,

and questions were invited from the students, of which a few general procedural questions were asked. The gender of participants was requested on this form as well, as I hoped to examine this as another variable during data categorization. Age and racial factors were not taken into account.

## **Interviews**

In order to compare my observations with those of a direct participant, I utilized the cooperation of five students and the instructor for interviews. Immediately preceding and following the class that day, I conducted a 30 – 60 minute semi-structured interview with the instructor on the topic of effective instruction and the use of humour in that instruction. Then, one week later, five students (four female, one male), chosen by the instructor based on the belief they would provide rich feedback, were interviewed. Sampling of the classroom population did not follow a typical case basis (Lindlof, p. 129), due to the small sampling size and desire to have a rich source of data for ethnomethodological examination. Gender representation was skewed toward females in the communication arts program in general, and my sample reflected this trend with a ratio of four females to one male.

The one-on-ones with the students took place one week after the observed, videotaped class, in the public foyer of the communication arts floor of the computer studies building on the LCC campus. This area had couches and a bank of televisions, and is generally regarded as the most relaxed place to hang out for the students in this program. The main drawback to using this space was the lack of privacy while asking questions that potentially involved their present educational situation. My schedule of interviews revolved around Seidman's *three interview series* (1991), where the interview process is split into an initial context-creating/rapport-establishing introduction, a second segment conducted to relate past and present conditions to the research question, and a final instalment that related the context established first with the present reality of the second, which in my case was directly asking questions about the necessity of effective instructors using humour in the delivery of their lessons. Instead of three separate interviews, as Seidman recommends, one interview roughly split into those three phases was



used. Questions, examples of which appear in appendix A, form IV (the transcripts of which are found in appendix C table IV), were used as a rough guide to follow through the three interviews, but most questioning was reactive to the responses of the subject, and encouraged much more than "yes or no" answers. Responses were audio taped for later analysis, with notes also being made during the live interview. Analysis was completed using Transana software, where transcripts and notes were taken when instructor effectiveness or humour were the topics of discussion. The length of each interview was fifteen to forty five minutes per subject.

Interviewing was required in this study as the communications being observed by the researcher occurred verbally in only one direction, which we know as a lecture. Therefore, to more fully comprehend how humour and student satisfaction are linked, an interview process was used. Questions proceeded from general attitudes about educational effectiveness toward more specific attempts to discover student opinions on the relation of humour and instructor effectiveness throughout the interviewee's scholastic history. The interview should have, as Lindlof (1995, p. 166) states,

- Provided insight into areas that would otherwise be hidden
- Attempted to comprehend the context of the interviewee in relation to the topic
- Attempted to comprehend the context of the interviewee in relation to other communicators
- Validated information provided in other interviews
- Investigated the theories of the interviewer
- Encouraged the interviewee to a communication style that is natural for their setting
- Collected accurate information from the interview in a competent manner.

Between interviews, attempts were made to keep high content comparability in order to more accurately compare answers, even though the feel of the interview was more ethnographic than respondent.

### **Triangulation**

The concept of triangulation in qualitative studies refers to the collection or use of multiple sources and methods to refine the focus of the research. *Methodological* triangulation is the term

used to describe a study that uses multiple means of collecting information. This practice has both benefits and drawbacks. This study used three processes (surveys, videotaping and interviewing) in an attempt to provide a greater clarity to the answer of my research question. Possible problems of this method include results that do not agree with one another, or observations collected do not support data collected by a different method.

Another type of triangulation I used, *source* triangulation, involved the interpretation of the same event by multiple participants (myself, several students and the instructor). Again, this may have provided either clarity or conflict. My intent was that both methods of triangulation would provide clarity, and also add to the richness of the data collected by compensating for the small size of my research sampling. Graham Hitchcock, in his *Research and the teacher*, mentions that triangulation is "especially useful for the teacher making use of unstructured interviews in small-scale research" (p. 104).

### **Data collection and analysis**

During the first phase of the research - the live observation - scratch notes were taken in a letter-sized notepad in addition to later categorization from videotape as per the previously mentioned format. The dialog of the lecturer was captured on videotape, but researcher observations were made of the full class, as the camera was only focused on the instructor and subsequent viewings were therefore visually limited. Little was added from the researcher observations, however, save some incidental contact between the researcher and students. What was not added was interpretation of the notes through a methodological lens. Instead, the notes were used to construct a context, and no conclusions were drawn from what had been observed. The researcher did include notes of his participation or thoughts, however, as personal inclusion in the context helped reveal truths at a later date. Similar note taking was completed during the interviews, which were also recorded on audiotape.

Attempts were made to conduct the interviews as soon as possible after the class observation, to maintain the contextual content of the humour. The earliest the students were available was one week following the class observation. The interview tapes were transcribed

within two weeks of the taping the using the Transana software, in an attempt to better capture the context of the interview in the transcription. Editing during transcription was mostly unnecessary, as the quality of speech of the college students was of at least an average standard, and voice quality was good.

Analysis of the data, as Lindlof (1995) suggests, took place in a cyclical fashion (p. 215). This allowed for constant reflection on the data that has been collected. As each cycle through the material occurred, attempts were made to summarize information through the methodological theory chosen, the symbolic convergence theory – or more specifically through the presence of indexical expressions. These explanations revolved around the meeting of first-order concepts, from the subjects and their situation, and the second-order concepts provided by the observations of the researcher. Transcription performed via Transana software offered the ability to sort and arrange all transcribed dialogue along with the ability to move quickly through the digital format by precise time codes.

Paragraphs of text were numbered, time coded, and fell under sub-categories relating to the research question. All notes at this point underwent a "long table" method of categorization (Krueger, Casey, Donner, Kirsch & Maack, p. 17) although much of the transcription exists electronically.

## **Ethics**

Perhaps the most important issues of the research process were based on ethics and privacy. Observational presence in the classroom was explained to the group, with initial concerns regarding whether such detail would have an effect on the behaviour of the participants. The concept of informed consent that is so vital to qualitative research was balanced in this case by the fact that most of the class will be represented in the research as a part of an anonymous group completing surveys. The group was verbally informed that my presence in the class was to study effective instructional habits, which is the essence of this research. Those participants chosen to participate in the interview process were informed not only of the nature of the research, but also of the time commitment that was required, and their agreement was recorded

on a permission form retained by the researcher. The survey forms also included a statement that generally informed the participants of the nature of the research without explicitly informing them of the topic. Finally, the interview process required a more complete explanation of intentions and usage of collected information. Students may have been hesitant to make truthful comments, due to the perception that their answers may influence their marks, or that their responses may influence the reputation of their instructor. To alleviate these concerns, anonymity of responses was clearly stated, both orally and in writing, and the fact that the research is being completed without the involvement of the administration of the College was also emphasized. The oral descriptions and written forms used attempted to describe all of these issues and suggest methods to address them are found in appendix B.

The individual who faced the most scrutiny in this process was the cooperating instructor. Although I had little concern going into the research (as this particular instructor enjoys a very positive relationship with his students), it was explained to him the risks he was taking, and the steps I undertook to protect the results. A written consent form was used for his situation as well, addressing what will happen to the data and results of the research.

The second issue, of student privacy, must obey Alberta's FOIP legislation (Freedom of Information, Protection of Privacy) for students attending public educational institutions. The observations made through my research did not involve records collected by the College about the students, which is the primary focus of the FOIP legislation. As I was a former member of the LCC faculty and will be collecting information, however, I made it clear that the information I collected was separate from my capacity as an instructor at LCC (which was also stated in both my submissions to the University ethics board and my oral explanations and forms for the participating students). According to section 42 of the FOIP Act, information collection in the manner I have described is only a problem if actual college records are required, of which I required none.

As a part of the research process at the University of Alberta, the forms found in appendix B were submitted for approval before any research began.

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## Findings

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As an instructor who uses humour quite readily, I feel that humour significantly increases my evaluation by students, and therefore I expected the results of my research to indicate a positive correlation between the use of appropriate humour and positive evaluations from students. I would probably not use humour as much as I do if I did not believe it was benefiting the students directly, or myself indirectly, in the learning process. As the students are there to learn (in most cases), and the instructors are there to teach (in most cases), it would therefore stand to reason that students who felt their learning process was effective would also find their instructor to be effective as well.

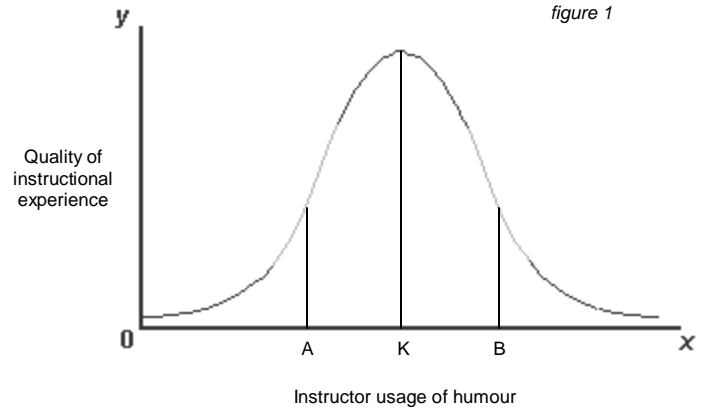
Thankfully, the two toughest challenges within this research are simply being assumed, and are not open for debate. First, what makes an instructor effective, and second, what makes an instructor humorous in the eyes of a student. The fact that I attempted to establish a link between humour usage and the attitude that the instructor is effective should not lessen the results I obtained. In fact, how each student defines "effective instruction" and "humorous instructors" was irrelevant to this research, and is in question far beyond the scope of what this level of research could hope to answer.

What became interesting to discover were the apparent connections between different types of humour, humour as a part of a process and not the process itself, and the resulting effectiveness as judged by the students. Would using aggressive, spontaneous humour result in a higher effectiveness rating than self-deprecating planned humour? Would males and females view humour incidents in the same way, and would the effectiveness of classes be viewed differently based on gender? Would humour usage, either in quality or quantity, effect student satisfaction with their classroom experience?

It may be helpful to illustrate this by using a mock graph, *figure 1*, plotting theoretical instructor effectiveness against the humour used during class. Results may plot a bell curve, an s-curve, or a linear relationship between the two variables. Because we are dealing with a

population and their perception of a non-controversial point, however, we may assume the bell curve to be the most likely representation.

Perhaps the strongest conclusion to be drawn from this research is that there may be a hypothetical zone of moderation when it comes to using humour. The humour usage must not be too often, or lessons may be lost in the chaos that surrounds the wacky class. The humour must not be too aggressive, or the light nature that humour brings might instead be replaced by an oppressive feeling of dread, leaving students wondering, "who's next?" There must be enough humour to show the instructor, and the material, is not so heavy as to remove all personality from the course. Instructors would tinker with their usage of whichever forms of humour they were the most comfortable, always striving to find a supposed  $K$  on the bell curve, but at least remaining in the imaginary range from  $A$  to  $B$ . Each instructor, every day, in any particular class, would have a different value for  $K$ .



## Survey

In following the course of the grounding work this project is modeled after, conducted by Jennings Bryant et al. (1980), the first data collected was via a quantitative survey. Completed by all students present the day of the class observation, the survey asked the students to rate their instructor and the instruction in that day's class in 14 categories, as well as stating their gender and the opportunity to provide a written response to a question asking for a description of the best instructor they have had (appendix A form II). Like the Jennings study, the rated qualities of instruction were then grouped into three general categories for comparison; *appeal* (dynamic, command of the situation, entertaining, witty, personable, funny, appealing), *competence* (understands concepts, informative, informed) and *delivery* (speaking ability, clarity in making a

point, voice quality). Given the results of research conducted by Feldman (1986) previously mentioned, it can be assumed that the students are providing an accurate and honest assessment of what they believe the questions to be, and that their responses will use more of the 11 point gradated scale than other methods such as peer evaluation. Instructions to the students were to fill in their answers based on that day's lecture (the present) and the instructor himself (the past and present). Thus, some uncertainty was introduced at this point as all previous encounters between the students and instructor could potentially influence these answers – as should be expected, but nonetheless outside of the scope of what this project is attempting to discover.

There were 37 respondents (23 female, 13 male, 1 not categorized). Summarized results are shown below in *figure 2* (and may be viewed in more detail in appendix C, Table 1). It should be noted that, based on such a small sample, any generalizations made cannot be accurately imposed on any larger population.

*figure 2*

Attribute	Average Rating	Females	Males
Speaking ability	9.76	9.83	9.62
Clarity in making a point	9.54	9.57	9.46
Voice quality	9.73	9.83	9.54
Dynamic	9.81	9.87	9.67
Understands concepts	9.73	9.91	9.46
Command of the situation	9.57	9.61	9.54
Entertaining	9.59	9.52	9.69
Informative	9.58	9.64	9.46
Witty	9.70	9.87	9.38
Informed	9.84	9.91	9.69
Personable	9.62	9.83	9.23
Funny	9.76	9.83	9.62
Appealing	9.64	9.74	9.42
"Appeal" qualities	9.72	9.75	9.51
"Competence" qualities	9.72	9.82	9.54
"Delivery" qualities	9.68	9.74	9.54
Overall, how effective was the instructor today?	9.56	9.61	9.42
Overall, how effective is this instructor?	9.62	9.74	9.38

The results in the grey shaded areas reveal categories residing in the *appealing* qualities of instruction. It is in these areas that an instructor's sense of humour would most likely influence student responses, perhaps in the categories *dynamic*, *entertaining*, *witty* and *funny* in particular. If we examine the highest three averages (with the black highlighting) in all categories, it can be seen that the categories *dynamic* and *informed* are ranked in the top three overall, by females and by males. An *informed* instructor is one whose knowledge of the source material is extensive and current, and indeed this category was often mentioned during the later interviews as an integral

part of being rated an effective instructor. A *dynamic* instructor is more difficult to define, but perhaps can be best described as an indication of the energy an instructor brings to the lesson. The categories with the most direct connections to humour, *funny* and *witty*, were also highly ranked. *Funny* was tied for third in overall importance, and was tied for fourth with the male respondents. *Witty* was tied for third most important for female students.

This may provide evidence of potential differences in the perception of the use of humour by students of different genders. Although there is some consistency throughout the categories, interesting discrepancies can be seen in the humour-related categories *funny*, *entertaining* and *witty*. If forced to compare these three responses, it would probably be a valid statement to say that *witty* is more involved with playing on the meanings of words, whereas *funny* and *entertaining* invoke images of a more physical style of humour. While *funny* was the third highest rated quality overall, it was more highly regarded compared to the other categories for males than for females. *Entertaining* was tied for the most important instructor attribute for males, while it was near the bottom of the rankings for females. *Witty*, on the other hand, while being tied for second-highest score by female students, was the second lowest ranked category by males. Though the sample size is small, these results may reveal a general bias by male students towards humour that is not seen as trying to sound smart (wit), and instead may more often reveal a preference for general humour, or even self-deprecating or sarcastic comments. Female students, on the other hand, may find humour to be more effective when it is revealed verbally, aligning with the common pop-sociology idea (think of the *Mars and Venus* books) that language plays a more important social role with females than with males. Indexical expressions for the female members of the class may be found in the way words are used, as opposed to other formats favoured by males.

Overall, the categories collectively known as *appealing* were found to hold equal importance to the other collectives *delivery* and *competence*. There was very little difference in the averages for these three general categories, with *appeal* and *competence* having an equal rating of 9.72, with *competence* only 0.04 points behind.



## Classroom Observation

The videotaped class, with approximately 68 minutes of actual instructional time, yielded 34 instances of humour, which was estimated as an average amount of humour by the instructor during his post interview. This equates to a humour incident every 2 minutes, which was far more frequent than the figure of every 15 minutes (approximately 3 humour incidents for every 50 minutes of class) reported in the much larger study by Bryant et al. (1980). A summary of the humour incident categorizations may be found below in *figure 3*. It can be seen that there are certain categories that have a dominant style or styles, while others have a more equal representation. For this particular lecture, it would appear that a *humorous comment* and *funny story* involving either *both the instructor and students* or *neither the instructor or students* that takes the *opportunity* presented to *moderately relate* to the topic of the lecture yet still *contribute* to the content, where the focus of the humour is *outside of the classroom* and, while often *aggressive* in singling out the target of the humour, rarely links the humour to the *gender* of the main characters.

figure 3

<b>presentation</b>	<i>jokes</i>	<i>riddles</i>	<i>puns</i>	<i>funny stories</i>	<i>humorous comments</i>	<i>other</i>
	1	0	4	10	16	3
<b>characters</b>	<i>instructor</i>	<i>students</i>	<i>both student and instructor</i>	<i>other</i>		
	5	4	11	14		
<b>planning</b>	<i>spontaneous</i>	<i>opportunistic</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>unknown</i>		
	5	17	12	0		
<b>relation</b>	<i>not related</i>	<i>moderately related</i>	<i>strongly related</i>			
	7	16	11			
<b>relevancy</b>	<i>distracting</i>	<i>contributing</i>	<i>neither distracting nor contributing</i>			
	4	21	9			
<b>target</b>	<i>self-disparagement</i>	<i>student-disparagement</i>	<i>self and student disparaging</i>	<i>other</i>		
	6	7	2	19		
<b>theme</b>	<i>gender hostile</i>	<i>non-gender hostile</i>	<i>non-gender non-hostile</i>	<i>gender non-hostile</i>	<i>nonsense</i>	<i>other</i>
	2	20	10	2	0	0

Referring back to the grounding research, many interesting observations can be made. According to Jennings et al. (1980), male instructors who frequently used funny stories received more positive overall evaluations than instructors who used these stories more infrequently (pg.

515). In addition, these same highly evaluated instructors were seen as being more *appealing* and were rated as having superior *delivery* skills. Although the scope of our study does not include comparisons between instructors, our survey results match the larger 1980 study in that stories were used often (29% of humour occurrences) and both the *appeal* and *delivery* collections of categories received positive evaluations.

Planning of the humour observed is a very subjective decision to make, and therefore a new option was added to this project as compared to the Jennings study. *Opportunistic* was added, and was differentiated from *spontaneous* based on the environment the humour took place in. *Spontaneous* was recorded if the humour appeared "out of nowhere", and *opportunistic* for humour that played off of either course content or class conditions without appearing to have been pre-planned (which was recorded as *prepared*). This was done to provide greater insight into whether an instructor could basically write their humorous material beforehand based on the course content or previous course experiences (*prepared*), present the same type of humour but without the appearance of having rehearsed (*opportunistic*), or have the humour appear as tangents to the direction of the instruction at that point, attempting humour for the sake of humour only (*spontaneous*).

Thus, the categories of *opportunistic* and *spontaneous* would be counted together to equate Jennings one category *spontaneous*. According to Jennings (pg. 515), male instructors were spontaneous in 62% of their humour incidents, as compared to 64% in this study. In addition, male instructors who were judged as using more spontaneous humour than their colleagues in the 1980 study were also given higher scores for overall ability and *delivery*.

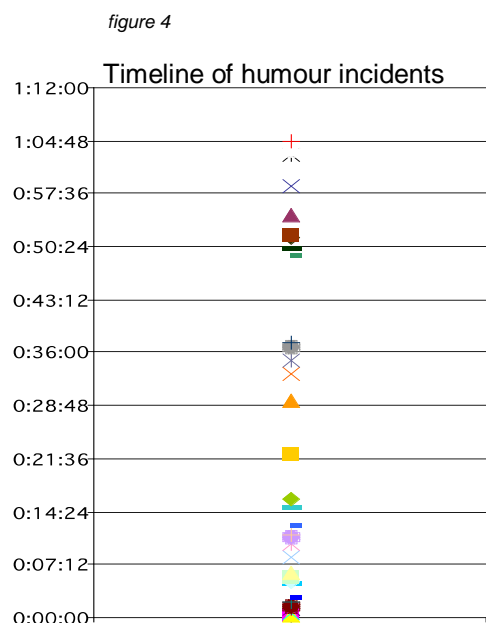
Although the results in the next categories, *relation* and *relevancy*, were both positive towards staying on topic and contributing to the course material, Jennings et al. (pg. 516) found

that male teachers were not only allowed leeway in going off-topic, those who did received higher *appeal* marks, but lower overall evaluative scores. Female teachers who also strayed from the task at hand with their humour were, paradoxically, rated much lower in overall effectiveness. The instructor in our study had very few instances of humour that was distracting or not related to the content.

*Themes* in our study were judged to be overwhelmingly hostile, given that much of the humour was directed at a specific target, usually at a perceived weakness that target possessed. As previously mentioned, there was little gender humour, and even less hostile gender humour. Jennings et al. (pg. 516) again found a gender inequality, where male instructors who used gender-based, hostile humour were highly rated for *appeal* as well as overall effectiveness, while female instructors using the same type of humour were lower than their counterparts in overall effectiveness (but still high for *appeal*). The *targets* of the humour in our study were most often someone or something outside of the classroom environment. Jennings et al. (pg. 516) found that instructors with results such as this tended to have higher overall effectiveness scores. He also noted that instructors who used more humour than the norm (as the subject in our case does) used targets outside the class much more frequently, or who often used nonsense humour also had high effectiveness scores. In contrast to our

findings, users of hostile humour were also much more likely to be self-disparaging, which we observed in less than 20% of the humour incidents in our study.

Examination of the humour occurrences as a timeline in our study (*figure 4*) shows an unequal distribution of incidents. The first 15 minutes of the lecture were by far the busiest in terms of humour



usage, with sporadic periods of humour activity occurring randomly after that point. In addition, the types of humour used in this first 15 minutes tended to be shorter in duration (puns, humorous comments) and opportunistic of what the students were actively involved in, as opposed to the less aggressive, attention requiring narratives that began to appear more frequently as the lecture progressed. This effect was acknowledged by the lecturer in a post-class interview, and was explained as an attempt to control the overall pacing and flow to maintain student interaction with the instructor and class.

## **Interviews**

In order to examine the question of how humour usage by college instructors can influence student evaluations of their instructors, interviews were used to provide a third method of data collection. The instructor of the class was given a general pre-lecture interview and a more focused post-lecture questioning, both taking place on the day of the class observation by the researcher. In addition, five students (four female and one male) were selected by the instructor for post-lecture interviews that were conducted one week later. Notes were used to keep the questioning moving towards the ultimate goal of relating evaluation (positive or negative) with the use of humour in instructional situations, but the interviews ran as semi-structured. Often, the participants led the interview in directions that, if left unexplored, may have left the data less rich.

### **Pre-class Instructor Interview**

The pre-lecture interview with the instructor was a little less than 30 minutes in length, and took place before the 8:00 AM class that day. Answers from the lecturer revealed seriousness about the college educational experience, with frequent references to anecdotal stories, both from the classroom and in the lecturer's time spent in the private sector previous to teaching.

Humour was not discussed specifically in the pre-interview, but was mentioned indirectly in a few situations. In the second answer, which had led quickly from the first question about the courses taught at the college, practicality and relating to real-world experiences was mentioned as being combined with entertainment. "Those are the types of things I try to bring... so they have some fun with it. It engages them, and in the end they're probably going to fail because they think it's easy, and that's what I want them to do... that its not as easy as they think" (appendix C, table 3, pre interview, question 2).

In this same general discussion, the topic of learning styles was brought up more than once without prompting from the researcher. Specifically, the distinction was made between those who learn from taking notes, and those who learn from listening to stories. As was later observed during the class observation, these stories are often presented in humorous ways, or contain situations the students find humorous. In questions five through nine in the pre-interview, stories and anecdotes were mentioned several times. The stories would meet the learning needs of those who listened and learned vicariously, while the note takers would benefit as well; "if you want to tell stories, they had better be entertaining for those who don't learn that way" (question 7). The answer to question 8 also refers to this attitude, "when you show up in class, you'd better be on... its showtime. Those students, each one of them, are paying X amount of dollars for that day, and if you're not prepared... your sort of stealing their money... in post secondary education we talk about learners, but there's also a sense that they're clients".

It might be expected that a prime motivation for instructors to use humour would stem from the social benefits shared laughter brings, where the students feel they are being spoken to individually, and the instructor feels as though they are connecting with the students. While this is most likely true for some instructors who use humour, it does not appear to be a prime motivation in this case. In question #10, in response to the need for instructors to feel highly regarded by their students, the subject answered, "I don't need to be liked by the students... I get the biggest buzz out of seeing the lightbulb go on". It would appear that the humour may be partially opening the students to share of themselves, somehow, in the class.

The instructor task of checking for feedback was certainly mentioned many times (questions 6-8, 10-12), but specifically in question #12, ""I check my own perceptions... there's alot of second-guessing what I'm about to say to a class". Finally, the instructor mentions in question #19 that he likes to put himself on the other side of the lectern, as he will, "empathize with the students - what is it like to be sitting in my class". Thus, perhaps he teaches as he prefers to be taught, or how he imagines he should be teaching.

The social benefit of the instructor using humour here may be that a laughing face is a responsive face. A bored student, learning or not, gives no immediate feedback. It would appear the humour used piques interest and not only stimulates the mind to perhaps become more receptive to the theories presented, but also to participate in the social interaction that certain instructors require in order to move through their lessons in an efficient manner. However, there may be a risk in assuming that the students are internalizing the humour as they would if used by their peers or friends, resulting in a more personable relationship.

### **Post-class Instructor Interview**

Post-lecture, a slightly longer and more specific line of questioning was presented. Here, the topic of humour was addressed by name and several of the answers revolved around both humour and the nature of the college classroom as entertainment. In fact, the first responses sounded more like an interview with a comedian or stage performer than an instructor, such as, "the pacing was off a bit because I lost some time..." (appendix C, table 3, post interview, question #1), "I made corny jokes at the start... it gave me a chance to loosen them up... I looked out and most of them were groaning, so that works you get their attention" (question #2), and, "the humour gets them going (its a morning class)... you pump them up a little bit... it starts off goofy and then goes down" (question #5). Combined with the fact that these statements were made after observations of the actual classroom lecture, the researcher would agree that the instructional process was reminiscent of something theatrical, revealed most pointedly by the pacing, shared laughter and attempts by all participants to maintain a sense of timing.

Of course, timing when using humour is crucial, both in delivery and response. Therefore, the humour that was used, at the times that it was used, was most likely performing a pacing mechanism for the lesson, the interaction between instructor and students, and between the students themselves. In fact, notes in my initial observations stated that there was frequent interaction between students while the lecture was ongoing. When asked about this in question #6 of the post-interview, the instructor replied, "I can always see where the groups are... they start yakking... I don't mind that... as soon as they start to disappear, I need to bring them back". Creating this type of social collective atmosphere would almost certainly benefit the instructor in class participation, and as a secondary benefit result in higher student evaluations based on the fact that the class would seem pleasant from a social atmosphere perspective.

Interestingly, the instructor graded his performance during these early questions, without prompting from the interviewer. This may reveal his realization that these performances are indeed evaluated all of the time, and that education is at least partly about being appraised by those around you

Not only was humour used to create and maintain a social reality, but it could also be used in anecdotal forms to link with specific curricular goals. When asked for examples of the effectiveness of using humour (question #8), the response was quite specific as opposed the general benefits already stated. Referring to a story used to illustrate the impact of interviewing and disclosure for media students, the instructor explained, "One I told that showed up on just about everyone's exam... it was a cue... it was about disclosure and how they have to follow a pattern of expectations... I was witness to one of the most painful first dates that probably any couple on the planet have ever gone through" (question #8). He believes it is very important to provide direct relation to what is being taught, however, as he states, "I think any story you tell to an audience that hasn't have a connection to the curriculum is an absolute waste of time and is totally self-absorbent" (question #18).

According to the instructor, the anecdote mentioned above explaining how a man on a first date disclosed far too much far too early to his date resulted in a strong reaction from much of the class, especially the female students. This example shows the tendency of this instructor to

use anecdotes involving characters outside of the class to illustrate theories given orally or as notes on the overhead. It also shows that incongruities as found in real life may make a lasting connection in the minds of students. When asked if this type of humour had limits for usefulness in the classroom, the instructor responded (question #10) that stereotypes, gender and otherwise, should be avoided, as should any and all profanities. He did mention in the same answer, however, that if the humour was, "goofy and silly enough, and over-the-top enough that it sort of reels you back" it could be more easily accepted, and "The key is to never prop yourself up as a guru, prop yourself up as a fumblemouth, an idiot or something" (question #19). It might be hypothesized that self-deprecating humour might also fit into this category, although appearing to be too tough on yourself as an instructor in regards to issues that have strong social meaning could instead be taken as having a poor self image, lowering the social perception of the instructor and therefore their resulting evaluation scores. This was hinted at in the Bryant study when female instructors were discussed as having used self-deprecating or aggressive humour, and perhaps as a result received lower overall effectiveness scores compared to male teachers who did the same (Bryant, 1980, pg. 517).

Based on the fact that this instructor seemed quite passionate about the humour that he used, the questioning then turned to whether all instructors should attempt to incorporate humour into the lectures. Two opinions were noted in his responses, and both would later be reinforced by answers given during student interviews. First, in question #12, while agreeing that instructors should not be dismissing bored students at the end of their lectures, the instructor stated the the use of humour, "absolutely depends on the nature of the course". His belief is that courses in areas such as communications may lend themselves to more frequent use of humour, "If there's a chance there to use it, and use it in, hopefully, an effective way, then yeah".

The second rationalization for deciding whether to use humour during instruction revolves around the enthusiasm felt for the curriculum by the teacher. In both this interview and a later student interview, the researcher was corrected when asking the question, "Is humour necessary for effective teaching to take place?" In both instances, the subjects suggested that the word "passion" should replace "humour", and was linked to "enthusiasm". Showing enthusiasm



appears to be linked to genuine interest in the topic along with an expertise that gives credibility to what the instructor is attempting to teach. On this topic, the instructor states, "I think some passion... change 'humour' to 'passion'... you can feel passion, but if it doesn't show up as enthusiasm, then it disappears" (appendix C, table 3, post interview, question #13). It can be speculated that this is related to trust issues between the student and instructor, where the student needs to feel that what it is that they are attempting to learn is worth their time, money and emotional investment. If these three needs appear to be satisfied by the classroom experience, the result could be expected to be higher effectiveness evaluations. In practical terms, "being completely comfortable with the curriculum - the theory and the application, examine which items allow for humour background - and how can I tie that humour and point and give it some relevancy and currency, tie those elements into what is happening in the world" (question #21).

### **Student Interviews**

Student interviews took place one week later, immediately following the Friday morning communication course observed previously. Casual observations were made during this course period, but no taping was done. Although there was at least one class between the two observations, there was an obvious flow in style and content from one class to the next. This allowed the researcher to feel confident that answers to questions related to this particular course would be consistent if asked at almost any point during the school term, and were not therefore dependent on that single taped lecture. Five students were interviewed, and were chosen by the instructor based on participation in the class, willingness to share opinions and potential diversity of backgrounds. Thus, while the gender representation was skewed (four female and one male), almost all other potentially relevant qualities (age, race, occupational and educational experiences, for example) were quite varied. By this point in the examination of data, common themes that would reveal a co-constructed reality between instructor and student that are positive in nature and based on humour are the goal. All five interviews began with very general questions, as the students only knew that research was being done on effective instructors, and

gradually moved towards a focus on the use of humour by instructors and how this humour might effect affectiveness.

### **Student Interview #1**

The first interviewee was experienced in post secondary education, having attended programs at two colleges and one university since graduating high school, and receiving one college diploma. No preferences were expressed based on type of post secondary education, as both colleges and university staff were described in unflattering terms. Her experiences were in a fairly wide range of specialties through two Canadian provinces.

Requested to describe memorable instructors at the very beginning of the interview, the student began to use terms such as "...funny, with a great sense of humour..." (appendix C, table 4, interview #1, question #2) and "...funny..." (question #3). Also matching responses found in the instructor interview, "their passion right now is to teach" was mentioned in her description of her best teachers, and there were mentions of practical experience with the subject matter (question #2, #5), a relaxed classroom atmosphere (question #2, #7), empathetic (question #3, #10) and anecdotal (question #5). Supporting the theory that the humour instructors use benefits their social standing, the student stated, "I think that if they use humour you, in a way, get a sense to know your instructor's better...like you know some of their personality" (question #16). She also made two statements supporting the use of humour to support curricular goals. First, when asked if she could remember a humorous incident that helped her as a student (question #11), she recalled a high school English teacher who had taught her how to identify prepositions in writing. A preposition was "Anywhere a cat can go" (under a car... on a countertop...). Interestingly, she then stated this teacher would not have been regarded as humorous by others in her class, and only used humour in situations where she "knew she had a point to teach" (question #13). Secondly, when asked about the importance of quality and quantity of humour used by the instructor in this study, the student stated that she felt it was both. The implication was that, if the instructor used humour too often, or there was no learning in conjunction with the

humour, the time spent in the classroom was being wasted (question #14), aligning with her communication instructor's earlier comments.

## **Student Interview #2**

The second interview was with a female student, younger than the first, who was a rebellious student in high school due to difficulties adapting to being diagnosed with ADHD, amongst other issues. This was her first year at a post secondary institution. Her mother is a teacher with a master's degree, so her opinions varied widely considering she has seen both sides of the instructor viewpoint.

Evidence supporting statements made by other interviewees surfaced quickly. The first question, about her previous education, eventually led to her stating that her current instructors have the media as "their life", and then mentioning the same instructors as being "teachers by trade" in her answer to the next question. Although she did not use the word "passion", it can be assumed that this was the quality she was describing. In addition, she made supportive statements of instructors who, "when you talk to them, they really listen" (question #2).

The first unsolicited mention of instructor humour came when describing a female peer of the subject of this research. Interestingly, after initially describing the jokes of the female instructor when asked to describe appealing instructional practices in the media program (question #4), the student differentiated between the two styles of our subject and his peer. The female instructor, other than being described as using jokes (of which none were observed from the male instructor during class), "pokes fun at our class", while the male instructor uses humour "more of his situations (question #14). This was further explained in the same question, as the female teacher, "doesn't really expose herself very much to the class... which is something that I appreciate, because I can just look at her as a teacher and not have personal feelings". Although her male instructor had stated he did not care if he was liked by the students, it appears that his style of humour lead this student, at least, to interpret an attempt at building a more personal relationship with students.

Next, this student revealed her learning style preference when asked about specific instructional methods that our subject used in his lectures. She described one of these methods as "stories...outrageous things that come out of his mouth" which "wake me up" and makes the point two or three times for students to pick up" (question #7). She then hinted at the fact that these stories may not always match her learning style, as sometimes, "it would be good to go and get some work done" (question #9), although when asked why she thinks he uses so many stories, she replied, "communications is about the situations you are in, does it for some of his own benefit to keep himself on track, to keep students alert" and, " I think for other people in that class it is very important that he is funny" (question #13).

Finally, in this interview, a specific indexical expression was noted, and would arise two more times before the interviews were complete. When the instructor was asked one week earlier about specific examples of humour working well in his lecture, he gave a vague description of an incident he was involved in as a member in a rowing club in British Columbia. Although the instructor described the class that day as, "the place was in bedlam and I saw people laughing so hard they had tears coming down" (appendix C, table 3, pre interview, question #7) and, "that story ended up being really funny" (question #9), the researcher had not truly grasped the moral of the story. The second student interviewed, however, described this exact story as one that was very memorable from her communications class, describing it as, "he made fun of this guy and himself" (appendix C, table 4, interview #2, question #8), revealing the self-deprecating and hostile humour that Bryant et al. (1980) found worked well for male college instructors. As mentioned, this would not be the final time this story was mentioned during the student interviews.

### **Student Interview #3**

The third interview was with a female student who had attended public schools in the local area, received a degree from a college two hours away, and returned to the media program in Lethbridge. In general questioning, she recalled some of her most and least effective

instructors. In none of these answers did she mention the use of humour, but she did appear to have a bias towards female instructors being more effective than males. When confronted with this, she replied that she did enjoy the male communications instructor studied in this project. Specifically, the stories he used to explain the themes and concepts presented and the humour contained with these stories were appreciated. The instructor was rated as being effective, and the humorous stories were appreciated because, "they're funny - I like humour, they keep me awake" (appendix C, table 4, interview #3, question #11). When asked to describe an example of how a humorous story could be entertaining but also relate to the lesson being taught that day (question #13), she became the third subject to identify the rowing story, correctly identifying the same theme offered by the instructor and the previous interviewee.

When asked about other instructors using humour in her academic experiences, she explained that she did not appreciate humour as much when she was younger. However, now that she was older, she revealed that perhaps using humour was an underutilized aspect of most college instructors' styles, stating, "I think if more teachers used it, it would be better" (question #17). When asked if all instructors should use more humour, she initially made a distinction between those who are funny and those who are not, but other than over-using humour to the detriment of reaching the curricular goals of the class, she did not feel that using humour had any other negative effects.

Given the earlier ideas stated in the Superiority Theory of humour, and the nature of much humour used in western society, it was a bit surprising to not hear any statements revealing experiences with instructors using politically incorrect or biased humour from any of the interviewees, or on any of the written responses on the surveys.

#### **Student Interview #4**

The next student to be interviewed had several years of experience in the workforce, and had just recently relocated to Alberta to attend the media arts program in Lethbridge. Although age was never mentioned in the Bryant et al. study (1980), one factor that has almost certainly changed in the past 20 years of college education is the average age of the students. This subject

typified this factor, as she was likely older than some of her instructors. As humour changes depending on the developmental age of those involved in the humour incident, perhaps this is an unstudied factor in the changing world of college pedagogical humour usage and feedback.

Two of her instructors at this college – including the subject of this project – were mentioned as examples of very effective college instructors, in addition to being popular with the students. Both were praised for their persistence in getting the theories across to the majority while creating an entertaining atmosphere. Although the class observation revealed only four puns, the communication class was described as being "punny" (appendix C, table 4, interview #4, question #11), although when asked why she thought the instructor used the puns, the answer was not to get a laugh. Instead, she stated, "I think it breaks the ice... it gets a reaction... it involves people... he gets a response from the class, that it just keeps drawing them back into the lecture" (question #12). In fact, her responses to next questions revealed her belief that one of the largest benefits on this instructor using humour was in the delivery of subject matter, stating, "he's very good at giving the information... then bringing it to the punch-line", culminating with her statement that, "he's a good speaker" (question #13), but also that she got the impression that he really wanted each of them to do well, perhaps revealing that the humour (and the way it was being used) was increasing the quality of social relationship between the instructor and students.

Finally, when discussing the importance of college instructors using humour in their delivery of lessons, more consistencies appeared with previous interviews. First, she stated that humour was not absolutely necessary for instructors to use, and in fact, "if it is uncomfortable for the person to use it... students will pick up on it, and it will make them look ridiculous..." (question #19). Second, she used "passion" to describe the qualities of an instructor who could successfully use humour, and thought that the humour worked best when used to make a concept easier to understand and remember for later.

### **Student Interview #5**

The final interview was with the only male chosen for this part of the research process, and perhaps this individual also possessed the most post secondary experience, having already

completed two university degrees. His description of effective instruction included ways to, "present material so that it is understandable, logical and fun as possible", and, "how you present material in a fun manner without going too far to make it offensive to some people, the way you present something reveals your respect for people". (appendix C, table 4, interview #5, questions #1-3). This interviewee also noted that, by making the class fun, an instructor appears to be like a normal person, although not exactly like a friend. Perhaps more than any other statement by the students, this sums up the instructor's feelings towards using the humour to reach the students more effectively without the need for also being liked by those same students. By using the humour and the stories, it adds a social ease to the lecture to the point that, to the students, it almost feels like an interesting conversation, albeit a rather one-sided one. Supporting this possible conclusion is the instructor post-interview, questions #6-7 (appendix C, table 3), where it was noted that the humorous stories, especially, would generate discussion between small groups of students and even attempts at interaction between solitary students and the lecturer. The effect was that of being lured into a sense of interpersonal or small group interaction, followed by a response in that format, then either a realization that there was still a lecture occurring, or a cue (oral or visual) from the instructor that he required their attention again. Our subject noted this and explained it as a way to get everyone involved in what would be otherwise a very weighted social situation.

Signs of indexical expressions were frequent in this final interview as well. Themes such as differing learning styles (appendix C, table 4, interview #5, questions #12), the rowing story (question #12), wasting class time with excessive humour, and using humour in ways that are applicable to the curricular goals (question #13), and that not every instructor could follow the same pattern to be humorous in class (question #14). In this final case, however, the student felt it was honesty – between the instructor and the students, and the instructor and themselves – that allowed for true effective instruction (questions #14-15).

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## Discussion

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Through the varied methods of this research project, it would appear that the use of humour aids both instructors and students in the creation of a shared, positive reality that generally results in positive evaluations of the instructor's methods of instruction. The strength of the connection between humour usage and positive student evaluations of their instructors would require a much larger data gathering and distillation process than this present work could hope to show. Yet, using the results of previous studies and the strong themes found in the research of this project, a relatively solid case could be made. Using humour in a college classroom can have a positive impact on student evaluations of their instructors.

Bryant's founding research is now over twenty years old, and the post secondary landscape has changed much in that time. Other changes include what audiences find humorous, society's views of gender roles and the general value of post-secondary education. Yet, we can surmise that there is value that humour brings to any public speaking or educational challenge. Certainly the oration of an ancient Greek philosopher would be different than a Lethbridge Community College media course instructor, but each has the ultimate goal of connecting with each audience member in as an effective manner as possible. The use of humour, it would appear, is one of the more pleasant processes (potentially) in which to attempt to make this connection.

Lacking the scope of the original 1979-1980 study, the research presented here instead attempted to locate an instructor known for using humour in the classroom and study his class. The sheer number of humour incidents (34) noted suggests that either this instructor utilizes humour far beyond even the most frequent users in the original study (the highest being 16 incidents per hour), or the definition of a humour incident differs between the original



researchers and the researcher in this project. Ethnomethodological studies generally make no excuses for using extremes, and in fact view this type of situation as simply being much more rich in what can be taken from what is observed. It was for this very reason that the students interviewed were hand picked. Regardless, what may have been lacking in longitudinal design in the observations may have been countered by using such a rich source of instructor humour.

There was concern expressed by the students that attempts to use too much humour could become frustrating and ultimately would be a waste of their time and tuition. Compared to Bryant's earlier work, it would appear that humour was used excessively here, yet there were few comments to support this as a negative aspect of this specific course in any of the data gathering methods. Students whose learning style was more in synch with traditional lecturing and note taking either enjoyed the humour for its own sake, saw the value of the humour for the other students, saw the humour as time for review, or benefited from the time taken by the instructor to present the humour to finish taking down their notes. These students were more likely to see beyond the humour itself, and would state that the humour actually revealed other positive character traits in the instructor, including "passion", "caring" and honesty. Though humour can certainly be used to hurt, the aggressive and sometimes hostile humour used by this instructor did not reveal negative feelings from the students regarding their evaluation of the instructional methods.

There were frequent and repetitious examples of the participants in our study either sharing or creating indexical expressions through which humour use was a common thread. Specific examples were given, with the rowing story mentioned in four out of six interviews, even though that particular story was not told or referred to in either observed lecture done during the study. Supporting this theory was that all four interviewees also gave a fairly close

report of what happened, who the participants were, and what the curricular "moral" was. In each instance, the story was recalled when the questioning turned to specific examples where humour may have been used to support what was being taught.

More general examples of creating a shared reality were revealed in the attitudes and opinions towards using humour, and how it was used in this course. In fact, some of these were even shared with the results from the Bryant study, and it is very unlikely this was due to knowledge that the participants had of this earlier work. While it is difficult to make generalizations from a single quantitative survey, it can be assumed that receiving scores of 9.5 and greater on a 10-point scale for effectiveness, and that four out of the five students interviewed were very positive about the effectiveness of the instruction in their class, more than likely reveals that this instructor is indeed considered to be very effective by the students at the college. Aligning with Bryant's conclusions, it appears that the data support male instructors who frequently use humour as being rated as more appealing, better able to deliver the course materials and more effective overall by their students as compared to their peers. The results do not support, however, the notion that simply adding humour for humour's sake will increase effectiveness, as distinctions were made at several points between optimal usage and letting the situation get out of hand.

Where there is a difference between the two projects is in the perception of instructor competence in relation to humour use. Bryant's study did not discover a link between these two, but there was data collected in our study that revealed that the students related using humour with knowledge of both the subject matter and the ability to stand at the front of the classroom and teach. Students surveyed had the instructor's *competence* rating tied with *appeal*, and

students in the interview mentioned his humorous stories providing examples that worked with the course material for student comprehension. This may be explained in one of three ways.

First, it may simply be a change in classroom social relationships that instructors now use humour to reveal their competency in the subject matter to the students. Humour may have become a valid method by which to extol your academic virtues, whereas in the past it may have been viewed as more of a weakness to show levity in post-secondary situations. Secondly, it may be that, as mentioned by the instructor in this study, this course in this program provides an excellent opportunity to fully utilize the benefits of humour in this way. A communications course, taught to media students by a well-travelled instructor may invite the opportunities to use puns, tell humorous stories and keep the class light. It may be much more difficult to use the same technique to instruct a linear algebra course, for example. The third possible explanation is that the positive evaluations and feedback are themselves responsible for an increase in self-esteem for the instructor, which therefore instils the confidence to use more humour.

Bryant found several apparent gender biases in both the student and instructor population, which were found in this study as well, though with a much smaller sampling and therefore a much higher degree of uncertainty. When the students mentioned both male and female instructors during interviews, there were distinctions drawn that echoed those found in Bryant's work, specifically when one student mentioned that her male instructor used humorous stories while a female instructor would use humour generated from the students and what they did or were actively doing at the time. Bryant's work found that there was a positive relationship between female instructors using hostile humour and their students awarding them positive evaluations for *appeal*.

There was much more data to draw from in comparing gender differences within the student population, yet the number was still quite insignificant when compared to the research by Bryant et al. (1980). This was another of the areas where there was a major discrepancy between the two studies. In Bryant's earlier research, it was the male students who tended to be much more enthusiastic when asked about the usage of humour by their instructors. In the present-day study, the females gave much higher scores in all survey categories when asked about humour usage or overall effectiveness, except in the category *entertaining*. Again, this could reveal a shift in societal use and appreciation of humour, but more likely it is based on the small statistical sample of only 12 male and 25 female students. However, given that these results are so different from what might have been expected, this may be an area that requires further study to determine how gender differences of instructors and students are related to the use and appreciation of humour in the college classroom.

### **Implications and Implementation**

Though it appears easy to conclude that the use of humour will greatly increase the chances that a college instructor will receive positive evaluations from their students, there are qualifications that have been made that would suggest caution. Although none of the students specifically mentioned specific negative instances of humour being used, it is quite easy to imagine a single off-colour comment compromising many hours of instructional time, or one raucous class necessitating weeks of retraining.

Perhaps the safest way to use humour is through the presentation of specific curricular facts, ensuring the correct idea is taken from the humour by following with a review of the concept through a more explicit measure such as notes or reading. Along with the explicit

benefits of humour usage such as social camaraderie and the positive feelings from laughter, it appears that the students also believe that the instructor must be an expert with the material if they are confident enough to use it to get a laugh while also presenting it as course work. Becoming an expert with your curriculum has nothing to do with humour, and any benefits of trying this method without being an expert would quickly backfire once the students discovered your flaws. Thus, the humour used is simply a very positive method to show your mastery of a subject, and will not actually increase the perception that you are an expert if used enough to prove otherwise. It is perhaps from this latter point that the concept of the instructor being honest with themselves – and the students – can be drawn.

Presentation of the curricular humour seems to get the most favourable reviews from students when used in the form of narratives. Again, if the instructor manages to situate themselves in the narrative, even as an observer or witness, and not necessarily a main participant, credibility levels will rise. The humour in these narratives is allowed to be aggressive, and therefore explicitly illustrative, yet caution should again be used in the degree of hostility. It is probably best if the subject of the hostile humour is left to save face, especially in situations where the subject of the humour is specifically the flaw of the character. The rower, for example, was a very memorable story with great potential for humour, yet the students who remembered this story did not take delight in the realization that the character had the very human flaw of being so afraid to lose that he would not even risk participating. The humour was found in the situation, but not in the flaws of the character. It is perhaps from choosing to use humour in this way that the term "caring" arose from the student interviews of their most effective teachers.

Finally, in searching for the evidence of indexical expressions, this research may have revealed that an effective method for instructors to use humour is through repetition. The instructor in this study used humour to pace his class, therefore revealing that he was using a predictable pattern that he and the students knew the pacing and timing for, and that all involved felt their place as social participants. The type of humour used, such as puns or short, humorous comments were used to get attention and make transitions. Narratives were used to get across points from the curriculum. Instructor statements carried a questioning inflection, inviting responses from the class. When we add the actual subjects of the funniness itself, we can see that humour may be used to provide the foundation and structure for an entire lesson if necessary, or it may simply be used to 'spruce the place up a bit'. Either way, when used in conjunction with an instructor's expertise in a subject area, humour has the potential to greatly influence the perceived effectiveness of that instructor by their students.

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# Appendix A

## Data Collection

### Form I Instructor Effectiveness and Use of Humour

#### Instructor Interviews

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

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You are invited to participate in a research project, organized by Ken Peck, to meet the requirements of his Masters program. This research will study the perception of instructor effectiveness in community colleges, and how that perception relates to the instructor's use of humour. All information you provide will be completely anonymous, and none of your information will be used for any purpose by the College or your students, past, present or future. You may refuse to participate at any time, and you have the right to ask questions of the researcher at any time to clarify your answers or role in the study.

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#### Pre-observation Interview

20 minutes

- Explain to the interviewee what the purpose of the interview is, and assure them that the contents of the interview will be treated confidentially.
- Suggested topics to cover:

"How important do you feel it is to be regarded well by your students?"

"What methods do you use in the delivery of course materials that aid in student comprehension or attention?"

"What are some general comments and feedback that you have received from students in the past in regards to your instructional style?"

"How often do you use humour in your lessons? How do you know if this humour is working?"

"What positive and/or negative anecdotes can you share that illustrate the effectiveness of using humour in your classes?"

#### Post-observation Interview

20 minutes

- Explain to the interviewee what the purpose of the interview is, and assure them that the contents of the interview will be treated confidentially.
- Suggested topics to cover:

"Were you pleased with the way the class went on the day I was in observing? Why or why not?"

"Did you feel you used more, less or a normal amount of humour with the students that day?"

"Have you ever made a conscious effort to include more humour in a lesson, or for a particular course? Why or why not?"

"Do you feel all instructors should incorporate humour into their lessons?"

"How would you suggest instructors who wanted to use humour more in the instruction could succeed in this change?"

## Form II Instructor Effectiveness Student Rating Sheet

You are about to participate in research, organized by Ken Peck to meet the requirements of his Masters program, that studies perceived instructor effectiveness in community colleges. All information you provide will be completely anonymous, and none of your information will be used for any purpose by the College or the instructor. You may refuse to participate at any time, and you have the right to ask questions of the researcher at any time to clarify your answers or role in the study.

Please fill out this form by shading in ONE square per row that best describes the qualities of the instructor and the instruction of today's class. For example:

	Extremely Good	10	9	8	7	6	Average 5 ↓	4	3	2	1	0	Extremely Poor	No Opinion
Speaking ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clarity in making a point	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voice quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dynamic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understands concepts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Command of the situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Witty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Funny	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appealing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall, how effective was the instruction in today's class?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Extremely Good	10	9	8	7	6	Average 5 ↓	4	3	2	1	0	Extremely Poor	No Opinion
Overall, how does the effectiveness of this instructor compare to other instructors you have?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your Gender      Female      Male  
☐      ☐

**In one sentence, describe the best teacher/instructor who has ever taught you. Please do not use their real name in your description.**

### Form III Content Analysis Humour Observation Sheet

The following checklist is for researcher use ONLY. Through observation of the class, and subsequent viewing on videotape, incidents of humour will be noted. These instances will be used to provide a context for the results obtained through student surveys and interviews.

**Timecode of humour:**

**Short description of humour:**

Type	Planning	Theme	Characters	Target	Relation	Relevancy
Joke	Prepared	Nongender hostile	Instructor	Self-disparaging	Very related to content	Distract from content
Riddle	Spontaneous	Gender nonhostile	Student	Student disparaging	Moderately related to content	Neutral
Pun	Opportunistic	Gender hostile	Both	Other	Not at all related to content	Contribute to content
Funny Story	Unknown	Nongender Nonhostile	Other			
Humorous comment		Nonsense	None			
Other		Other				

**Scratch Notes:**

**Timecode of humour:**

**Short description of humour:**

Type	Planning	Theme	Characters	Target	Relation	Relevancy
Joke	Prepared	Nongender hostile	Instructor	Self-disparaging	Very related to content	Distract from content
Riddle	Spontaneous	Gender nonhostile	Student	Student disparaging	Moderately related to content	Neutral
Pun	Opportunistic	Gender hostile	Both	Other	Not at all related to content	Contribute to content
Funny Story	Unknown	Nongender Nonhostile	Other			
Humorous comment		Nonsense	None			
Other		Other				

**Scratch Notes:**

## **Form IV**

### **Instructor Effectiveness and Use of Humour**

#### **Student Interviews**

- Begin with informal small-talk to put subject at ease
- Explain to the interviewee what the purpose of the interview is, and assure them that the contents of the interview will be treated confidentially for both the student and instructor.

---

You are about to participate in research, organized by Ken Peck to meet the requirements of his Masters program, that studies perceived instructor effectiveness in community colleges. All information you provide will be completely anonymous, and none of your information will be used for any purpose by the College or the instructor. You may refuse to participate at any time, and you have the right to ask questions of the researcher at any time to clarify your answers or role in the study.

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- Begin with informal small-talk to put subject at ease
- Explain to the interviewee what the purpose of the interview is, and assure them that the contents of the interview will be treated confidentially for both the student and instructor.

---

You are about to participate in research, organized by Ken Peck to meet the requirements of his Masters program, that studies perceived instructor effectiveness in community colleges. All information you provide will be completely anonymous, and none of your information will be used for any purpose by the College or the instructor. You may refuse to participate at any time, and you have the right to ask questions of the researcher at any time to clarify your answers or role in the study.

---

#### **Interview Part A**

- Suggested topics to cover:
  1. "What schools have you attended, and what were your teachers like in those schools?"
  2. "Which teachers were your favourites? Why were they your favourites?"
  3. "Which of your teachers were the most successful at their jobs?"

#### **Interview Part B**

- Suggested topics to cover:
  1. "Tell me how important you feel it is to study interpersonal communication as a part of your program"
  2. "Tell me how much you enjoy your interpersonal communications course"
  3. "Tell me something about your instructor"
  4. "Tell me about the methods your instructor uses in your interpersonal communications course that help you learn the best"
  5. "Tell me about what the instructor in your interpersonal communications course does to make the class more enjoyable"

#### **Interview Part C**

- Suggested topics to cover:
  1. "Tell me about a funny incident used by your instructor in class"
  2. "What was so memorable about this event?"
  3. "Was this a positive or a negative event?"
  4. "Tell me about how your interpersonal communications instructor uses humour in class"
  5. "Tell me how effective your interpersonal communications instructor is"

# Appendix B

## Permission Forms

[Top](#)

### Student Survey Consent:

The following will be read to the class before beginning, with opportunity to ask questions following the presentation.

March 21, 2003

Thank you very much for agreeing to provide access to your class for the purposes of my research project in the MACT program at the University of Alberta faculty of Graduate Studies.

Briefly, my project is to gather data involving the use of particular instructional methods by college instructors during the presentation of course materials, and how these methods are perceived by their students.

The University of Alberta expects high standards of ethics in its students and instructors. This letter is to provide you assurance on the following points, some of which may have been described when you were asked to assist with this research project.

1. *Confidentiality.* Nothing I learn about your organization will be identified with it to anyone inside or outside the organization, except in the project report.
2. *Anonymity and confidentiality.* I will not identify any individuals in your organization in any project report or identify their comments or behavior to others in the organization.
3. *Project report.* All researchers, by signing the forms for their projects, undertake that they will keep confidential anything they learn about other organizations in the same way as point 1 above.
4. *Voluntary participation.* All personnel in your organization who are involved in the project should do so voluntarily. If you ask your people to be involved, please do not coerce them.
5. *Informed consent.* We will describe the nature and objectives of the project to all people in your organization who are involved and obtain such people's consent.
6. *Right to withdraw.* We will tell every person involved that he/she may withdraw from participation at any time without giving reasons, even if that causes the project to fail.
7. *Time commitment.* We will tell all people who are involved in the project approximately how much of their time this involvement will require and get their agreement to that.
8. *Information gathering.* We will take no documents or copies away from your organization without explicit consent of a person competent to give such consent. We will make no tape or other recordings of interviews without advance consent of the person being recorded. No subject matter specific to the organization will be collected or recorded, in accordance to FOIP legislation.

These points are included in this ethics form we must complete for the project, and we ask that you sign this form to indicate that you have received this letter and its assurances. The researcher's name is Ken Peck, whose phone number is 403-801-5176 and email address is ke\_peck@yahoo.com. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the project or my behavior while doing the project.

Sincerely,

Ken Peck

## Student Interviewee Consent:

March 29, 2003

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

Thank you very much for agreeing to provide access to your class, as well as for some of your thoughts and beliefs, for the purposes of my research project in the MACT program at the University of Alberta faculty of Graduate Studies.

Briefly, my project is to gather data involving the use of particular instructional methods by college instructors during the presentation of course materials, and how these methods are perceived by their students. I will be asking the following of you: 10 minutes to conduct an anonymous survey at the end of the class period, and a 20 minute interview to be done outside of class time. Debriefing sessions with all participants will be done within one week of their participation.

The University of Alberta expects high standards of ethics in its students and instructors. This letter is to provide you assurance on the following points, some of which may have been described when you were asked to assist with this research project.

1. *Confidentiality.* Nothing the researcher learns about your organization will be identified with it to anyone inside or outside the organization.
2. *Anonymity and confidentiality.* The researcher will not identify any individuals in your organization in any project report or identify their comments or behavior to others in the organization.
3. *Project report.* The researcher, by signing the forms for their projects, undertake that they will keep confidential anything they learn about other organizations in the same way as point 1 above.
4. *Voluntary participation.* All personnel in your organization who are involved in the project should do so voluntarily. If you ask your people to be involved, please do not coerce them.
5. *Informed consent.* The researcher will describe the nature and objectives of the project to all people in your organization who are involved and obtain such people's consent.
6. *Right to withdraw.* The researcher will tell every person involved that he/she may withdraw from participation at any time without giving reasons, even if that causes the project to fail.
7. *Time commitment.* The researcher will tell all people who are involved in the project approximately how much of their time this involvement will require and get their agreement to that.
8. *Information gathering.* The researcher will take no documents or copies away from your organization without explicit consent of a person competent to give such consent. The researcher will make no tape or other recordings of interviews without advance consent of the person being recorded. No subject matter specific to the organization will be collected or recorded, in accordance to FOIP legislation. All materials are to be kept for at least 5 years after completion of the research.

These points are included in this ethics form the researcher must complete for the project, and I ask that you sign the attachment to this form to indicate that you have received this letter and its assurances. The researcher's name is Ken Peck, whose phone number is 403-801-5176 and email address is ke\_peck@yahoo.com. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the project or my behavior while doing the project.

Sincerely,

Ken Peck



## Instructor Consent:

Lethbridge Community College

March 21, 2003

Thank you very much for agreeing to provide access to your class, as well as for some of your thoughts and beliefs, for the purposes of my research project in the MACT program at the University of Alberta faculty of Graduate Studies.

Briefly, my project is to gather data involving the use of humour by college instructors during the presentation of course materials, and how this use of humour is perceived by their students.

The University of Alberta expects high standards of ethics in its students and instructors. This letter is to provide you assurance on the following points, some of which may have been described when you were asked to assist with this research project.

1. *Confidentiality.* Nothing I learn about your organization will be identified with it to anyone inside or outside the organization, except in the project report.
2. *Anonymity and confidentiality.* I will not identify any individuals in your organization in any project report or identify their comments or behavior to others in the organization.
3. *Project report.* All researchers, by signing the forms for their projects, undertake that they will keep confidential anything they learn about other organizations in the same way as point 1 above.
4. *Voluntary participation.* All personnel in your organization who are involved in the project should do so voluntarily. If you ask your people to be involved, please do not coerce them.
5. *Informed consent.* We will describe the nature and objectives of the project to all people in your organization who are involved and obtain such people's consent.
6. *Right to withdraw.* We will tell every person involved that he/she may withdraw from participation at any time without giving reasons, even if that causes the project to fail.
7. *Time commitment.* We will tell all people who are involved in the project approximately how much of their time this involvement will require and get their agreement to that.
8. *Information gathering.* We will take no documents or copies away from your organization without explicit consent of a person competent to give such consent. We will make no tape or other recordings of interviews without advance consent of the person being recorded. No subject matter specific to the organization will be collected or recorded, in accordance to FOIP legislation.

These points are included in this ethics form we must complete for the project, and we ask that you sign this form to indicate that you have received this letter and its assurances. The researcher's name is Ken Peck, whose phone number is 403-801-5176 and email address is ke\_peck@yahoo.com. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the project or my behavior while doing the project.

Sincerely,

Ken Peck

## Organization Consent:

Lethbridge Community College

March 21, 2003

Dear Mr. Krywolt:

I would like to ask for your permission for access to your organization for the purposes of my research project in the MACT program at the University of Alberta faculty of Graduate Studies.

Briefly, my project is to gather data involving the use of humour by college instructors during the presentation of course materials, and how this use of humour is perceived by their students. I would be using a course taught by D'Arcy Kavanaugh to the Communication Arts students, CAP 158 Communication Process, for my study.

The University of Alberta expects high standards of ethics in its students and instructors. This letter is to provide you assurance on the following points, some of which may have been described when you were asked to assist with this research project.

1. *Confidentiality.* Nothing I learn about your organization will be identified with it to anyone inside or outside the organization, except in the project report.
2. *Anonymity and confidentiality.* I will not identify any individuals in your organization in any project report or identify their comments or behavior to others in the organization.
3. *Project report.* All researchers, by signing the forms for their projects, undertake that they will keep confidential anything they learn about other organizations in the same way as point 1 above.
4. *Voluntary participation.* All personnel in your organization who are involved in the project should do so voluntarily. If you ask your people to be involved, please do not coerce them.
5. *Informed consent.* We will describe the nature and objectives of the project to all people in your organization who are involved and obtain such people's consent.
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These points are included in this ethics form we must complete for the project, and we ask that you sign this form to indicate that you have received this letter and its assurances. The researcher's name is Ken Peck, whose phone number is 403-801-5176 and email address is ke\_peck@yahoo.com. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the project or my behavior while doing the project.

Sincerely,

Ken Peck

## MACT RESEARCH PROJECT ETHICAL INFORMATION

*To individuals and organizations considering participation in this MACT research project:*

- *The University of Alberta expects high standards of ethics in its students and instructors.*
- *A course project could expose organizations' personnel to risk that their comments or actions would cause harm to such personnel, inside or outside the organization. The University has created procedures to minimize such risk.*
- *By signing this form, all people indicate their understanding of and compliance with statements on the other side of this form.*

<b>Course name and number:</b> EXT 508 (MACT Research Project)		<b>Term:</b> Spring, 2003
<b>Researcher name:</b> Ken Peck	<b>Phone:</b> (403) 801-5176	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ke_peck@yahoo.com">ke_peck@yahoo.com</a>
<b>Supervisor name:</b> Kirby Wright	<b>Phone:</b> (780) 492-5063	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:kirby.wright@ualberta.ca">kirby.wright@ualberta.ca</a>
<b>Researcher's Signature</b> _____		

### **Brief description of the particular research project**

I will be studying particular instructional styles (the use of humour) on the perceived effectiveness of instruction in a college class. Data will be collected by observing the instructor during actual instruction, by collecting surveys from the entire class of students, and by interviewing the instructor and a select group of students from the class.

### **Organization involved in this particular project:**

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

I have received a letter providing the assurances on the reverse.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix C

Data Collected

Table I – Survey Results (Page 1 of 3)

[Top](#)

Gender	A Speaking ability	B Clarity in making a point	C Voice quality	D Dynamic	E Understands concepts	F Command of the situation	G Entertaining	H Informative	I Witty
1 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
2 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
3 F	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10
4 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
5 F	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	9
6 F	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	9
7 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
8 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
9 F	10	8	10	9	10	10	9	10	10
10 F	8	7	9	10	9	9	9	9	10
11 F	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	10
12 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
13 F	10	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
14 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
15 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
16 F	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	10
17 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
18 F	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	10
19 F	10	8	10	10	10	10	6	6	10
20 F	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10
21 F	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
22 F	9	10	9	9	9	10	9	10	9
23 F	10	9	9	9	10	8	10	9	10
Avg Females	9.83	9.57	9.83	9.87	9.91	9.61	9.52	9.64	9.87
24 M	10	9	10	7	8	8	8	7	8
25 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
26 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
27 M	9	10	9	9	10	9	9	10	10
28 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
29 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
30 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
31 M	8	8	9	10	8	10	10	9	9
32 M	10	8	9	10	8	8	9	9	9
33 M	8	8	7	10	9	9	10	8	7
34 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
35 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
36 M	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9
Avg Males	9.62	9.46	9.54	9.67	9.46	9.54	9.69	9.46	9.38
37	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	10	10
Avg	9.76	9.54	9.73	9.81	9.73	9.57	9.59	9.58	9.70

Averages in categories

9.72

9.72

9.68

: appeal (dynamic, command of the situation, entertaining witty, personable, funny, appealing)

: competence (understands concepts, informative, informed)

: delivery (speaking ability, clarity in making a point, voice quality)

: incomplete response, not included in calculations

: average of 9.75 or above

: related to use of humour

Table I – Survey Results (Page 2 of 3)

Gender	J	K	L	M	Appeal Avg	Competence Avg	Delivery Avg	Overall, how effective was the instructor today?	Overall, how effective is this instructor?
1 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
2 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
3 F	10	10	10	10	9.66	10.00	10.00	10	10
4 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
5 F	9	10	10	10	9.66	9.67	10.00	10	10
6 F	10	10	9	9	9.33	9.67	10.00	9	9
7 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
8 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
9 F	10	10	10	9	9.57	10.00	9.54	10	10
10 F	9	9	9	9	9.29	9.00	8.00	9	10
11 F	10	10	10	10	9.71	10.00	10.00	9	8
12 F	10	10	9	9	9.71	10.00	10.00	9	10
13 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	9.67	10	10
14 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
15 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	8
16 F	10	9	10	10	9.57	9.67	10.00	9	10
17 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
18 F	10	9	10	10	9.57	10.00	10.00	9	10
19 F	10	10	10	10	9.43	8.67	9.33	8	9
20 F	10	10	10	10	9.86	10.00	10.00	10	10
21 F	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
22 F	10	10	10	10	9.57	9.67	9.54	10	10
23 F	10	9	9	8	9.00	9.67	9.33	9	10
Avg Females	9.91	9.83	9.83	9.74	9.75	9.82	9.74	9.61	9.74
24 M	8	8	8	8	7.66	7.67	9.67	8	7
25 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
26 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
27 M	10	8	10	10	9.17	10.00	9.33	9	9
28 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
29 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	9	9
30 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
31 M	10	7	10	9	9.29	9.00	8.33	9	9
32 M	9	9	9	9	8.83	8.67	9.00	9	9
33 M	9	8	9	8	8.71	8.67	7.67	9	9
34 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
35 M	10	10	10	10	10.00	10.00	10.00	10	10
36 M	10	10	9	9	9.57	10.00	10.00	9	10
Avg Males	9.69	9.23	9.62	9.42	9.51	9.54	9.54	9.42	9.38
37 Avg	9.84	9.62	9.76	9.64	9.66	9.67	9.66	9.56	9.62

Table I – Survey Results (Page 3 of 3)

Gender	Comments about the most effective instructor ever
1 F	A person who uses personal experience to share and inform concepts, is not afraid to look <b>foolish</b> if it will help a person "get" what concept is being presented.
2 F	Creates an <b>entertaining</b> and realistic informative class
3 F	He was <b>entertaining</b> , passionate, <b>funny</b> , knowledgeable and wanted his students to succeed, not only in school, but in life.
4 F	They consider and people have different learning styles and taught differently so everyone learned/understood
5 F	My high school choir teacher - very effective.
6 F	<b>Fun</b> , informative, caring, personable, understanding, good knowledge of subject.
7 F	had an amazing passion for teaching and for advertising...we were approachable, friendly and always <b>happy</b> ... really had the ability to make me want to learn and succeed in her class...we were patient and understanding and really understood her students' needs.
8 F	Someone who uses stories or <b>jokes</b> to illustrate their point, and is easy to approach.
9 F	Intelligent, kind, empathetic ( <i>empathetic?</i> )
10 F	<b>Entertaining</b> , <b>funny</b> , appealing... Overall is not the typical teacher, rather to personal examples in his life, instead of boring theory.
11 F	D'Arcy is a very knowledgeable teacher. He makes information that can be dry very interesting and <b>fun</b> .
12 F	
13 F	They make it interesting and <b>fun</b> .
14 F	They were <b>funny</b> , understanding, caring and their passion in life is to teach.
15 F	It was a biology teacher at Mount Royal. She was awesome... really wanted her students to do well and was always willing to help me - had a very strong knowledge of what she was teaching and excellent at explaining concepts.
16 F	A teacher who illustrates and doesn't just tell.
17 F	D'Arcy has been the best instructor I have come across. He is informative in an <b>entertaining</b> kind of way. He inspires students to be the best that they can.
18 F	He's very good!
19 F	My best teacher genuinely cared about her students. She made a point of getting to know everyone on a personal basis and was absolutely great! Kind, <b>funny</b> and caring.
20 F	They were very informed of what they were teaching, they brought up different topics in viewpoints, they include <b>humour</b> where appropriate.
21 F	My gymnastics coach was very helpful and supportive and I learned a lot.
22 F	They used <b>anecdotes</b> and everyday situations to relate material to the class.
23 F	Grade 5 - He was the first person to point out little things to me that made me feel smart - he noticed details and was very positive.
24 M	The best teacher that has ever taught me was a creative writing instructor who was an ex-bank robber and was <b>experienced in life</b> rather than education.
25 M	He was knowledgeable, cared and knew the matter good enough to a apply it to everyday situations.
26 M	They assumed that everyone, no matter how they learned best, was taught to their style.
27 M	<b>Very personable</b> .
28 M	
29 M	He was <b>funny</b> , personable, <b>entertaining</b> , he was a DJ and was excellent with people.
30 M	
31 M	Diverse. Every day was fresh with new ideas and concepts.
32 M	
33 M	A realistic HUMAN being taught well because she understood the students and she was REAL.
34 M	A very reasonable instructor who was not condescending in their style and was very successful in conveying information that was not necessarily interesting at times.
35 M	My best teacher used <b>humour</b> to get his point across. Also treated students with respect and valued everyone's opinion.
36 M	
37	He makes communications class <b>fun</b> . That's not an easy thing to do.

# Appendix C

[Top](#)

Data Collected

## Table II – Lecture Transcript of Humour Incidents

The following notes are exported from the software Transana, where the timecodes for each entry are embedded within this transcript for simple returns to each humour occurrence.

▣ **Coercive power** - humorous comment, other characters, opportunistic, very related to content, contribute to content, other disparaging, non-gender non-hostile.

D'Arcy uses Ken's reference to the fictional \$20 payment as a way to introduce the concept of coercion.

▣ **Coercive power** - humorous comment, both instructor and student, opportunistic, very related to content, contribute to content, self disparaging, non-gender hostile.

D'Arcy suggests the students have coercive power over him, based on the fact they could make him look bad for the research.

▣ **Coercive power** - humorous comment, both instructor and student, opportunistic, very related to content, contribute to content, student disparaging, non-gender hostile.

D'Arcy counters the previous comment by stating that the students not present will receive a lower grade than those present.

▣ **Time on hand** - pun, both instructor and student, opportunistic, not related to content, neutral relevancy, other disparaging, non-gender non-hostile.

D'Arcy states they have "time on their hands", as the clock on the wall was missing, and he was using his wristwatch to keep track of the time. Referred to again at 18:05.

▣ **Throwing Keys #1** - other type of humour, both instructor and student, prepared, moderately related to content, neutral relevancy, other disparaging, non-gender hostile.

D'Arcy throws his keys to a student after several "Are you ready?"s.

▣ **Missed catching keys** - other type of humour, both instructor and student, prepared, moderately related to content, neutral relevancy, self disparaging, gender hostile.

Student throws keys back to D'Arcy, who misses catching them (on purpose), with a different student stating he catches like a girl.

▣ **Catch like a woman** - humorous comment, both instructor and student, prepared, not related to content, distract from content, student disparaging, gender hostile.

Tough to categorize, as D'Arcy deals with the comment about "catching like a girl", makes positive comments about the two girls he threw the keys to, then comments they would scare him because they are mean.

▣ **People giving voluntary responses look to the ceiling** - humorous comment, both instructor and student, opportunistic, moderately related to content, contribute to content, student disparaging, non-gender hostile.

D'Arcy explains how an active listener will look up while thinking, which he explains as "Help me momma, help me!" in trying to determine an answer.

▣ **Four letter word... TEST!!** - humorous comment, student, planned, very related to content, contribute to content, student disparaging, non-gender hostile.

D'Arcy uses this to show how words have connotations. He makes fun of a male student's reaction (and refers to the student by name... and again later at 13:55) to the word, then states that the same student shouldn't worry, as he seems to remember he did well on the previous test. There is quite a loud laughter response from the class.

▣ **Here's one... DENTIST!!** - humorous comment, both instructor and student, planned, very related to content, contribute to content, self disparaging, non-gender hostile.

Another example of instinctual reaction to a word, but this time D'Arcy, after asking who is a coward when going to the dentist, disparages himself.

▣ **Have any of you seen "The Marathon Man?"** - other, neither instructor or student, opportunistic, moderately related to content, distract from content, other disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy references to the dentist scene in the movie "Marathon Man", and asks how many have seen the movie. Maybe two students out of the entire class have seen it. Then, when he states to go see it just before their next trip to the dentist, many students laugh, even though they have not indicated that they have seen the movie or know what it is about.

▣ **How many people like the needle?** - funny story, student, opportunistic, moderately related to content, contribute to content, self and student disparaging, nongender hostile.

Referring to the dentist's needle, D'Arcy begins by saying he does not act like a grown man when getting the needle, then asks how many students like getting the needle. Two apparently respond in the affirmative, to which D'Arcy responds "It might be a novocaine thing", which generates much laughter.

▣ **Held up at a gas station** - funny story, instructor, planned, moderately related to content, contribute to content, self disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy tells the story of him getting robbed while working at a gas station. Get's bigger and bigger laughs as he reveals his thoughts of, "Oh, this isn't very good..." up to "... I want a raise!" Many other types of humour used as well, such as pun ("graveyard shift"), funny sound effect ("run away, run away"), reference to popular culture (Monty Python sketch), and an interesting point where he says to the robber, "Oh, and safe's over there...", where the students laugh, pause, then laugh louder (apparently as they "get it").

▣ **I grew up as a kid back in the 1860s** - humorous comment, instructor, spontaneous, not at all related to content, neutral to content, self disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy makes a quick remark that he grew up in the 1860s. This evolves into a story about D'Arcy growing up and not being able to go to movies until he was older.

▣ **Quizzes for the reporting class** - funny story, both student and instructor, planned, moderately related to content, contribute to content, student disparaging, nongender hostile.

Referring back to the way students panic at the beginning of the term when they find out they have current event quizzes, as compared to their calm demeanour towards the end of the year. D'Arcy uses sound effects and physical humour to describe student reactions to quizzes. He gets louder reactions when bringing up going out for a smoke, and competition with other classes.

▣ **Don't respond to a tough interview with a punch to the head** - humorous comment, instructor, spontaneous, moderately related to content, contribute to content, student disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy makes the comment that, if someone you interviews makes a critical comment, don't respond in the first way you think of, which might be to cuff them on the side of the head.

▣ **Seinfeld, where Jerry, Kramer and Newman all panic** - humorous comment, neither student or instructor, planned, very related to content, contribute to content, neither student or self disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy brings up a Seinfeld episode where Jerry thinks he got blood on him, panic spread to other characters. Little reaction from class, even with use of physical and sound effects. Then, he brings up yawning, laughing and panic as being contagious as well, to better response.

▣ **Newfoundlanders are really good at handling panic proper** - humorous comment, neither student or instructor, spontaneous, not at all related to content, distracts from content, neither student or self disparaging, nongender hostile.

When D'Arcy tries to make a serious point about Newfoundlanders not panicing because of the many trials they must endure, a comment from a student about drinking lots of screech gets many laughs from the class, which D'Arcy repeats then answers himself.

▣ D'Arcy, as per his comments in my interview with him, carries the panic theme through the holocaust topic without student comment.



▣ **Baseball player in a coma** - humorous comment, neither student or instructor, spontaneous, moderately related to content, neutral to content, neither student or self disparaging, nongender hostile.

After telling the story about the baseball player who goes into a coma from stress, D'Arcy states that he hoped nobody would flick his ear/nose and do funny things in front of him as he sat comatose on the bench.

▣ **Crazy Canadian drivers** - humorous story, neither student or instructor, prepared, very related to content, contribute to content, neither student or self disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy tells a variety of stories about the dangerous/crazy things people do while driving. The conversation turns to input to students about some of the dangerous things the students do as well.

▣ **Feeling sick** - humorous story, both student and instructor, opportunistic, moderately related to content, contribute to content, student and instructor disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy explains how the sickness he got from the class (described as producing phlegm and coughing up a lung) relates to physical condition relating to panic.

▣ **Race horses wearing blinders** - humorous comment, neither student or instructor, opportunistic, moderately related to content, contribute to content, neither student and instructor disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

D'Arcy uses this to demonstrate the concept of tunnel vision. He states that he bets on the horses that do not use blinders, as they seem to be very alert to everything around them.

▣ **"We'll put a different slant on it"** - pun, neither student or instructor, spontaneous, not at all related to content, neutral to content, neither student and instructor disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

While fixing the overhead, D'Arcy states that he will put a different slant on it.

▣ **Jokes about the unemployed in media** - joke, neither student or instructor, planned, moderately related to content, neutral to content, neither student and instructor disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy sarcastically refers to a joke that those who are unemployed end up in consulting, since they cannot run their own career.

▣ **"The most intimidating thing to anybody in the media is a blank screen - its God's way of telling you that you are indeed mortal"** - humorous comment, other characters, opportunistic, very related to content, contribute to content, other disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

D'Arcy attempting to explain that good writing comes from taking the chance and starting to write, not just sitting around and thinking about what to write.

▣ **Reversal technique** - do the opposite of everything you would normally do - funny story, other characters, prepared, very related to content, contribute to content, other disparaging, gender nonhostile.

D'Arcy uses the Seinfeld episode where George does everything opposite to the way he normally does it, and uses the specific example of George approaching the good-looking woman in the restaurant.

▣ **"Sheep shot" pun** - pun, instructor, opportunistic, moderately related to content, neutral to content, other disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

D'Arcy, in his intro to the sheep story (below), uses the pun as a take-off of "cheap shot". He adds a second pun "A yarn of another kind" after the first laughter/groans from the class have subsided.

▣ **Sheep story** - funny story, instructor, prepared, very related to content, contribute to content, self disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

D'Arcy relates his story from a previous trip to Scotland, and the troubles he had getting past a flock of sheep on the road. He uses the story to illustrate use of the reversal technique.

▣ **Build a better mousetrap** - funny story, other characters, opportunistic, very related to content, contribute to content, other disparaging, gender nonhostile.

D'Arcy uses the story of the female instructor who brought in her cat to catch a mouse in a college classroom to illustrate how to actually solve the problem - don't build a better mousetrap, but get rid of the mouse! There seems to be a link between "she" and being afraid of mice... but the female instructor solves the problem when the maintenance staff couldn't.

▣ **Surviving a plane crash on a mountain** - funny story, other characters, opportunistic, somewhat related to content, contribute to content, other disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

To illustrate expert power (and disparage meetings and focus groups?), D'Arcy uses the example of how a group would deal with being stranded on a mountain.

▣ **Deadlines** - humorous comment, student, opportunistic, moderately related to content, contribute to content, student disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy uses funny voice and "Help me, momma, help me!" comment to show student stress over looming deadlines.

▣ **Surviving a plane crash on a mountain II** - funny story, other characters, opportunistic, somewhat related to content, contribute to content, other disparaging, nongender nonhostile.

▣ **The final one** - humorous comment, students, not related to content, does not contribute to content, other disparaging, nongender hostile.

D'Arcy refers to the end of note taking for this class.

### Summary of Humour Incidents Observed

	Incident Time	Subject of humour	Presentation type	Characters in humour	Planning of humour	Relation to content	Relevancy to goals of lesson	Target of humour	Theme of humour
1	00:00:12	Coercive power	humorous comment	other characters	opportunistic	very related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
2	00:00:19	Coercive power	humorous comment	both instructor and student	opportunistic	very related to content	contribute to content	self disparaging	nongender hostile
3	00:00:27	Coercive power	humorous comment	both instructor and student	opportunistic	very related to content	contribute to content	student disparaging	nongender hostile
4	00:00:40	Time on hand #1	pun	both instructor and student	opportunistic	not related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
5	00:01:05	Throwing Keys #1	other	both instructor and student	prepared	moderately related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
6	00:01:23	Missed catching keys	other	both instructor and student	prepared	moderately related to content	neutral to content	self disparaging	gender hostile
7	00:02:00	Catch like a woman	humorous comment	both instructor and student	prepared	not related to content	distract from content	student disparaging	gender hostile
8	00:02:49	People giving voluntary responses look to the ceiling	humorous comment	both instructor and student	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	student disparaging	nongender hostile
9	00:04:39	Four letter word.... TEST!!	humorous comment	student	prepared	very related to content	contribute to content	student disparaging	nongender hostile
10	00:04:58	Here's one... DENTIST!!	humorous comment	both instructor and student	prepared	very related to content	contribute to content	self disparaging	nongender hostile
11	00:05:26	Have any of you seen "The Marathon Man?"	other	other characters	opportunistic	moderately related to content	distract from content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
12	00:06:06	How many people like the needle?	funny story	student	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	self and student disparaging	nongender hostile
13	00:08:05	Held up at a gas station	funny story	instructor	prepared	moderately related to content	contribute to content	self disparaging	nongender hostile
14	00:09:53	I grew up as a kid back in the 1860s	humorous comment	instructor	spontaneous	not related to content	neutral to content	self disparaging	nongender hostile
15	00:11:05	Time on hand #2	pun	both instructor and student	opportunistic	not related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
16	00:11:12	Quizzes for the reporting class	funny story	both student and instructor	prepared	moderately related to content	contribute to content	student disparaging	nongender hostile
17	00:12:31	Don't respond to a tough interview	humorous comment	instructor	spontaneous	moderately related to	contribute to content	student disparaging	nongender hostile

Use of Humour and Perceived Instructor Effectiveness  
Kenneth Peck

		<b>with a punch to the head</b>				content			
18	00:14:50	<b>Seinfeld, where Jerry, Kramer and Newman all panic</b>	humorous comment	other characters	prepared	very related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
19	00:16:06	<b>Newfoundlanders are really good at handling panic proper</b>	humorous comment	other characters	spontaneous	not related to content	distracts from content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
20	00:22:17	<b>Baseball player in a coma</b>	humorous comment	other characters	spontaneous	moderately related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
21	00:29:27	<b>Crazy Canadian drivers</b>	funny story	other characters	prepared	very related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
22	00:32:58	<b>Feeling sick</b>	funny story	both student and instructor	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	self and student disparaging	nongender hostile
23	00:35:03	<b>Race horses wearing blinders</b>	humorous comment	other characters	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
24	00:36:38	<b>"We'll put a different slant on it"</b>	pun	other characters	spontaneous	not related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
25	00:37:21	<b>Jokes about the unemployed in media</b>	joke	other characters	prepared	moderately related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender hostile
26	00:49:12	<b>"The most intimidating thing to a anybody in the media is a blank screen - its God's way of telling you that you are indeed mortal"</b>	humorous comment	other characters	opportunistic	very related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
27	00:50:10	<b>"Seinfeld" reversal technique</b>	funny story	other characters	prepared	very related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	gender nonhostile
28	00:51:38	<b>"Sheep shot"</b>	pun	instructor	opportunistic	moderately related to content	neutral to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
29	00:51:50	<b>Sheep story</b>	funny story	instructor	prepared	very related to content	contribute to content	self disparaging	nongender nonhostile
30	00:54:40	<b>Build a better mousetrap</b>	funny story	other characters	opportunistic	very related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	gender nonhostile
31	00:58:30	<b>Surviving a plane crash on a mountain</b>	funny story	other characters	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
32	01:02:55	<b>Deadlines</b>	humorous comment	student	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	student disparaging	nongender hostile
33	01:03:35	<b>Surviving a plane crash on a mountain II</b>	funny story	other characters	opportunistic	moderately related to content	contribute to content	other disparaging	nongender nonhostile
34	01:04:41	<b>The final one</b>	humorous comment	student	opportunistic	not related to content	distract from content	other disparaging	nongender hostile

# Appendix C

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Data Collected

**Table III – Interview Transcript with Instructor**

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■ **Pre-Interview with D'Arcy**

1. ■ **What courses/classes are you responsible for at the college?** - writing courses - and how they pertain to (usually) print journalism, a communication process course that is psychology and sociology of communication related to the media - sometimes uses quizzes to show students that communication in their area is not always common sense.
2. ■ **The quizzes tend to be pretty practical, then?** - yes, D'Arcy uses a story to illustrate a quiz he uses (when D'Arcy lived in Vancouver a few years ago, co-operative venture between RCMP in Surrey and Vancouver City Police over a gangland bombing), students quiz D'Arcy like he is several different characters - he states that students typically have decided how they will respond far before the statement is actually finished. Another quiz is mentioned (documentary clips without the sound, ask students what the clips are about), an intercultural game is also used, D'Arcy tells the story of two guys who were role-playing - with one being very "touchy" - and the reaction of his partner. "Those are the types of things I try to bring... so they have some fun with it. It engages them, and in the end they're probably going to fail because they think its easy, and that's what I want them to do... that its not as easy as they think"
3. ■ **How did you get into journalism?** - graduated from UBC in the early 70s in English, which "gave me a chance to work as a person who lifted heavy things". Picked up by a newspaper in Medicine Hat who often picked up English majors who were good with words and were desperate for jobs. Worked on 4 newspapers for 12 years, then as a freelancer for 10 years. It was all about talking to people... not always as gregarious as he is now... "If you ask questions and shut up... and you ask good questions based on good listening skills, that you hear great stories". Starting teaching on a part-time basis, tough call to decide between journalism and teaching, thought he would be good at, and enjoy, teaching. He states that he has enjoyed it alot.
4. ■ **Did you have a mentor in Medicine Hat?** - a couple of guys in Medicine Hat, describes them more as helpful than as mentors. On West Coast, involved in the business for 30 years, found first real mentor ("Not warm and fuzzy") but extremely helpful.
5. ■ **Do you see yourself mirroring anyone as you teach?** - he didn't seek out mentors, but instead "ran into them" - but it sounds like often the lessons that were learned were under duress, or during struggles. He will bring back incidents, not the person. He brings up different learning styles "For the storyteller learners, I'll trot out these stories, because it worked for me and I'll modify it for them... I'll tend to trot these people out in anecdotes"
6. ■ **How do the students feel about that (rational vs storytelling teaching styles)?** - he took a learning course, asks the students if they have ever had a teacher who taught you something and you didn't learn it, explains how people learn differently and how to make instructors accountable, uses this to explain his different teachings styles and how the overheads are for the rational students, and the stories are for those you learn from stories,
7. ■ **(story about the rower)** (told well before the later student interviews) "about people's failure to accept the risk of change... the place was in bedlam and I saw people laughing so hard they had tears coming down", some people were learning, and some were having fun - if you want to tell stories, they had better be entertaining for those who don't learn that way. "Students today are so pop-culture oriented... if I give them fuddy-duddy stuff, they'll tune me out". His daughter keeps him hip to what's hot and what's not, which he sees as imperative to use with groups like he sees
8. ■ **Do you enjoy teaching at the college?** - "Oh yeah, I love it... I've been fortunate... when I get up in the morning I go to a job that I love", "alot of people are what they do, I'm not", "The theatrical thing is... when you show up in class, you'd better be on... its showtime. Those students, each one of them, are paying "X" amount of dollars for that day, and if you're not prepared... your sort of stealing their money... in post secondary education we talk about learners, but there's also a sense that they're clients"
9. ■ **There's sometimes a fine line between teaching and acting or stand-up comedy** - sure, tell a story about panic - about his favourite excuses from students about not getting work done.
10. ■ **How important do you feel it is to be well-regarded by students?** - "I don't need to be liked by the students... I get the biggest buzz out of seeing 'the lightbulb go on'", he asked the students on that first day how many had felt frustrated in their previous education (specifically math) almost all put their hands up high. He'll challenge them and test them.
11. ■ **Should all instructors follow your methods to have success in the classroom?** - too many students are frustrated because instructors are not presenting material for all students to learn
12. ■ **You mentioned earlier that many of your mentors were friends, as an instructor here at the**

college, although you mentioned you are a tough instructor, I have not heard many comments of that nature. Most comments are positive. Do you strive for a 'friendship'-type of relationship with the students? - "I check my own perceptions... there's a lot of second-guessing what I'm about to say to a class", "I don't want them to think the way I think... but to question their perceptions... and be skeptical from a healthy sense", "If they want to like me after... that's a nice little by-product"

13. **Scepticism and entertaining... anyway related?** - "If you wrap it up in a nice package, lots of people will buy it... accept style, but go for substance"
14. **So, essentially, you're modeling exactly... the same skills that your going to need them (to) use when they're actually reporting?** - sure... that's why I give them real stories... I'll give them a real story, exaggerate it a bit, and they will usually catch it.

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**Post Interview**

1. **Were you pleased with the way the class went today?** - the pacing was off a bit because I lost some time... but having said that, we got all 10 points down...it was OK... we'll connect the dots with real-life scenarios later.
2. **How did you feel about the humour that was used today?** - I made corny jokes at the start... it gave me a chance to loosen them up... I looked out and most of them were groaning, so that works you get their attention", "...there was one that was a little on the edge, because you get some people on the edge... it was probably a 7 out of 10... the one I told you about before about the rowing was a 10"
3. **So, is that a 7/10 for the effectiveness of the humour?** - yes
4. **What about the quantity?** - under the potential... an 8, 8.5... you have to watch because of "panic proper" and losing hope, and you get into the Holocaust. I always bring that up because one time a student brought it up and it was very awkward... "I have to be really careful that nothing is even remotely close to being funny"
5. **It seemed that the amount of humour decreased as the class went on. Was this because of the topics you were covering?** - that's part of it, but it also by practice, the humour gets them going (its a morning class), you pump them up a little bit, "It starts off goofy and then goes down", if its too goofy at the end... then I don't have a chance to explain why its applicable.
6. **I noticed that when you used humour, those in a group would look at each other and interact in other ways, and those by themselves would perk up and sometimes interact back with you... then you have a cue within 5-10 seconds that brings them back** - "I can always see where the groups are... they start yakking... I don't mind that... as soon as they start to disappear, I need to bring them back"
7. **They seem to discuss things in a group, and integrate what they have just heard in a social way... even those sitting by themselves would attempt to interact with you** - I like to get other voices in the class... because 45 minutes of anybody... even God gets boring"
8. **What anecdotes do you have that might show the effectiveness of using humour in your classes?** - one I told that showed up on just about everyone's exam... it was a cue... it was about disclosure and how they have to follow a pattern of expectations... "I was witness to one of the most painful first dates that probably any couple on the planet have ever gone through"... they will be asking for full disclosure from their sources and clients, but they will not be disclosing anything back... when you tell the story, all the women in the class were nodding and cringing at the description... because for a lot of them it did strike home.
9. **Do you think that's why these stories get brought up... because not only do they relate to the course work, but there's something about the stories that they see in themselves?** - sure like the rower story! - that story ended up being really funny... part of what the trigger was that I met one of the other rowers and he brought it up... its all about "I can't lose, I can't lose... this was a guy who had staked everything on winning a bloody rowing race", "I worked the concept throughout... it wasn't just a story about rowing, it was a guy who was rowing, and needed to win", "I tend to poke fun at myself, and my own mistakes, that were right off the beat... right off the job", he tells the John Newcombe interview in the shower
10. **There are so many categories of humour, and you use many of them, can you think of times where a line has been crossed?** - a story about "the boys"... "It was goofy and silly enough, and over-the-top enough that it sort of reels you back... never underestimate the ability to be offended", they stereotype voraciously... one day I did it... there was a lot of pissed off people. "The groans. The puns. Who cares", "It tends to be sex-related... I did commit one faux pas once and I didn't even know it. It was all about saying a "hard on", "In the last five years, I might have used one curse word... that was trotted out to show that people could be offended. "I don't believe in using curse words in the classroom at all".
11. **How vital to your instructional style is humour?** - "I'm probably a fairly theatrical and dramatic instructor", "I probably use it more in that class because... partly to get their attention, partly because there's 75 people in there and you can lose them in a millisecond if you are dull or monotone or if all you do is go through endless lists without having any interaction or goofing around or looking at them or whatever", it depends on the nature of the class
12. **You mentioned earlier that you thought being entertaining was an important part of being an instructor... do you think that all instructors should attempt to use humour?** - it absolutely

- depends on the nature of the course, "If opportunity arises, it is certainly a tool to gain attention", "If there's a chance there to use it, and use it in, hopefully, an effective way, then yeah", you can talk to the people who are not taking notes without those who are taking notes feeling like they are falling behind. "If somebody walks out of a class and they're bored... I don't know about that"
13. **■If we identified some boring teachers, would every one of them benefit from adding humour?** - I think some passion... change humour to passion... you can feel passion, but if it doesn't show up as enthusiasm, then it disappears...", "someone will say 'What are you going to say?'... I just wing it", I do a lot of impressions...
  14. **■I don't think you did any (impressions) last year, either...** - "Part of it is that my impressions tend to be a bit on the older side", add some life into it... as long as it has some purpose... I may have not made the link
  15. **■and you would do that by asking questions?** - ask a question, give a scenario, what's the problem here?, "So sometimes I walk away thinking 'OK, that was a funny piece, but I'm not sure that it clicked for them... I find I have to do it more than once... at the start, once or twice during the process, and then two or three times at the end, so they get the points 4 or 5 times... and then the next thing is to spend a couple of minutes tying it into how its going to apply to the media"
  16. **■When you say 'passion', I think of the word 'honesty'. Can you fake passion?** - I think you'd have to be a Hell of an actor... students, even when they're dozy at 8:45 in the morning, they recognize bullshit, they recognize fakery... today's student has so many options... they're going to blow you off faster than when I was growing up"
  17. **■Would you say the students are getting an honest representation of 'D'Arcy the Person', or are they seeing 'D'Arcy the Instructor'?** - Most of the students think I'm over-the-top, wild, crazy... I tend to be more quiet... explains to the students that he will be there, on time, knowing what he is talking about, and therefore will get your money's worth. Outside of the classroom, the passion is there, but the wild/goofy/exuberant stuff isn't... its passion, but its passion when I'm on the job... I think the nice thing is, if its there, you can turn it on and off like a faucet.
  18. **■I'm the same way, but how do we help someone who is having troubles if we can't recommend using humour?** - "a lot of what Monty Python did... was brilliant... now a whole lot of it was about not taking yourself seriously... and that takes work... allow yourself to show who you are", "find another way to tell stories for those people who need to hear stories and rationalize it, give some experiences from themselves without turning it into 'all about me', because I think any story you tell to an audience that hasn't have a connection to the curriculum is an absolute waste of time and is totally self-absorbant",
  19. **■"The key is to never prop yourself up as a guru, prop yourself up as a fumblemouth, an idiot or something", "A whole lot of it is... feeling uncomfortable enough within a system... sometimes you have to have freedom in the system to do good teaching, as well as they freedom within yourself. And that's tough", "Everybody has a great story from, probably, every second day of their lives", empathize with the students - what is it like to be sitting in my class**
  20. **■Have you had any feedback "after the fact" from students, as opposed to immediate feedback, a week/month/year later, regarding your use of humour?** - it differs from course to course, "occasionally they will bump into those stories themselves, except instead of me, it is them, and that's partly because the stories are all real and they all generally come from the workplace", more often gets "It was a fun course that was about yadda yadda - they tend to remember the humour/stories after an event that is parallel to one of my stories
  21. **■What are 5 principles every effective college instructor should follow?** - being completely comfortable with the curriculum - the theory and the application, examine which items allow for humour background - and how can I tie that humour and point and give it some relevancy and currency, tie those elements into what is happening in the world - as they are media students - as long as the topic lends itself to humour, halfway through a story/anecdote/gag/impression check the audience and make they are getting - if not, cut it short, if they're loving it, go longer - examine the feedback - don't tell jokes for your sake - and this can be tough for people not used to reading their audience and can make students angry.

# Appendix C

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Data Collected

## Table IV – Interview Transcript with Students

### Student Interview #1

1. Previous education - Saskatoon business college in SK, university of SK for one year, graduated from criminal justice at LCC, now in broadcast journalism.
2. Favourite instructor - criminal justice instructors due to practical experience/relaxed teaching style/funny/great sense of humour. She also believed they would evaluate themselves well, as would other students who had them as instructors.
3. Words to describe best instructors - funny, relaxed, understanding, "their passion right now is to teach".
4. Would these also be the most popular instructors? - definitely. She can't think of any that would not be in both her favourite category and also most popular.
5. How are you enjoying the communication process class? - "its great, D'Arcy's an awesome teacher", subject matter "tends to be a little dry, but with D'Arcy's take on it... he, he makes it fun and he uses examples of...from his life or from stories he's heard to relate to the material",
6. Does D'Arcy's style fit in with the Criminal Justice instructors you mentioned before? - "Umm...in some ways, yes, in some ways no... D'Arcy has a different outlook... he's more laid back"
7. What words describe the instruction in your communication process class? - "laid back, open, umm, very receptive, um, fun"
8. What would be some specific methods that he uses that seem to work really well? - "he uses humour alot, ummm... his overheads are really clear..."
9. What would be some words that describe all the instructors you have had that teach well? - "At the Univeristy... the way felt was that you were just a number", "at the business college, frankly they were a bunch of idiots"
10. What would you suggest to instructors that they could do to improve their classes? - long pause "Just be very open-minded, and receptive to what people in your class are saying... I think"
11. Can you tell me about a specific incident that pops into your mind from that class ...that shows the use of humour that you found very memorable? - she brings up a situation from high school about the use of prepositions, "anywhere a cat can go" - a preposition is anywhere a cat can go.
12. What do you think made that so memorable? - "She was a funny lady... I think because... its a really easy way to teach students that... and ... its just funny".
13. Was she a humorous teacher? - "No, she really wasn't... she could be funny if she wanted to be... if she knew she had a point to teach..."
14. Contrast that with D'Arcy, who uses humour quite often... is it the amount of humour that is used, is it the way that it's used... - "both... you don't want some who is constantly cracking jokes (X3)... and your not learning anything, they're just really funny, and then you get the class all riled up..."
15. Have you been in a situation where humour has been used in a negative way, or has hurt somebody's feelings? - "No, I don't think so"
16. How important is humour for instructors to use in a college... can you be an effective instructor in class without using it, can you over-use it... - "I think you have to have some sense of humour to be an effective teacher... 'cause if you don't... like my University profs, it was cut and dried and totally boring and I never wanted to go... and I think that if they use humour you, in a way, get a sense to know your instructor's better.. like you know some of their personality"



▣ Student Interview #2

1. ▣ *Previous education - moved around alot, went to many different schools, her mom is a teacher, attendance problems in high school, some good/some bad teachers, some upgrading, came to LCC because of a female instructor in the AD/PR program, sees her current instructors as the media being "their life"*
2. ▣ *What has changed since those days when you chose not to go to school? - when she was in high school, she had "a lot of life got in my way". Quality of teachers in the public education system. Refers to a female English 30 teacher who told her she would have to work "twice as hard" to compensate for being "over 5'5", weighing less than 150 pounds, and looking good in a bathing suit"... her Mom (who has a Masters degree in English) wrote a paper to hand in for her daughter to catch her in a marking scam. Received 47% in the class. Teachers are expected to do a lot... moral provider, babysitter, teacher, mother/father, counselor, psychologist... society expects too much... teachers in the LCC program she is in are "teachers by trade", they have come to a point in their life where they want to make a difference... they teach using many different styles for every learning type... "I try to look at college like I'm paying for a service, and, if a teacher goes beyond that service, then I should go beyond my responsibilities" as being just a student.*
3. ▣ *If you had to use some others words to describe why <the instructors at LCC> are as effective as they are, what would they be? - critical thinkers, relate to student's interests, use examples, visual aids, are very observant, "when you talk to them, they really listen".*
4. ▣ *Can you think of some specific things that they would do while they're teaching the class that would appeal to everyone? - use people's names, pick up on what everyone is interested in, he uses repetition quite a bit, he'll go back and talk about things from previous classes or even previous semesters, have extensive knowledge of all of the others classes that the students are taking, Anne makes jokes, teach things twice, give breaks when students appear to need them.*
5. ▣ *How important is it to study communications? - "I'm a big fan of communications, verbally and non-verbally", "alot of the problems in our society come from not having proper communications", previous generations have poor communications skills, she prides herself as being an objective communicator, important in all relationships, communication...touches every aspect of our life... communication with yourself, too*
6. ▣ *How does D'Arcy communicate with the students in the communication class? - uses notes (on overhead), very vocal, gestures, he uses the things that he teaches.*
7. ▣ *Are there any particular styles that he uses? - uses names, he has patterns - like saying what will be on tests, "works with you", uses routine but throws things in to keep everyone awake like "stories/outrageous things that come out of his mouth" which "wake me up" and makes the point two or three times for students to pick up"*
8. ▣ *Can you think of one from this semester... that you found really memorable... that helped you... - rowing story about a friend of his who didn't want to lose so bad that he didn't want to participate - it was funny that this guy was so successful, he made fun of this guy and himself... he'll go back to his stories too.*
9. ▣ *Does D'Arcy use these type of stories the right amount of the time? - some days are busy, so it would be good to go and get some work done.*
10. ▣ *What would be the main reason why you think he uses the stories? - so the students really grasp the concept, communications is about the situations you are in, does it for some of his own benefit to keep himself on track, to keep students alert.*
11. ▣ *How effective would you say he is in teaching that material? - 80% effective compared to the ideal.*
12. ▣ *Have you ever had a 100% instructor? Use three words to describe them - yeah... precise, not beating around the bush too much, assertive, insightful.*
13. ▣ *How important do you think it is that D'Arcy is as humourous as he is in class? - I'm a very serious person, I do appreciate humour, "but I don't think that I have a regular sense of humour" - "I may laugh alot, but I'm kinda simple", simple pleasures, "I don't like things that are scandalous, sexual...", derogatory. I think for other people in that class it is very important that he is funny.*
14. ▣ *Do you find that D'Arcy and Anne use humour in different ways? - "Anne jokes at us... she pokes fun at our class... and D'Arcy does it more of his situations... Anne doesn't really expose herself very much to the class... which is something that I appreciate, because I can just look at her as a teacher and not have personal feelings", "but I do think humour is important" but get to the point, humour is about 6.5 - 7 out 10 for importance, {9/10 from D'Arcy's point of view.}*



▣ Student Interview #3

1. ▣ *Previous education* - Taber (local small town), liked female K teacher, K-12 separate, graduated from Devry business, Ad/PR at LCC.
2. ▣ *Describe the good teachers and bad teachers you have had* - really good teacher in grade 5, she was **kind/caring**, 36-38 students, two really bad teachers in junior high, one male who threw chalk, students who were not good in math were picked on, one male gym teacher who picked on farm kids and kicked her in the butt. Good female lawyer teacher at Devry.
3. ▣ *Are these your favourite teachers, or the most effective?* - they are the same, **but they were not necessarily the most popular**.
4. ▣ *Describe what all of the good teachers had in common* - **good speakers, caring** (with the exception of the Devry teacher), **very good at getting straight to the point**.
5. ▣ *Can you define "caring" for me?* - **took an interest** in the kids, some teachers can be closed off.
6. ▣ *What can instructors do up at the front of the class to be successful?* - not picking favourites/being fair.
7. ▣ *All of your favourites have been female, and your least favourites have been male* - I didn't notice, D'Arcy is a really good teacher, so is Richard (another LCC instructor)
8. ▣ *How important is studying communications?* - yeah, if we are going to be interviewing and talking to the public, different perspective from the management communication taken before.
9. ▣ *What are some words you would use to describe why you enjoy that class?* - alot of interesting **stories**, he is **lively**, not monotone, uses his arms/expressions.
10. ▣ *Can you think of some methods D'Arcy uses to pass on knowledge to the students?* - **his own personal experiences** in the media, **stories** are interesting - are they all true?
11. ▣ *What is it about the stories?* - **"they're funny - I like humour, they keep me awake"**...I like the hands-on stuff we do in some of the other classes"
12. ▣ *How effective do you think D'Arcy is in getting across the points of that class?* - "I understand everything he says...he's effective... I'm not confused ever... I'm doing well on the tests"
13. ▣ *Can you tell me one story that you found particularly memorable?* - **rowing in Vancouver**, stuck out because I'm a paddler... he was on a team of 4 rowers, one guy never wanted to do anything he would lose at... he was supposed to be watching where the boat was going, and they almost ran into a yacht.
14. ▣ *How was the reaction to that story in class?* - **everyone was laughing, it was really funny**.
15. ▣ *Describe how D'Arcy uses humour in this class* - he uses a **subject**, and he has **a story that relates to that, that'll pull the theme of what he's trying to teach and make it funny so that you remember it better...** a joke sticks in your head, where something that's boring you don't remember.
16. ▣ *You didn't mention humour when you described your favourite/best teachers before... you think D'Arcy is an effective teacher... so it isn't necessary to use humour to be an effective teacher?* - **"When I was younger, I didn't appreciate humour as much"**... "I had some that said things that were ridiculous that made me laugh, but I don't think they meant it to be that way"
17. ▣ *How is humour used by the instructors here at the college?* - "I like humour, I think it's grown on me more as I've got older. **I think if more teachers used it, it would be better"**
18. ▣ *Should all teachers use more humour?* - **"not everyone's funny"**... or they could have a dry sense of humour", "humour shouldn't really hurt unless its non-stop, and causes the class to get out of control", "I don't think humour can ever hurt anything"

▣ Student Interview #4

1. ▣ *Previous education* - "Its going to be a long time...I'm coming back to school after a long time away", graduated in Prince George BC, junior high school was worst... environmental ed teacher busted for selling drugs... bullies ran the school... preppy school now, came from Saskatchewan where they took the doors off the bathroom.
2. ▣ *What made you choose <to go into> Print <Journalism>?* - "I worked as a dispatcher for years... in BC, the economy is real bad there... lost my job, everybody ended up on EI... tests pointed me towards communication arts... I have a 13 year old son, so I didn't want to live in Vancouver.
3. ▣ *So even though you liked writing, you never thought of going into print?* - in a writer's guild, but "I never thought I could talk to people" = shyness + "a little long in the tooth"
4. ▣ *Tell me about some of the teachers you have had* - grade 5 teacher was one of the first who ever made her feel really smart - he was able to pick out the small things in life and point out that you were good at them, grade 10 English - I tried really hard - the teacher said I was a really good writer, I'm the first person in my family to go on past high school, Biology teacher... hated me.
5. ▣ *The grade 5 teacher and the English 10 teacher... appealed to you personally... were they popular teachers?* - not the grade 5 teacher - he was thought of as being really strict - it is easier to follow rules as a girl than as a boy, the English teacher was popular with some.
6. ▣ *How effective were both of them?* - the grade 5 teacher did a good job, the <English teacher> did OK... there were some things they missed the boat on.
7. ▣ *Same questions I have been asking, but now about some of the college instructors you have had* - "D'Arcy is really awesome... he really shines", "Farron Ellis, my God, he's awesome!... he reaches everybody, he's also very popular... he has a way of getting across complex ideas with persistence"
8. ▣ *How important do you feel the communications class is?* - "its way more important than I thought it would be... I thought it would be alot more theoretical"
9. ▣ *What sort of things in the communications class would you consider to be the most important?* - "to move it from theory into practice... to actually take some of the things you learn in class and actually use them...", evaluating yourself as you communicate.
10. ▣ *Would it be the same class if it was taught straight out of the textbook?* - "No, hehe, no... I love the way he adds stories... and also, he takes it one step closer into practice from the theory in the textbook".
11. ▣ *Can you use some words or phrases that describe how he <D'Arcy> instructs the class?* - tells stories, "He's very punny"
12. ▣ *Why do you think he uses them <puns>?* - "I think it breaks the ice... it gets a reaction... it involves people... he gets a response from the class, that it just keeps drawing them back into the lecture"
13. ▣ *Is there a particular style that seems to work, or a way that he tells them that seems to work?* - "Its the way that he tells them... he's really good at it... they're not necessarily about him... he's very good at giving the information and... and then bringing it to the punch-line, or the kick... he does his little ad-libs all the way through it... he's a good speaker"
14. ▣ *Do you find that other instructors at the college do that as well?* - Anne does as well... they both use stories, but Anne is a little more regimental.
15. ▣ *What would be some of the qualities that you would say he <D'Arcy> has that might facilitate something like that <great group work> happening with a group?* - immediate feedback, easy to talk to about stuff at school, he's approachable, you have a feeling that he really wants you to do it <succeed>
16. ▣ *Can you talk about one of the stories that he has used that you found particularly memorable, especially if it helped you with a concept in class* - the mouse thing - because we talked about it today - its all about how you look at a problem, I know that he's well traveled - it helps with asking questions when you know about other places in the world.
17. ▣ *What do D'Arcy, your grade 5 teacher, and your English 10 teacher have in common?* - "the

personal touch... he knows your name... they know where you are academically, and want to help you improve it"

18. ☐ What about specific instructional style... when they're standing up in front and teaching...  
- <none>
19. ☐ How important do you think it is for college instructors to use humour in their class? - "I think it helps... I think if it is uncomfortable for the person to use it, though, that the... students will pick up on it, and it will make them look ridiculous..."
20. ☐ Can every college instructor at some level be funny - could they all use humour in some way?  
- "I don't know if they can or not... I suppose they can, but, I've also known some people who are very serious", "I don't think its absolutely necessary, but if they can, yeah, it really makes a difference... there's some stuff I'll never forget because it made me laugh so hard"
21. ☐ If we looked at the class <history> you were speaking of... as being quite a dry class... -  
"liven it up... history is about people... people's stories...", "look at what you are passionate about"
22. ☐ Would you say that D'Arcy's use of humour belies his passion about what he is teaching? -  
"No, I think... what makes him special is that he is very passionate, and you know it. You can feel it in everything he does"
23. ☐ Anything else you would like to mention on that topic <humour> as far as the use of humour in class? - "I love it. I think when it relates to the subject you are learning it helps to stick in your mind a whole lot better"
24. ☐ And does it work for most of the other students in the class as well? - "absolutely... I think that all the students remember him as well... its someone you can trust to know what they are talking about"
25. ☐ Can you think back to any teacher/instructor that you have had in the past... did they not use humour, did it not have an impact, was it negative... - "I don't remember that any of them were really funny... I think for the most part that most of them were pretty straightforward... I don't remember anyone in the past who used humour as a learning tool"

▣ Student Interview #5

1. ▣ *Previous education* - "The instructors I can remember are the ones who relate to the student a bit better", a good teacher can teach the whole class despite different levels of understand(ing) and learning abilities, being fair/no favouritism, material can be boring - present material so that it is understandable, logical and fun as possible. He has two degrees from the U of Lethbridge - Fine Arts and Business.
2. ▣ *Describe your best instructors* - fair, present material in a fun way, sometimes you just like the person because they have a good personality/almost like a friend/say "Hi" to them like a friend, see them as peers - but not equal.
3. ▣ *What would be some specific actions instructors could do to be seen as respectful/fair* - no favouritism, how you present material in a fun manner without going too far to make it offensive to some people, the way you present something reveals your respect for people, fairness. It's a fine line you shouldn't cross - you have to earn respect - you can't ask for it.
4. ▣ *What are some very specific actions of the effective instructors you are describing?* - in Fine Arts there is subjective marking required - the instructor has to decide the criteria for good marks, there was one instructor who forced him to push his boundaries, (makes an interesting point about having a personal touch to the viewer/reader from his perspective as a painter. Instructors want to be liked as well and may not push as hard in order not to be disliked)
5. ▣ *How important is the communication course?* - "alot of times you think its common sense... you don't really know something until you really study it and realize how much you really don't know", "understand things in a way you <didn't> understand before", "being a person... that is able to advance in anything they do is the one that are teachable... they are never good enough" \*ed. note(could the feeling of 'getting' a joke provide the same 'inside knowledge' feeling)
6. ▣ *Do you enjoy that course?* - "actually, I really do... I read the textbook for the fun of it".
7. ▣ *I assume you like the instructor as well...* - "yes I do actually... I won't say we are friends... I almost see him beyond an instructor almost, to like him as a person, as a friend".
8. ▣ *But you've said that you haven't had contact with him that way, so what does he do in class that allows him to have that standing with you?* - he knows everybody by name, he goes back to make sure everybody understands - but will make it fun to those who already know the concepts he is teaching.
9. ▣ *Can you think of some specific ways that he makes it fun?* - ...examples he uses (are) practical and everyone can relate to it, encourage many people to respond to it, you can show interest by using what somebody says in your explanations.
10. ▣ *You've mentioned he uses examples alot, would you say he tells stories?* - he uses alot of personal experience and something he has heard of, he has been in the media for a long time so he has lots of examples, "Some of them may sound absurd... but you know what; they happen".
11. ▣ *Can you think of a specific example you have learned from?* - "There are many", he had a friend who he would canoe with who was afraid of winning - people have their own comfort zones that they don't want to leave.
12. ▣ *Would you say you have seen other instructors at the University or college use the same kinds of techniques?* - "He is at the top of the list... others try to make the class as fun as possible but they don't use as many examples as he does", "He makes it fun, but at the same time you understand the material", other instructors don't make it as fun as possible, I don't have to enjoy the class to learn... I can get over it.
13. ▣ *Can you think of examples where instructors have tried to be too funny too often?* - "The whole class can be wasted on something... it was funny, but...you wasted a whole class on something that doesn't really contribute too much", D'Arcy doesn't do this, he only uses stories that are about what he is teaching.
14. ▣ *If we agree that he is an effective instructor, could we bring in a new instructor for the exact same class and tell them to follow the exact same style to be effective?* - no... everyone is unique... "You respect a person because they know who they are", consistency is

the key to being an instructor, a good instructor conveys that they are a whole person on their own... they know who they are... they are confident in their personality... they will bring out the best without worrying about being <disliked>... they are there to do a job, to do their best... and hopefully they enjoy it while they are doing it"

15. *Can we tell an instructor who is not effective to use humour to improve?* - not necessarily, humour can only work when it is used appropriately and tastefully, "The best comedians are being their own person... they are being themselves"
16. *Could every college instructor make every class fun?* - its possible, "Some students, no matter what you do... wouldn't enjoy the class", a good instructor needs good students - like communication you need both sides to work.