

5-2008

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Recommended Citation

Thomas, Stefanie and Scaturro, Sarah (2008) "The Relationship of Work and Grades Among Undergraduate Students," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 7 , Article 7. Available at: https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/psych_journals/vol1/iss7/7

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The Relationship of Work and Grades Among Undergraduate Students

Stefanie Thomas and Sarah Scaturro

Full-time undergraduate students take a minimum of 12 credit hours per week and several of them also work part-time jobs outside of school. If an inverse relationship exists between grades and work, it could potentially affect students' choices. In the present study, 84 participants filled out a survey with questions pertaining to the subject of grades and work, in addition to other variables like sex and grade status. We found a fairly strong inverse relationship existed between a student's G.P.A. and the number of hours a student worked outside of school. We found a strong relationship exists between the total number of hours a student works (including an outside job and work and learn program hours) and a student's G.P.A.

Full-time college students take 12 or more credit hours of each semester, and typically have more than 12 hours of homework in one week. On average, that is at least 24 hours of workload within a seven day period. What if a student also works while managing a full-time student workload? Does having a job outside of the time that school requires have any relationship on a student's grades? Knowing whether or not there is a relationship between working and students' grade point averages can help influence students' decisions about employment while in college.

According to Curtis and Williams (2002), 83% of the full-time undergraduate students they surveyed believed that their part-time job had caused a distraction, to some extent, from their studies.

In Hawkins, Smith, Hawkins II and Grant's (2005) study, "the average number of hours worked and perceived work interference with studies were statistically significant negative predictors of self-reported overall G.P.A." In the same study, men's school work was more greatly affected by part-time employment more so than the women that also worked part-time (Hawkins, Smith, Hawkins II & Grant, 2005).

If students do choose to work part-time, there is little, if any support for them through universities. A majority of universities do not offer support such as late night computer labs, email set ups for students to turn in papers later, late night study groups for working students, etc. Class times and facilities are not always available for students to easily make time for both school and work. In addition, many university faculty members do not even consider that there is limited support for working students that are attending school full-time. Some schools offer work and learn programs, that allow students to take money off of their tuition by working at the school or university, but many times it is not enough money for the student to pay for school or other expenses. Sometimes the pay is not high enough and/or not enough working hours are provided (Curtis, 2005).

In two states, Maine and Washington, the government has already limited the number of hours kids in high school can work to 20 hours. In a study done by National Research Council (1998) it was found that kids who worked in high school were likely to have more absences and more likely to be involved with drugs than kids who didn't.

In a self-reported study involving 20,000 randomly questioned groups of high school students, Steinberg (1998) also found that twenty hours was the cut off before students' school work became greatly affected. It has also been reported that working the

first semester has the most adverse affect on grades, more so than any other semester in college (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to find out if the average amount of hours a student works per week is related to students' G.P.A. This study consisted of 84 participants from Lindenwood University's Human Subject Pool. The students were asked to report their work hours on a survey which was then compared to their G.P.A.

We hypothesized that there was an inverse relationship between the number of hours a participant works and his/her G.P.A. We based this hypothesis on the idea that it would be more difficult for a full-time student to find time to successfully maintain their G.P.A. and also be employed. A full-time student spends numerous hours in class as well as doing homework, and may have a difficult time finding the free time to work a part-time job. It may also be that students with a poor G.P.A. may work as a back up in case they do not graduate.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four individuals volunteered to participate in our experiment through the Human Subject Pool at Lindenwood University. All participants were undergraduate students at Lindenwood University. There were 43 females and 41 males that participated in the study. All of the participants attend Lindenwood University and received extra credit points in a psychology, anthropology, or sociology course they were enrolled in by taking part in this experiment. Of the 43 females and 41 males that participated, 58.3 percent were freshmen, 23.8 percent were sophomores, 9.5 percent

were juniors, and 8.3 percent seniors. All of the participants were undergraduate students at Lindenwood University.

The questionnaire asked participants if they had a job outside of going to school full-time. Of the 84 participants, data was collected from 83 because one participant's data was not completed. Thirty-three participants had a job outside of school. Of the 33 who had a job, the mean hours worked was 21.5, the median hours worked was 20, and the mode hours worked was 15. The minimum number of hours worked by participants was five and the maximum was 40. The majority of students who worked were unable to do homework at their job, as seen in Figure 1.

G.P.A. was collected from 83 participants. One participant was excluded because they did not complete the question about G.P.A. Of the 83, the mean G.P.A. was 3.06. The minimum reported was 1.8 and the maximum was 4.0.

Materials

Surveys pertaining to the hypothesis were provided. These surveys (see Appendix D) included questions about variables such as sex, class status, and whether or not they participate in a part-time job. Consent forms (see Appendix B) and feedback letters (see Appendix A) was also be provided. Ink pens, two chairs, and a table were used in the experiment. We were assigned lab room D and B in Young Hall 105 to conduct our experiment, through the Human Subject Pool. The computer program, SPSS, was used to calculate results.

Procedure

Each participant was first asked to read and sign an informed consent form giving us permission to conduct the survey. The participants also filled out the experimenter's

list of participants and their receipt from the Human Subject Pool that acknowledges the participant's professors that they have earned extra credit towards their course. Next, the participants were given a short survey pertaining to job information such as how many hours they work in a week and their G.P.A. This data was later collected from the questionnaires and was analyzed using SPSS. After the participants completed their survey, they were debriefed and allowed to ask any questions, given a feedback letter with our contact information, and then were released.

Results

We hypothesized that there is an inverse relationship between the number of hours a student works and his/her G.P.A. To test this hypothesis we used the data obtained from the 33 participants who reported working outside of school, and used Pearson's r correlation. A moderately strong inverse relationship was found between the variables of work and G.P.A., $r = -.268$

The participants were also asked if they participated in Work and Learn, which is an on-campus program that offers students the opportunity to learn through various jobs on the college campus. As seen in Figure 2, the majority of participants did report having a job on college campus.

The Pearson's r correlation was then used to determine whether there was an inverse correlation between the variable of total hours worked overall by participants and the variable of G.P.A. A moderately strong inverse relationship was found between the two variables, $r = -.219$.

Discussion

As predicted, participants who worked more hours at a job outside school, tended to have a lower G.P.A. When examining the 82 participants who reported having a job at school, outside of school or both, their G.P.A. was inversely related to the total amount of hours worked.

An explanation of these results could be that students who work more do not have as much time as students who do not work to concentrate on their studies. Students may work more by choice or may work more because they are in need of financial support to pay for school and/or necessities.

An alternate explanation is that students that work more do so by choice because they do not enjoy school as much as the do work. If a individual enjoys working more than school, this could also potentially affect their studies. The fact that students feel that school is not enjoyable could affect the effort they put into their school work causing a decline in G.P.A. and a raise in hours worked.

Problematic Variables

The study was held in lab room D and B, which was assigned to us through the Human Subject Pool. Both labs that we used turned out to have many sound disturbances. Not only did the air conditioner cause noise that distracted our participants, other experiments were being held at the same time causing distractions such as talking. These distractions could have caused our participants to become unfocused on his/her answers to the questionnaire.

This study supports the idea that an inverse relationship does exist among students' G.P.A. and the amount of hours they work at jobs. This could potentially be

important information for undergraduate students in that it can affect the choices they make pertaining to school studies and job choices.

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Figure 1.

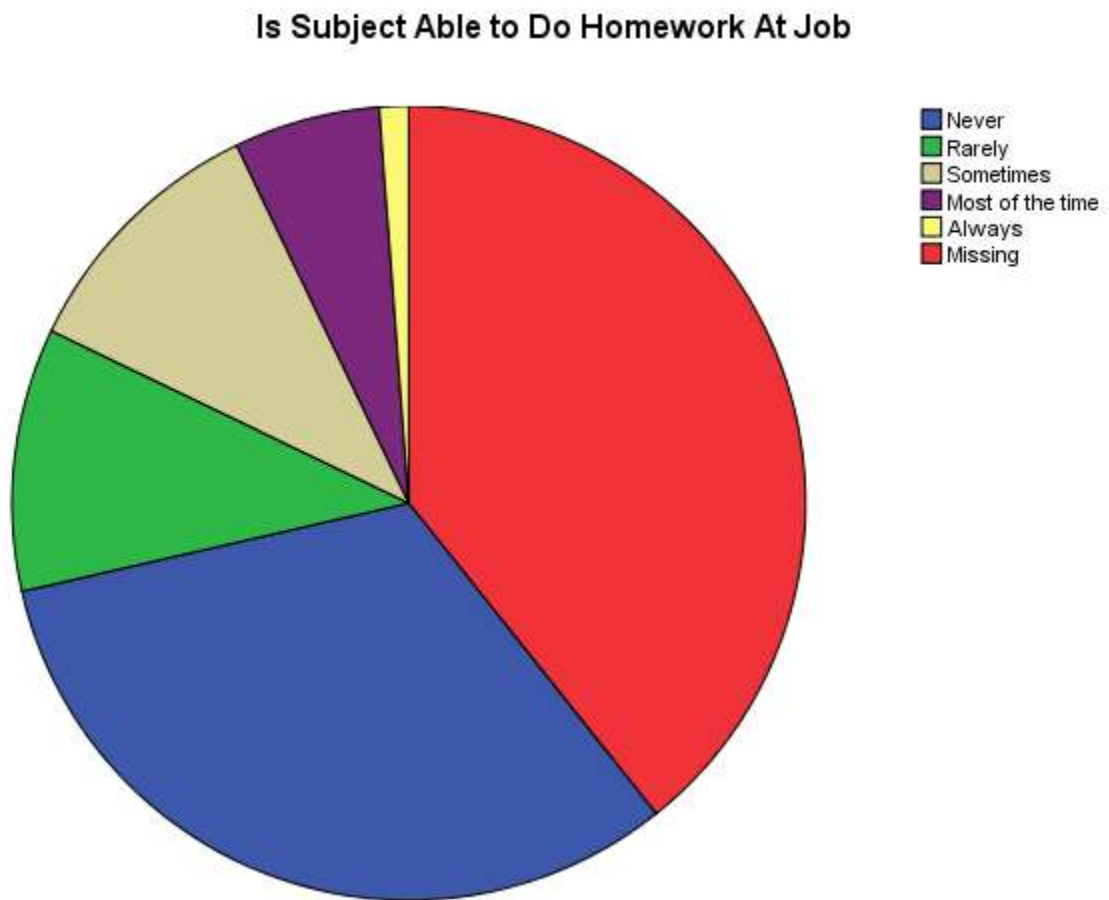
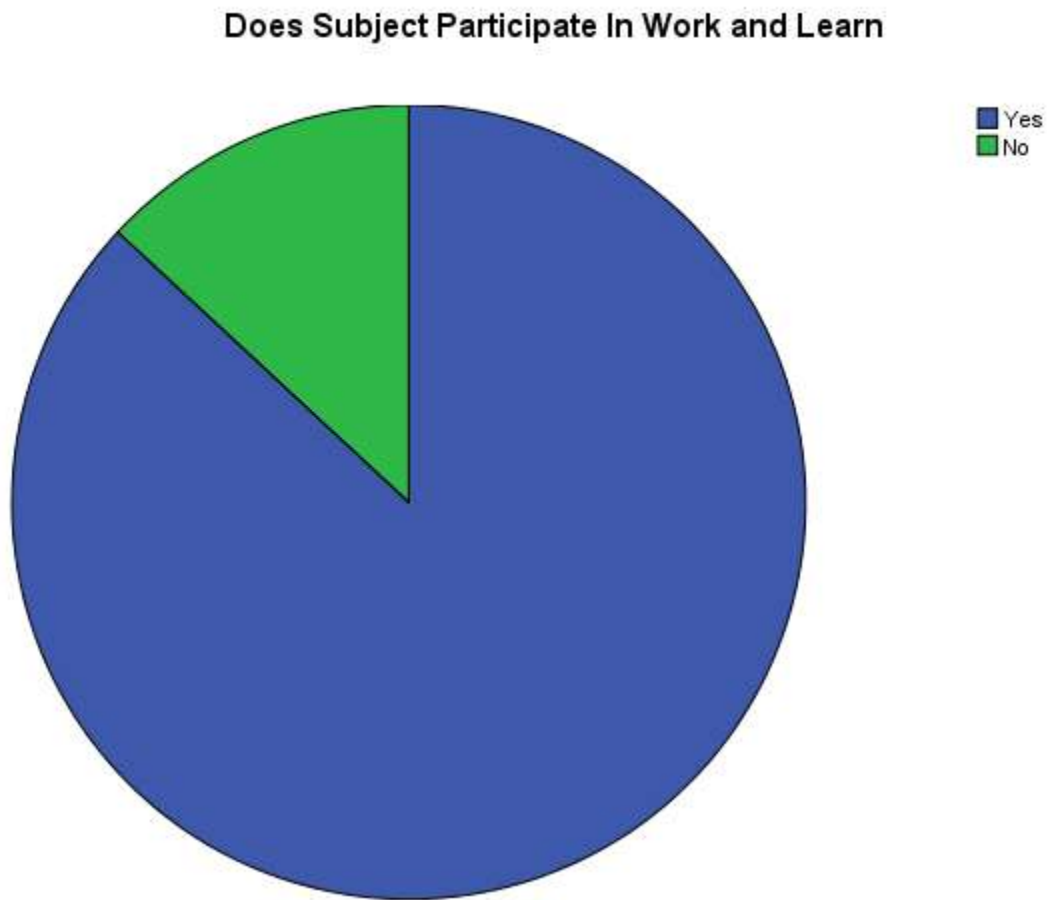


Figure 2.



Appendix A

Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in our study. The questionnaire was used in order to determine if the number of hours a student works each week has any relationship with the student's GPA. The questionnaire was conducted in order to determine students average number of hours worked per week and the GPA that the student earns.

Please note that we are not interested in your individual results; rather, we are only interested in the results of a large group of students, of which you are now a part of. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to bring them up now or in the future. Our contact information is found at the bottom of this letter. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of the findings of this study at a later date, please contact us and we will make it available to you at the completion of this project.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

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Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

I, _____ (print name), understand that I will be taking part in a research project that requires me to complete a short questionnaire asking about my current GPA and my employment. I understand that I should be able to complete this project within 5 minutes. I am aware that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I should not incur any penalty or prejudice because I cannot complete the study. I understand that the information obtained from my responses will be analyzed only as part of aggregate data and that all identifying information will be absent from the data in order to ensure anonymity. I am also aware that my responses will be kept confidential and that data obtained from this study will only be available for research and educational purposes. I understand that any questions I may have regarding this study shall be answered by the researcher(s) involved to my satisfaction. Finally, I verify that I am at least 18 years of age and am legally able to give consent or that I am under the age of 18 but have on file with the HSP office, a completed parental consent form that allows me to give consent as a minor.

Date: _____

(Signature of participant)

Date: _____

(Signature of researcher obtaining consent)

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Appendix C

Questionnaire

1. Male or Female

2. What is your class status? (please circle the one that applies to you below)

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

3. What is your current GPA? _____

4. Do you take part in the work and learn program at Lindenwood University? Yes or No

(if yes continue to question 5, if no then continue to 6)

5. Do you complete the 10 hours per week number? Yes or No

6. Do you have a job outside of school? Yes or No

(if yes then continue to 7, if no then questionnaire is complete)

7. How many hours a week do you work on average? _____

8. How often are you able to do homework at your job?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

Always

9. How does having a job affect your grades in school?