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Possible Undue Stress Factors on Graduating Seniors

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The purpose of this study is to determine whether the hypothesis of the experiment is true, which was to find if the student body thinks that a policy to which the graduating seniors must turn in all graded work two weeks before the final exam is fair. It also offers a chance for the student body to voice opinions or suggestions in an open and anonymous questionnaire format. Fifty students chose to partake in a questionnaire that included questions about the university's policy. They were divided into two groups: one group had twenty-three students [freshman and sophomores] of Human Subject Pool (HSP) students and additionally a small group of one-eighty class respondents; in the second group there were twenty-seven students that were upper-class students [juniors and seniors] from two three-hundred level classes. However, the results were not proven statistically significant as far as the wanting of a policy change between the groups. Nonetheless, the total results of the study added together did show a trend towards a policy change.

Universities will frequently change their policies in order to make things more efficient, more beneficial to students, or even to reduce cost. Making sure that the student's skills are always improving is a desire of most educational institutions (Luke, 2003). However, every once in awhile there is a change in policy that does not bode well with the student body. The main reason of the discord by students is the increased stress

on their part while seeing no actual benefit of the new policy. When this happens there could be two options in solving the predicament. One option is to have the university switch back to the original policy, while the other is to try to make it more accommodating by modifying the existing policy. Policies are changed by the universities when the student is directly affected like in student mobility (Pusser & Turner, 2004).

There have been studies on the well-being of the students regarding stress factors. For example, studies show that students under financial strain may be affected or result in serious implications in their health (Jessup, Herberts, & Solomon, 2005). The report found a correlation between the mental and the physical health of individuals, with the worsening of financial matters being consistently associated with deteriorating health. Although financial matters could be the upper tier in regards of stress factors, grades are very important to the student also. Thereby, it is causing increased stress to students when a threat comes against their grade point average (GPA). With the increased workload in a shorter amount of time, it is bound to cause interest in how well the students perform within all sectors (Hall & Thomas, 2004).

It is common for most students to wait till the last minute before doing an important paper or research project at the end of the semester. Secondly, just trying to squeeze enough time into a hectic schedule in order to complete the assignment will cause stress alone. Now imagine yourself as a graduating senior, and in every one of your classes, you have a paper due, and further to top it off, you have to have it done two weeks earlier than the other students in class. When universities change the curricula it

may require further changes in support issues (Whittle & Murdoch-Eaton, 2005). This results in the stress level for the senior to be magnified to a much higher degree. For students with a high GPA, who want to maintain it, or other students who are on the edge of failing a class, this is even more of a concern. Whether it's a goal of the student to graduate Magna Cum something or to just get their diploma, this is an unneeded stress that is added to the graduating senior. Hence, these feelings of concern do manifest amongst the graduating student body, but the voice of resistance is weak and disorganized.

What can one do about it? People could voice concerns with their professors and maybe even their departmental Dean. But let's face it; one student is not likely to change a university policy by oneself. However, if a study was performed and it had proven that the new policy is a significant concern within the student body, there may be a chance for a change in policy considered for future seniors.

It is possible to change university policies; one researcher used focus groups in order to solve a problem. By using a questionnaire to gather information it was found that deaf and disabled post-graduates were not sufficiently aware of the facilities and support services available at their university (Pearn, 2004). If the standards of using a questionnaire and using focus groups can affect university affairs, it surely can be done with the preexisting problems that the students are experiencing at Lindenwood University.

In a survey of Lindenwood University's Human Subject Pool (HSP) students, a group of one-eighty level class students, and two groups of three-hundred level class

students, the total population results showed that a slightly higher percentage did not favor the mentioned Lindenwood's University policy. My hypothesis therefore is that a significant amount of students will state that having graduating seniors complete their final course content before final exams is stressful and unfair.

The purpose was to determine that the hypothesis is in fact true and to offer a chance for the student body to voice their opinions or suggestions regarding the policy in an open format. Similarly, the rationale is to make it publicly known what the students of Lindenwood think of the Lindenwood policy by offering a format in which many students at one time can voice an opinion.

Method

Participants

The study's subjects was divided into three groups: The first group was Human Subject Pool (HSP) students who have volunteered for the study by signing up their name and picking a timeslot from the set times that fit their schedule by using a HSP sign up form (B) on the HSP board on the fourth floor of Young Hall of Science. These students from the HSP are typically first year students. Additional students were added to this group, but they came from a 180-level class that contains some sophomores and juniors. What's more this group was offered a full-sized snickers bar as gratitude for filling out a questionnaire when it was turned in. The second group of students is volunteers from two 300-level classes that agreed to take part of my survey. There was no compensation for this group. The total number of subjects that participated was 50; 27 from 300-level students and 23 from a combination of the HSP and 180-level courses.

Procedure

There were two groups surveyed in this experiment. Group one participants began their portion of the study by choosing a scheduled time on the HSP board. These appointments were set by HSP students who have volunteered for the study by signing their name and picking a timeslot that was made available by the experimenter. The times were on the corkboard that contains the HSP sign up sheet (B) which is beneath the recruitment letter. Upon arranging the set appointments, the HSP student was welcomed and given a consent letter explaining the purpose of the study. It required a signature verifying that the student understands the content of the letter, and it was also required that the student's initials confirmed their age of 18 years or older. Again, it was stressed at this point in time that all personal identifying information was to be held confidential. The experimenter then asked if the student was aware of the policy regarding the last semester of graduating seniors. If the student was not familiar with the policy, the policy was explained to the student in a flat and unbiased manner. However, if it was understood the student continued with the questionnaire (Appendix A). Next, the student was asked a series of nine questions regarding the Lindenwood policy change regarding that the graduating seniors complete all their grades two weeks before final exams of their last semester. The researcher made sure that the student was aware that the student could ask any questions regarding clarity or definition. After eight questions had been answered, the survey asked if the student had an opinion of a different policy and if so inclined would they write it down on the questionnaire form in the space provided. After the questionnaire was completed, the researcher personally thanked the interviewee for

his/her efforts and handed the student a feedback letter, the extra credit form and a copy of the consent form regarding the purpose of the study, he/she was then dismissed. At the end of each interview the response papers were coded so that all personal identifying information was not available when the analyses were computed. Additionally, there was a one-eighty-level class at Lindenwood that was included in this group due to the lower class type population. This group was given an incentive of a snickers candy bar for their participation in the study. The mass handout was performed like the second groups handout mentioned below.

The second group was administered the survey by a mass handout of questionnaires in two three-hundred-level classes. The professors' approval was given before the presentation of the questionnaires. At the end of class the experimenter asked for the help in completing a survey for a research project (Appendix B). Every student that wanted to take the survey was given one. It was made clear that each student was given a choice on whether or not to take the survey. This was the same questionnaire as mentioned above. The questionnaire, when it was handed out was stapled to a consent form for the students to read, sign, and initial, just like the previous group had to go through. The researcher also made it clear that the questionnaires would be collected at the beginning of the next class. As they were turned in, I handed out their copy of the signed consent form and also a feedback letter to all those who turned in a questionnaire.

Results

Even though 65% of the respondents rated the increased stress because of the time constraints in the middle-high range to very-high range, my hypothesis was not proven to be significant between the groups of students. However, an optimistic view could be seen by the showing that the percentage rates are in favor of the hypothesis, with 56% of the respondents agreeing that the policy was not fair. Nevertheless, two significant matters were found during the analysis. One was in the question, "Do you want to be able to show off your diploma with your name in it to family and friends on graduation day?" there was a 90/10 split in responses, with the favor going to students wanting to show the diploma with their name on it. What's more, this is one of the main reasons why the policy got changed to begin with. The other question proven significant, "Do you feel that if you have completed your grades before the semester ends as a graduating senior that you should have to attend the remaining classes of course in the semester?" had the same response rate, a 90/10 split, in favor of not having to attend classes after grades were turned in. The other yes or no questions that were in the questionnaire, regarding if the school's policy was fair and whether one felt that there would be an effect on their GPA in a shorten semester, were approaching a higher percentage difference. The percentages were identical on both questions with about a 60/40 split. The responses showed opinions against the policy and also belief in increased stress levels regarding their GPA. Interestingly, there was a high percentage rate of students that do not prefer a later graduation date; seventy percent of students thought it was mid-range high or very-high in inconvenience.

Discussion

It seems that the upper-class students were more inclined to think that the new policy was not fair, while the freshman were split about even with half of them thinking that it was fair and the other half thinking it wasn't. My original thought before the experiment was that the lower class students (freshman and sophomores) would not be aware of the hectic schedules or in fact realize the stress of a shortened semester as the upper-class students that were closer to graduation would. However, the difference between the groups was insignificant. There were a couple of reasons in which the snickers bar was made an incentive to the one-eighty class students and not the three-hundred level classes. One being the cost to the experimenter, and secondly, the experimenter expected more of a showing from the classes due to the nature that they were psychology classes and that they would be more sympathetic to the cause of the act of running an experiment. The cause may have been twofold, as the students were also in fact seniors about ready to graduate. There also were a few concerns regarding the comments made at the end of the survey. One was the lack of comments there was only nine comments made, and they did not offer any real substantial offerings of change. Many were reiterating the proposal that seniors should not have to attend classes after grades were turned in. Two participants stressed that the professors were under an equal amount of strain and also felt the pinch at the end of the semester. The best suggestion was that there should be more surveys in order to understand the true nature of the student body.

Another suggestion offered was a new question on just how much stress would be enough before the new policy is not worth it. Keep in mind the survey that I have completed, with the fifty people tested, was only one percent of Lindenwood's student population. This can not reflect, as a whole, the student body's opinion. However it may be a start for a bigger survey in the future.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

1). Do you feel like the Lindenwood University policy that graduating seniors must complete their grades before a final exam on their final semester in order to graduate is fair?

Yes _____

No _____

2). If you were or are a graduating senior, on a scale of 1 to 6 (1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest) how would you rate the anticipated stress/pressure on completing grades before final exams?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

3). If a policy change meant an inconvenience to you such as getting an authentic diploma with your name on it, how would you rate the inconvenience on a scale of 1 to 6 (1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest).

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

4). If a policy change meant an inconvenience such as a later graduating date, how would you rate the inconvenience on a scale of 1 to 6 (1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest).

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

5). Do you feel that if you have completed your grades before the semester ends as a graduating senior, that you should have to attend the remaining classes of courses in the semester?

Yes _____

No _____

6). Do you feel that your overall grade point average (GPA) would be effected by the shortened semester and the early completion of graded work for the graduating seniors?

Yes _____

No _____

7). How much, if any, concern would you have regarding your overall GPA by this policy on early grade completion? Label the amount of concern on a scale of 1 to 6 (1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest).

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

8). Do you want to be able to show off your diploma with your name in it to family and friends on graduation day?

Yes _____

No _____

9). Are there any not concerns regarding this policy or a suggestion for a new policy that you would like to contribute towards this study? (Your opinion and suggestion are completely anonymous and your name will be held confidential and no identifying information will be disclosed)

Appendix B

Dialogue

Hello my name is Steven Hahne; I'm doing an experiment in Research Methods.

Basically it is a questionnaire/opinion poll that should not take more than 5 to 10 minutes to complete. I'm doing this to try and get a little more feedback from the upper-class people. There is no pressure to do this, nor is there any reward to do it, like grades or extra credit. It is regarding a Lindenwood policy on graduating seniors. If you do complete the survey, your names will be held in the strictest of confidence and all opinions will be anonymous. If there are any questions please feel free to ask either now or before you return them at your next class. I will be in the hallway collecting them before class.