**[The Ideal Professor vs. The Typical Professor](https://sn2prd0510.outlook.com/owa/redir.aspx?C=92--iZaij0Gg3gwX82N7EsD8Ri9eqs4Iajm3uEg6E5rGyRAl5_lt7RVWH70OiD71QH3LVIYo4KY.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.facultyfocus.com%2farticles%2fteaching-professor-blog%2fthe-ideal-professor-vs-the-typical-professor%2f" \t "_blank)**

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD

It's a new year and a new semester, with new courses and different students — along with perhaps a few favorite courses and students you get to spend time with all over again, and maybe a couple of each you won't miss at all. In other words, it's a new beginning.

As we begin again, I thought this characterization of "The Ideal Professor" might be of interest. It's offered by students who were asked to compare their Ideal professors with their Typical ones. This cohort of juniors and seniors rated professorial characteristics in three areas: personal, course design, and policies and behaviors. The items were selected for the survey based on research in each of these three areas.

Perhaps a bit surprising is the lack of strong distinctions between Ideal and Typical professors. "We found that preferred qualities and behaviors were not wholly absent in the Typical professor — they simply appeared less pronounced than in the Ideal professor." (p. 182) Despite overall similarities, the research team does describe some of the differences between the two as "striking" and eight of these are listed below. The numbers reflect the percentage of students who endorsed this characteristic for their Ideal professors and the percentage who said they characterized the Typical professor.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Teaching Characteristic**  | **Ideal** | **Typical** |
| Professor speaks clearly/not monotone | 80 | 93 |
| Course and daily goals appear on the syllabus | 83 | 52 |
| Students have a voice; input on course policies and procedures | 40 | 7 |
| Professor talks informally with students sometimes | 43 | 15 |
| Professor lectures | 78 | 93 |
| Professor uses discussion | 58 | 37 |
| Professor does in-class activities/demonstrations | 57 | 21 |
| ·Uses humor often/occasionally·Uses humor occasionally only | · 97 | ·75 |
| ·Cheating/plagiarism policy – investigates and resolves incidents·Do not know what approach is used to deal with academic dishonesty | ·58 | ·64 |
| Solicits anonymous, written, informal feedback on teaching/course | 68 | 17 |
| ·Solicits student feedback two or more times per term·Never solicits student feedback | ·72 | ·30 |

The research team offers this succinct summary: "Overall, our research suggests that Ideal professors are highly accessible to students, allow student input into the course policies and procedures, provide for significant variety in the course, and provide a comfortable learning atmosphere for students." (p. 182)

Two findings are worth noting as we launch a new year and another semester. First, students indicated that overall, personal characteristics were not important for their Ideal professor. I take that as a validation of our individuality. Ideal professors aren't all cut out of the same cloth. We can be who we are; we shouldn't try to create some inauthentic teaching personae. And I think it's encouraging that the characteristics these students identified as belonging to those teachers who most effectively taught them were not absent in Typical professors. They just weren't as pronounced. I take that to mean, if you aspire to be ideal, you don't have to do new things, just more of those good things you already do.

The question not answered by this research is whether the characteristics identified as ideal have any bearing on student learning. Based on other research, it is probably safe to say that most of the characteristics don't cause learning but they may make it a more likely outcome of a classroom experience.

**Reference:** Epting, L. K., Zinn, T. E., Buskist, C. and Buskist, W. (2004). Students perspectives on the distinction between ideal and typical teachers. *Teaching of Psychology,* 31 (3), 181-183)

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