

# How Hard Do I Have to Work? Student and Faculty Expectations Regarding University Work

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Researchers have examined a variety of factors influencing student performance. For instance, O'Toole, Spinelli, and Wetzel (2000) found that student-faculty interactions are important to student learning. Students viewed instructors as the most important component in their learning process. The role of the student (in terms of factors such as preparation, time, and effort) was not included among the 23 items that O'Toole et al. measured in their examination of important learning dimensions in business courses.

Although Schuman, Walsh, Olson, and Etheridge (1985), in their decade-long investigation, were not able to support the hypothesis that effort influences grades, Michaels and Miethe (1989) did find that students' academic effort was rewarded by higher grades. Young, Klemz, and Murphy (2003) showed that effort, time spent studying, and ability to apply knowledge influence learning performance. They suggested that students' performance can be improved if they have clear expectations for time commitments.

Do students realize the importance of their own activities in the learning process? Trout (1997) painted a portrait of a nation of college students who are not only disengaged from the learning process but are also well versed in consumerism. The result is a situation in which students "expect satisfaction

**ABSTRACT.** In this study, the authors examined student and faculty expectations regarding college student course work behaviors. Three hundred and eighty-seven students and 52 faculty members from the same university completed surveys designed to measure their perceptions of the amount of student effort required to earn an A, B, C, or D letter grade. Findings show that students and faculty members generally agreed on how hard students have to work in an academic environment. The authors discuss some gender differences in students' expectations.

regardless of effort" (p. 50). Although Trout suggested several actions that professors should take, he emphasized that researchers should study the problem and ascertain what college students' attitudes are toward education.

Our purpose in this study was to examine students' perceptions of college work required for certain grades. As a point of comparison, we also examined faculty members' perceptions.

## Method

### *Participants*

*Students.* Our survey respondents were business majors enrolled in the core courses Introduction to Organizations or Business Analysis at a public West Coast campus of over 30,000 students. A total of 387 students (51% men and 49% women, 51% juniors and 47% seniors,

with an average age of 25 years) completed the survey. Respondents' average self-reported GPA was 2.77, and the average number of years spent working on a college degree was 4.01. The men reported working "at a job" more hours per week ( $M = 24.74$  hours) than did the women ( $M = 20.72$  hours).

*Faculty members.* We asked faculty members teaching in the business college at the same university to complete a similar anonymous survey. We gave the survey to 110 faculty members, and 52 responded. The sample represented a cross-section of divisions within the college. Of the 52 faculty respondents, 2 refused to identify gender. Of the remaining 50 respondents, 36 were men and 14 were women. Forty-four of these respondents were full-time faculty members, 7 were part-time faculty members, and 1 did not indicate either full- or part-time status. Thirty-five of the faculty respondents were full professors, 4 were associate professors, and 7 were assistant professors. Four of the respondents were lecturers, and 1 respondent answered "other." Thirty-seven respondents were tenured, and 14 were not. One respondent declined to state tenure status.

### *Procedure*

We asked students and faculty mem-

bers to complete an anonymous survey concerning their beliefs on expected student behavior in a hypothetical average course that was “not too easy and not too difficult,” that met twice a week for a semester, and in which attendance was not taken by the instructor. They were informed that we would use the results of the survey to assist students with improving their study skills.

The brief two-page survey consisted of five items pertaining to expected academic behavior, three items on personal beliefs about school and grades, and eight demographic items. For the first item dealing with expected academic behavior, students and faculty members wrote their responses to the following question: “How many class meetings, if any, do you think a student could miss and still reasonably expect to earn an A?, a B?, a C?, a D?” (see Table 1). The other four questions in this section were framed similarly and sought respondents’ perceptions on (a) how many hours per week a student should study to earn each particular grade, (b) how many days in advance of an exam a stu-

dent should begin reviewing to earn each particular grade, (c) how many days in advance of the due date a student should begin to work on a 15-page term paper to earn each particular grade, and (d) how many times a month a group of students should meet for a required semester-long group project to earn each particular grade.

On the three items pertaining to beliefs about school and grades, we asked students and faculty members to indicate, on a scale ranging from 1 (*always true*) to 7 (*always false*), the verity of the following statements: (a) “Grades in a course are based on student performance,” (b) “School demands are more important than job demands,” and (c) “School demands are more important than personal demands.”

The student demographic items included questions concerning gender, age, class standing, major, years spent working on a college degree, status (transfer student or native), average number of hours per week at work, and GPA. The faculty demographic items included questions concerning gender,

department, years teaching, full-time/part-time status, current rank, and tenure status.

## Results

To examine students’ perceptions of effort required to obtain different letter grades, we analyzed data with a series of  $2 \times 4$  repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). We used Gender (male vs. female) as the between-subjects factor and Grade Objective (A vs. B vs. C vs. D) as the within-subjects repeated factor. We performed post hoc means comparisons of any significant Gender effects with simple univariate ANOVAs of Gender on each Grade Objective level. In Table 1, we present the means of gender differences within the student responses on beliefs about effort required to attain specific course grades.

### *Students’ Beliefs About Effort and Grades*

*How many class meetings do you think a student could miss?* The  $2 \times 4$  ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of Gender,  $F(1, 379) = 13.32, p = .000$ ; a significant Grade Objective main effect,  $F(3, 1137) = 331.01, p = .000$ ; and a marginally significant interaction effect,  $F(3, 1137) = 2.15, p = .092$ . Post hoc comparisons showed that, compared with female students, male students believed that a student could miss more class meetings and still obtain each respective grade in the course.

*How many hours per week should a student study?* The  $2 \times 4$  ANOVA resulted in a significant Grade Objective main effect on responses to how many hours per week a student should study,  $F(3, 1137) = 145.04, p = .000$ . No other effects were statistically significant,  $ps > .05$ .

*How many days in advance of an exam should a student begin to review?* We found a significant Grade Objective main effect regarding the number of days that students felt that they should begin to review in advance for an exam,  $F(3, 1137) = 215.18, p = .000$ . In addition, the Gender main effect was significant,  $F(1, 379) = 5.13, p = .024$ . Post hoc compar-

**TABLE 1. Mean Student Responses for Beliefs Regarding Effort Required to Earn Grades, by Gender**

Question	Grade	Men	Women
No. of classes that student can miss and still expect to earn this grade	A	2.35	1.50**
	B	3.86	2.73**
	C	5.45	4.13***
	D	7.89	6.21**
No. of hours per week a student should study to earn this grade	A	10.52	11.39
	B	8.27	9.70
	C	6.07	6.35
	D	3.93	4.20
No. of weeks that students should start studying in advance for an exam to earn this grade	A	7.92	9.18 <sup>ms</sup>
	B	5.26	6.54*
	C	3.05	4.20**
	D	1.78	2.45
No. of days that students should start working on a paper in advance of due date to earn this grade	A	26.78	26.98
	B	18.49	19.16
	C	11.19	12.35
	D	5.63	7.24
No. of times that team members should meet per month to earn this grade	A	5.90	5.99
	B	4.23	4.42
	C	2.83	3.02
	D	1.73	1.77

*Note.* Significance indicated for the post hoc comparisons between men’s and women’s responses. Superscript *ms* stands for marginally significant,  $p < .1$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

isons showed that the women thought that a student should spend more days reviewing for an exam to obtain each respective grade than the men did. No other effects were significant.

*How many days in advance of the due date should a student start work on a paper?* We found a significant Grade Objective main effect regarding the number of days that a student should work on a paper in advance of the due date,  $F(3, 1146) = 620.80, p = .000$ . No other effects were significant.

*How many times a month should the group members meet?* Results revealed a significant Grade Objective main effect pertaining to the number of times that the group members should meet per month,  $F(1, 1146) = 868.78, p = .000$ . No other effects were significant.

#### *Differences Between Faculty Members and Students Regarding Effort and Grades*

To examine the effect of status (faculty vs. student) on perceptions regarding effort needed for obtaining specific grades, we ran a series of  $2 \times 4$  repeated measures ANOVAs with Status as the between-subjects factor and Grade Objective as the within-subjects repeated factor. We used simple univariate ANOVAs of Status on each Grade Objective level to do post hoc means comparisons of any significant Status effects. In Table 2, we present the mean responses for student and faculty beliefs about effort required for earning specific course grades.

*How many class meetings do you think a student could miss?* All Status effects on this variable were statistically insignificant. Students and faculty members essentially agreed on how many classes can be missed for different grade objectives. The Grade Objective main effect was significant,  $F(3, 1287) = 174.24, p = .000$ .

*How many hours per week should a student study?* In general, students thought that they needed to study more hours per week than did faculty members,  $F(1, 430) = 6.80, p = .009$ . The main

**TABLE 2. Mean Student and Faculty Responses for Beliefs Regarding Effort Required to Earn Specific Grades**

Question	Grade	Students	Faculty members
No. of classes that student can miss and still expect to earn this grade	A	1.93	2.16
	B	3.30	3.57
	C	4.79	5.43
	D	7.10	7.84
No. of hours per week a student should study to earn this grade	A	10.92	7.59**
	B	8.95	5.76*
	C	6.21	3.94*
	D	4.03	2.41 <sup>ms</sup>
No. of weeks that students should start studying in advance for an exam to earn this grade	A	8.55	8.33
	B	5.89	5.78
	C	3.61	3.36
	D	2.12	1.79
No. of days that students should start working on a paper in advance of due date to earn this grade	A	26.90	30.10
	B	18.75	22.00 <sup>ms</sup>
	C	11.73	15.56*
	D	6.41	8.66
No. of times that team members should meet per month to earn this grade	A	5.93	4.80*
	B	4.32	3.90
	C	2.92	2.60
	D	1.75	1.66

*Note.* Significance indicated for the comparison between student and faculty means. Superscript *ms* stands for marginally significant,  $p < .1$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

effect of Grade Objective on the number of hours that a student should study per week was also significant,  $F(3, 1290) = 54.05, p = .000$ . No other effects were significant.

*How many days in advance of an exam should a student begin to review?* All Status effects on this variable were statistically insignificant. Faculty members and students essentially agreed on the number of days that a student should begin studying in advance for an exam. The Grade Objective main effect was significant,  $F(3, 1296) = 112.12, p = .000$ .

*How many days in advance of the due date should a student start work on a term paper?* The main effect of Grade Objective on the number of days that a student should start work on a term paper in advance was significant,  $F(3, 1296) = 296.36, p = .000$ . In addition, the main effect of Status was marginally significant,  $F(1, 432) = 3.53, p = .061$ . Post hoc comparisons showed (a) a significant difference between faculty members and students regarding the number of days

that a student should begin work on a paper in advance to earn a C and (b) a marginally significant difference regarding the corresponding number of days necessary for earning a B. No other effects were statistically significant.

*How many times a month should the group members meet?* We found a significant Status  $\times$  Grade Objective interaction,  $F(3, 1275) = 5.427, p = .001$  and a Grade Objective main effect,  $F(3, 1275) = 272.73, p = .000$ . Post hoc comparisons showed that faculty members and students essentially agreed on the number of times that group members should meet per month to earn a D, a C, and a B. They differed, however, in the number of meetings needed for earning an A.

#### *Beliefs About School and Grades*

In Table 3, we provide the student and faculty mean responses relating to agreement with the three statements about the grade–effort relationship and about the importance of school demands versus job and personal

**TABLE 3. Faculty and Student Mean Ratings of Agreement With Statements About School and Grades**

Statement	Students	Faculty members
Grades are based on student performance.	1.87	1.30***
School demands are more important than job demands.	2.34	2.78*
School demands are more important than personal demands.	2.76	3.22*

Note. Respondents rated their agreement with statements on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*always true*) to 7 (*always false*). Significance indicated for the comparison between student and faculty means. \* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

demands. We evaluated each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (*always true*) to 7 (*always false*). We used simple univariate ANOVAs of Status to compare the faculty and student means.

Compared with students, faculty members were more likely to agree that grades in a course are based on student performance,  $F(1, 435) = 23.38, p = .000$ . Compared with faculty members, students were more likely to agree that school demands are more important than job demands,  $F(1, 435) = 5.11, p = .024$ . Finally, students also were more inclined to agree that school demands are more important than personal demands,  $F(1, 435) = 4.43, p = .036$ .

### Summary and Conclusions

In general, students and faculty members share perceptions regarding how hard students have to work in an academic environment. In contrast with Trout's (1997) perception that students

"expect satisfaction regardless of effort" (p. 50), students in our study believed that more effort (e.g., study time, frequency of meetings, and preparation for papers) is required to earn higher grades. Surprisingly, the students thought that they had to study more hours per week than the faculty members thought necessary.

Echoing Campbell and Henry's (1999) statement that "women were more likely than men to explain their course performance as a result of effort" (p. 100), our results indicated that women believed more strongly than men that they had to work harder. Compared with the male students, the women in our study thought that they (a) could miss fewer class meetings and (b) had to begin reviewing earlier for an exam to earn high grades. But because we did not assess actual effort, we cannot determine whether one gender or the other was over- or underestimating the actual effort needed for obtaining a specific grade.

Another topic that researchers should examine is whether chronic achievement orientation is a better predictor of effort needed for receiving a desired grade goal than gender alone. In other words, are students who aspire to get As better at predicting how much effort it takes to obtain an A?

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### NOTE

1. Because of the small number of female faculty members in our sample, we could not perform an analysis of gender differences within the faculty responses.

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