Reviewer's report

Title: Explaining teaching performance in seminars; a questionnaire study with a multi-level approach.

Version: 1  Date: 1 June 2014

Reviewer: Jennifer Loertscher

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript describes an investigation of how students' perception of teaching performance in seminar courses correlates with a number of different factors including number of students, student preparation, level of group engagement and seminar content. The authors present a rich introduction that provides relevant context for the study and establishes the originality of the contribution. Methods and data analysis are sound. The authors are also to be commended for suggesting concrete ways in which data generated could be used to improve instruction in seminar courses.

My major concern relates to the authors' assertion that they are investigating teacher performance. As mentioned in the section of the paper describing limitations, the only way in which teacher performance was assessed was through a student perception survey. Therefore, what was being measured was student perception of teacher performance, not teacher performance itself. I think this is an important distinction that must be made clear in the manuscript. Furthermore, although students are the major “clients” in the educational experience (as described by the authors), the authors make no attempt to address whether student perceptions accurately reflect actual teacher performance or student learning.

Discretionary Revisions

None

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The term “explaining” in the title is vague. It should be replaced with “investigating” or a similar term.

2. The authors use the term “facilitating” on pages 3, line 61, page 11, line 282, and page 12, line 316. I stumbled every time I read this and would suggest using “facilitation” instead.

3. The phrase “deep learning approach” is in quotation marks on page 4, but it unclear where this quote comes from.

4. The term “seminars” is italicized on page 4, line 88. There is no need for italics here.

5. The term “dimensions” used on page 5, line 121 seems odd. The term
“characteristics” would be a better choice.

6. The term “enroll” is misspelled on page 6, line 135.

7. The term “previously” would be more appropriate than “earlier” on page 7, line 155.

8. Replace “you” with “she or he” on page 11, line 267.

9. Replace “of” with “on” on page 11, line 271.

10. The phrase “insights in and between these variables” on page 11, line 273 does not read well.

11. Replace “to study to what extent” with “investigation of” on page 12, line 318.

12. Replace “Descriptives” with “Description” in the title of Table 1.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Authors should change “teacher performance” to “student perception of teacher performance” (or a similar term) in all cases throughout the paper. This change will require rethinking of the manuscript title and may require reworking some of the text in areas where this term is used. The authors should moderate claims about student learning (for which they have no evidence) like that made in the first paragraph of the discussion.

2. Authors should include a brief paragraph reviewing what is known about how student perception surveys correlate with other measures of teacher performance and student learning. This paragraph could be included in the introduction or discussion.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.