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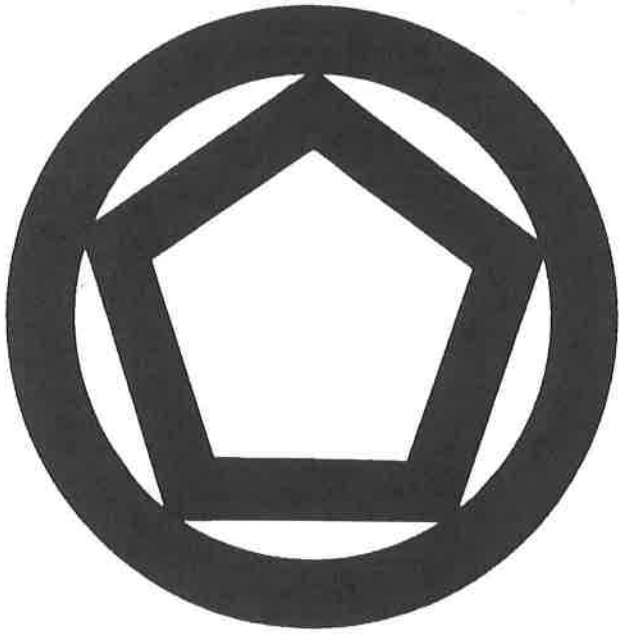

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RESEARCH NOTE:
WORK AS PART OF A STUDENT'S TYPICAL DAY

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How does a student typically allocate time over the various activities they engage in over the course of a day? Academic pursuits comprise only a portion of a day; even though many academicians feel that the majority of time should be spent in educational activities. Students seek time for physical fitness activities, socializing, relaxing and work.

Work has become an important element of many students college experience. Work provides the monetary resources to pay tuition; often through work study allotments in financial aid packages. Work offers opportunities to gain valuable employment skills (so the career counselors advocate). Work generates spending money for social functions and life necessities. Most students can not avoid working during school.

Does work detract from academic performance? Most researchers (eg. Van de Water, 1989) contend that work does not influence academic performance for general student populations. Work may, however, affect subgroups within the student population that have not been considered in previous research. Men and women and different racial groups may be influenced differently by working while in school.

In a study on the career progress of a group of students through an engineering program, time commitments to various activities were examined for possible influence on the persistence of students in engineering. The questions pertaining to work were limited by preliminary results which indicate that students wish they could work less than they currently are. African-Americans have a much greater need to work which may influence their academic performance. This research note presents preliminary findings on time commitments that students make and the amount of time allocated to work. Additional work is being done to develop a causal model that relates work to academic progress.

METHODS

Sample

A list of students enrolled in engineering at Michigan State University in the Fall of 1987 was compared to the engineering enrollment list for the Fall of 1988. Students were sorted into five groups: (1) persisters (remained in same engineering major); (2) changers (switched engineering majors); (3) leavers (left the engineering program); (4) transfers (entered engineering from another major); and (5) first timers (matriculated for first year at university).

All minorities were sampled. A random weighted sample of white males and females was taken from each group. Additional white males were included to account for response rate effects (men generally have lower response rates than women).

The survey was pre-tested on a small group of engineers. After evaluating the pre-tested comments and results, surveys were sent to 2,250 students. A total of 606 responses were received (27% return rate). This response rate appeared conservative as many first timers and leavers (specifically freshman and sophomores) reported they never intended to be engineering majors but had noted engineering as their major during orientation. (In perusing this further, we found some students while completing orientation indicated an academic major they had no intention of majoring in. The status associated with being in a high profile major prompted these students to make these initial selections.)

Minority responses were low (below 20%) except for minority women. Across gender, men had a lower response rate than women, 21% compared to 35%. Transfers and first timers had slightly lower response rates (20%) with the remaining groups which were between 25% - 27%.

Survey

A questionnaire was designed to tap into student perceptions about their engineering experiences and to index their career development. Specific questions examined the problems students faced; the allocation of time during the week; their expectation and performance; career goals; and achievement motivation. The survey instrument attempted to gain a complete picture of engineering students from their pre-college attitudes and abilities to their career and life expectations.

RESULTS

This report shares the results that pertain to time allocation between daily activities. Work was not a focal point of the study; thus, confirmatory questions were not asked concerning attitudes toward work while a student. These results are inferential which make it difficult to generalize to a larger population. However, our sensitivity toward how different groups react to student employment can be enhanced, as well as, the development of future questions for study.

Typical and Ideal Days Respondents were asked to allocate 24 hours of a typical weekday (Monday through Thursday) over a list of activities, including classes, studying, sleeping, work and necessities (eating). This exercise was followed by a similar task which required them to allocate the 24 hours over "an ideal" weekday (ideal meaning how they would prefer to spend their time during the day). Finally they were asked to allocate the 48 hours of a typical weekend over a similar list of activities. The allocation of time for a typical day, ideal day, and typical weekend is shown in the accompanying figure.

The hours have been converted to percentages (10% equals approximately two hours and twenty-five minutes). Nearly 30% of a typical day was spent sleeping (7 hours). For 8 hours student studied or were in classes. The remaining 8 1/2 to 9 hours was utilized to relax, socialize, work, complete life necessities and participation in physical fitness. Work typically comprised one hour and a half to two hours of the day.

If the hours could be ideally distributed by the students, they would request more time for sleep (about 30 minutes) and physical fitness (slightly over an hour more a day). Where would this time come from? A shift of time from life necessities (down 1.4%) and work (down 1.5%), about 20 to 25 minutes, each, would be made. Students would actually prefer not working more than one hour per day.

Typical Weekend Over the weekend students usually are not in the classroom. This time is reallocated to other activities. Not much of this time goes toward studying, as the proportion of time studying stayed the same at 17% or slightly more than 8 hours over two days (10% of the weekend represents about 5 hours). More time was spent sleeping, relaxing, completing life necessities, and socializing. Time spent socializing nearly doubled to 14.2% (about 7 hours). This change was not unexpected as most students do the majority of their socializing on weekends. Time spent in physical fitness and religious activities ("other") also increased. The amount of time spent working equalled about two hours and forty minutes. Work comprised about as much of the weekend as a typical day.

Group Comparisons. In Table 1, the time allocation for men and women, racial groups and enrollment status are reported. Women spent slightly more time in class and studied 30 minutes longer than men. Women also worked and dealt with life necessities longer than men. Men on the other hand allocated more time to relaxation, socializing and physical fitness.

For "an ideal" day, women would like to spend less time studying (still more than men), in class, working and dealing with life necessities in order to sleep, relax and pursue physical fitness. Men would also cut back their classroom time but would study a few moments longer during the day. Men would prefer a few extra minutes of sleep and more time for physical fitness. Men would acquire this time by reducing the amount of time spent working and dealing with life necessities.

The differences between a typical and "an ideal" day were more pronounced by racial groups. "Other minorities" (comprised of Asian-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) were spending more time in the classroom and studying than Whites (40 minutes) and African-Americans (33 minutes). This extra academic time came at the expense of socializing and physical fitness. African-Americans worked nearly twice as long as the other two groups: nearly three hours a day compared to one and one-half for the others. Compared to the other groups, Whites spent more time relaxing, socializing, and in physical fitness.

All groups would ideally like to spend less time working and dealing with life necessities. African-Americans indicated a significant drop in the time spent working (an hour). This time would be used for studying (increase of 40 minutes) and physical fitness (increase of about 20 to 25 minutes). African-Americans were the only group that actually increased the amount of academic time under ideal circumstances. For Whites and "other minorities" studying less with more time for sleeping and pursuing physical fitness was requested. "Other minorities" showed a sharp decline in the times they would ideally spend studying.

First timers spent less time in the classroom than other status groups; they probably were not yet heavily involved in laboratory courses that add several hours to classroom time. Even though leavers spent more time in class than the others, they reported that they studied less (three and one-half hours) compared to other groups—persisters studied nearly five hours per day. First timers and leavers spent more time socializing and relaxing than other groups. Leavers also tended to sleep longer, work more, and perform more life necessities than the other groups. Persisters indicated less of their time was spent socializing, relaxing and pursuing physical fitness when compared to the other groups.

Work comprised 5% to 12% of the day (one hour to three hours). Underclass students and transfers worked fewer hours. Adjusting to a new environment, requires time and work takes a low

priority, unless it is required as part of one's financial aid package. Upperclass students worked longer, approximately one and one-half hours per day. Again, the fact that stood out was the 12% of the day that African-Americans spent working.

Men and women had very similar time allocation patterns over a typical weekend. Where men were likely to spend an additional hour in physical fitness activities, women used this time to study.

Allocation patterns produced more noticeable differences. African-Americans and "other minorities" studied more on the weekend than Whites (by about an hour) and socialized less. African-Americans again reported working twice as much as both of the other groups. African-Americans spent less time sleeping and in religious pursuits ("other").

Students involved in engineering (persisters, transfers, and changers) spent more time studying (about 75 minutes) and less time socializing (about 45 minutes) than leavers and first timers (the exception being changers who socialized more). Leavers spent less time studying (55 minutes) and more time socializing (20 minutes) than persisters. Overall the amount of time working was similar, though older students tended to work more.

SUMMARY

Working has become an integral part of a student's daily routine while at college. Work is necessitated by increasing tuition rates, as well as the use of work study allocations in financial aid packages. On the average, students were working between seven and fewer hours per week. That doesn't mean that students really want to work this much. If the evidence from this study is typical, students would prefer to work about 25% less while taking classes. Yet, in face of the financial realities of higher education, students are more likely to be working in the future.

Part-time work has been shown to have no direct effect on students academic performance (Van de Water, 1989). So, it was unexpected to observe that any time gained from not working would not necessarily be used for academic purposes. Freedom from work would allow students more personal time.

The exception to this pattern was African-American students. These students worked nearly twice as much per day as White students. From additional information in the survey, finance was considered to be the most serious problem that African-American students reported facing while in school. There was a positive correlation between time spent working and the seriousness of the financial situation African-American students faced. These students indicated that it was mandatory that they work. Working apparently takes away from study time which ultimately will influence academic performance. At this point, our analyses have found a linkage between financial situation and grades but furthersteps need to be completed to determine the strength of these relationships. This preliminary finding regarding work for African-Americans has prompted us to examine work issues more closely as they pertain to minority students.

REFERENCES

Van de Water, Gordon. (1989) The Effect of Part-Time Work on Academic Performance and Progress. Journal of Student Employment. Vol I No 1, 5-12.

About the Author

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Figure 1. Breakdown of Typical and Ideal Weekday and Typical Weekend

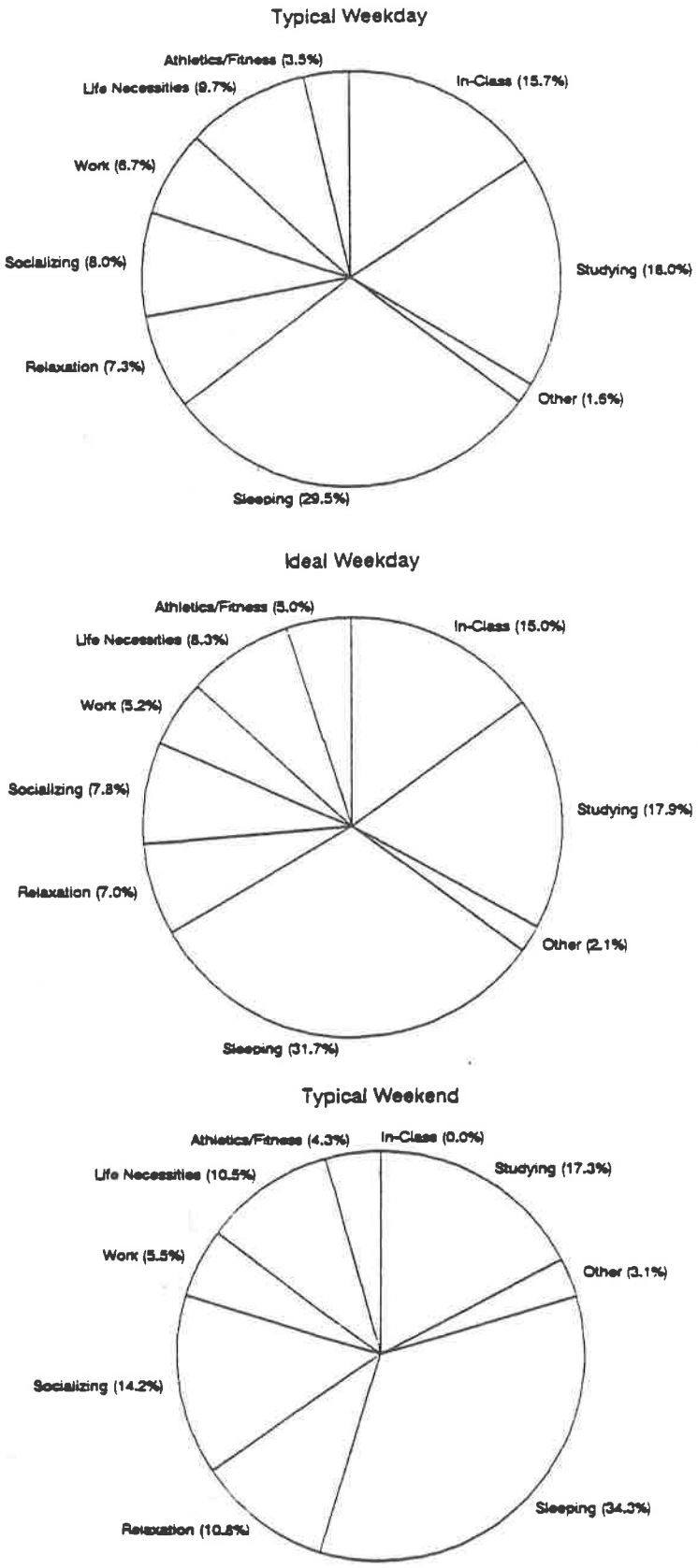

Table 1. Allocation of Time Over a Typical Day, Ideal Day, and Typical Weekend for Students in Engineering According to Gender, Race and Enrollment Status (Percentages)

Typical Day/Ideal Day

Activity:	In Class		Studying		Sleeping		Relaxation		Socializing		Work		Life Necessities		Athletics Fitness		Other	
	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal	Typical	Ideal
GENDER:																		
Men	15.7	15.2	17.2	17.5	30.2	31.9	8.0	7.1	8.6	8.3	6.6	5.4	9.3	8.0	3.9	5.6	0.5	0.9
Women	16.1	15.1	19.2	18.7	29.3	31.0	6.7	7.1	7.5	7.4	7.0	5.1	10.5	8.8	3.0	4.7	0.6	1.2
RACE:																		
White	15.7	14.7	17.7	17.2	29.8	31.5	7.5	7.0	8.2	9.6	6.2	4.8	9.9	8.4	3.4	5.1	1.5	1.5
Black	15.3	15.3	18.1	21.0	26.6	24.5	6.2	6.0	7.0	6.1	12.1	7.9	8.8	6.6	2.9	4.5	2.9	3.1
"Other"	16.0	15.5	20.4	18.6	29.2	30.7	7.0	7.2	6.1	6.7	6.4	5.7	9.8	8.6	2.6	4.5	2.4	2.5
STATUS:																		
First Timers	14.3	14.0	17.9	18.8	29.4	31.6	8.3	6.8	9.2	7.9	5.0	5.0	9.8	8.1	3.9	5.2	2.2	2.4
Changers	15.9	14.7	18.6	17.6	29.6	32.6	6.9	7.0	7.4	7.7	7.3	5.6	9.5	8.0	3.5	5.3	1.3	1.5
Transfers	16.5	15.7	19.3	18.1	29.9	31.6	7.0	7.9	6.9	8.1	5.9	4.3	9.5	8.5	3.7	5.2	3.3	0.6
Persisters	15.8	14.9	20.5	18.9	28.3	31.1	6.6	7.1	6.8	7.5	7.9	5.9	9.6	8.1	3.0	4.4	1.6	2.1
Leavers	16.2	15.8	15.2	16.6	30.2	31.9	7.5	7.0	8.6	8.0	6.8	4.7	10.1	8.9	3.6	5.5	1.6	1.5

TYPICAL WEEKEND

Activity:	In Class	Studying	Sleeping	Relaxation	Socializing	Work	Life Necessities	Athletics Fitness	Other
GENDER:									
Men	--	16.6	35.1	11.6	14.7	5.4	10.1	5.2	1.3
Women	--	18.8	34.6	10.3	14.2	5.7	11.3	3.5	1.6
RACE:									
White	--	17.0	34.9	11.1	14.9	4.4	10.6	4.4	3.7
Black	--	18.5	31.2	9.5	11.7	8.6	10.6	3.4	6.6
"Other"	--	21.4	33.7	9.1	11.0	3.2	10.2	5.0	4.0
STATUS:									
First Timers	--	14.9	35.2	11.6	15.1	4.1	10.3	4.2	3.4
Changers	--	19.1	34.6	7.4	15.6	3.8	10.2	4.5	2.3
Transfers	--	20.6	35.5	11.6	12.3	4.3	10.0	3.8	1.8
Persisters	--	19.4	33.1	10.2	12.3	6.7	10.6	4.0	3.3
Leavers	--	15.5	34.8	10.7	14.4	6.1	10.5	4.6	2.3