

COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIVERSITY-LEVEL WORK

Mary T. Curren, CSUN, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge, CA 91330-8377; (818) 677-2458

Joan Dahl, CSUN, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge, CA 91330-8377; (818) 677-2458

Brian van der Westhuizen, CSUN, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge, CA 91330-8377; (818) 677-2458

ABSTRACT

There has been much discussion at our college about the decline of student preparedness. There is no question that our entry-level students' skills have declined over the past twenty years. Nowadays, the majority of our university's entering freshmen do not pass the entry-level tests in Mathematics and English, which means that these students are not prepared for college-level work.

Ability is only part of the issue, however. Attitude is also crucial. A recent article by Paul Trout (1997) on this subject paints a portrait of a nation of college students who are not only "disengaged" from the learning process but are also well versed in consumerism. The result? A situation where students "expect satisfaction regardless of effort" (p. 50).

Trout suggests several actions that professors should take, with the first being to study the problem and ascertain what college students' attitudes are towards education. Our presentation will provide the results of our first two attempts to survey our business students about their attitudes towards college education.

Method for First Survey

One year ago, we surveyed 310 students who were enrolled in a new Introduction to Organizations course. This course was designed to be taken at the beginning of a business student's major course of study (after fulfillment of the general electives); thus, most students were juniors.

Students were asked to fill out a "Survey of Study Practices and Class Preferences," which was comprised of 31 statements about study practices and expectations. Students indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement by circling the appropriate number on a 7-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). Twenty seven of these statements were adapted from Pintrich and De Groot's (1990) Self-Efficacy, Intrinsic Value, and Self-Regulation scales. Students were also asked to provide us with some personal statistics:

major, current GPA, age, gender, and number of years worked.

Method for Second Survey

This year, we surveyed 387 students who were enrolled in either the Introduction to Business course or a new Introduction to Analysis course; consequently, 51 percent of the respondents were juniors and 47 percent were seniors.

Students were asked to fill out a survey, and they were informed that the results of the survey would be used to assist students with improving their study skills. They were assured that the questionnaire was anonymous, and were advised that their honest and complete responses would be appreciated.

Students were told to assume that the questions referred to an average course (not too difficult, not too easy) that met twice a week for a semester (30 class meetings) where the instructor did not take attendance. Students were asked several questions about what would be a reasonable effort on the part of a student who expected to earn an A, B, C, or D in the course. In particular, students were asked how many class meetings could be missed, how many hours a week one should study, how many days it would take to review for an exam, how many days should be spent preparing a 15-page paper, and how many times a five-member group should meet in a month to work on a semester-long project. Demographic data was also obtained.

REFERENCES

- Trout, Paul A. (1997). Disengaged Students and the Decline of Academic Standards. *Academic Questions*. Spring: 46-56.
- Pintrich, Paul R. and Elisabeth V. De Groot (1990). Motivational and Self-Regulated Learning Components of Classroom Academic Performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 82(1): 33-40.