

Purpose of Attending Columbus State University: A Factor of Success?



COLUMBUS
STATE
UNIVERSITY

Amanda Andrews and Jennifer L. Brown, PhD
College of Education and Health Professions
Columbus State University

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite decades of educational research in student persistence, the current rate of student retention for freshman college students is 73.3% for four-year public institutions (ACT, 2011). Early experiences in an undergraduate program largely determines students' persistence at a particular university. Success during this first year is crucial as students' success weighs heavily on their ability to integrate into the academic and social communities within the college setting.

The pre-enrollment expectations of undergraduate students have a major impact on whether those students will stay at or leave an institution (Tinto, 2006). Tinto believed the students who persisted at an institution had different reasons for attending compared to students who did not persist. Furthermore, Tinto found that institutional commitment factors, such as reasons for attending a specific institution, can influence whether students remain at the institution until graduation.

While this first year tends to be critical for future success, persistence and retention is a multifaceted problem. Academic success is influenced by many characteristics, including pre-college variables (e.g., reasons for attending college). Some of these reasons given for attending college tend to be more intrinsic while others tend to be more extrinsic.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to attend college on students' academic performance during their first year at a university in the southeastern region of the United States.

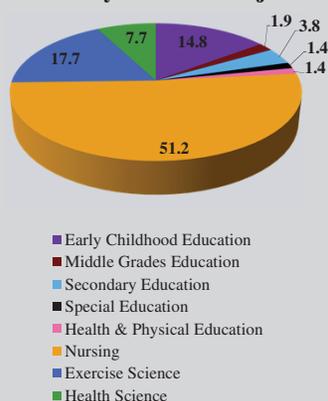
METHODS

The researchers conducted an exploratory observational study using pre-existing data from the *Freshman Orientation Survey* (Brown, 2012). The survey was given at the summer orientation sessions to incoming freshman who declared a major within the College. The survey data was merged with institutional research data (i.e., first-semester and first-year GPAs). The study included a sample of 209 participants who completed the survey in full.

Demographics



Initially Declared Majors



SURVEY ITEMS

1. What is your primary reason for attending Columbus State University (CSU)?
2. Rate the following items on a scale of 1 (Not Important) to 4 (Extremely Important) based on your decision to attend college. I want:
 - To prepare for a professional career
 - To get a better job
 - To learn more things that interest me
 - To become a more cultured and well-rounded individual
 - To make more money.
 - To please my parents and family.
 - To get more vocational training.
 - To gain knowledge

RESULTS

Using SPSS, a series of descriptive and frequency analyses were conducted. Then, a series of correlational analyses were conducted among the intrinsic and extrinsic variables and the participant's first-semester and first-year GPAs.

- A weak, negative relationship was found between a student attending college to make more money and the student's freshman year GPA ($r = -.140$), meaning students who attended college to earn more money tended to perform poorly.
- Attending for a specific degree program or faculty member had the lowest attrition with only one respondent leaving by the end of the first year, meaning individual faculty members or specific programs of study may be the key for unlocking the current retention puzzle.
- A larger percentage of participants (18.6%) who marked academic reputation of CSU as their primary reason for attending made less than a 3.0 first-year GPA while only 9.9% who gave the same reason made a 3.0 or higher GPA.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest there are broad reasons, both intrinsically and extrinsically for students attending college. The relationships between these reasons and freshman GPAs were weak, and most of them were negative among this sample. This research suggests that the effects of extrinsic motivation (i.e., to get a better job) had the greatest impact on academic performance among these participants.

If students are attending and succeeding most effectively because of their motivation to get a better job, institutions could focus on setting up, or promoting already established systems, to attract more students to attend for the same reason.

From this study, the researchers concluded that perhaps it was strictly the motivation of a student to succeed, rather than the reason behind their attending college, which propels them to success.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research is needed to determine the generalization of this research. First, a larger more diverse sample could assist in generalizing the data. The *Freshman Orientation Survey* will be administered during subsequent orientation sessions in order to continue the data collection process and expand the pool of participants. Second, future research could prove helpful by examining additional reasons individuals attend college and giving survey respondents the opportunity to specify the reason they choose "other" in their reason for attending.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Amanda Andrews
Andrews_Amanda5@columbusstate.edu

Dr. Jennifer L. Brown
brown_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu