This study attempts to explore students’ perceptions of traits of effective instructors in three countries; United States, Jordan, and Chile. A survey questionnaire was administered to samples of college students in the USA, Jordan, and Chile during academic year of 2004-2005. The questionnaire was sent and distributed to 500 college students in each country. Demographic variables, such as gender, age, educational background, GPA, and learning style were included in the questionnaire. In addition, the survey requested information about perceptions of importance of instructor traits. The framework for the questionnaire and many items were adopted from a study by Moorman (2004). Participants responded to forty-five statements using a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from not important to very important. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The values of alpha for the three samples ranged from 0.85 to 0.91. SPSS statistical software was used to compute frequencies, means, percentages, Cronbach’s alpha, and factor analysis. ANOVA procedure was used to test the hypotheses. When significant differences in group means were found, the analysis was extended by performing pairwise comparisons.

Two-hundred fifty four American students, 229 Chilean students and 190 Jordanian students returned completed surveys. This represented response rates of 51, 46 and 38 percent respectively. Forty-five percent of American students were males, compared with 82 and 45 percent in the Chilean and Jordanian sample. In the three samples, students were undergraduate students and the majority was younger than 30 years old. The student samples represented different disciplines (business, hard sciences, and social sciences). Additionally, the three samples included students from lower level classes (freshman and sophomore) and upper level classes (junior and senior).

Students in the three countries agreed on thirty-eight statements out of forty-five statements used in the study. However, they differed in their degree of agreements. Only one trait “is specific gender” was reported by all three samples as not important. On the other hand, there were thirty-seven traits were considered by students to be important to very important. Thus, it is vital for instructors to acquire and maintain such traits. These traits could be classified into 5 main categories: 1) traits related to instructor’s personality; 2) traits related to instructor’s communication skills; 3) traits related to instructor’s style of class management and evaluation process; 4) traits related to instructor’s qualification and credential; and 5) traits related to teaching style.

There were significant differences among students in the three countries with respect to the importance of traits that are related to instructor’s communication skills,
class management, instructor’s qualifications, and teaching style. American and Chilean students felt more strongly on the importance of having instructor with good record of publications. On the other hand, Jordanian students felt neutral about the same issue. With respect to class management and students performance process, while Chilean students felt that instructor should be an easy grader, American students and Jordanian students were neutral on this issue. With respect to teaching style, Chilean students felt that “assigning group projects” is important, while American and Jordanian students were neutral. American students and Chilean students believed that seeking feedback from students on the content of the course on the website and requesting students to report weekly on their progress in the class were important traits. On the other hand, Jordanian felt neutral about such traits. Regarding the class management traits, American and Chilean students felt that it is important for instructor to have a role of formal authority and role of delegator. On the other hand, Jordanian students felt that these roles were somewhat important. With respect to instructor communication skills, American students and Chilean students felt that it is important that instructor uses student name in the class, while Jordanian students felt neutral.

There were disagreements among students on the top five traits of effective instructors. While American and Jordanian students indicated that the most important trait was “Respectful of students”, Chilean students felt that “Good subject knowledge” was the most important trait. Students differed on the second most important trait, while American students identified “Approachable in and out class”, Jordanian students identified “Explaining course material clearly and concisely”, and Chilean students identified “Respectful of students”. The third most important traits that were identified by American students, Jordanian students, and Chilean students were “Clear class expectation”, “Approachable in and out class”, and “Explaining course material clearly and concisely”, respectively. While American students indicated “Good verbal communication” as the fourth most important trait, Jordanian students and Chilean students identified “Good subject knowledge” and “Current in his/her academic field”, respectively. The fifth most important traits that were identified by students were “Good subject knowledge” and “Explaining course material clearly and concisely” by American students, “Is courteous” by Jordanian students, and “Good verbal communication” by Chilean students. Despite the differences in students’ degree of agreements on traits of effective instructor, students agreed that to be respectful of students, approachable in and out the class, to explain course materials clearly and concisely, and to have good subject knowledge were the most important traits of effective instructor.

REFERENCES: