INTRODUCTION

This is a first attempt to determine the effect of the college instructor's academic rank on student evaluation of the instructor's performance. Assumption: Students' knowledge of their instructors' academic rank reflects the students' perception of their role in the formal organization structure.

Studies of student evaluation of teaching activities have usually operated with one of 3 assumptions concerning the student role in the organizational structure of the university. 1) The student is a client of the organization, and as a consumer of the organization's services, is fundamentally outside the aegis of bureaucratic operations. 2) The student is a part of the organizational structure, but at such a low level of status and power as to have minimal effects on vertical authority or patterns of structure. 3) The student is an integral part of the functioning of organizational structure, and must therefore be considered a salient, low-power actor with a two-way flow of structural effects. Assumptions about the structural place which students occupy make a profound difference in the way the student is treated in models of university bureaucratic structure.

Nowhere is this more important than in the area of student evaluations of course effectiveness. An example of the difference these assumptions make can be seen in the common use of the academic rank of university teachers as an independent or intervening variable in the evaluation of teacher performance and effectiveness. In this context, these assumptions may manifest themselves in the treatment of the hypothesized relation between academic rank and effectiveness evaluations in several forms.

Assumption 1, in which the student is seen as a client, implies that students, as mere consumers of university services need not be concerned with the academic rank of the instructor, which is merely a bureaucratic status designation. Thus it should not affect students' evaluation of their role performance.

Assumption 2, that the student is a low level bureaucratic participant, implies that students are technically bureaucratic personnel but are temporally short-range, and incapable of controlling long-range bureaucratic outcomes. Again, the bureaucratic rank of their teachers should make little difference.

Assumption 3, that students are an integral part of the functioning of organizational structure, implies that the bureaucratic authority held by their instructors should logically affect the students' evaluation of teacher role performance.

THEORETICAL RELATIONS

Formal organization theory in the form of Max Weber's image of formal bureaucractization tends to serve the researcher of university structures much more adequately than more utopian collegial models suggested by those who would see academic personnel in colleges and universities as professionals (Weber 1952 21; Goode 1969 304). There is considerable dissensus as to the exact nature of the professional status of the university teachers, and the degree to which the different ranks share professional status equally. Adding to the confusion, Kleingartner cataloged the traits used by 7 authors to characterize professions, and found 10 such traits, but no consensus as to whether these were defining characteristics (Kleingartner 1967 10).

Earlier, Wardwell had pointed out that the relation between bureaucractization and professionalism has much to do with the factors of autonomy and authority. By definition, autonomous professionals should resist bureaucractization as it usurps the professional's prerogatives in the area of their
other, not as whole persons, but as increasingly specialized position holders. From the Weberian point of view, the inescapable conclusion is that the university is a bureaucracy, and that it is equally likely that the status levels such as academic rank in bureaucratic positions should moderate the role performance evaluations of students. One should expect to find a halo effect mediating the performance evaluations of high-status members at the expense of low-status members.

If higher academic rankings correspond to the bureaucratic status differences, then students should be expected to assume that superior status position, as a reward of achievement in Weberian terms, is ipso facto evidence of prior superior role performance. The evaluation of the higher position should be affected accordingly.

As a testable hypothesis, we could say that students who know their teachers' rank should give higher evaluations to high status than to low status teachers. This hypothesis raises a new question. What can be said of students who do not know the academic rank of their instructors? Experienced teachers know that they have students in class who never discover their instructor's name or rank even at the end of the course. This raises the possibility that students may vary in the degree to which they perceive themselves as involved in the bureaucratic process. The drastically different rates of participation in university life suggests as much.

The implications of this observation are important. First, it suggests that one of the cutting criteria of student response to university phenomena, of which teacher evaluation is only one, might correspond to their degree of acceptance as to their own legitimacy and salience in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Second, it suggests that this perception of salience may be the intervening variable which is paramount in defining the student's reactions. Might students of some specialties or
perception of the professors' academic rank and performance evaluation, such that professors with high perceived status will be accorded a higher evaluation of role performance than those with low perceived status. Permutations of possible responses are diagrammed on Table 2.

METHOD The hypothesis can be tested readily by finding out whether students know the organizational status or academic rank of their teachers, and by determining the effects of this knowledge on the students' evaluations of teacher performance. Since a significant number of the respondents may be expected not to know the academic rank of the instructor, the design of the survey must be expanded to examine the effects of the students who are unsure of the status, and who guess what the status might be.

A standard teacher evaluation form used at Iowa State University was amended in two ways for this study. 1) Questions relating to the academic rank of the instructor were included near the middle of the form. 2) A single overall evaluation item was made more direct and rewritten to read: "The instructor conducted a useful and effective course." Students rated the item on a 5-point Likert-type scale with these choices: 1) Far below average (lowest 10%); 2) Below average (next 20%); 3) Average (middle 40%); Above average (next 20%); 5) Far above average (top 10%). These evaluations were institution specific, as the instructions indicated that the students were to make the rating to indicate "how this instructor compares with all other instructors whom you have had at I.S.U." Evaluation forms were administered during the final week of the quarter. Responses were machine-scored from mark-sense sheets, and key-punched for analysis by computer.

Sampling of instructors was accomplished by asking students in an undergraduate course in sociology to request the participation
of their instructors in other courses. This method was non-random, but was considered applicable for a theory test in exploratory areas. At the same time, the sample was thought to be of a size adequate to dispel some of the more extreme biases. The most serious biases may have emerged from the approachability factor, in that the most student-accessible faculty members were chosen. Participant teachers, without prior planning, represented the spectrum of academic ranks surprisingly well. There were 2 each in the graduate teaching assistant and instructor ranks, and three each in the assistant, associate, and full professor ranks. Total sample size consisted of 13 faculty members or graduate teaching assistants and 455 student raters. There were 19 cases omitted due to unduly contradictory or ambiguous responses. Student volunteers administered the evaluation forms where instructors requested them to do so. Otherwise the materials were left for the teacher to administer. Most of the legwork in this study was performed by 6 lower division sociology students as a required group project in a course taught by the author.

RESULTS Students were fairly capable of indicating the teacher rank. According to Table 1, 54 percent of the students could either tell or guess the correct rank of their teachers. Of those guessing wrong, 37 percent guessed too low, compared to only 10 percent who guessed too high. If the knowledge of academic status differences is an indication, then students are aware of the university bureaucratic structure. Students ignorant of their teachers' rank were a minority. This fact raises some serious research questions as to what role performance and attitude differences exist between those students who do and those who do not know their teachers' rank. A hint appears in the aggregate categories and responses in Table 2.

The lowest rating of teacher performance was delivered by students who knew and correctly guessed teacher ranks. Meanwhile, the highest instructor ratings came from those students who guessed, but guessed lower than the actual rank of their teacher. Those who guessed wrong, but higher than the correct rank rated their teachers slightly higher than those who were correct. The magnitude of the differences was significant (p=0.001), as shown in Table 1. The hypothesis was that students knowing the status of their instructor would deliver higher evaluations than their uninformed counterparts. The data indicates the opposite: that such students give lower evaluations of the teacher. The hypothesis is not confirmed.

One interpretation of the data is that the degree to which students perceive themselves a part of the bureaucratic operation, as shown by knowledge of teachers' academic rank, clearly does affect the evaluations.

The parallel between those who were correct and those who guessed too high requires some explanation. It might be that the two bear such striking similarities due to the use of rather demanding bureaucratic standards of judgment. In that case, the students may use the same standards but guess the teacher to be of higher rank, and consequently expect a higher quality role performance. For the students guessing low, a different dynamic may operate. It may be that from their viewpoint, lower academic rank may be perceived as a virtue, and not as a negative status factor. As a result, they may have felt an affinity with these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived rank</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too High</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Low</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F_{2,452} = 11.24; \ p = .001 \]
TABLE 2: ACCURACY OF PERCEIVED INSTRUCTOR RANK WITH ASSOCIATED RATING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank known?</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Guessed rank</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Correct</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>Too High</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>Too Low</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Correct</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>Too high</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>Too low</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

teachers, or may have judged them by less demanding standards. The differences between responses of students who knew their teachers rank and were correct and those who guessed correctly were trivially small, and are within the range of sampling error according to a statistical test. The second group of guessers who guessed correctly may have been drawn from the same population of students as those who know their instructors' rank, but simply lacked the confidence to declare such knowledge. Excluding the wrong categories of aggregated data, the two groups of students who guessed correctly, and those who answered yes and were correct yielded the lowest and the third from the lowest ratings of teachers' performance.

Why should this be so? Could it be that those students who know the academic rank of their instructors bear a fundamentally different view of what constitutes good role performance for college teachers? It is no more far-fetched to assume that they may feel more a part of the bureaucratic hierarchy than it is to assume that they simply felt warmer toward the teachers, or that they found the atmosphere of the classroom more conducive to learning. Another way of approaching this question would be to find out which groups of students gave the highest evaluations. The highest rating came from students who answered yes, but were wrong, and guessed too low. The next highest rating came from those students who had answered no, and then guessed too low. That these responses appear to be logical opposites of the first set suggests that in cases where students assume lower than actual academic rank for their instructor, the explanatory factor may well be the student's degree of hierarchical involvement.

Students guessing too low may have perceived the status proximity of the somewhat younger teacher as closer to their own status. This coupled with a lower expectation of quality performance based on lower organization status may have yielded higher ratings. Young-looking and young-acting assistant and associate professors, one suspects, are likely to receive higher ratings from this phenomenon. Note too, that students guessing incorrectly appeared much more ready to give the benefit of the doubt to the professor, and to assign him or her lower status and higher ratings. Statistical tests of the means in Table 2 indicate that the evident differences were sufficiently large to suggest underlying substantive differences. For example, between all correct and all incorrect answers, T-tests indicated that the
bureaucratic participants, and thus internalize a concept of the ideal role expected of faculty, deliver lower instructor evaluations. This is probably based on the student's contrast of the actual with the expected role performance.

Tentative conclusion: Students should not be regarded merely as clients, but as position-holding members of the hierarchical bureaucratic structure of the university.

REFERENCES


