

Student and Instructor Effects on Student Academic Performance in Selected Classes at East Georgia College

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In spring of 1996, East Georgia College conducted a survey of students who had completed selected classes to identify unique characteristics of the student population and to examine how student background characteristics, student study behavior, student use of instructional resources, student ability, and student motivation affected academic success. The survey proved to be beneficial both as a means of better understanding the unique characteristics of East Georgia College students and as an activity that encouraged student respondents to practice effective study habits.

Like most non-residential two-year colleges, East Georgia College attracts a diverse student population with varied levels of academic preparation. National studies of community colleges have found that the current college population is "more diverse than ever before, with differences apparent in several areas, including ability, academic preparation, age, maturity, social background, ethnicity, language, and psychological preparation for college" (Maxwell, M. 1994). In addition, community colleges are serving increasing numbers of underprepared students (Cohen, A. & Brawer, F. 1989).

The East Georgia College serves a unique group of rural commuting students. A large percentage of these students are non-traditional, married, and have full or part-time jobs. In addition, about 29% are developmental students. EGC faces the challenge of how to guide and teach students who are underprepared for traditional college studies.

The administration and faculty of East Georgia College have been seeking ways to improve the academic performance and graduation completion rates of its students. Since academic success is directly related to retention and degree completion, a Course Experience Survey was designed to examine how student background characteristics, student study behavior, student use of instructional resources, student ability, and student motivation affected academic success in selected courses. Administrators and faculty are using the data from this survey to better understand the unique characteristics of East Georgia College students and how those characteristics affect academic success. Implications for administrative policy and teaching strategies are also being examined.

Course Experience Surveys were sent to a saturated sample of 473 students who took college algebra, English composition, history, and sociology in the Fall of 1995 or the Winter of 1996. Individual questionnaire items were designed to be as closed-ended and objective as possible. In order to collect data on a wide range of student background characteristics, student study behavior, and student use of instructional resources. Open-ended questions were used to identify factors related to student motivation. Student ability was measured using data from student records including SAT scores and grade point average. The dependent variable, academic success, was operationalized as the grade earned for the course.

Demographic information including age, sex, race, marital status, and number of children was collected. Student background information included number of classes taken, number of credit hours taken, distance student must commute to attend EGC, hours per week student works, father's level of education, mother's level of education, number of serious family problems encountered during the quarter, and number of serious personal problems encountered during the quarter. Variables used to examine student study behavior included the completion of assigned reading prior to lectures, the completion of assigned reading prior to tests, request for help from the professor, request for help from peers, study with peers, note-taking during lectures, absence, tardiness, early departure from class, absence for tests, and number of hours of study per week conducted outside of class. Questions used to measure student use of instructional resources included "Did you buy all the textbooks for the course?," "Did you meet with the professor in his/her office for help with the class?," as well as questions addressing requests for help from the professor during class and requests for help from peers.

Variables used to assess student ability included SAT scores, GPA, difficulty of understanding the textbook, difficulty of understanding lectures, and difficulty of understanding the vocabulary used on tests. Information regarding SAT scores and GPA were collected from student files prior to questionnaire distribution. Individual questionnaires were numbered and student names were removed in order to preserve anonymity for the respondents.

The data are in the process of being analyzed. Univariate analysis was conducted for all variables including frequency distributions and measures of central tendency. Correlation and multiple regressions measures are being used to describe the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

This study enabled administrators and faculty to better understand the unique characteristics of East Georgia College students and how those characteristics affect academic success. The student participants were also directly benefitted by the study. Numerous students explained to researchers that the experience of completing the questionnaire and of hearing the findings discussed encouraged them to adopt positive study attitudes and study habits. Once the data analysis is complete, additional information about the findings may be obtained from Dr. John Black, Vice President for Academic Affairs, East Georgia College. •

References

- Maxwell, M. (1994). From access to success. Clearwater, FL: H. & H.
- Cohen, A. & Brawer, F. 1989. The American community college. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.