

The University of Rhode Island

Robert L. Carothers, Ph.D., President

Student Concern and Importance Areas Spring 1999

September 1999, Vol. 3(9), No. 1



SQOLAS

Student Quality of Life and Satisfaction

**The Division of Student Affairs
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, Rhode Island
02881**

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Student Concern and Importance Areas

William B. Disch, Thomas R. Dougan, James F. Campbell, Megan F. Nolan, & Stacy B. Shapiro

The University of Rhode Island

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to establish which of 16 targeted, high-concern student areas 720 University of Rhode Island students would rate as being the most and least important, and as generating the most and least individual concern. The target areas, determined by committee meetings and literature reviews, were: drug/use abuse, future career issues, social behavior, sexual behavior, use of time, consumer/finance issues, physical health, mental health, multicultural/diversity issues, gender issues, academic issues, alcohol use/abuse, sexual orientation, current employment issues, crime/violence issues, and living issues (safety, security). See Table 1.

Overall, future career issues, physical health, academic issues, mental health, use of time, and consumer/finance issues were rated as being more important and generated higher levels of individual concern. See Tables 3 and 4. Crime/violence issues, multicultural/ diversity issues, gender issues, alcohol use/abuse, drug use/abuse, and sexual orientation were rated as being less important and generated less individual concern.

Data are presented consisting of demographics (see Table 2), and descriptive statistics related to the 16 target areas by gender and class year. Correlational analysis using the overall sample indicated that concerns about future career issues were strongly associated with concerns about physical health, academic issues, mental health, use of time, social behavior, and sexual behavior. See Table 5 for overall correlations among the 16 concern and importance areas. Sexual behavioral concerns were highly associated with concerns about social behavior, mental health, alcohol/drug use/abuse, sexual orientation issues, living issues, and physical health. Academic concerns correlated most highly with concerns regarding use of time, gender issues, and future career issues.

Finally, Table 6 presents results from two prior concern and importance area studies using the same instrument (1998), and an earlier version of the instrument (1997), and different sampling techniques. Results show similar response rates for identical and similar items across the three studies. Issues related to multiple student concern and importance areas are discussed.

Student Concern and Importance Areas

Brief Report

An extensive body of literature has shown that when major college student concern and importance areas are studied collectively, the highest rated concerns by students are focused primarily upon career planning, financial management, and time management (Carney & Savitz, 1980; Disch, Dougan, & Campbell, 1997; Disch, Harlow, Campbell, & Dougan, in press; Gallagher, Golin, & Kelleher, 1992). Additionally, concern areas involving high-risk behaviors (sexual-behavioral, drugs and alcohol, crime and violence-related) have been found to be less important overall to students than to faculty, staff, and administrators (Gallagher, Golin, & Kelleher, 1992; Harris & Anttonen, 1986).

Sax, Astin, Korn, and Mahoney (1997) showed that even though student involvement in their studies has declined, especially over the prior 12 years, they are more concerned with future career goals and how the earning of a college degree will enhance their future quality of life. They also found significant decreases in student political involvement and social activism, and more conservative social attitudes towards abortion, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity. Furthermore, student concerns about financial security and current financial situations are increasing at an alarming rate (Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 1996). They found that between 1976 and 1996, student ratings of financial assistance for college as being "very important" has more than doubled from 13% to 33%. This trend also shows that the typical entering freshman is financially most concerned with having to work while at school and not having adequate funds to complete college.

The purpose of the current survey was to assess student response ratings of 16 high-concern target areas. The targeted concern areas were drug/use abuse, future career issues, social behavior, sexual behavior, use of time, consumer/finance issues, physical health, mental health, multicultural/diversity issues, gender issues, academic issues, alcohol use/abuse, sexual orientation, current employment issues, crime/violence issues, and living issues (safety, security).

Method

The Student Concern and Importance Areas Survey was part of a larger Student Quality of Life and Satisfaction Survey (SQOLAS). The study was conducted during the spring 1999 semester. Participants were obtained using a stratified random sampling design where subjects were selected from large general education courses (required for graduation), reflecting a large homogeneous cross-section of the entire undergraduate population. The researchers, after obtaining permission from instructors, distributed surveys in large classes. Participants read and signed a consent form before filling out the IRB-approved confidential

and anonymous instrument. Initially, 1,350 were distributed and 768 were returned resulting in a response rate of 57%. After careful screening of the surveys for random and other dubious responding, 720 of the surveys remained for analysis, resulting in a final response rate of 53%.

Results

The data were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Software Package, version 9.0; 1999) computer program. Demographic results by overall and gender are presented in Table 2. Demographic variables include gender, age, class year, living status, relationship status, full/part time student status, overall GPA, academic status (progress), and work status.

Tables 3 and 4 present results indicating consistent ratings of the 16 major target areas across groups. The group breakdowns were: overall ($N = 720$), men ($n = 204$), women ($n = 516$), freshman/sophomore ($n = 527$), junior/senior ($n = 193$), freshman/sophomore women ($n = 385$), freshman/sophomore men ($n = 142$), junior/senior women ($n = 131$), and junior/senior men ($n = 62$).

Future career issues, physical health, academic issues, mental health, use of time, and consumer/finance issues were rated as being the most important areas and generated the highest levels of individual concern. Crime/violence issues, multicultural/diversity issues, gender issues, alcohol use/abuse, drug use/abuse, and sexual orientation were rated as being the least important and generated the least individual concern. See Tables 3 and 4.

Pearson product-moment correlational analysis of the overall ratings of the 16 target areas revealed that concerns about future career issues were strongly associated with concerns about social behavior, academic issues, and use of time. Ratings of sexual behavioral concerns were highly associated with concerns about social behavior, mental health, alcohol/drug use/abuse, and sexual orientation issues. Finally, academic concerns correlated most highly with concerns regarding use of time, gender issues, physical health, and future career issues. See Table 5. Only significant correlations of .25 or greater were flagged.

Finally, Table 6 presents results from two prior concern and importance area studies (1997, 1998) using different survey techniques and response rates that show highly similar results across studies. As noted earlier, the 1999 (current) version employed group sampling that produced a homogeneous sample of undergraduates with a response rate of 53%. The 1998 version employed group sampling that also produced homogeneous sample of undergraduates. The response rate was 100%. The 1997 version was a mail survey (individual sampling) that produced a heterogeneous sample of undergraduates and graduates.

The original 1997 version used an overall set of 10 overall concern and importance areas as opposed to the 16 in the 1998 and 1999 versions. Learning style (cognitive/study oriented) was dropped from the 1997 version and replaced with academic

concerns (success/progress) for the later versions. Additionally, complex items from the 1997 version (physical/mental health, social/sexual behavior, etc.) were simplified in order to reflect single items for the later versions (physical health, mental health, social behavior, sexual behavior).

Discussion

The results from this study are consistent with previous findings and confirmed similar results from the 1997 and 1998 versions of the SQOLAS (Student Concern and Importance Areas Survey), (Disch, Dougan, & Campbell, 1997; Disch et al., in press). It was found that future career planning, financial management, and time management are among the highest rated concern areas for college students, supporting similar reports from Carney and Savitz (1980); and Gallagher, Golin and Kelleher (1992). In addition, the results show that academic issues, physical health, and mental health are among the variables that are consistently rated by students as being the most important and generating the most individual concern.

However, the results must be interpreted carefully and inferences and generalizations must be cautious. The survey was administered during the spring 1999 semester and several events related to students such as campus violence, tuition increases, multicultural/diversity, and gender issues (amongst others) could have skewed the results.

A major goal of the current study was to use the results in order to paint a clearer picture of a collective view of overall student concerns and needs. Much more research is needed between and within the various target areas and among diverse groups of participants. Additionally, although there were 720 undergraduate participants, juniors and seniors accounted for only 27 percent of the total sample ($N = 193$), and women outnumbered men over 2-to-1.

Finally, another purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of student needs and concerns in general, in order to better address them. Currently, several student quality of life research projects and various student-related programs and committees are in progress and in various stages of planning. For example, the latest version of the SQOLAS instrument is attempting to assess weights of the various concern and importance items, as well as differentiate between “personal” versus “general” concepts of concern and importance.

SQOLAS

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William B. Disch, Thomas R. Dougan, James F. Campbell, Megan F. Nolan, Stacy B. Shapiro

FACT SHEET

The primary purpose of this study was to establish which of 16 targeted, high-concern student areas 720 University of Rhode Island students would rate as being the most and least important, and as generating the most and least individual concern. The target areas, determined by committee meetings and literature reviews, were: drug/use abuse, future career issues, social behavior, sexual behavior, use of time, consumer/finance issues, physical health, mental health, multicultural/diversity issues, gender issues, academic issues, alcohol use/abuse, sexual orientation, current employment issues, crime/violence issues, and living issues (safety, security) future career issues, physical health, academic issues, mental health, use of time, consumer and finance issues, social behavior, sexual behavior, living issues, current employment issues, crime and violence issues, multicultural or diversity issues, gender issues, alcohol use or abuse, drug use or abuse, and sexual orientation.

Future career issues, physical health, academic issues, mental health, use of time, and consumer/finance issues were rated as being the most important areas and generated the most individual concern. Crime and violence issues, multicultural/diversity issues, gender issues, alcohol use/abuse, drug use/abuse, and sexual orientation were rated as being the least important areas and generated the least individual concern.

Correlational analysis of the entire sample related to the 16 major target areas showed that future career issues were strongly associated with concerns about social behavior, academic issues, and use of time. Ratings of sexual behavioral concerns were highly associated with concerns about social behavior, mental health, alcohol/drug use/abuse, and sexual orientation issues. Finally, academic concerns correlated most highly with concerns regarding use of time, gender issues, physical health, and future career issues.

The Student Concern and Importance Areas Survey was administered in March 1999. The following are general results and highlights from the survey. Unless otherwise noted, results are from the overall sample of 720 participants.

Note: the scale used was 1 = LEAST importance/concern and 4 = MOST importance/concern.

Overall Rank	Major Concern Area	Mean (average) Rank
16	Future Career Issues	3.7
15	Physical Health	3.5
14	Academic Issues	3.4
13	Mental Issues	3.4
12	Use of Time	3.4
11	Consumer/Finance Issues	3.3
10	Social Behavior	3.1
9	Sexual Behavior	3.0
8	Living Issues (safety, security)	3.0
7	Current Employment Issues	2.9
6	Crime/Violence Issues	2.5
5	Multicultural/Diversity Issues	2.4
4	Gender Issues	2.3
3	Alcohol Use/Abuse	2.3
2	Drug Use/Abuse	2.1
1	Sexual Orientation	2.0

Note. Higher overall rank = higher importance and concern, lower overall rank = lower importance and concern.

Table 1

Student Concern Areas Survey

Please rate the following items as to how IMPORTANT they are to you PERSONALLY and how CONCERNED you are about them as far as how they impact you PERSONALLY. Please circle only one number for each item.

	Strong personal importance & concern	Moderate personal importance & concern	Slight personal importance & concern	No personal importance & concern
<u>Drug Use/Abuse</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Future Career Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Social Behavior</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Sexual Behavior</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Use of Time</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Consumer/Finance Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Physical Health</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Mental Health</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Multicultural/Diversity Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Gender Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Academic Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Alcohol Use/Abuse</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Sexual Orientation</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Current Employment Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Crime/Violence Issues</u>	4	3	2	1
<u>Living Issues (safety, security)</u>	4	3	2	1

Table 2

Demographics by Overall and Gender

	Overall (N = 720) N (Percent)	Men (n = 204) n (Percent)	Women (n = 516) n (Percent)
Gender			
Men	204 (28%)		
Women	516 (72%)		
Age			
Mean (20 yrs.)	“	“	“
Median (19 yrs.)	“	“	“
Mode (19 yrs.)	“	“	“
18 yrs.	210 (29%)	51 (25%)	159 (31%)
19 yrs.	230 (32%)	61 (30%)	169 (33%)
20 yrs.	139 (19%)	34 (17%)	105 (20%)
21 yrs.	73 (10%)	24 (12%)	49 (10%)
22 yrs.	22 (3%)	14 (7%)	8 (2%)
23 yrs.	13 (2%)	9 (4%)	4 (< 1%)
24 yrs.	9 (1%)	5 (3%)	4 (< 1%)
25+ yrs.	24 (3%)	3 (3%)	18 (4%)
Class Year			
Freshmen	322 (45%)	86 (42%)	236 (46%)
Sophomore	205 (29%)	56 (28%)	149 (29%)
Junior	144 (20%)	44 (22%)	100 (19%)
Senior	49 (7%)	18 (9%)	31 (6%)
Undergraduate Total	720 (100%)	204 (100)	516 (100%)
Living Status			
On-Campus	419 (58%)	106 (52%)	313 (61%)
Down the Line	91 (13%)	37 (18%)	54 (11%)
Live with Parents	88 (12%)	34 (17%)	54 (11%)
Fraternity/Sorority	74 (10%)	13 (6%)	61 (12%)
Not Down Line or w/Parents	41 (6%)	10 (5%)	31 (6%)
Relationship Status			
Single	702 (98%)	199 (98%)	503 (98%)
Married	10 (< 2%)	2 (< 2%)	8 (2%)
Divorced/Separated	6 (< 2%)	2 (< 2%)	4 (< 2%)

Note. Percentages not totaling 100 indicate participant non-response (missing data), percentages totaling over 100 indicate multiple responses on an item by a participant.

Table 2 (cont.)

Demographics by Overall and Gender

	Overall (N = 720) N (Percent)	Men (n = 204) n (Percent)	Women (n = 516) n (Percent)
Full (10+ Credits) or Part (<10 Credits) Time Student?			
Full-time	698 (97%)	194 (95%)	504 (98%)
Part-time	16 (2%)	6 (3%)	10 (2%)
Overall GPA (self-reported) (mean, standard deviation)			
Freshperson	3.0 (0.6)	3.0 (0.5)	3.0 (0.6)
Sophomore	2.9 (0.5)	2.9 (0.6)	3.0 (0.5)
Junior	3.0 (0.5)	2.8 (0.4)	3.0 (0.5)
Senior	3.0 (0.4)	3.1 (0.4)	3.0 (0.4)
Academic Status (self-reported)			
Far Ahead in Academic Program	10 (1%)	2 (1%)	8 (2%)
Somewhat Ahead in Academic Program	82 (11%)	19 (9%)	63 (12%)
On-Track in Academic Program	408 (57%)	114 (56%)	294 (57%)
Somewhat Behind in Academic Program	193 (27%)	62 (30%)	131 (25%)
Behind in Academic Program	16 (2%)	7 (3%)	9 (2%)
Do You Work?			
Full-time	37 (5%)	13 (6%)	24 (5%)
Part-time	410 (57%)	110 (54%)	300 (58%)
Do not work	271 (38%)	79 (39%)	192 (37%)
How many hours of work did you average per week during the past year? (mean, standard deviation; including those who stated they do not work)			
Freshperson	13 (8)	16 (10)	12 (7)
Sophomore	16 (9)	19 (11)	15 (8)
Junior	17 (9)	20 (9)	16 (8)
Senior	17 (9)	17 (9)	17 (9)
Do You Own a Computer?			
yes	457 (64%)	125 (61%)	332 (64%)
no	253 (35%)	76 (37%)	177 (34%)

Note. Percentages not totaling 100 indicate participant non-response (missing data), percentages totaling over 100 indicate multiple responses on an item by a participant.

Table 3
Concern Area Rankings, Means, and Standard Deviations by Overall, Gender, Student Status (16 = Most Importance/Concern)

	Overall N = 720	Women n = 516	Men n = 204	Fresh/Soph n = 527	Junior/Senior n = 193
Future Career Issues	16 3.7 (0.5)	16 3.8 (0.5)	16 3.6 (0.6)	16 3.7 (0.6)	16 3.8 (0.5)
Physical Health	15 3.5 (0.7)	14 3.5 (0.7)	15 3.4 (0.8)	15 3.5 (0.7)	15 3.5 (0.7)
Academic Issues	14 3.4 (0.7)	15 3.5 (0.7)	13 3.3 (0.8)	14 3.5 (0.7)	12 3.3 (0.8)
Mental Health	13 3.4 (0.9)	12 3.4 (0.9)	14 3.3 (0.9)	13 3.4 (0.9)	14 3.4 (0.9)
Use of Time	12 3.4 (0.7)	13 3.4 (0.7)	12 3.2 (0.8)	12 3.4 (0.7)	13 3.3 (0.7)
Consumer/Finance Issues	11 3.3 (0.8)	11 3.3 (0.8)	11 3.2 (0.8)	11 3.3 (0.8)	11 3.2 (0.8)
Social Behavior	10 3.1 (0.8)	10 3.1 (0.8)	10 3.1 (0.8)	10 3.1 (0.8)	10 3.1 (0.8)
Sexual Behavior	9 3.0 (0.9)	8 2.9 (0.9)	9 3.0 (0.8)	9 3.0 (0.9)	7 2.9 (0.9)
Living Issues (safety, security)	8 2.9 (1.0)	9 3.0 (0.9)	7 2.8 (1.0)	8 2.9 (1.0)	8 3.0 (0.9)
Current Employment Issues	7 2.9 (0.9)	7 2.9 (0.9)	8 2.9 (1.0)	7 2.9 (0.9)	9 3.0 (0.9)
Crime/Violence Issues	6 2.5 (1.0)	6 2.5 (0.9)	5 2.4 (1.0)	6 2.5 (1.0)	6 2.4 (1.0)
Multicultural/Diversity Issues	5 2.4 (0.9)	5 2.5 (0.9)	4 2.3 (1.0)	5 2.4 (0.9)	5 2.4 (1.0)
Gender Issues	4 2.4 (0.9)	4 2.4 (0.9)	3 2.2 (0.9)	4 2.4 (0.9)	4 2.4 (0.9)
Alcohol Use/Abuse	3 2.3 (1.0)	3 2.3 (1.0)	6 2.4 (1.1)	3 2.3 (1.0)	3 2.2 (1.1)
Drug Use/Abuse	2 2.1 (1.1)	2 2.1 (1.1)	2 2.2 (1.1)	2 2.1 (1.1)	2 2.0 (1.1)
Sexual Orientation	1 2.0 (1.0)	1 2.0 (1.0)	1 2.0 (1.1)	1 2.0 (1.0)	1 1.9 (1.1)

Note. Order of values: rank (mean, standard deviation).

Table 4

Concern Area Rankings, Means, and Standard Deviations by Student Status and Gender (16 = Most Importance/Concern)

	Fresh/Soph Women N = 385	Fresh/Soph Men n = 142	Junior/Senior Women n = 131	Junior/Senior Men n = 62
Future Career Issues	16 3.7 (0.5)	16 3.6 (0.7)	16 3.8 (0.5)	16 3.6 (0.6)
Physical Health	14 3.5 (0.7)	15 3.5 (0.8)	15 3.6 (0.6)	15 3.4 (0.8)
Academic Issues	15 3.5 (0.7)	14 3.4 (0.8)	13 3.5 (0.7)	11 3.0 (0.9)
Mental Health	12 3.4 (0.9)	13 3.3 (0.9)	14 3.5 (0.9)	14 3.3 (0.9)
Use of Time	13 3.4 (0.7)	12 3.3 (0.8)	12 3.4 (0.7)	13 3.1 (0.7)
Consumer/Financial Issues	11 3.3 (0.8)	11 3.2 (0.8)	11 3.3 (0.8)	12 3.1 (0.7)
Social Behavior	10 3.1 (0.8)	10 3.1 (0.8)	10 3.2 (0.8)	9 2.9 (0.9)
Sexual Behavior	8 3.0 (0.9)	9 3.1 (0.8)	7 2.9 (0.9)	8 2.9 (0.9)
Living Issues (safety, security)	9 3.0 (0.9)	7 2.8 (1.0)	8 3.0 (1.0)	7 2.9 (0.9)
Current Employment Issues	7 2.8 (0.9)	8 2.9 (1.0)	9 3.0 (0.9)	10 2.9 (1.0)
Crime/Violence Issues	6 2.6 (0.9)	5 2.4 (1.0)	6 2.5 (1.0)	6 2.4 (1.0)
Multicultural/Diversity Issues	5 2.5 (0.9)	3 2.2 (1.0)	5 2.5 (1.0)	5 2.3 (1.0)
Gender Issues	4 2.4 (0.9)	2 2.2 (0.9)	4 2.5 (0.9)	3 2.2 (1.0)
Alcohol Use/Abuse	3 2.3 (1.0)	6 2.5 (1.0)	3 2.1 (1.0)	4 2.3 (1.0)
Drug Use/Abuse	2 2.1 (1.1)	4 2.2 (1.1)	2 2.0 (1.1)	2 2.0 (1.1)
Sexual Orientation	1 2.0 (1.0)	1 2.1 (1.1)	1 1.9 (1.1)	1 1.8 (1.1)

Note. Order of values: rank (mean, standard deviation).

Table 5

Pearson Correlations of the 16 Major Target areas by Overall (N = 720)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1) Future Career Issues		.29*	.31*	.27*	.31*	.24	.35*	.28*	.23	.24	.12	.12	.14	.10	.13	.08
2) Physical Health			.32*	.60*	.33*	.31*	.36*	.27*	.35*	.21	.24	.28*	.27*	.16	.11	.13
3) Academic Issues				.27*	.34*	.29*	.22	.19	.26*	.17	.19	.28*	.31*	.15	.12	.11
4) Mental Health					.31*	.22	.35*	.31*	.40*	.18	.27*	.32*	.30*	.21	.19	.21
5) Use of Time						.41*	.34*	.24	.21	.23	.19	.24	.20	.13	.11	.14
6) Consumer/Financial Issues							.19	.11	.27*	.30*	.22	.23	.23	.09	.10	.12
7) Social Behavior								.50*	.28*	.22	.22	.31*	.30*	.23	.18	.30*
8) Sexual Behavior									.27*	.19	.22	.19	.21	.37*	.31*	.34*
9) Living Issues (safety/security)										.34*	.56*	.35*	.38*	.21	.21	.27*
10) Current Employment Issues											.35*	.22	.23	.18	.20	.20
11) Crime/Violence Issues												.41*	.42*	.32*	.32*	.36*
12) Multicultural/Diversity Issues													.73*	.19	.19	.30*
13) Gender Issues														.17	.16	.30*
14) Alcohol Use/Abuse															.75*	.37*
15) Drug Use/Abuse																.34*
16) Sexual Orientation																

Note. Rating scale used by participants was 4 = most importance/concern and 1 = least importance/concern; therefore, a positive correlation indicates that as one target area rating increases (more importance/concern), the other target area does the same.* $p < .05$, two-tailed. Because of the large overall sample size, only significant correlations of .30 or greater are flagged.

Table 6

Comparison of the Overall Concern and Importance Area Rankings from Three Independent Samples

	1999 (16 Categories), Spring N = 720, 57% response rate	1998 (16 Categories), Spring N = 100, 100% response rate	1997 (10 Categories), Spring N = 467, 15% response rate
Most Important	Future Career Issues	Future Career Issues	Career and Employment
ρ	Physical Health	Physical Health	Use of Time
	Academic Issues	Academic Issues	Physical and Mental Health
	Mental Health	Mental Health	Consumer and Finance
	Use of Time	Use of Time	Living Issues
	Consumer/Finance	Consumer/Finance	Socio-Sexual Behavior
	Social Behavior	Social Behavior	Crime and Violence
	Sexual Behavior	Sexual Behavior	Learning Styles
	Living Issues (safety, security)	Living Issues (safety, security)	Multicultural and Gender
	Current Employment Issues	Current Employment Issues	Drug and Alcohol Consumption
	Crime/Violence	Crime and Violence	
	Multicultural/Diversity Issues	Gender Issues	
	Gender Issues	Multicultural Issues	
	Alcohol Use/Abuse	Alcohol Use/Abuse	
ο	Drug Use/Abuse	Sexual Orientation	
Least Important	Sexual Orientation	Drug Use/Abuse	

Note. The 1999 version employed group sampling that produced a homogeneous sample of undergraduates. The 1998 version employed group sampling that produced homogeneous sample of undergraduates. The 1997 version was a mail survey that produced a heterogeneous sample of undergraduates and graduates.

Explanation of General Statistical Terms *

Average (mean, median, mode)

The mean, median, and mode are indices (measures) of central tendency. The mean is the arithmetic average of scores (the sum of the scores divided by the total number of scores), the median is the point that divides the distribution into halves, and the mode is the most frequently occurring score.

Standard Deviation

Specifically, the standard deviation represents the average deviation from the mean. That is, the standard deviation represents the positive square root of the arithmetic average of the squared deviations from the mean. For example, if the mean of “learning styles” is 7.5 on a 1-to-10 point scale, and the standard deviation is 2.5, the scores on “learning styles” deviate and vary from the mean an average of 2.5 points.

Correlation

The correlation, specifically, the Pearson product-moment correlation, is a statistical technique used to assess the extent of the approximate linear relationship between two quantitative variables such as shoe size and height. The extent of the linear approximation between two variables is indexed by the statistic called the correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient, r , can range from -1.00, to 0, to +1.00. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient, using its absolute value (no +/- signs), indicates the degree to which a linear relationship is approximated. The greater the distance from zero (- or +), the better the approximation. The sign of the correlation coefficient (- or +) indicates the direction of the linear approximation. For example, a correlation coefficient of .85 (with positive correlations, the + sign is seldom used) between shoe size and height indicates a positive correlation, in that as shoe size increases, so does height. A negative (or inverse) correlation of -.65 between age and height would indicate that as age increases, height decreases.

Correlations assess only the approximate linear relationships. One cannot infer any sort of causation. For example, one could not conclude that “large feet cause tallness” or that “increased age causes shortness” and vice-versa.

* From Jaccard & Becker (1990).

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