Fayetteville State University
DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University

Faculty Working Papers from the School of Education

School of Education

1-1-2005

Assessing the Academic, Personal and Social Experiences of Pre-College Students

Terence Hicks
Fayetteville State University, tlhicks@pvamu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/soe_faculty_wp

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Hicks, Terence, "Assessing the Academic, Personal and Social Experiences of Pre-College Students" (2005). *Faculty Working Papers from the School of Education.* Paper 7.
http://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/soe_faculty_wp/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Working Papers from the School of Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University. For more information, please contact mlawson@uncfsu.edu.

Assessing the Academic, Personal and Social Experiences of Pre-College Students

Hicks, Terence

Abstract:

This study examined the before-and-after effects of transitional summer programs at the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore, on pre-college students' perceptions, expectations, emotions, and knowledge about college. The study focused on academic, personal and social experiences, and how these changed throughout the course of the summer program. The participants (n=197) of this study were traditional, first-time, full-time pre-college students. The participants attended one of two six-week summer programs, the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program (LSAMP) or the Preparation and Adjustment for College Entrance Program (PACE). This study used a pre- and post-test, two-group comparison design with a quantitative component for collecting the data. This study found statistically significant differences among pre-college students, who participated in either a scholar's pre-college summer residential program (LSAMP) or in an at-risk pre-college summer residential program (PACE). The study also documented the impact of an intervention that focused on the academic achievement, study skills and the participation's perception of the academic, personal, and social aspects of attending college and their willingness to participate in an academic support intervention for pre-college students making that crucial transition to a postsecondary setting.

Introduction

Studies indicate that most researchers study college students in their first year of school for two reasons: the first year shapes subsequent persistence at the university, and the largest proportion of institution leaving occurs in the freshman year. The transition from high school to college is a time of great challenges and changes for the student. The Preparation and Adjustment for College Entrance (PACE) program staff's primary focus is measuring the effectiveness of the delivery of services provided to its students. If the effectiveness of the PACE program is to reflect an understanding of the academic, personal, and social difficulties that at-risk student's experience, then there is a need to identify any significant pre-post program changes in at-risk students' expectations for their first-year academic, personal and social experiences.

Fleck (2000) noted that progress has been made in identifying which students will struggle to perform adequately in college courses, and in predicting who will leave college before graduation. Hicks (2003) suggests that, because first-generation, pre-college students may be perceived as having different expectations, poorer academic and social preparation, greater financial constraints, lower self-esteem, and insufficient parental support, it would seem logical to suggest that they do not perform as well as other college students. Unfortunately, the ability to predict academic performance and retention sufficiently and accurately remains limited. According to Fleck, gaps exist in the research on the role that perceptions and expectations play in grades earned and in retention rates. Additionally, the lack of literature related to the academic, personal and

social performance, as well as retention of minority students, indicates that more research is needed.

Ultimately, being able to accurately predict which students are likely to experience academic, personal and social difficulties, or leave college before they graduate, would allow experts to design and implement interventions to help students earn satisfactory grades and persist until graduation. If unrealistic perceptions and expectations resulted, steps could be taken to challenge students to foster attitudes conducive to earning good grades, persisting and ultimately graduating.

Purpose of the Study

The transition from high school to college is a time of great challenges and changes students. This study describes students' expectations concerning their potential adaptation to college, and determines if participation in the pre-college programs alter students' perceptions and expectations about college, and, therefore, if the programs better prepare them for matriculation. Specifically, this study displays the effects of the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Program (LSAMP) and the Preparation and Adjustment for College Entrance (PACE) program on first-time, full-time students.

Method

Profile of Participants

The setting for this study was a four-year public research and doctoral degree-granting institution. The participants were first-time, pre-college freshmen between the ages of 17 and 19, and were primarily African American. Fifty-one percent of the sample was female. As previously mentioned, the participants attended one of two six-week summer programs, the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program (LSAMP) or the Preparation and Adjustment for College Entrance Program (PACE).

The LSAMP participants, defined as traditional, first-time freshman, were selected because of their record of outstanding performance in the areas of science and mathematics in high school. The LSAMP students selected had at least a 3.0 GPA and SAT scores of 900. Thirty-one percent of the students were first-generation. The PACE participants were first-time, pre-college freshman, who had applied for full-time admission to the university, but did not demonstrate all the criteria required for such admission, due to deficiencies in their high school achievement.

LSAMP students had the highest cumulative high school GPA for first- and non-first-generation students and the highest SAT scores for first- and non-first-generation students. The data show no statistically significant GPA differences between first- and non-first generation students within the PACE and LSAMP programs. When programs were combined, only the SAT scores showed a statistical significant difference between the two groups. (see Table 1 for breakdown.)

Instrumentation

The researcher obtained data from a PEEK questionnaire (Perceptions, Expectations, Emotions, and Knowledge about college questionnaire, developed by Weinstein, Palmer and Hanson (1995)) administered to 197 pre-college students who attended summer programs. The PEEK elicited the expectations that pre-college students had about their college experiences.

The researcher surveyed the students during the first and last weeks of their summer programs to see how their opinions changed after participating. The survey contained questions regarding the student's academic, personal, and social expectations of their anticipated attendance at a university.

The PEEK explores the expectations and beliefs about the college experience. Students use a five-point rating scale of one (not at all likely) to five (extremely likely) to indicate the extent to which they expected to experience 30 situations or circumstances in a college setting. The PEEK instrument yields information from the three scales of academic, personal and social expectations, each consisting of 10 items (see Table 2).

Procedures

The researcher administered the PEEK questionnaire to participants and conducted focus group sessions for the summer programs, during the welcome orientation. The researcher selected 15 well-rounded focus group participants, based on geographic location and collected demographic data. The focus groups included five participants per group-two groups from the PACE program and one from the LSAMP. The researcher administered the PEEK instrument after conducting the first focus group sessions and again during the last week of the summer program.

Results: Academic Expectations and Perceptions by Summer Program

Table 3 contains the pre- and post-test responses for each question, related to the academic expectations and perceptions by summer program. In comparing the programs, a significant difference was found for (item 1); My college grades same as high school grades. The PACE students' agreement increased, whereas the LSAMP students' agreement decreased. This implies a change for some participants in their perception of potential college grades being the same as those received in high school. Both groups showed decreases in their 'likely' responses to memorizing material (item 16). It appears as though the LSAMP students anticipated less memorization of course work than the PACE students. The LSAMP student responses, to talk to instructor (item 22) and understanding of material (item 28), had interesting patterns; toward the conclusion of the summer program, fewer LSAMP students expected to talk to their instructors and more students expected to have a better understanding of the material.

Regarding college instructors will be concerned (item 10), on the post-test, more LSAMP students felt that the instructors would be concerned about their well-being in their

classes, than on the pretest. The PACE and LSAMP students tended to have the same pre- and post-test perceptions about their instructor telling them about difficulty in their courses. More than half of these students felt that it was likely to some degree that their instructors would inform them of course difficulties. Perhaps this was true of the special honors sections of the LSAMP classes, but not the other classes in which they have enrolled. The LSAMP students also seemed to expect to have less trouble in their courses than what they may actually experience. Typically, the LSAMP classes are more rigorous than most. They are encouraged in their classes to interpret facts and take part in scholarly discussions in class.

Alternately, the PACE students are admitted to the university with the understanding that they are required to meet with an academic advisor and attend special sessions to assist in their academic pursuits. In this study, because the PACE students struggled academically, they expected to receive academic support from their instructors, counselors and tutors. When the PACE students met regularly, as a group, they agreed that they didn't feel alone in this endeavor. They felt that they had the support of one another and their academic advisor.

Both groups had misperceptions regarding their college instructor teaching them study skills (item 19). Pre- and post-test responses to this item showed that more than half of the PACE students expected, to some degree, that study skills likely would be taught. However, post-test responses for the LSAMP students showed that more than half did not expect that study skills would be taught. A number of myths exist about academically-talented college students; one is that these students do not have academic needs (Gerrity, Lawrence and Sedlacek, 1993). Another myth, identified by Myers and Pace (1986), is that students in honors programs are without problems. Gerrity, Lawrence and Sedlacek (1993) suggest that the needs and interests of academically-talented students are best served by coursework, and living and learning environments that are specially designed, differing from regular course offerings.

Personal Expectations and Perceptions by Summer Program

Table 4 contains the pre- and post-test responses for each question, related to the personal expectations and perceptions. The distributions of pre- and post-test responses were very similar for both programs; the response pattern from pre- to post-test changed very little. An increase in "quite likely" and "extremely likely" responses was found for the PACE students for item 26, I am worried that I won't make it through college and a significant difference was found for the post-test responses for item 14, There is nothing I will rather be doing than getting my college degree.

Social Expectations and Perceptions by Summer Program

Table 5 contains the preand post-test response for each question that was related to the social expectations and perceptions according to summer program. Item 27, students will have many different cultural backgrounds, had a significant difference found on the post-test. Furthermore, from inspection of the post-test distribution, it can be seen that the "not

at all likely" to "somewhat likely" end of the distribution may be driving this difference as the two groups have reverse patterns. Grouping "quite likely" and "extremely likely" responses together for the post-test produced similar results for PACE and LSAMP.

In general, the PACE and LSAMP students felt that college students would have many cultural backgrounds. This perception held by the pre-college students toward cultural awareness could be productive for a university. Multicultural events could take place on campus to assist in making the diversity of the campus more apparent. Students from various cultural backgrounds and American students could interact at different club or organizational meetings.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly suggested that summer programs for at-risk and low-income, minority students like the PACE, can help facilitate their transition and adjustment to college life and improve their persistence rates. Over the years PACE and LSAMP programs have proven that a strong curricular and counseling component can help teach students how to participate and succeed in an academic environment. The findings from this study indicate that the populations served by the two programs vary greatly. Some programs, such as the PACE, are specifically designed for target populations such as minority, low-income, disabled, or first-generation students. In addition, these programs serve students who do not have a high GPA average or SAT score. Other programs such as the LSAMP are developed for students within particular majors such as math and science. These summer programs tend to have a very different curriculum focused on introducing lab work, understanding what it means to work in the science and math area, familiarizing them with group and problem-based learning, and developing mentoring relationships.

Although it may be a good idea for all students, the structured summer program approach is particularly helpful for students considered at risk in a university setting. The summer program atmosphere is surrounded with positive early-academic components, such as initial course selection, intrusive advising, developmental instruction, study groups, tutoring, and labs. The evidence, from evaluation research, that summer bridge programs play an important role in increasing retention among college students especially at-risk students is solid.

Early-alert programs, such as the PACE and LSAMP, are ideal mechanisms for providing students with college-life information and for preparing them for college prior to enrolling. Pre-college summer programs allow the students to know and understand their cognitive abilities, academic skills and fullest potential, and what it takes to exceed on a college level. In general, summer program participants, who complete the freshman year, have considerably higher GPAs and introductory-course performance than other marginally admitted freshmen. Overall students who participate in the PACE or LSAMP program are well-prepared and tend to experience greater academic, personal and social success, and have higher retention and graduation rates than other first-time freshmen.

REFERENCES

Fleck, P. (2000). Expectations, academic performance, and retention of undergraduate engineering students (Doctoral Dissertation, Kent State University, 2000). Dissertation Abstracts International, 61(07), 2618A.

Gerrity, D., Lawrence, J., and Sedlacek, W. (1993). "Honors and nonborns freshmen: Demographics, attitudes, interests, and behaviors." National Association of College Admissions Directors and Counselors Journal, 13, 43-52.

Hicks, T. (2003). "First-Generation and Non-First-Generation Pre-College Students' Expectations and Perceptions about attending College," Journal of College Orientation and Transition, 11(1), 5-19.

Myers, C., and Pace, B. (1986). Counseling gifted and talented students. Journal of Counseling and Development, 64, 548-552.

Weinstein, C., Palmer, D., and Hanson, G. (1995). Perceptions, expectations, emotions and knowledge about college. Clearwater, FL: H&H.