Increase Objectivity in Grading of Classroom Participation

Many of our courses depend heavily on stimulating student discussions in the classroom. In fact, with the exception of straight lecture, almost all other teaching and learning methods rely on interaction, between student and teacher as well as among students themselves. To encourage this behavior, many of us grade students’ participation. But we don’t always use very objective methods, and we rarely involve students in the process of clarifying expectations. I would like to share a strategy that does add objectivity and gets student “buy in” as part of the process. This strategy involves the creation and use of Behavioral Anchored Rating Scales, or BARS as they are often called. I did not create the idea for BARS, but they are now widely used.

A sample of the behaviors on the BARS that I’m using for the A and F categories in my 400-level marketing course appear below. If you’d like to see the entire scale, please visit my website: www.sba.muohio.edu/giffordjb/index.htm and click on BARS Discussion Rating Scale (2002-2003). You are welcome to borrow any of these phrases that you feel fit your courses and participation expectations.

“A” Excellent
• Provides a point for discussion/debate which no one had thought of before
• Adds significant new insights into the topic
• Asks pointed and challenging questions that stimulate other questions
• Facilitates progress in small-group discussions; volunteers to record comments
• Stimulates critical thinking; imaginative and realistic
• Brings in outside experience related directly to the case decisions
• Persuasively argues a point and changes the opinions of classmates
• Displays logical outside-the-box thinking
• Intuitively understands and shares insights from “between the lines”

“F” Very Poor
• Does not participate in classroom or small-group discussions
• Frequently comments in ways that provide limited new thinking and take time away from others; noise
• Very weak or no notes on case
• Being late or disruptive in class; unprofessional behavior
• Works on homework for another class during class time
• Not listening to others
• Unreceptive to the consideration of alternative approaches; dogmatic and close minded
• Asks question for which they already know the answer

By Jack Gifford, Miami University, in The Teaching Professor, October, 2002.