Factors and Experiences that Help and Hinder Undergraduate Student Learning

Introduction

Institutions that understand what helps and hinders student learning will know how to improve student proficiency in core academic areas that are important for college and workforce success.

Research supports learning as a holistic (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005), complex, and domain-specific process (Beyer et al., 2007). Institutions are encouraged to employ principles of learning that are domain-independent, experience-independent, and culturally relevant (Ambrose et al., 2010).

It is important that institutions continue to examine a variety of (new) learning tools and innovative pedagogical approaches in order to improve or evolve undergraduate teaching methods, curriculum, and experiences. This study provides important descriptive evidence for understanding undergraduate student learning across campus and over time. The results provide specific ways faculty and administrators may teach and implement services to better serve students.

Purpose and Methods

Examine and compare student perceptions over time in regards to factors and experiences that help and hinder student learning at one university campus.

Results

Top Reported Learning Aids

- Having course readings, assignments, lecture notes, etc., on the web (avg. 91%)
- Having a clear understanding of the prof/TA expectations (avg. 87%)
- Having prof(s)/TA(s) who were experts in their fields (avg. 87%)
- Having syllabus on the web (avg. 85%)
- Using my own efforts—reading, studying, doing my homework, going to classes, staying focused (avg. 85%)
- Having prof(s)/TA(s) who seemed to care about my learning (avg. 84%)

Top Reported Hindrances

- My own procrastination (avg. 62%)
- Wanting to play instead of study (avg. 50%)
- Poor study habits (avg. 49%)
- Homework with insufficient feedback (avg. 45%)
- The amount of time I had to spend at a job (avg. 45%)

Overall, major did not really matter for learning aids and hindrances.

Where major did matter:

- Taking essay exams as an aid
  - 2014 Professional School (N=60): 47% Did not do/have
  - 2014 Arts and Sciences (N=66): 26% Did not do/have

Overall, ethnicity did not really matter for learning aids and hindrances.

Where ethnicity did matter:

- Talking one-on-one with the professor/TA as an aid
  - 2014 Non-Hawaiian (N=116): 9% Did not do/have
  - 2014 Native Hawaiian or Part-Hawaiian (N=11): 9% Did not do/have

- Participating in class discussions as an aid
  - 2014 Professional School (N=60): 7% Did not do/have
  - 2014 Arts and Sciences (N=66): 5% Did not do/have

- Using the library to do research as an aid
  - 2014 Non-Hawaiian (N=116): 62% Did not do/have

Conclusions

- Faculty can support student learning through online course materials, clear expectations, being experts, and caring about student learning.
- Students do assume responsibility for their learning. They recognize the importance of putting forth effort and the personal factors that hinder learning.
- Overall, what helped and hindered student learning was stable over time, from sophomore to senior year. Thus, the institution and faculty can focus on employing the learning aids identified by most students. Because the hindrances related to personal factors remain stable, faculty can consider addressing them in their pedagogy in 100–400 level courses.
- Perceived learning aids and hindrances were not exclusively domain-independent (major) or culturally-specific (ethnicity).
- The number of learning aids reported and the number of hindrances reported were slightly related to students’ GPA.

Contact

Web: http://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment
Email: airo@hawaii.edu