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Title: The Effect of Living Arrangements on Undergraduate Academic Performance

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between students' academic performance and living arrangements among a sample of students attending the City College of New York, as both residents living on-campus and commuters living off-campus have advantages and disadvantages that come with their living arrangements. An anonymous survey was created through Google Forms asking about the details of one's living situation (on-campus resident or commuter) as well as their academic profile, such as their study schedule and GPA. The survey was shared among classmates, peers, and friends within the City College community to gather information. Residents living on-campus had an average GPA of 3.60, while commuters had an average GPA of 3.44. A larger percentage of on-campus residents reported more engagement with the campus community as well as more time spent studying in an accessible, quiet environment. On-campus residents had a higher average GPA, with a larger percentage of them being able to invest more time into sleep and studying compared to commuters, suggesting that living within the school environment provides more opportunities to study, engage, and do well in class.

Introduction

One of the key decisions that many students face during the transition from high school to college is choosing whether to dorm or commute to school. A student's residential status and living arrangements may present them with either challenges or opportunities that influence their engagement in college and, subsequently, their academic achievements. While students who commute save thousands of dollars, they are often not able to fully utilize on-campus services, lose added hours of sleep from the commute time, and need to study in a crowded or loud household. On the other hand, students who live on campus sometimes have to deal with difficult roommates, which can affect their study and sleep schedule, as well as their mental wellbeing.

How does a student's living arrangements affect their academic performance? This study aims to more clearly define the relationship between the social and physical aspects of a college student's living environment and their success in the classroom, a topic that has not been very well researched. Simpson and Burnett (2017) conducted a similar study using archival data, and found that from their sample of students in a Southeastern university in the United States, the group of students commuting to school had a higher grade point average (GPA) than students who were living on campus. However, as the Simpson & Burnett study was limited to a population of students from one institution, in one specific geographic location, the commuting methods and living situations of students in the City College of New York that this study evaluates may be different. Because college students who commute have fewer opportunities to engage with the school community and need to designate time to travel to school, we hypothesize that commuter students will have a lower academic performance than students who live on campus.

Methods

In this study, an anonymous, self-administered survey was made in order to measure the influence on one's living circumstances on academic performance. Some categories used to examine this were use of transportation, studying areas and sharing living spaces with others. The overall target demographic was current undergraduate students in the City College of New York with any major, in any year. The survey was sent out to undergraduate students attending the college both within and out of the bounds of the Writing for the Sciences class (n = 48). Some demographic questions are asked about the year of study, major, and ethnicity. Other questions include the length of one's commute, how many people live with the respondents whether at home or on campus, and the amount of sleep they get. The respondents were mostly already acquainted people who either commuted to campus or lived in the dorms. The responses were collected after a week, then the graphs and charts already provided through Google Forms were analyzed and formatted into charts in Google Sheets. Some responses, such as the question about one's major, were open ended and thus needed to be interpreted on a qualitative basis when viewing the results.

Results

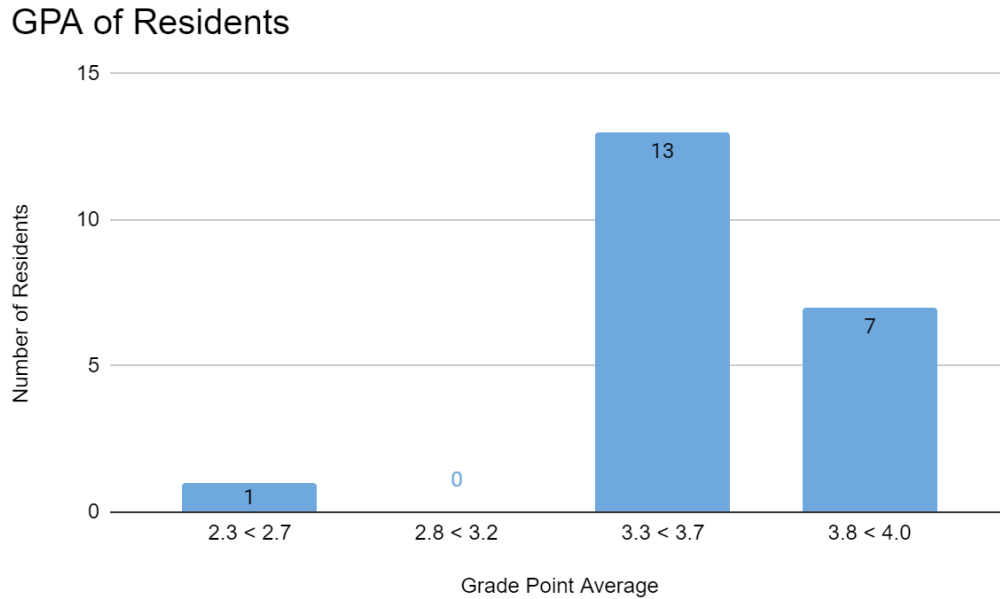


Figure 1. The number of residents with grade point averages from $2.3 < 2.7$, $2.8 < 3.2$, $3.3 < 3.7$, and $3.8 < 4.0$ ($n = 21$). Majority of the residents reported GPAs 3.3 and higher.

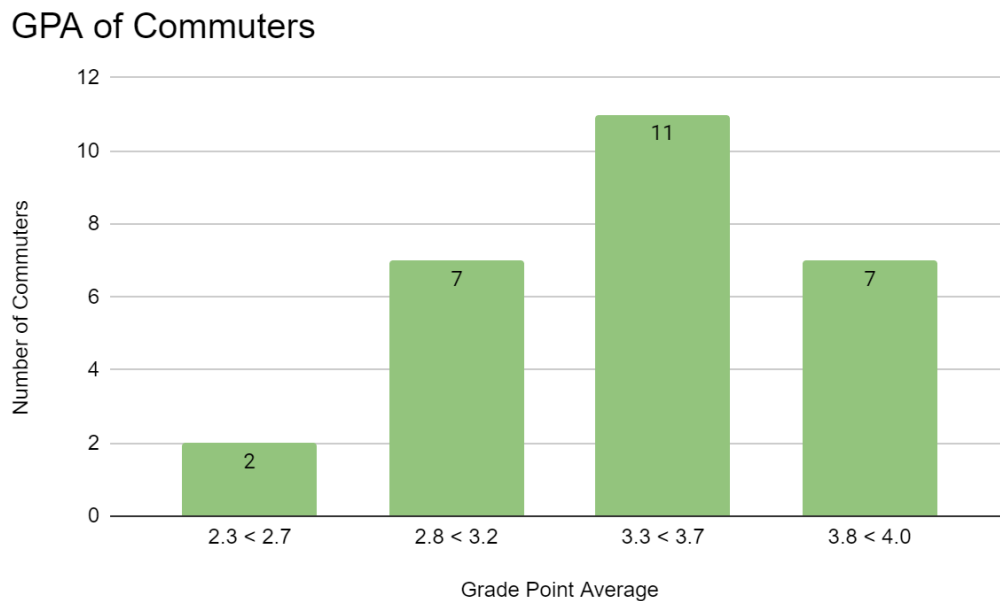


Figure 2. The number of commuter students with grade point averages from $2.3 < 2.7$, $2.8 < 3.2$, $3.3 < 3.7$, and $3.8 < 4.0$ ($n = 27$). A greater number of participants from the commuter sample reported GPAs of 3.2 and below compared to the resident sample.

A total of 48 responses were analyzed. The participants' living situations were categorized as either on-campus residents or commuters. Out of the 48 responses, 21 (43.7%) students lived on-campus, while 27 (56.3%) were commuters.

A majority of the on-campus residents reported having a quiet and proper place to study (86%), with 54% of them studying for at least 10 hours per week. On the other hand, 73% of commuters also reported having a quiet and proper place to study, with 44% of them studying for at least 10 hours per week.

The average GPA for on-campus residents was 3.60, while off-campus residents had an average GPA of 3.44. On average, on-campus residents reported studying for 10.68 hours per week, whereas commuters reported 8.94 hours per week. The group of on-campus residents reported an average of 6.27 hours of sleep per day, while an average of 6.52 hours of sleep daily was reported for the group of commuters.

Only 32% of commuters reported having enough time to be involved in the campus community, while 44% of on-campus residents reported the same. Additionally, 50% of on-campus residents were satisfied with their study schedule, while 61% of commuters reported satisfaction with their study schedule.

Discussion

This study aims to evaluate the relationship between the social and physical aspects of a college student's living environment and their academic success at City College. Our hypothesis was that students who live on campus and have immediate access to school services as well as a comfortable and appropriate environment where they can study have higher grade point averages than students who commute to school. We investigated whether this hypothesis was true within a

sample of students in City College by collecting data through an anonymous questionnaire about the studying, sleeping, and academic performance patterns of those who commute and those who live in dorms. Our results indicate that on-campus residents had a higher average GPA and reported more weekly study hours compared to off-campus residents, suggesting a positive relationship between living within the school environment and having sufficient time to prepare and do well in class. However, off-campus residents reported slightly higher satisfaction with their study schedule, which brings up the possibility that students who are required to shape their commuting time into their schedule have more developed and efficient time management skills.

Our study had some limitations that may have influenced our results. One limitation is that the survey we designed to collect information was only disseminated to a small sample of students within City College, most of whom were our acquaintances and friends pursuing a similar major or with similar educational backgrounds. A larger number as well as a greater variety in the sample of students surveyed would have provided a stronger basis for more accurate results. Another limitation is that there are a lot of additional factors that affect both a student's performance in school and their engagement with the community that our survey did not control for, such as family circumstances, number of credits, whether the student is working, and socioeconomic status. Lastly, GPA was the main tool we used as a measurement for academic success, but there are many other aspects that define one's academic performance that our questionnaire did not cover. Further research is needed to determine the underlying factors behind these differences and to explore ways to improve the academic performance and well-being of both on-campus and off-campus college students.

References

1. Simpson DB, Burnett D. 2017. Commuters Versus Residents: The Effects of Living Arrangement and Student Engagement on Academic Performance. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. 21(3):286–304.
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