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Academically Adrift: Findings & Lessons for Improvement

Thursday, March 24, 2011

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Academically Adrift: Findings & Lessons for Improvement



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**Academically Adrift:
Findings & Lessons for Improvement**

March 24, 2011

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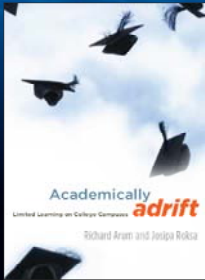
Richard Arum
New York University

Josipa Roksa
University of Virginia

Our Presenters

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Source (University of Chicago Press, January 2011):



We thank the Carnegie Corp. of New York and the Lumina, Ford and Teagle Foundations for their generous financial support and the Council for Aid to Education for collaboration and assistance with data collection.

- A brief summary of our research
- Our recommendations
- Questions from the audience

Overview

Polling Question #1:

How many hours do you think students study per day at your college or university?

- A. About 1 or 2
- B. About 2 or 3
- C. About 3 to 5
- D. More than 6

Research Questions

Are students improving their critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills during college?

What specific experiences and college contexts are associated with student learning?

How do disadvantaged groups of students fare in college with respect to learning?

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Determinants Of College Learning Dataset

Longitudinal Design

Fall 2005, Spring 2007, Spring 2009, Spring 2010, Spring 2011 (planned)

Large Scale

2005-2007: 24 diverse four-year institutions; 2,341 students

2005-2009: 29 diverse four-year institutions, 1,666 students

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Determinants Of College Learning Dataset, Cont.

Breadth of Information

Family background and high school information, college experiences and contexts, college transcripts, Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

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Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

- ▶ Dimensions of learning assessed
 - critical thinking, complex reasoning, and written communication
- ▶ Distinguishing characteristics
 - Direct measures (as opposed to student reports)
 - NOT multiple choice
 - Holistic assessment based on open-ended prompts representing "real-world" scenarios

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Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), cont.

- ▶ Used in other contexts
 - One of the measures of learning used by VSA
 - Will be utilized in 2016 by OECD-AHELO project

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Performance Task (example)

Jamie Eager is a candidate who is opposing Pat Stone for reelection. Eager critiques the mayor's solution to reducing crime by increasing the number of police officers.

Eager proposes the city support a drug education program for addicts because, according to Eager, addicts are the major source of the city's crime problem.

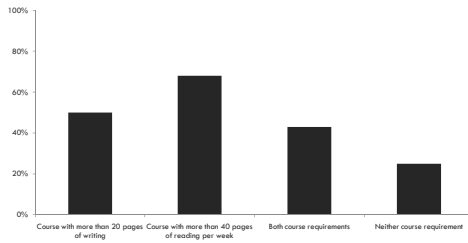
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Performance Task, cont.

Students are provided with a set of materials (e.g. newspaper articles, crime and drug statistics, research briefs, internal administrative memos, etc.) and asked to prepare a memo that addresses several issues, including a) evaluate the validity of Eager's proposal, and b) assess the validity of Eager's criticism of the mayor's plan to increase the number of officers.

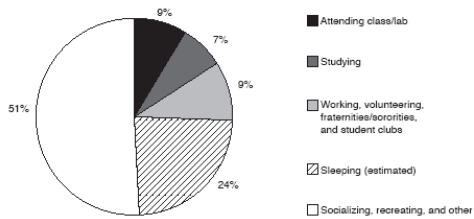
<http://www.collegiatelearningassessment.org/>

Course Requirements



Note: Based on Spring 2007 survey.

Students' Time Use

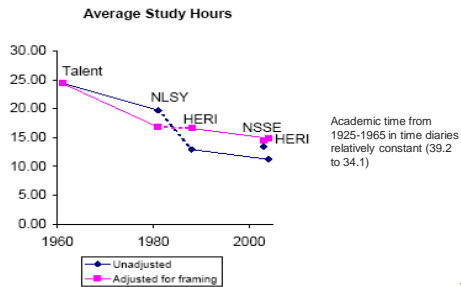


Note: Based on Spring 2007 survey.



Academic Commitment Over Time

(source: Phillip Babcock and Mindy Marks, *forthcoming* 2010)



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CLA Gains 2005-2007 (Performance Task)

0.18 standard deviations – 7 percentile point gain (0.47 sd, 18 percentile points, 2005-2009)

No statistically significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills for 45 percent of the students in the sample (36 percent, 2005-2009)

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Polling Question #2:

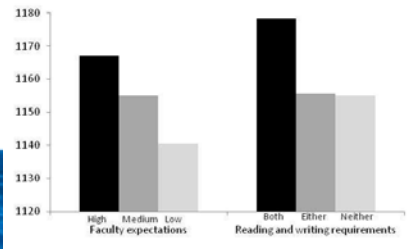
What is the primary reason students show low gains on this measure?

Select only one of the following:

- A. Students are inadequately prepared.
- B. Students are busy with other things
- C. Faculty are not adequately prepared to teach
- D. Institutional incentives do not emphasize undergraduate learning

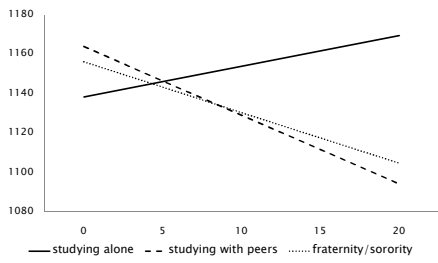
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CLA Performance: Faculty Expectations and Reading/Writing Requirements



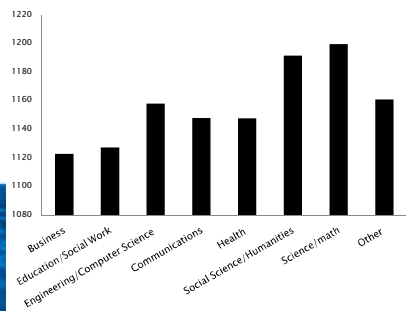
Note: Predicting 2007 CLA scores while controlling for 2005 CLA scores, student characteristics, and institutions attended.

CLA Performance: Studying and Fraternities/Sororities



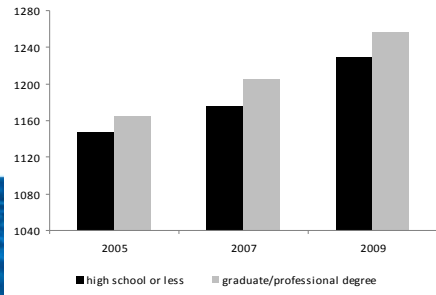
Note: Predicting 2007 CLA scores while controlling for 2005 CLA scores, student characteristics, and institutions attended.

CLA Performance: College Major



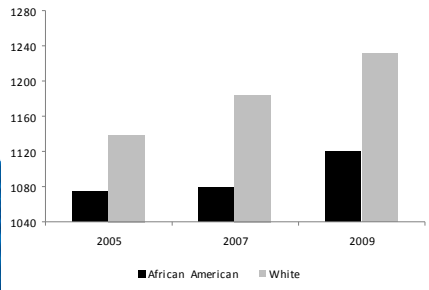
Note: Predicting 2007 CLA scores while controlling for 2005 CLA scores.

Inequality in CLA Performance: Parental Education



Note: Based on a 3-level HLM model, controlling for a range of demographic/family characteristics.

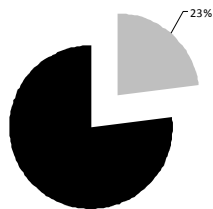
Inequality in CLA Performance: African American vs. White



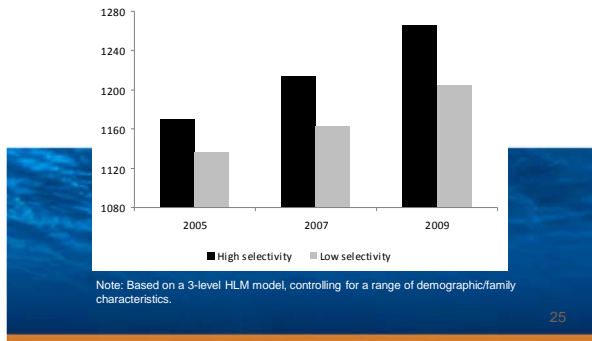
Note: Based on a 3-level HLM model, controlling for a range of demographic/family characteristics.

Institutional Variation

23 percent of CLA growth between 2005 and 2009 occurs across institutions



College Selectivity and CLA Performance



Summary of Findings

- Students experiencing low (and likely declining) levels of academic rigor.
- Gains in student performance are disturbingly low in U.S. higher education.

Summary of Findings, cont.

- Learning in U.S. higher education is characterized by persisting and/or growing inequality with respect to individual characteristics.
- There is notable inequality in experiences and outcomes across U.S. institutions associated with college selectivity.



Policy Recommendations

Federally imposed accountability would be counterproductive (existing measurements are imperfect; unintended consequences likely)

Federal resources could provide incentives for institutional improvement, innovation and assessment

Policy Recommendations, cont.

- Federal resources are needed to develop research infrastructure to advance scientific knowledge of learning in higher education
- Accountability should operate at lower levels in the system



Recommendations for Institutional Improvement:

- Administrative Leadership
- Faculty Leadership
- Review Faculty Evaluation Criteria
- Administrative Support Services
- Students

Polling Question #3:

To what extent are student course evaluations used to assess teaching quality on your campus?

- A. They are a primary consideration
- B. They are a secondary consideration
- C. They are not considered at all.

Administrative Leadership

Promote organizational cultures emphasizing student learning – both symbolically and substantively:

- Evaluate internal incentive structures
- Support ongoing assessment of program quality and student learning outcomes
- Develop plans for improvement
- Monitor implementation of improvement plans
- Align resource allocation decisions with academic goals

Administrative Leadership, Cont.

Work collaboratively – improvement of academic rigor and undergraduate learning are issues that faculty, students and administrators should work on together.



Faculty Leadership

Faculty must assume individual & collective responsibility for ensuring adequate academic rigor across programs and classes – with reviews at course, department and school level:



- course requirements (e.g., levels of reading and writing)
- course expectations (i.e., study hours)
- grading standards
- core curriculum

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Faculty Leadership, Cont.



Faculty should have high expectations for their students and communicate expectations clearly and consistently

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Review Faculty Evaluation Criteria

Internal deliberations warranted to review criteria used for decisions related to tenure, promotion and compensation:

Do we have the right balance in our weighting of faculty teaching, research and service?

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Review Faculty Evaluation Criteria, cont.

Are we using multiple indicators to assess teaching quality (e.g., syllabi review, peer observation, samples of student work)?

Are the measures of instructional quality used properly aligned with the goal of promoting academic rigor and student learning outcomes (i.e., not simply measures of student satisfaction)?

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Administrative Support Services

Institutional research required for ongoing assessment of student academic experiences and learning outcomes. [Since students move across programs, institutional-level mechanisms required to monitor overall student academic experiences/outcomes].

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Administrative Support Services

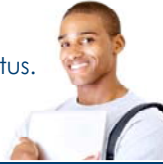
Institutional teaching and learning support services for faculty improvement efforts. [Since faculty often are not trained to teach in their graduate programs].

Align student support services with goal of promoting student academic performance, not just social engagement or student retention, wellbeing and consumer satisfaction.

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Students

Communicate clearly and consistently to students the value of academic engagement and the goal of promoting attitudes, dispositions and *higher order skills* (i.e., not just subject specific knowledge) essential for economic success, civic engagement and adult status.



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Students, Cont.

Communicate clearly and consistently high expectations and that students ultimately have to take responsibility for their own learning.



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<http://highered.ssrc.org/>

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We'd like to hear from you!

Our evaluation form is located here:
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Thank you!

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