

USING FEATURE FILMS TO GRADE O.B.

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One of the greatest difficulties in attempting to evaluate students' ability to apply organizational behavior concepts is the scarcity of stimulus material that approximates real life situations. The two most frequent solutions to this problem are the use of either 1) conventional written cases and 2) "cases" written by students about organizations with which they are personally familiar. Unfortunately, however, neither of these approaches allows the instructor to fully evaluate students' ability to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant data as they proceed through the concept application process.

When conventional written cases are used, a problem arises from the fact that students are exposed to only a limited set of data since much of the interpretive work has already been done by the casewriter. This occurs because it is extremely difficult, using the limited medium of print to 1) effectually portray the nuances of human behavior and emotion and 2) accurately and, at the same time succinctly, describe the complex relationship between human behavior and the situation within which it occurs.

On the other hand, when student "cases" are used, it is the instructor who suffers from a lack of exposure to potentially relevant data. Consequently, the instructor is faced with the difficult task of evaluating the adequacy of what is present in an analysis without having the benefit of knowing what is absent.

One potential solution to the problem of selecting stimulus material for application exams is the use of full length feature films. In addition to being readily available and relatively inexpensive,* this particular medium enjoys a number of advantages over other types of case materials. These include the fact that many films (1) vividly and accurately depict both behavior and the situation within which it occurs in a manner that closely approximates the kind of exposure students would receive if they were actually present as observers, (2) may be used to demonstrate the applicability of OB concepts in a wide variety of situations (I have found that a sort of a "shock learning" occurs when students are able to apply theoretical concepts developed in the ABC Widget company to the behavior of individuals who are, for example, struggling for survival in the Arabian Desert, and (3) generate a high level of student interest and involvement.

One example of the way I have incorporated full length feature films as stimulus material for application exams uses the film The Flight of the Pheonix** (20th Century Fox, 1965). This is a story of the attempt

*Sixteen MM prints of many excellent titles may be rented for \$25-50 or, as an even less expensive option, students may be assigned to see a particular movie on TV, or at the local theater, student film co-op, etc.

**Other films that I have used as stimulus material for examinations include The Magnificent Seven, The Glass House, The Caine Mutiny, The Bedford Incident, The Sting, and Serpico.

of the passengers and crew of a small cargo plane to reach safety after their aircraft has crash landed in the Arabian Desert.

1. The film was shown at a variety of times during study days and early examination days and students selected the number and times of showings to attend.

2. Students were provided with a list of characters, a brief synopsis of events and a list of topics to consider while viewing the film. The list of topics to consider included such things as the stages in group development, basis of interpersonal influence, motivation, roles played by group members, etc.

3. The students were given specific questions from several of the topical areas from the list provided earlier. For example, students were asked to specify the bases of power (French and Raven) used by several of the principal characters, support their answers with specific examples from the film and present any generalizations that they could make based on their observations of the characters in the film.

Overall, I have been quite pleased with this approach to the examination process. I am convinced that examinations of this type allow us to evaluate far more accurately students' (and in fact our own) performance in applying OB concepts than is possible using either conventional or student cases. In addition, students' reactions to these tests have been very favorable. They frequently express the opinion that this approach increases their learning ("I really didn't understand the concepts until I tried to apply them."), helps them integrate the material ("It really helped me to see how things fit together."), and, I think most important, allows them to prepare for an exam because they want to rather than because they have to. A not untypical comment is "This is the first time I ever enjoyed studying for a test."