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EXPLORING INSTRUCTOR FLEXIBILITY: THE DECISION TO GRANT OR REJECT
STUDENT REQUESTS, THE INSTRUCTOR ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE, AND THE ROLE
OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

ERIANNE THEDORF

65 Pages

Instructor flexibility, specifically in cases that contradict one's syllabus policy, has received scant attention in communication scholarship. This study sought to understand why instructors grant or deny student requests, the ethical perspectives that instructors use when making their decisions, and the role of student engagement in those decisions. Through a thematic analysis of instructor answers to an open-ended survey, results indicated that flexible instructors consider student behavior and engagement, emphasis on learning, supporting student success, and concern for the student's situation when granting a student request that defies a syllabus policy. Inflexible instructors reported adhering to classroom policy and promote student equality through fairness, consistency, and not considering student characteristics when making their decision. Instructors noted they consider other factors such as extenuating circumstances, communication habits, assignment details, and equality when granting student requests. Finally, evidence of all five ethical perspectives—political, human nature, dialogical, situational, and utilitarianism—were found as lenses that instructors used to grant or deny student requests that break instructor policy.

KEYWORDS: instructor flexibility, instructor inflexibility, student requests, ethical perspectives, student engagement

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STUDENT REQUESTS, THE INSTRUCTOR ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE, AND THE ROLE
OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

ERIANNE THEDORF

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

School of Communication

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2022

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CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	3
Instructor Flexibility	3
Student Requests	4
Ethical Perspective	5
Student Engagement	7
Behavioral Engagement	9
Student Immediacy	10
Student Misbehavior	11
Emotional Engagement	11
Instructor-Student Relationship	13
Cognitive Engagement	13
Student Effort	15
Out-of-Class Communication	16
Research Questions	17
CHAPTER III: METHODS	18
Manipulation Check	18
Participants	18
Procedures	18
Measures	19

Data Analysis	20
Results	20
Main Study	21
Participants	21
Procedures	21
Measures	22
Data Analysis	23
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	24
Justifications	24
Flexible Instructors	25
Student Behavior	25
Emphasis on Learning	25
Supporting Student Success	26
Concerns Regarding Student Situation	26
Inflexible Instructors	27
Adherence to Classroom Policies	27
Promoting Student Equality	28
Teacher Philosophy and Characteristics	28
Flexible Instructors	29
Student Learning and Helping the Student	29
Inflexible Instructors	30
Consistency	30
Promoting Student Equality	31

Student Characteristics and Behaviors	32
Flexible Instructors	32
Student Engagement	32
Student Situation	33
Inflexible Instructors	34
Additional Factors	35
Extenuating Circumstances	36
Communication	36
Assignment Details	36
Equality	37
Ethical Standards	38
Political	38
Human Nature	39
Dialogical	39
Situational	40
Utilitarianism	40
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	41
Practical Implications	47
Instructors	47
Students	50
Limitations	51
Directions for Future Research	53
REFERENCES	56

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Instructor flexibility is a concept that has rather scant research. Researchers have mentioned flexibility and inflexibility of instructors in the classroom when researching other concepts, but a concrete understanding of instructor flexibility and the cause has yet to be determined. Previous research about instructor flexibility is minimal with no clear understanding of why instructors choose to be flexible or inflexible with students and/or their policies. It is not uncommon to hear instructors have been flexible in certain unique cases for students, but not for others. This research study seeks to understand if student engagement in the classroom directly affects an instructor's willingness to be flexible with a student after receiving a request. Would an instructor be more willing to break one of their policies for a student who is highly engaged in the classroom? Would an instructor be more rigid or inflexible for a student who is lowly engaged after being asked to break their policy? Does student engagement affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible with a student?

Student engagement has been studied in a variety of contexts in hopes of measuring and understanding the multiple variables involved when a student enters a classroom. Some engagement research looks to resolve feelings of boredom in students, inattentiveness, prevent student dropouts, and offer solutions for instructors to create a classroom that increases engagement, thus increasing comprehension and learning (Fredricks et al., 2011). While engagement is a multidimensional construct and researchers have created and identified interrelated subtypes to improve and understand the classroom experience, engagement and its relation to instructor flexibility have not been explored. Research has identified and created the different subtypes of student engagement but has yet to explore if student engagement has an influence on instructor flexibility.

This research will seek to understand whether the level of engagement a student portrays in a classroom setting has any influence on instructor flexibility when asked to grant a request. Under what conditions will instructors break one of their policies to help that student, if at all? Do instructors consider a student's engagement level when choosing to grant or deny their request? For the sake of this research study, instructor flexibility is defined as the act of an instructor providing leniency on one of their standards or policies for the benefit of the student. It is reasonable to expect a highly flexible instructor would disobey their policy to grant student requests while a highly strict instructor would be inflexible with their policies and would deny a student's request. Student engagement is conceptually defined as any sort of observable verbal or nonverbal evidence of participation or commitment by a student to show attentiveness and interest inside and outside of the classroom. This includes any sort of work, exertion, motivation, or attempt made to learn or understand the course material.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructor Flexibility

When describing instructor characteristics, the adjectives flexible and strict are not new to the teacher evaluation lexicon, but research has yet to completely conceptualize both terms (Tatum & Frey, 2021). The conceptual definition of instructor flexibility for this study is the willingness of an instructor to defy their policy in the student's best interest. A flexible instructor offers leniency to their own rules to help students in need. For example, if a student asked an instructor for an extension on an assignment but the instructor does not accept late work, the instructor may offer flexibility on their own rule to help the student in need by granting the student's request and/or allowing the student to turn in the assignment late. A highly flexible instructor contravenes their policies to grant student requests while an instructor who is highly inflexible would be strict in their policies and deny a student's request.

One external component that may affect instructor flexibility is the experience or tenure of the instructor. One may assume an instructor who is more knowledgeable or comfortable with their course may be less rigid. Previous research has found that experienced instructors report greater flexibility in the classroom as opposed to prospective instructors (Kearney & Plax, 1987; Plax et al., 1986). It is expected that one factor alone will not predict an instructor's flexibility, but rather that multiple factors may play a part in an instructor's decision to be flexible or inflexible. Santelli et al. (2020) explored leniency and flexibility of instructors through late work policies and found that the difference in adherence to late policies "may be attributed to a variety of factors, including teaching philosophy, student expectations, or if student participants have previously requested leniency on a late policy" (p. 45). Thus, there may be multiple underlying factors that affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible with a student, but in this exploratory

study, one factor, specifically student engagement, will be analyzed to see if it affects instructor flexibility. This study will seek to understand if student engagement affects an instructor's willingness to be flexible on one of their policies after receiving a student request. The rationale behind student engagement as a predictor of instructor flexibility assumes that after an instructor is presented with a student's request to break a syllabus policy, the instructor will first consider the student's level of engagement, then determine whether to grant the request (be flexible) or deny the request (remain inflexible). An instructor's preference for student engagement may be a predictor of an instructor's willingness to grant a student's request.

Student Requests

Since this research study incorporates student requests of the instructor, it is essential to understand previous research regarding student requests. Student request research has included facework and politeness theory frameworks to understand the guidelines and effects of politely asking a request of an instructor (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Sidelinger et al., 2012). Hartford and Bardovi-Harling (1996) found that students who seek requests from instructors should acknowledge their imposition, mitigate the request, and allow room for negotiation to achieve their end goal. While this type of research is concerned with framing speech acts or messages during the request to receive maximum results, the present study investigates whether the student level of engagement predicts instructor willingness to be flexible. Sidelinger et al. (2012) found that an instructor's liking of a student and connected classroom was a strong predictor of their willingness to comply with student requests. Regarding preference, an instructor who prefers a certain level of engagement in a classroom may like a student more, which may in turn be a predictor of willingness to be flexible with the student. Other research has also found that nonverbal responsiveness of students positively affects an instructor's liking

of students, and this could be related to the nonverbal observations of engagement that instructors identify in the classroom (Mottet et al., 2004). If a student's responsiveness is largely nonverbal and the student shows evidence of high engagement, this may cause an instructor to like them more and be more willing to be flexible to the student upon request. However, if instructors are choosing to be flexible for certain students based on liking, this could then create an ethical dilemma of bias or inequality in the classroom. Additionally, instructors may have their own ethical perspectives in deciding whether to grant or deny a student's request.

Ethical Perspective

After receiving a request from a student, instructors may feel a moral or ethical obligation to adhere to their policies or rules causing them to be inflexible. Conversely, instructors may also feel tempted to consider those same policies to be flexible for a student who is in need. It is assumed that instructors may explain their reasoning for being flexible or strict based on ethical standards or perspectives. Five of the many perspectives as described by Johannessen et al. (2008) help to inform this study as ethical perspectives act as lenses that individuals use to form their decisions and choices. The five perspectives that are important for this study include the political, human nature, dialogical, situational, and utilitarianism perspectives. The political perspective is informed by Wallace's (1955) four values: respect, fairness, freedom, and belief in the ability to understand democracy. An individual's political perspective is based on the values of the specific political system they find themselves in. An instructor who uses the political perspective when choosing to be flexible or inflexible may provide reasoning that cites being fair to all students, following the rules/policies, and establishing respect for all students.

The second ethical perspective Johannessen et al. (2008) define is human nature. The human nature perspective focuses on the individual assessing whether the outcome of the choice

will be beneficial for the human holistically—that the choices made using this perspective focus on an individual being kind, compassionate, and maximizing an individual’s potential (Johannesen, 2008). An instructor who explains their flexibility as a means of helping the student reach their fullest potential or not degrading the student may be using the human nature perspective. An instructor who shows evidence of considering the student both inside and outside of the classroom, not just based on their time with the instructor, would be using the human nature perspective as it focuses on the student holistically.

After human nature, the third ethical perspective is dialogical. The dialogical perspective promotes the development of the self, personality, and knowledge (Buber, 1970). Individuals who think ethically using this perspective tend to communicate in ways that can promote discussion and learning through conversation, which bolsters the knowledge of an individual. Dialogical instructors may expect their students to communicate with them in ways that promote learning and development of themselves in the classroom. Instructors who use this perspective may be more flexible with students only after discussing and having a conversation with the student before deciding about granting or denying their request since there is a large focus on communication.

Individuals may choose what kind of ethics they wish to utilize based on the situation; thus, the fourth ethical lens is the situational perspective. This perspective implies that based on certain factors such as the context, individuals within the encounter, or current resources, that individuals may choose a certain form of ethics based on the current situation. Instructors may cite a situational ethical perspective when explaining their flexibility or inflexibility due to the student’s engagement levels, or the power that the instructor has over the student in general based on their roles. Additionally, an instructor may cite that due to positive rapport with a

student, they may assume situational ethics due to the instructor-student relationship they have with one another as a reason to be more or less flexible.

Finally, the last perspective Johannesen et al. (2008) mention that relates to this study is the utilitarianism perspective. This perspective seeks to choose an option that has the greatest benefit for the most amount of people. Choosing this perspective in the classroom may look like an instructor choosing to be flexible with the student because it will both provide a positive instructor evaluation and/or satisfy the student. Comparatively, an instructor may become stricter and deny a request of a student by using a mindset of “if I allow this student an exception, I must do it for all of my students.”

Using these ethical perspectives to inform the data analysis, we may better understand if instructor flexibility can be viewed using a specific ethical lens. Asking instructors to explain their reasoning behind why they choose to be flexible or inflexible with a student may reveal that instructors base their decisions to grant a student’s request not on engagement alone, but instead on their ethical perspectives.

Student Engagement

To understand if student engagement levels influence instructor flexibility, student engagement must be conceptually defined. Student engagement literature differs in defining engagement and researchers have defined the term conceptually to fit their research needs. Past definitions of engagement in education-based research include the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes (Krause & Coates, 2008) while others suggest that it is a combination of students’ time on task and their willingness to participate in activities or schoolwork (Stovall, 2003). Communication-based research defines student engagement as a student’s willingness to

participate or show interest in class (Mazer, 2012) and considers student behavioral factors such as silence in class, oral participation in class, thinking about content, and communication out of class (Mazer, 2013). Some researchers argue that an agreement needs to be made regarding the specificity of the definition so research can become clearer and more concise. Christenson et al. (2012) produced a handbook of research on student engagement to bring clarity to the facets of student engagement and to address the “unknowns” about the concept. A broad definition of engagement is concerning for some as it risks explaining everything a student does as engagement and having definitional clarity will ensure more informed predictions regarding the identification of engagement in the classroom (Fredricks et al., 2016).

In a further attempt to understand student engagement, researchers have sought to make sense of what behaviors are and are not considered engagement. Research posits that students who are engaged show behavioral involvement in learning and positive emotional tone as well as perseverance in the face of a challenge (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Engaged students do not just attend and perform academically, but rather they persist, self-regulate their behavior toward goals, challenge themselves, and enjoy learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). Engaged behaviors include listening, student-to-student interaction, and interaction with the instructor (Lane & Harris, 2015). Behaviors of disengagement include students who are passive, do not try hard, are bored, give up easily, and display negative emotions (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Disengaged students show behavior like packing up early, unresponsiveness, staying off-task, disengaged student interaction, and distraction by other students (Lane & Harris, 2015). For this study, student engagement is conceptually defined as any sort of observable verbal or nonverbal evidence of participation or commitment by a student to show attentiveness and interest in and out of the classroom. This includes any sort of work, exertion, motivation, or

attempt made to learn or understand both in the classroom—such as observable evidence that a student is attentive, invested, interested, and cares about learning and comprehension—and out of the classroom—such as visiting office hours or emailing the instructor. Fredricks et al. (2004) identified three main subtypes of engagement in the classroom: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. For this study, these three subtypes will assist in identifying the different observable engagement behaviors students actively portray in the classroom.

Behavioral Engagement

The first subtype of engagement identified by Fredricks et al. (2004) is behavioral engagement which quite literally focuses on the behavior of the student. This type of engagement includes following the rules, adhering to classroom norms, and avoiding disruptive behaviors (Fredricks et al., 2004). Other types of behavioral engagement include effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions, and contributing to class discussion. Behavioral engagement includes participation of the student in school-related activities and extracurriculars (Finn, 1993), focuses on the participation of the student, and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropout (Fredricks et al., 2004). Classroom behaviors such as attendance and voluntary classroom participation are included in measuring the level of student behavioral engagement (Appleton et al., 2006). Behavioral engagement can range both as low as submitting to classroom rules and keeping on task to as high as participating in student clubs or registered student organizations. Appropriateness of language and the social aspects of communication that a student portrays would be further evidence of behavioral engagement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Student completion of work and following the rules are also examples of their behavioral engagement.

Within the classroom, student behaviors that have high behavioral engagement include completing assignments and homework and obeying school rules or standards (Birch & Ladd, 1997). A student who shows high levels of behavioral engagement puts forth hard work, attention, listens, and is persistent in the classroom. Positive behavioral engagement includes actively participating both voluntarily and when called on by the instructor. Beer et al. (2010) argue that class attendance is one of the simplest forms of observable behavioral engagement as it is visible and external to the student.

Negative behavioral engagement in the classroom can be largely identified through misbehaviors like disrupting class, failing to participate, not following directions, disrespect, and arguing (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Negative behavioral engagement includes a withdrawn, remissive, and uncommunicative student. Students who are antisocial or who intentionally choose to withdraw from class tend to have negative or low behavioral engagement. Low behavioral student engagement includes negative behaviors which show disengagement of the student such as tardiness, absences, fighting, or interrupting (Finn, 1993). Low behavioral engagement is not necessarily always negative as a student who behaves, attends class, and turns in work, but is hesitant to participate or answer instructor questions, could have a moderate behavioral engagement level.

Student Immediacy. Sinatra et al. (2015) identified measures of student behavioral engagement which included aspects of attention such as making eye contact and leaning forward in discussions. This type of nonverbal communication is similar to student immediacy in the classroom as students show they are verbally aware, listening, and paying attention. Baringer and McCroskey (2000) concluded that instructors are more motivated to teach students whom they perceive to be more immediate. Student interest in education and evidence of nonverbal

engagement could affect the willingness of an instructor to be flexible based on the preference of immediacy from the student. Behavioral engagement through the identification of student immediacy may affect instructor flexibility.

Student Misbehavior. Another concept that is closely related to evidence of behavioral engagement in the classroom is student misbehaviors. Students who show low levels or no behavioral engagement act out, disrupt class, have low or no participation, and are absent. Misbehaviors may not be preferred by instructors in the classroom and that preference may lead instructors to deny fulfilling the request and the unwillingness to be flexible or feel sympathy for a student. Aldrup et al. (2018) found that student misbehaviors and instructor-student relationships play a major role in instructor well-being. Failure for students to stay behaviorally engaged may result in instructor exhaustion and cause inflexibility to those who misbehave and show low behavioral engagement in the classroom.

Emotional Engagement

The next subtype of student engagement is emotional engagement which refers to the affective reactions in the classroom such as interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Emotional engagement encompasses positive and negative reactions to instructors, classmates, academics, and the school as the student reflects on ties to an institution and their influence or willingness to do the work (Fredricks et al., 2004). Identifying student emotional engagement includes recognizing student attitudes, interest, and values. This subtype of engagement can range from as low as simply liking a class to as high as finding and identifying value within the institution. Compared to behavioral engagement, emotional engagement may be harder to identify as some feelings are internalized and not always portrayed both verbally and nonverbally in all contexts. Mazer (2012) defines this concept as a type of

emotional interest, such as the feeling of excitement or energy surrounding the material instead of identifying these communication habits as emotional engagement. For this study, a student who portrays a strong sense of positive emotion, interest, and value in a class would be considered to have high emotional engagement.

Most research attempting to measure and identify emotional engagement uses self-report measures for the students, but it may also be possible to identify emotional engagement patterns through instructor reports and observation as well. Emotional engagement includes the types of feelings a student has regarding their class, instructor, other class members, and their school. Students with high emotional engagement would enjoy interacting with their classmates, enjoy coming to class, and have a positive instructor-student relationship (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students with positive emotional engagement feel they have a reason to belong or feel included in the community and enjoy being a part of it. Additional behaviors that would be exhibited by a high emotionally engaged student include interest and curiosity in the class and enthusiasm to be in class and learning (Reeve, 2012). A low emotionally engaged student would withdraw their emotions or visibly show signs of anger, distress, frustration, or anxiety in the classroom (Reeve, 2012).

One issue that could occur when trying to identify student emotional engagement is the current emotions or feelings of the student. While an instructor may use nonverbals to make assumptions about emotions felt by a student, emotions vary and are not always constant. When assessing whether the student feels included or enjoys interacting with their classmates and instructor, the student could have a bad day, which would result in a misleading perception of emotional engagement. Temporary emotions may complicate the observation of emotional

engagement in the classroom but can be solved by averaging multiple engagement scores over time (Goldspink & Foster, 2013).

Instructor-Student Relationship. Just as research regarding student immediacy can help to identify behavioral engagement, instructor immediacy and instructor-student relationship may help to bolster and identify student emotional engagement in class. Immediacy increases the liking of an individual, which in turn increases individual immediacy (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000). Observable emotional engagement includes understanding the feelings that a student has about their class members, instructor, and institution. A visible, strong, and positive instructor-student relationship may be an indicator of a student's emotional engagement as they enjoy interacting with their instructor and enjoy being in class. A lack of positive instructor-student relationship may represent low emotional engagement. Positive communication with an instructor and classmates could be representative of students who have high emotional engagement since they feel worthy, belong, and feel they should be in the class.

Cognitive Engagement

The third subtype of student engagement is cognitive, which stresses investment and purpose in learning and involves strategy and self-regulation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitive engagement states that a student makes a conscious effort to understand and interpret the material being taught because of a value placed on learning and future endeavors, not necessarily the grade orientation (Appleton et al., 2006). Students who portray cognitive engagement will seek to learn for their own goals and autonomy based on personal investment as well as the need to understand and comprehend, rather than simply memorizing to receive a good grade. Similar to emotional engagement, communication research also regards cognitive engagement as an interest rather than a type of behavior. Mazer (2012) identifies cognitive interest as the level of

attraction to a subject based on comprehension of the content. Both disciplines focus on the comprehension of material and this study will focus on a student's comprehension of content to identify cognitive engagement.

Fredricks et al. (2004) explain that cognitive engagement incorporates thoughtfulness and the willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. Students who portray cognitive engagement set motivational goals and seek to not only understand the information taught but apply it as well. Cognitive engagement can range as low as simple memorization of information for educational purposes to using self-regulated learning strategies to promote deep understanding and expertise (Appleton et al., 2006). Since this type of engagement is not as easily observable, evidence may be based on student verbal confirmation or confession of a conscious effort to truly understand the course material. This includes students not memorizing material for a good grade or a test, but wishing to understand concepts for future academic, personal, or professional purposes.

Identifying the cognitive engagement of a student may be more difficult compared to behavioral or emotional engagement because cognitive engagement is largely psychological by nature, but observation can still be conducted. The cognitive engagement a student has could be observed through their problem-solving methods, preference for hard work, independent work style, and ways of coping with perceived failure (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Since cognitive engagement focuses on the student and their emphasis to learn, apply, and comprehend the material, not just memorizing or recalling, some student behaviors could be linked to identifying cognitive engagement. Clearer identification and observation of cognitive engagement occur through student confessions such as study habits or work ethic (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Goal-orientation and goal setting as determined by the student can be an indicator of their level

of cognitive engagement as well. Requesting and completing additional readings, studying sources beyond those required, seeking out complex material, and discussing concepts with the instructor after class are examples of cognitive engagement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

While this information is not always observable or identified through nonverbals (Beer et al., 2010), a high cognitively engaged student may confide in the instructor that they wish to master the material for future use or better their education. A student with low cognitive engagement may look to memorize and recall the information for a test to receive a good grade, whereas a student who has high cognitive engagement will take that same test with the intention of measuring what they do and do not know. Afterward, a highly cognitively engaged student will wish to go over the questions missed and clarify the information they misunderstood previously. A student with low cognitive engagement is focused on performance while high cognitive engaged students emphasize the elaboration of course concepts and curriculum. Students will persist to connect old knowledge with new and make sure they are comprehending fully if they have high cognitive engagement. Research has found that students can portray cognitive engagement in a class by self-monitoring, exchanging ideas, giving directions, and justifying an answer (Helme & Clarke, 2001). A student who is concerned with the grade may only seek out extra credit opportunities, while a student who cares about comprehension may not ask for extra credit but may wish to correct previously incorrect work and go over missed questions on tests.

Student Effort. An indicator of cognitive engagement in the classroom may be student effort and the additional work a student acquires. Requests for extra work and additional materials may reflect a student who has high cognitive engagement and cares about the comprehension and further research of the class concepts (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Mac Iver et al.

(1991) found that greater value of a subject resulted in students seeking further learning opportunities in that subject area. A higher value of learning and subject material is reflective of a student with high cognitive engagement. Students who only care about receiving a certain grade in a class may exhibit low levels of effort or interest in comprehending the material as they seek to be rewarded for their performance and not comprehension. This study seeks to understand if cognitive engagement and effort might affect instructor flexibility.

Out-of-Class Communication. A student who participates in out-of-class communication (OCC) may also show signs of high cognitive engagement because they are seeking communication avenues with their instructor or classmates out of designated class time to clarify and discuss class concepts. Zhang (2006) identified OCC as “the formal and/or informal interaction between faculty and students which takes place outside of formal classrooms and during times other than when class is scheduled” (p. 34). OCC as initiated by a student can also include face-to-face or computer-mediated communication (Goldman et al., 2016). No OCC or low OCC from a student could translate to a lack of desire to understand the content outside of receiving a good grade or passing a class. Instead of the minimum requirements of communication or learning material in only the classroom context, a student who participates in out-of-class communication is seeking to understand information to better themselves and their education moving forward. Cui and Coleman (2020) found that students partake in out-of-class communication with their instructor to continue discussions started in class, let the instructor know they are interested in the course, clarify the material, ask questions about course content, and ask for guidance. These out-of-class communication motives strongly align to observable cognitive engagement behavior and could be used to help understand if cognitive engagement influences the willingness of an instructor to be flexible.

Research Questions

After reviewing the current literature on instructor flexibility and student engagement, one must wonder if an instructor's impression of student engagement affects their willingness to be flexible to a student after receiving a request. Instructors set policies and procedures within their syllabus at the beginning of every semester, but does student level of engagement influence the willingness of an instructor to disobey their standards and provide flexibility? This study seeks to understand if an instructor will be more or less flexible depending on the student's displayed level of engagement in the classroom. The following research questions are posited:

RQ₁: Does a student's level of engagement influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request?

RQ₂: What justifications do instructors provide for their willingness to be flexible or inflexible after receiving a request?

RQ₃: What teacher characteristics and philosophy affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible?

RQ₄: What student characteristics and behaviors influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible?

RQ₅: What other factors influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request?

RQ₆: What ethical standards, if any, are used to justify instructor flexibility or inflexibility?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This research study was exploratory in nature and utilized a mixed-methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. To ensure that the design of the main study portrayed the certain level of student engagement intended in each scenario, a manipulation check was first conducted.

Manipulation Check

Participants

Participants for the manipulation check included 27 students who were at least 18 years old and currently enrolled at a large midwestern university. No other information or demographics were collected from participants for the manipulation check. Participants who wished to receive extra credit for their participation were directed to a separate survey at the end where their personal information was recorded without being linked back to their responses in the manipulation check survey.

Procedures

A manipulation check was needed to affirm that the student engagement scenarios created for the main study correctly portrayed the level of student engagement intended. The closed-ended manipulation check was posted to the university's research board for 14 days and any student enrolled in the university could participate. Participants enrolled in a communication course through the university could receive extra credit for their participation at the discretion of their instructor. Through an electronic survey via Qualtrics, participants were randomly assigned to one of two student engagement scenarios. The first scenario was indicative of a student who is high in all three forms of engagement, while the second scenario was indicative of a student who is low in all three forms of engagement. Participants were presented with one of two randomized

scenarios of student engagement (high or low) followed by a 13-item survey that utilized Mazer's (2012) student engagement scale to check perceptions of student engagement presented in the scenarios.

Measures

Previous research has measured engagement through a variety of means, such as student self-reports, instructor other-reports, and observations, but this study is focused on identifying engagement through other-reports in the form of hypothetical scenarios and whether it affects an instructor's willingness to be flexible with a student. Processes used to identify and measure engagement in the classroom include a variety of mixed methods in both quantitative and qualitative research, and researchers argue that measuring evidence of engagement is more reliable through the triangulation of self-reports from students, instructor reports, and observations (Fredricks et al., 2016; Henrie et al., 2015). Data collected with student self-reports alone is largely skewed since students tend to over-rate their level of engagement. Contrastingly, due to instructor assumptions and interpretations of student engagement, instructors report lower engagement scores as compared to student self-reports (Goldspink & Foster, 2013). Due to limited time and resources, and to promote consistency, student engagement scenarios were created for this study. Before presenting instructors with the hypothetical student scenarios, a confirmation of engagement level in each scenario was tested.

To ensure that participants were correctly identifying the level of student engagement intended in the created scenarios, an adaptation of Mazer's (2012) student engagement scale was utilized. For the manipulation check, participants read a scenario that specifically reflected a student who is either highly engaged or lowly engaged based on student engagement behaviors as identified within the 13-item scale. Mazer's scale includes items that address all three forms of

student engagement in the classroom—behavioral, affective, and cognitive—and the student scenarios were written to reflect all engagement types and items in the scale. The highly engaged student scenario included evidence of student behaviors such as oral in-class behaviors (behavioral engagement), thinking about course content (affective engagement), and out-of-class behaviors (cognitive engagement). The lowly engaged student in the second scenario was the inverse and showed minimal to no evidence of oral in-class behaviors, thinking about course content, and out-of-class behaviors. Participants in each scenario responded to 13 items that used a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*). Directions asked participants to respond with whether they believed the student in the scenario would have participated in the actions listed in the scale (see Appendix for full instrument and scenarios).

Data Analysis

To confirm that the student engagement scenarios created indicated the appropriate level of student engagement and were significantly different from one another, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted.

Results

The manipulation check included 27 respondents that were randomly assigned to either the high student engagement scenario or the low student engagement scenario. Twelve respondents were assigned to the high student engagement scenario and 15 respondents were assigned to the low student engagement scenario. After reading the scenario, respondents answered the adapted 13-item scale reflecting the student's behavior (Mazer, 2012). An independent samples *t*-test revealed a significant difference between the high ($M = 59.50$, $SD = 5.71$) and the low ($M = 22.20$, $SD = 12.68$) student engagement scenarios, $t(20.34) = 10.176$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [29.66, 44.94]. Thus, there was a perceived difference between the level of

engagement portrayed between the high and low student engagement scenarios, and they could be used for the main study.

Main Study

Participants

Participants for the main study included 58 instructors who were at least 18 years old and currently teaching or instructing at least one section of a course at a specific large midwestern university. Participants had previous experience teaching at the university level. Participants included 36 females, 18 males, one nonbinary, one other, and two respondents who declined to answer demographic questions. The ages of participants ranged from 23 years old to 77 years old. Time, in years, that participants have been teaching ranged from 1 year to 48 years.

Procedures

Recruitment for participants occurred through a faculty campus list-serv for those who had opted-in to receive research solicitations. Instructors voluntarily participated in a survey via Qualtrics that contained one closed-ended item and eight open-ended questions. Participation was anonymous and no personal information was collected from participants other than the demographics listed previously. The survey was open for 12 days and was closed due to sufficient response.

Participants were prompted with one of two scenarios of student engagement and each participant, regardless of what scenario was provided, received the same student request. The instrument indicated that the student in the scenario was enrolled in one of their classes and had asked the instructor for an opportunity to redo an assignment they performed poorly on. The following student request was chosen with the intention that instructors are normally not polarized on this student request and most instructors are within the middle of the continuum to

allowing students the opportunity to revise or redo assignments. Other student requests like rounding a grade up, accepting late work, or extensions seem to have very polarizing viewpoints in instructor syllabi. The goal was also to show instructors that the student is making the initiative to learn from their mistakes and seeking to improve in the process. Some student requests simply indicate that they are grade-orientated which can be commonly denied by instructors if students only care about their grade.

Following the message that states the student is asking for an opportunity to redo an assignment they performed poorly on, instructors answered a closed-ended question (yes or no) about whether they would grant the student's request, followed by eight open-ended questions regarding their decision to grant or deny the student's request and their reasoning (see Appendix for scenarios and questions).

Measures

After reading one of the two randomized student engagement scenarios, participants were told that the student from their scenario asks if they can redo an assignment they performed poorly on. Instructors were told that their syllabus policy states that they do not allow redos or makeups. Respondents were told to answer the following questions with this student and their request in mind. The first question prompted to instructors was closed-ended and asked if they would grant the student's request (yes or no). Participants then answered eight open-ended questions that addressed: their reasoning for their choice, factors that led to their decision, whether their teaching philosophy or teacher characteristics affected their choice, whether student characteristics or student behavior affected their choice, if other factors were considered crucial to meet the request, and if they would normally allow a student to redo an assignment in their own course.

Data Analysis

To answer RQ1, a chi-square analysis was conducted using the closed-ended question in the survey to understand if there is a significant difference between whether a student's level of engagement predicts an instructor's willingness to be flexible. For the eight open-ended questions following, the responses from those questions underwent thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). The responses to the open-ended questions were sorted by level of student engagement scenarios, then by the specific question, and finally by whether the respondent granted or denied the request. After familiarizing myself with the data, respondents who indicated in their response that they did not meet the requirements to participate, did not understand the directions, or did not understand that their syllabus policy in the scenario states they do not allow redos, were removed from the analysis. Initial codes were created to seek for justifications, specific teacher and student characteristics, and evidence of Johannesen et al.'s (2008) ethical perspectives. After reviewing the open-ended responses from instructors, potential themes and patterns were identified that may have influenced the instructor's willingness to be flexible or inflexible with the student's request. Responses were coded individually based on each scenario, each question, and response to deny or accept the request. After identifying themes and categorizing them, the overarching main themes were organized and created from the data.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

To answer RQ1 and determine whether student engagement level predicted an instructor's willingness to be flexible, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Of the 30 participants who received the high student engagement scenario, 11 respondents said they would grant the student's request, while 19 said they would not. Of the 28 participants who received the low student engagement scenario, 7 respondents said they would grant the student's request, while 21 said they would not. In a 2 x 2 design (engagement level x instructor willingness to grant the request), the result for this test was not significant: $\chi^2(1, N = 58) = 0.921, p = .337$. From these results, there is not a significant difference between a student's engagement level and an instructor's willingness to be flexible. Thus, a student's engagement level alone does not differ an instructor's willingness to grant a request.

Justifications

While student engagement alone may not predict an instructor's willingness to be flexible, a thematic analysis of the responses to the first two open-ended questions help to answer RQ2, what justifications do instructors provide for their willingness to be flexible or inflexible after receiving a request? Flexible instructors in the high engagement scenario cited the student's behavior and an emphasis on learning as justifications for granting the student's request, while flexible instructors in the low engagement scenario emphasized supporting student success and concerns about the student's situation. Inflexible instructors regardless of student engagement scenario cited two themes: adherence to classroom policies and promoting student equality as justifications for denying a student's request.

Flexible Instructors

In the high engagement scenario, the instructors who chose to be flexible and grant the student's request indicated two themes regarding their justification for granting the request: student behavior and emphasis on learning. In the low engagement scenario, instructors who chose to be flexible with the student and grant the request provided justifications in two themes: supporting student success and concerns regarding the student's situation.

Student Behavior. Instructors who chose to be flexible with the student after receiving a request did reference the student's behavior with characteristics including their motivation, initiative, effort, and dedication as reasons for allowing the request. Responses indicated that instructors were more willing to be flexible with students who were intrinsically motivated and had taken the time to "put in the work" in the course. One instructor stated, "A student that wishes to be constantly improving deserves such an opportunity. It's an easy decision." Other justifications included that the student's track record and history were largely positive, and that the student is invested in the course and learning. A focus on the student's positive behavior in the classroom was largely a justification for granting the student's request.

Emphasis on Learning. The second theme for flexible instructors in the high engagement scenario included the instructor's emphasis on learning. Instructors noted that they would allow the student to redo the assignment because they believe that students should learn from their mistakes and should be allowed to have second chances. When asked what led them to make their decision, a respondent simply stated they "wanted their student to learn." This may suggest that instructors are willing to be flexible with their policies for the sake of student development and learning. Some respondents indicated that cases are different and should be

judged on a case-by-case basis, citing that they should first meet with the student to discuss whether they would fully allow a redo of the assignment or another opportunity instead.

Supporting Student Success. Flexible respondents in the low engagement scenario indicated that they wanted to support the student's success as a justification for allowing the redo of the assignment. Justifications for granting the request with the student's success in mind included participants indicating that they wanted the student to be successful in the course, the student took the initiative to contact the instructor, and the student asked about the opportunity to improve. One instructor stated, "Typically, I would say no. However, it seems this student is beginning to take an interest. Why shut that down? This one redo could be what they need to successfully complete the class." Participants indicated that if the student is making the effort to improve or contacting the instructor about redoing an assignment, then they want to support the student's success.

Concerns Regarding Student Situation. Another theme of flexible instructors in the low engagement scenario included concern for the student's situation as justification for granting the request. Participants indicated that they would want to meet with the student to discuss their situation and understand what might be affecting their learning in the course. It was assumed that since the student is performing poorly in the class already, they may be struggling to learn and there may be more happening in the student's situation than what appears. A respondent answered, "There may be more to this picture than what I'm seeing." Flexible instructors may consider other possible conditions besides student engagement as reasons for being flexible when receiving student requests.

Inflexible Instructors

In both the high and low student engagement scenarios, two overarching themes of justifications emerged from instructors who were strict and denied the student's request: adherence to classroom policies and promoting student equality. Participants who chose to be inflexible provided the same justifications regardless of which scenario they were provided.

Adherence to Classroom Policies. The first theme of adherence to classroom policies included any form of justification that referred to the standards that had been set for the class previously, or policies in the course syllabus. Respondents who denied the student's request in the high engagement scenario overwhelmingly referenced the policy in the syllabus that does not allow redos as a justification for denying the student's request to redo an assignment. This was echoed in the low engagement scenario as well. Strict adherence to the syllabus policy was the largest theme for inflexible instructors. Responses indicated that instructors felt responsible for enforcing the rule that they had made and since it was included in their syllabus, they were expected to be consistent and abide by the rule they created, thus denying the student's request.

In addition, multiple respondents also referred to the syllabus as a contract. It was implied that since the syllabus acts as a binding contract, and students are also expected to follow the rules and policies created, that instructors cannot simply break their own rules whenever they feel like it. One participant in the highly engaged scenario stated: "The syllabus is a contract with all of the students in the class and not just the ones we have 'connected' with. The only way to allow this student to redo an assignment would be to change the syllabus to allow all students to redo one assignment of their choosing." This response also showed an example of the second overarching theme in inflexible instructors which was promoting student equality.

Promoting Student Equality. Another very common justification cited by the strict instructors who denied the student request referred to elements of student equality such as fairness, favoritism, and not providing special treatment. Overwhelmingly, participants who denied a student's request regardless of the scenario stated that they needed to be fair to all students in the classroom and not "play favorites." Instructors mentioned that they felt they would be promoting favoritism, ableist practices, biases, or discrimination in their classroom by allowing one student to complete a redo of an assignment, and not offering the opportunity for all. Participants indicated a distaste for providing special treatment to certain students or allowing favoritism in the classroom. Multiple respondents indicated that if they allow one student to submit a redo, then they must open the opportunity to all students as it then would be fair and equitable to all. One participant stated, "A faculty should not allow one student an opportunity if the other students in the class do not have the same opportunity." Many respondents indicated that if they did allow the opportunity to the student, then they would extend that same opportunity to the rest of the class or change their syllabus policy altogether. There was little to no difference between justifications from inflexible instructors in either scenario. Both sets of inflexible instructors valued the adherence to classroom policies and promoting student equality.

Teacher Philosophy and Characteristics

To answer RQ3, what teacher characteristics and philosophy affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible, a thematic analysis of responses from the third and fifth open-ended questions helped to determine if the instructor's philosophy or characteristics affected their decision to be flexible or inflexible for the student's request. Flexible instructors in both scenarios cited a focus on student learning and helping the student as a part of their teaching

philosophy and characteristics that helped to make their decision. Inflexible instructors cited consistency and promoting student equality as part of their teaching philosophy and characteristics as to why they decided to deny the student's request.

Flexible Instructors

In the high and low engagement scenarios, flexible instructors identified a focus on the student and student learning as elements of their teaching philosophies and teaching characteristics. Responses from both questions contained an overlap, as it may have not been clear how a teacher characteristic was different from elements of a teaching philosophy. There was no clear difference between the philosophies and characteristics provided by flexible instructors in either scenario.

Student Learning and Helping the Student. Flexible instructors overwhelmingly prioritized the student's learning and focused on helping the student. Respondents indicated that they want students to learn from their mistakes, reach their full potential, and support student learning. One respondent stated, "I believe that is part of my teaching philosophy deep down. I want to provide inclusive learning experiences and help students reach their full potential." Some responses focused on the fact that students are doing the best that they can and that students should be able to receive the opportunity to redo work so they can learn and grow.

Another common theme that focused on helping the student included that not all situations are the same and should be addressed on a case-by-case basis, or that some students need individualized attention based on their learning style or needs. A participant stated, "I don't evaluate how they learn as much as what they learn. Not everyone is the same. Some folks need a little more time and effort than others." Some respondents even indicated that flexibility is a part of their teaching philosophy and characteristics citing that they believe they should be

understanding, have compassion, and have grace for students. One response said, “Yes, my philosophy centers equity, empathy and flexibility—all of which are relevant to this decision.”

Those who were flexible with students prioritized that within their philosophy and characteristics. There was also evidence of a change in teaching philosophy and characteristics as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant stated, “Since the pandemic I’ve realized that compassion isn’t a commodity that has to be reserved only for special circumstances. Everyone has the potential to have a bad semester, mental health issues, family problems, health problems, money problems, being overworked, schedules that collide in bad ways, etc.” Flexible instructors focused on understanding student situations and promoting the success of the student within their teaching philosophy and characteristics.

Inflexible Instructors

Themes for teaching philosophy and characteristics in inflexible instructors largely reflect the same themes that were identified regarding the justification of denying the student’s request. Inflexible instructors in both the high and low engagement scenario cited consistency when upholding policies and promoting student equality as foundational to their teaching philosophy and characteristics.

Consistency. Similar to the justifications provided for the reason to deny the student’s request, inflexible instructors had a large indication of consistency and personal integrity as a part of their teaching philosophy. Respondents indicated that once they create a policy within their syllabus, they prioritize being consistent in upholding the rule they have created. Some participants indicated that if they are not holding up the rules they have created, then this affects their personal integrity in the classroom. Instructors wish to uphold their personal integrity and follow the rules they have created; this means denying all student requests to break their policy

regardless of engagement level. A participant stated, “Information given out dictates the policy. We can’t change them for one or two students—good or bad.” Respondents in the low engagement scenario referenced the syllabus as a binding contract as a reason to maintain consistency. Another instructor stated, “Fairness. The syllabus is our contract with students. We cannot expect some students to have to adhere to the contract and not others” while another said, “But I do tend to look at my syllabus as that binding contract not only so students know what to expect but to hold myself accountable in how I apply policies fairly to all students.” Thus, the teaching philosophies of inflexible instructors may include the idea that the syllabus acts as a contract, and they must adhere to the policies created to maintain that consistency across all students.

Promoting Student Equality. The theme of promoting student equality includes any indication of an instructor citing fairness, equality, or not providing special treatment for certain students. Overwhelmingly, instructors in both the high and low engagement scenarios who were inflexible cited fairness and equality as foundational elements of their teaching philosophy and teaching characteristics. Just as their justifications for denying the request, instructors emphasized the need to treat all students the same, regardless of how they act in the classroom or their relationship with the student. A response indicated, “I believe in having equitable practices in my teaching. Therefore, I must have all students follow the policies as laid out in my syllabus. I cannot make exceptions for some and not others.” Instructors believe in fairness across all students and providing equitable practices in the classroom. Another theme of teaching philosophy and characteristics that was mirrored from justifications is that inflexible instructors believe if they violate one of their policies for one student, then they must be able to do it for all students. A respondent indicated, “If I made adjustments to my extension process for this student

upon further inquiry/discussion—it would be a universal extension provided to other students.” This implies the idea that inflexible teachers promote equality and equal treatment of all students in their teaching philosophy and teacher characteristics even when they do choose to be flexible. There is an emphasis to maintain equality across all students, regardless of situation or engagement level.

Student Characteristics and Behaviors

Answering RQ4, what student characteristics and behaviors influence an instructor’s willingness to be flexible, thematic analysis of the fourth and sixth open-ended questions helped to understand what student characteristics and behaviors affected an instructor’s decision to deny or grant a student’s request. Flexible instructors mentioned student characteristics and behaviors such as the student’s engagement and student concerns as reasons to grant the request. Comparatively, inflexible instructors said they did not consider student characteristics and behaviors when choosing to deny the student’s request.

Flexible Instructors

Instructors who chose to be flexible with students and grant their request in both the high and low engagement scenarios referred to student behaviors and characteristics that reflected their level of engagement as a reason to help them make their decision to grant the request. The overarching theme for flexible instructors included addressing the certain behaviors and characteristics of the student’s engagement in class as a reason to grant the request. One theme was specific for the lowly engaged scenario, and that included instructors indicating that they were worried about the student’s situation.

Student Engagement. Flexible instructors in the high engagement scenario stated that they did consider elements of the student’s behavior when making their decision to grant the

request. Respondents indicated that they considered behaviors such as the student's sincerity, effort, out-of-class communication, effort, and willingness to be open. These behaviors are largely reflective of the student's engagement. Additionally, in the high engagement scenario, instructors noted that they considered student characteristics such as attendance, willingness to participate, motivation, past work quality and work ethic, intentions, effort, and the student's sincerity as factors that affected their decision. As in previous questions, respondents reported similar answers in the behavior and characteristic questions. Responses largely indicated that instructors considered the student behaviors and characteristics that are indicative of the student's engagement when choosing to be flexible with the student. In the low engagement scenario, respondents also mirrored behaviors and characteristics that were reflective of the student's engagement style such as lack of asking for help, lack of engagement, lack of responsibility, and lack of communication when making their decision.

Student Situation. Specifically for the lowly engaged student scenario, flexible instructors were concerned about the student's situation when describing behaviors and characteristics that affected their decision. Overwhelmingly, participants noted that they considered the student's behavior and characteristics when choosing to be flexible because they were worried about the student's situation and assumed there must be more happening in the student's life. In behaviors, instructors indicated that they considered the student's behavior, and would plan to meet with the student to figure out what is happening and to help the student. One respondent stated, "Absolutely! Student behavior is simply a reflection of what is really going on, so I tend to want to sit with students and figure it out." Regarding characteristics, instructors indicated that they are concerned that there may be unknown circumstances affecting the student's life, which affects the student in the classroom. Characteristics considered in concern

for the student included mental health issues, unprecedented stressors (referring to COVID-19), life and home balance, and other outside demands. Flexible instructors from the low engagement scenario considered the student's life outside of the classroom when making their decision to be flexible.

Inflexible Instructors

Inflexible instructors in both the high and low engagement scenarios overwhelmingly said they did not consider student behaviors or characteristics when making their decision to deny the student's request. In the high engagement scenario, instructors indicated that they would not consider student behavior when making their decision and mirrored the same justifications as indicated in RQ2. Instructors focused on adhering to the classroom policy and promoting equality of students regardless of student behavior or characteristics. One respondent even indicated that considering these behaviors could lead to discrimination, stating, "No. If I start considering student behavior when following my policies, it opens the door for discrimination."

Of the behaviors and characteristics that were mentioned by inflexible instructors in the high engagement scenario, participants indicated that they appreciated the student's willingness to talk to them, their effort, and performance, but it was not enough to change their decision to grant the student's request—they still cited the policy and equality as their reasoning for denying the request. One instructor indicated that they considered the student's behavior, but since they have been taught to understand that a syllabus is a contract, they cannot deviate from that. They stated: "Absolutely! They clearly want to learn and are highly motivated to do whatever it takes to meet their goals. I will do anything within my power to support them, but it has been drilled into my head that the syllabus is a contract with the class. I'm not allowed to work around it."

Again, inflexible instructors largely did not consider student behavior and characteristics when denying the request, but rather made sure to adhere to policies and promote equality.

In the low engagement scenario, inflexible instructors also indicated the same themes as those in the high engagement scenario. Instructors largely indicated that student behaviors and characteristics did not impact their decision to deny the request. Those who said they did consider the student behavior or characteristics also agreed with high engagement scenario instructors and said it was not enough to break the policy and they must follow the syllabus policy accordingly. A smaller theme in the respondents who did consider the student's behavior indicated the student's effort as behavior that affected their decision. A few respondents mentioned student behavior and characteristics such as personal responsibility, accountability, lack of effort, lack of being proactive, and lack of engagement as reasons that affected their decision to deny the request. However, most respondents indicated they did not consider student behavior and characteristics and again referred to following adhering to policies and promoting equality.

Additional Factors

While understanding that multiple factors could affect an instructor's flexibility, a thematic analysis of the seventh open-ended question helps to answer RQ5—what other factors could influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request. Responses indicated that instructors in both the high and low engaged scenarios cited themes of extenuating circumstances, communication, assignment details, and equality as other factors that affect their willingness to meet the request.

Extenuating Circumstances

In both scenarios, instructors who were inflexible and denied the student's request overwhelmingly stated that extenuating circumstances were a factor that would influence the instructor's willingness to be flexible. Respondents indicated that if the student had documentation or was experiencing something with their family or mental health, then they would be more likely to be flexible with the student. This aligns with previous responses where inflexible instructors wish to adhere to classroom and university policy.

Communication

Instructors in both scenarios indicated that communication, specifically the student's communication with the instructor, would affect their willingness to grant the request. Respondents indicated factors such as whether it was the student's first time asking for the request, whether they had communicated with the instructor beforehand, and other proactive behavior as a factor that would help to meet the request. Participants indicated that if the student had communicated with the instructor previously about their issues or if they were struggling with an assignment, then they would be likely to meet the request versus if the student had reached out after the assignment was already due. One respondent wrote, "If I didn't have any conversations with the student leading up to this scenario, I would strictly apply the policy." Instructors prefer students to communicate with them and consider it a crucial factor to meet a student's request.

Assignment Details

Another theme that was identified regarding factors that would be considered crucial to meet the student's request included details of the assignment. Respondents indicated that the type of assignment or weight of the assignment would affect their willingness to say yes or no to the

student's request. If it was a smaller assignment, some respondents indicated that there will be other times to make up the work. For example, one participant stated, "The weight of the assignment. Whether or not they would have other opportunities already in our coursework to demonstrate understanding and compensate for the poor grade" as a crucial factor to consider when meeting the student's request.

Additionally, respondents indicated the original due date of the assignment is crucial to meeting the student's request. If a certain amount of time has passed since the due date, some instructors felt it would not be worth it to meet the request. A flexible instructor stated, "Time frame when the assignment was originally completed. The only way I might not allow something to be made up would be if the assignment was weeks ago and/or it was the last week of the semester, and they haven't done anything before this time." Time both since the assignment due date and the time available to the instructor were additional factors that would affect the instructor's flexibility.

Equality

Consistent with other research questions, instructors again cited the theme of equality as a factor that would affect their decision to meet the request. Respondents indicated that whether they offered the same opportunity to other students would affect their decision to grant the request. If the instructor had offered the redo to other students, they would be willing to meet the request out of equality and fairness for all students. A respondent stated, "I would consider the established rules and guidelines that have been set for the class. These become expectations, and if I were to grant exceptions to one, I would want to do it for everyone to be fair." Instructors may be willing to meet a request of a student, but only if they allow it for all.

Ethical Standards

Finally, while instructors cited many different reasons for being flexible or inflexible with students, RQ6, seeks to understand what ethical standards are used to justify instructor flexibility or inflexibility. Using Johannessen et al. (2008) and their five ethical perspectives, all five perspectives were present in instructor responses. The following perspectives were identified: political, human nature, dialogical, situational, and utilitarianism.

Political

Inflexible instructors showed evidence of the political perspective when justifying their decision to deny a student's request. Evidence of the political perspective throughout instructor responses includes any form of fairness and equality for all students through following policies and rules that have been set in place. Instructors indicated on multiple occasions that they referred to university policy, emphasized fairness, and largely focused on not defying their policy, which are all behaviors that align with the political ethical perspective. Instructors mention following policies set by both themselves and the university when choosing to deny a student's request which is political in nature since those who use this perspective prioritize the explicit set of values and procedures to the system when making decisions (Johannessen et al., 2008). Flexible instructors did not indicate evidence of the political perspective as they were willing to break their own rules and allow the student to redo an assignment even though their policy stipulates they do not allow make-ups.

Additionally, further evidence of this perspective was indicated through inflexible instructors and under what circumstances they would be willing to be flexible with students. Inflexible instructors overwhelmingly stated that they would be flexible for students if they had been through an extenuating circumstance. This still aligns with the political perspective because

inflexible instructors will become flexible, but only with proper documentation or an extenuating circumstance that aligns with syllabus or university policies. Respondents still choose to address the policy first, then make their decisions based on the policy and following the rules set.

Instructors who are inflexible largely use the political perspective.

Human Nature

The human nature perspective was also present in instructor responses. Respondents who were flexible with students and granted them the request to redo the assignment did reference behavior that was reflective of the human nature perspective. Instructors indicated that they had wanted students to learn and supported the student holistically. Not only were instructors concerned about the student's success in the class, but they were also concerned about the student's current situation outside of the classroom. Flexible instructors emphasized learning with the students both inside and outside of the classroom, which is reflective of the human nature perspective. Those who use this perspective prioritize the characteristics of a human to make sure they reach their maximum potential. Flexible instructors indicated evidence of this through their willingness to help and support students in need.

Dialogical

Instructors also showed evidence of the dialogical perspective in their responses when emphasizing the importance of communication. When asked what other factors would affect an instructor's willingness to meet a request, respondents indicated the communication habits with students. Whether the student had communicated with the instructor ahead of time was a factor that would affect an instructor's flexibility. Additionally, participants emphasized the desire to sit down with the student and discuss their situation to understand what is occurring. Some respondents indicated that only after they had met with a student would they consider being

flexible or granting the student's request. All these behaviors and justifications are indicative of the dialogical perspective as they value communication and discussion between both the instructor and student. There is a clear emphasis that an exchange must occur, or if there have not been any exchanges between student and instructor, that those who use a dialogical perspective may not be flexible with students.

Situational

The situational perspective was also evident in instructor responses as participants who were flexible with students indicated that it depends on the student's current situation and that whether they choose to be flexible with students is dependent on a case-by-case basis. Respondents indicated that not all situations are the same, and they should be treated individually based on student circumstances, instead of an overarching rule. These responses are reflective of the situational perspective as their flexibility changes based on the situation or context specific to each student.

Utilitarianism

Overwhelmingly, there was a large presence of the utilitarianism perspective in the responses of inflexible instructors. Participants who emphasized fairness and equality for all students commonly mentioned that if they allow an exception for one student, then they must do so for all students. These instructors prioritize an equal chance for all students and the greatest benefit for all students, which aligns with the utilitarianism perspective. Those who chose to be inflexible stated that if they were to be flexible with one student, they would have to change their policy or offer the opportunity to all students. If one student is allowed to benefit from an exception in a policy, then instructors who use the utilitarianism perspective expressed that they would have to make sure all students can benefit as well.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

After analyzing participants' responses to the closed-ended question and open-ended questions in the main study, the study's research questions must be revisited. This study sought to understand if a student's level of engagement influenced an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request. Answering RQ1 based on the chi-square analysis, a student's level of engagement did not influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request.

While a quantitative test indicated a student's engagement alone does not influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible, instructors provided justifications for their willingness to be flexible or inflexible through their responses to the open-ended survey questions. Answering RQ2—what justifications do instructors provide for their willingness to be flexible or inflexible after receiving a request—flexible instructors from the highly engaged student scenario cited student behavior and emphasis on learning as justifications for granting their request. Flexible instructors in the high engagement scenario considered the student's positive behavior in the class and the amount of work and effort that the student portrayed as reasoning to help them with their decision to grant the request. This is consistent with the findings of Sidelinger et al. (2012) when they found that an instructor's liking of a student was a strong predictor of their willingness to comply with student requests. In this case, the instructors preferred the student's engagement and behavior in class as justifications for granting the request. This could be related to the instructor possibly considering the student's engagement level or behaviors that show student engagement, before deciding to be flexible with the student.

Additionally, flexible instructors in the high engagement scenario emphasized student learning as a reason for granting the student's request. Instructors promoted the student learning

from their mistakes and being able to redeem themselves as a reason to be flexible on their policies and grant the student's request. Thus, it could be assumed that instructors who are willing to be flexible on their policies for students value student learning and make sure that the focus of learning is on the student and their comprehension, rather than enforcing policies.

Flexible instructors in the low engagement scenario had similar themes with their justifications for helping the student including supporting student success and concerns regarding the student's situation as reasoning for granting the student's request. Flexible instructors mirrored the emphasis on student success in the low engagement scenario just as flexible instructors in the high engagement scenario emphasized student learning. However, for the low-engaged student scenario, flexible instructors were also concerned about the student's situation. Instructors indicated that they were concerned there might be something going on with the student and wanted to be flexible since there could be external factors outside of what they are seeing. Thus, flexible instructors justify their willingness to be flexible based on student behavior, emphasis on learning, supporting student success, and concerns regarding the student's situation.

Inflexible instructors regardless of what scenario was presented indicated evidence of adhering to classroom policies and promoting student equality as justifications for denying a student's request. Inflexible instructors focused strictly on not bending the rules since their policy stated they do not allow extensions for students. Inflexible instructors value maintaining the rules and policies they create and use them as justifications to deny the student's request, regardless of their engagement scenario. Additionally, inflexible instructors place a heavy emphasis on making sure that all students are being treated fairly and equally. Overwhelmingly, the justification for denying the student's request included the justification that all students

should be treated the same, should be treated fairly, or that no one should receive an opportunity that others do not. Inflexible instructors emphasize making sure that they follow the rules set by themselves and the university, in addition to making sure that one student does not have a higher advantage than another, rather that all students have the same opportunities and are equal.

In exploring what teacher characteristics or teaching philosophy might inform an instructor's willingness to be flexible (RQ3), results revealed that flexible instructors value student learning and helping the student, while inflexible instructors value consistency and promoting student equality. Instructors who chose to be flexible with students emphasize making sure the student could learn from their mistakes, and the focus is largely on the student and helping them. Flexible instructors may be more willing to help students since their teaching philosophy places emphasis on the student and their success. Instructors who were inflexible mentioned teaching philosophies that included consistency, both across all students and maintaining the policies they created. Inflexible instructors prioritized enforcing the policies that they had created for professional and personal integrity, in addition to maintaining that consistency to promote equality for all students. It was expected that if a policy was put into place, there was a reason for that policy and since the syllabus is a contract, they must be consistent with that contract. Instructors who are inflexible value treating all students fairly and offering the same opportunities to all as part of their teaching philosophy and characteristics.

Addressing RQ4, what student characteristics and behaviors influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible, themes indicated that flexible instructors consider the student's engagement and the student's current situation, while inflexible instructors do not consider student characteristics and behavior when choosing to deny the student's request. Flexible instructors mentioned elements of a student's engagement such as their effort and participation in

the high engagement scenario and their lack of participation in the low engagement scenario. Instructors commended students for approaching them and often mentioned student behaviors that mirrored their engagement style as something they considered when making their decision. Additionally, flexible instructors mentioned the student's current situation as a characteristic that led them to be flexible and grant the request. Flexible instructors were worried that there could be events outside of the student's control that caused them to perform poorly on the assignment or that could be affecting their behavior in class. Inflexible instructors, however, stated that they did not consider student behavior or characteristics when making their decision, instead they emphasized not favoring the students and promoting equality in the classroom.

While understanding that student engagement alone is not the only predictor of instructor flexibility, RQ5 sought to understand what other factors influence an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request. Instructors indicated that extenuating circumstances, communication, assignment details, and equality were all factors that were crucial when considering meeting a student's request. Specifically for inflexible instructors, they mentioned that they would be willing to defy their policy, but only if the student provided some type of documentation or had a university-approved excuse that proved an extenuating circumstance. Again, inflexible instructors stated wanting to follow the rules and policies stated. Flexible instructors also mentioned extenuating circumstances as reasonings to grant a student's request but were not as adamant about documentation.

Communication was another theme common that would affect an instructor's flexibility as participants noted that it mattered whether it was the first time the student was reaching out to them, if this was a habit or a request they ask for often, or if the student had communicated with the instructor previously about what they are going through. Instructors wanted students to

communicate with them proactively, and that they would be more willing to be flexible with the student had they had previous conversations with students before about their situation.

Communication habits and previous requests of the student could affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible as an instructor may not feel comfortable breaking one of their policies for a student repeatedly.

An additional factor that instructors included that affects their flexibility was the details of the assignment. Instructors noted that the weight of the assignment, what type of assignment it is, and when they were asking for the redo as compared to the original date the assignment was due would affect their flexibility. Some instructors believe assignments that are worth little points are not worth redoing as there are other assignments the student can be focusing on to improve their grade. Others said their flexibility depends on how late the student is asking to redo the assignment as compared to when it was originally due and when they received their grade back, citing that the class could have been far into a new topic or unit and the instructor does not want the student focusing on old material. Instructors may not want to go back and regrade an assignment that has passed within some time. Some respondents did note that they do not have the time to regrade student work based on their workload and class size.

Finally, the last factor that instructors stated would influence their willingness to meet a request was equality and whether they had been equal with other students previously. Instructors stated that if they had allowed one student the opportunity to redo an assignment they performed poorly on, then they must allow another. Their previous decision on student requests then informed their ability to be flexible since they valued equality and made sure that all students have the same opportunities.

The last research question, RQ6, looked to see if instructors used any ethical standards to justify their flexibility and inflexibility. Instructors showed evidence of all five types of ethical standards when making decisions to grant or deny student requests. Inflexible instructors largely used the political perspective as they cited needing to follow the policies and rules that they made, in addition to referring to the syllabus as a contract. Strict adherence to the rules that the university and the instructor set for the class is very reflective of the political ethical perspective. Even when asked when they would be flexible for students, inflexible instructors stated that they would allow flexibility on their rule, but only if the student had evidence of an extenuating circumstance or documentation to prove it. This still adheres to the political perspective as the only way around the stated policy is by following university policy regarding excused circumstances.

Instructors also showed evidence of the human nature perspective as flexible instructors often placed emphasis on students, their full potential, and caring about them both inside and outside of the classroom. The human nature perspective focuses on caring for someone holistically, which was very evident based on the responses from flexible instructors. Concern for the student's situation and wanting to support the student's learning and success in the classroom was reflective of the human nature perspective when making decisions.

The dialogical perspective was also evident in instructor responses as participants indicated they would like to first have a conversation with the student or hope that the student has had some type of communication with them before deciding to grant the request. Instructors wanted to talk with the student and expect the student to communicate with them about their situation before asking for the request. By having the conversation with the student first, based

on the situation at hand, instructors could then make an informed decision about whether they would like to accept or deny the request.

Depending on the student's situation also informed an instructor's flexibility. The situational perspective was evident through flexible instructors as they said each student's case is different and some argued they should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Instructors cited that it depends on the student's current situation whether they would be flexible with some students and inflexible with others. This indicates that instructors may determine their flexibility after understanding the student's situation.

Finally, inflexible instructors showed a strong sense of the utilitarianism perspective to justify their inflexibility. Overwhelmingly, instructors cited that if they allowed one student the ability to redo an assignment, then they must extend that opportunity to other students as well. This aligns with the utilitarianism perspective as they value fairness and equality and doing what is best for the greatest amount of people. Instructors wanted to make sure that any opportunity offered to one student is available to all students. Preferential treatment of one student and not offering that same exception to other students was not favored by those who were inflexible thus aligning with the utilitarianism perspective.

Practical Implications

Using the results of this study, instructors and students can better understand the multiple elements that affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible after receiving a request.

Instructors

Specifically for instructors, the results of this study have practical implications to help better understand the process that occurs when they accept or deny a student's request. Consistent with the findings of Santelli et al. (2020) differences in adherence to policies were

attributed to a variety of factors which included the instructor's teaching philosophy and if the student has previously requested leniency on a policy. Instructors who emphasize student learning, supporting student success, and are concerned about their student's situations inside and outside of the classroom may be more flexible when students ask requests of them. Similarly, flexible instructors may consider student engagement levels and the student's current situation before deciding to grant the student's request. Instructors who seek to make their decisions about the student's request based on what is best for the student may use a human nature perspective when addressing student issues. Finally, flexible instructors may only be flexible with some students based on their specific situation and on a case-by-case basis, which is reflective of a situational perspective.

However, if instructors believe in strictly adhering to their course rules and university policy, they may find themselves to be inflexible and consistent with the political ethical perspective. If teachers value equality, consistency, and adherence to classroom policies, they may be more inflexible after receiving a student's request. Additionally, there may not be much a student can do to sway an inflexible instructor to grant a request since inflexible instructors do not consider student characteristics or behaviors when making their decision. Instructors who break their policies but only after receiving documentation or a university excuse may largely find themselves to be inflexible in breaking their own rules. Finally, inflexible instructors use the utilitarianism perspective since they value doing what is best for the greatest number of people. If instructors grant a request for one student, then they value allowing that same opportunity to the rest of their students and class.

In general, instructors should understand the factors that they consider when choosing to grant or deny a student's request. When presented with a student request in general, or even to

break one of their policies, instructors should assess whether their decision was based on extenuating circumstances, communication with the student, the details of the assignment, and/or equality of how they have treated other students in the class. Instructors should be careful to understand why they are granting the student's request, or what factors are affecting their decision to deny the student's request. If equality is essential to the instructor's teaching philosophy, then they should seek to understand if granting a student's request is promoting equality for their students.

Instructors should also consider from what perspective are they deciding to grant or deny a student's request. They should consider how their decision aligns with their teaching philosophy and what ethical perspectives they may be using. Instructors showed a strong desire in both scenarios and flexibility levels to have conversations with the student about their situation and expected students to be proactive in informing them, which is largely dialogical in nature. Understanding what ethical perspective an instructor uses in the classroom can help to better inform future policies and future decisions.

Finally, instructors should use this study to help inform their syllabus policies in future courses. While there is no preference or recommendation that instructors should be flexible or inflexible, instructors should understand how flexible they wish to be with students or specific course policies when writing and revising their syllabi. If instructors wish to be flexible with students throughout the course, then writing and creating syllabus policies that are flexible from the beginning will help prevent breaking a policy for student benefit. For instructors who choose to be inflexible and follow their syllabus policy, if multiple student requests are present or there is a pattern of the same request or difficulty, instructors should consider revising their syllabus policies for future courses and refer to their teaching philosophy and ethical perspectives when

writing their syllabi. An option for instructors who view a syllabus as a contract would be to include a clause or policy that states that individual student circumstances will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. This then allows instructors the room to be flexible with students with extenuating circumstances while still maintaining their syllabus policies. By revising and updating their course syllabus, instructors may not have to break their own policies to help students in the future.

Students

For students, the results of this study help inform how their behavior and communication can or cannot help them in the classroom. Flexible instructors tended to focus on the student's behavior and their engagement in the classroom. If students wish to have their requests met, maintaining good behavior and high engagement in the classroom, in addition to having a teacher that promotes student learning and success may potentially help them have their requests met in some circumstances, however, students have less agency than they think they have when asking for a request of an instructor. Students should understand that their high or low engagement in the classroom does not go unnoticed by instructors and flexible instructors pay attention to students whether they are engaged/disengaged, successful, or having issues completing work in the classroom. Flexible instructors indicated that they were willing to help students who were both highly and lowly engaged in the classroom. So, while a student may believe that exhibiting their best behavior may have some influence over their instructor, flexible instructors are inclined to help students no matter their engagement level. Students do not have as much influence on their instructor's decision to grant the request as they might think. Flexible instructors seek to help any student regardless of engagement.

Students may have more luck with instructors being flexible and granting a request if they prioritize and maintain their communication with their instructors. While it may be tempting for students to wait for instructors to approach them, instructors indicated that they wanted students to communicate with them proactively if they were having issues with an assignment or needed extra help. Students should use their communication skills to keep their instructors informed if they feel they might ever have to ask for a request from them. If students can communicate their situation to instructors ahead of time, or keep them informed if they are struggling, instructors may be more willing to be flexible and grant the student's request. Therefore, by keeping instructors informed and communicating with them in the classroom, students may be more fortunate in having their requests granted by instructors. These findings could suggest that how a student uses behavior alteration techniques (BATs) and behavior alteration messages (BAMs) can affect an instructor's willingness to be flexible with them after receiving a request.

Limitations

While no study is immune to limitations, they must be addressed to help improve future research or replication. One limitation of this study is that these results are not generalizable to every university or population. This study included responses that were specific to instructors at a large midwestern university and some of the decisions regarding defying a policy could be institutionally based. Some institutions may have strict rules or regulations in place that do not allow instructors to defy their policies, thus the results of this study may not apply to all scenarios. The findings of this study may be specific to the institution in which it was conducted, and more research is needed to understand if it applies to other educational contexts.

Another limitation of this study includes the use of hypothetical scenarios for instructors to refer to when answering the questions within the survey. There seemed to be confusion among some participants based on their responses as an indication that they may not have understood the directions. Some respondents indicated that they would never deny a student's request for a redo on an assignment because their syllabus allows it; however, the instructions in the scenario indicated that the instructor has a syllabus policy that states they do not allow redos or make-ups on assignments. Some respondents did not read directions carefully or did not place themselves within the hypothetical.

Hypothetical scenarios also create limitations for responses since scenarios may state that instructors act in ways that do not align with their teaching policy or syllabus. This may create psychological reactance or misunderstanding when answering questions regarding their teaching philosophy or teacher characteristics. It may be difficult for participants to place themselves in a hypothetical scenario that they could never imagine themselves in. Some respondents blatantly stated, "I would not have this policy in the first place" and refused to answer the rest of the questions. For clarity purposes, future research could be richer through focus groups or interviews instead of an open-ended questionnaire. Respondents may have been afraid to state that they would defy their own policy or be flexible out of fear that it goes against the university's expectation or policy. Some respondents chose to not answer the demographic questions at the end of the survey, which may indicate that they did not want to be connected to their responses or be reprimanded by the university based on their response. Focus groups or interviews in future research would help to gain a richer understanding of an instructor's decision to be flexible or inflexible and whether the institution's policies affect this decision.

Finally, the wording of the open-ended questions was also a limitation of the study. Responses from participants in the teaching philosophy and teacher characteristics questions often overlapped, which indicated a lack of understanding of the difference between the two in responses. If replicated, this study should be more specific about the difference between the two terms by defining each, or by being more specific about what kind of response is solicited. This issue was also mirrored when understanding the difference between student characteristics and behaviors, so a revision of survey questions should be performed for future research.

Directions for Future Research

Since this was an exploratory study on instructor flexibility and how student engagement and ethical perspectives are connected, future research should continue to explore these connections. While this study did not find a significant difference between a student's engagement level and whether it affects an instructor's willingness to grant a request, findings did indicate that flexible instructors do consider student behavior and student engagement. Research should continue to explore if student engagement or student behavior has any role in instructor flexibility. Since student engagement alone is not a predictor of instructor flexibility, understanding what other factors affect an instructor's flexibility to break their policies could better inform instructor teaching practices and student behavior in the classroom. Future research should seek to understand how instructors choose to be flexible for some requests but not others. Are there some requests that instructors are more likely to be flexible on than others? Future research could use an instructor's syllabus as a foundation to understand what policies they feel comfortable being more flexible on than others and the logic behind their decision.

Regarding instructor flexibility, future research should seek to understand the true meaning of instructor flexibility and what that looks like in the classroom. An instructor

flexibility scale should be created to understand if there are levels to an instructor's flexibility or what other factors do affect an instructor's flexibility outside of defying one of their policies. By understanding how to measure instructor flexibility first, researchers can understand what level of flexibility instructors may have in the classroom, and how that can inform teaching.

Future research could also benefit from understanding the relationship between trait and state in instructor flexibility and student behavior. Instructor flexibility could be based on traits of an instructor—whether they are empathetic, kind, or follow rules—or based on the state of the instructor at the time, such as the beginning, middle, or end of the semester. The same research could be conducted to understand if student trait and state impacts an instructor's flexibility. Do certain student traits affect an instructor's flexibility, or does the state of the student and their standing in the class affect the instructor's decision? Future research could explore this direction in further detail as well.

The effects of COVID-19, and transitioning to online environments in many schools, may have affected an instructor's willingness to be flexible with students. Instructors who were strict before the pandemic may have offered more grace and flexibility to students. A few respondents indicated that they are much more lenient and flexible with students and their situations outside of the classroom as a result of the pandemic. How the pandemic has impacted instructor flexibility is also a direction for future research.

An instructor may choose or feel the need to be flexible with students due to social desirability or the fear of receiving poor teacher evaluations. Instructors may feel inclined to be more flexible with students out of fear that they will receive poor teaching evaluations as a result. Future research should seek to understand if social desirability is a factor behind an instructor's choice to be flexible. Further, instructors may have responded in this study that they

have to be inflexible with students or follow their syllabus policy due to university expectations or constraints. A university's expectations, policies, or rules could also be indicators that instructors who choose to be inflexible may be limited due to the structure of that institution. Future research should explore the connection between structuration theory and instructor flexibility to understand if the policies and syllabi that instructors create are confining or restricting them when receiving student requests. Focus groups and interviews would better allow for a richer analysis and help to understand the process of an instructor's decision.

Finally, demographics were collected from participants during their response, such as gender, age, and how long in years the participant has been teaching, but an analysis was not conducted to identify any patterns or significance. Future research could seek to explore whether gender, age, or tenure have any effect on the willingness to be flexible with students. One must wonder if a certain gender is more or less flexible, if age plays a factor, or if experience teaching leads to instructors being more or less willing to break one of their policies. Future research should continue to explore instructor flexibility.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

Directions: Please read the following scenario then answer the questions underneath the scenario while recalling the student and their behavior.

[Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following scenarios.]

Scenario 1: High Engagement

A student is enrolled in a specific college course. This student pays attention, has never missed a class, contributes often during discussions, and always turns in work completed in full and on time. The student has a strong relationship with the instructor, they are attentive in class, and the student shows evidence of passion and interest in the class. The student emails the instructor outside of class time to ask clarifying questions and visits during office hours to review course materials, their notes, and previous tests. The student exhibits high effort in class and places emphasis on comprehending and applying course content for future use.

OR

Scenario 2: Low Engagement

A student is enrolled in a specific college course. This student does not pay attention, misses class often, rarely contributes during discussions, and either turns in work late or not at all. The student has a weak relationship with the instructor, they are inattentive during class, and the student seems bored or disinterested during class time. The student never emails the instructor outside of class and never visits office hours to go over the assignments they have missed or to clarify course content. The student exhibits low effort in class and only cares about memorizing the content to pass the class.

[All items used a seven-point semantic differential scale, ranging from never to very often]

Student Engagement Manipulation Check:

Directions: Please answer the following questions regarding whether you believe the student in this class participated in the following actions:

1. This student in the scenario listened attentively during the class.
2. This student gave their full attention during the class.
3. This student listened attentively to other classmates' contributions during class discussions.
4. This student attended class.
5. This student participated during class discussions by sharing their thoughts/opinions.
6. This student orally (verbally) participated during class discussions.
7. This student thought about how they can utilize the course material in their everyday life.
8. This student thought about how the course material related to their life.

9. This student thought about how the course material will benefit them in their future career.
10. This student reviewed their notes outside of class.
11. This student studied for a test or quiz.
12. This student talked about the course material with others outside of class.
13. This student took it upon themselves to read additional material in the course topic area.

Directions: Please read the following scenario then answer the questions underneath the scenario while recalling the student and their behavior.

[Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following scenarios.]

Scenario 1: High Engagement

You have a student enrolled in a course you teach. This student pays attention, has never missed a class, contributes often during discussions, and always turns in work completed in full and on time. You have a strong relationship with the student, they are attentive in class, and the student shows evidence of passion and interest in the class. The student emails you outside of class time to ask clarifying questions and visits during office hours to review course materials, their notes, and previous tests. The student exhibits high effort in class and places emphasis on comprehending and applying course content for future use.

OR

Scenario 2: Low Engagement

You have a student enrolled in a course you teach. This student does not pay attention, misses class often, rarely contributes during discussions, and either turns in work late or not at all. You have a weak relationship with the student, they are inattentive during class, and the student seems bored or disinterested during class time. The student never emails you outside of class and never visits office hours to go over the assignments they have missed or to clarify course content. The student exhibits low effort in class and only cares about memorizing the content to pass the class.

Instructor Flexibility Open-Ended Questionnaire:

Directions: The same student from the scenario you just read asks if they can redo an assignment they performed poorly on. Your syllabus policy states that you do not allow redos or makeups. Please answer the following questions with this student and their request in mind.

1. Would you grant the student's request to redo the assignment? [Yes or No]
2. Please explain your reasoning for your choice.
3. What led you to make this particular decision? Please be specific.
4. Did you consider your teaching philosophy when making this decision? If so, how?
5. Did you consider the student's behavior when making your decision? If so, how?

6. What personal teacher characteristics led you to make this decision? (e.g., allowing extensions, fairness, equality, etc.)
7. What student characteristics did you consider when making this decision?
8. What other factors would you consider as crucial when making a decision to meet this request?
9. Would you typically allow students to redo an assignment they performed poorly on? Why or why not?

Demographic Questions

1. What gender do you identify as? [Options: Male, Female, Nonbinary, Other]
2. What is your age? [Slider]
3. How long have you been teaching (in years)? [Slider]