How Business Students Spend Their Time—Do They Really Know?

John R. Tanner
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Geoffrey Stewart,
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Glenn M. Maples
Northwestern Louisiana University

Michael W. Totaro
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to determine how students majoring in some area of business spend their time, relative to how they think they spend their time. In order to assess this gap, undergraduate business students who were enrolled in the first or second business statistics course at a regional southern university were required to record in a logbook, for a period of one week, the number of hours they spent using YouTube, FaceBook, MySpace, the number of hours they watched TV, the number of hours spent studying, as well as several other items. Students in the statistics classes were chosen because all business students, regardless of their major, have to take these courses, and the researchers felt that this was the best way to get a representative group of all business majors. Data was collected from a total of 212 business majors. Additionally, before they started this one-week period, the students were asked to determine, to the best of their abilities, the amounts of time they thought they spent on these activities. Tests of significance revealed ten (10) significant differences between the actual time spent on the activities selected, and the pre-conceived estimate of time spent on these activities. On nine of these significant differences, the students thought they spent more time on the specific activity than they actually did. This would seem to indicate that students need to improve their time management skills. For example, students estimated that they spent more than 1.5 times more time using FaceBook and MySpace than they actually did, and estimated twice as much on Moodle (an open source course management system) as they actually did.

Our findings should be of value to students, faculty, and advisors. It is very likely that many students are unaware of such differences, and if they can be made aware of them, by either faculty or advisors, or both, it should result in higher academic performance by the students. The results may also lead to students devoting more attention to developing their time management skills, which should enhance their personal development, and even their collaborative learning skills.

Keywords: Business undergraduates' time use, time management skills, academic performance

INTRODUCTION

Today's college student has access to technologies that might have seemed virtually "science fiction" a mere 20 years ago. The Internet, WWW, cell phones, iPhones, and iPods are only part of a vast array of potential distractions to today's college students, who spend less time studying than their predecessors (Nonis & Hudson, 2006). The ubiquity of such technologies suggests that college students may in fact be unaware of these distractions. The purpose of this paper is to determine how students majoring in some area of business spend their time, relative to how they think they spend their time. Our approach involves analyzing information collected by students by means of a logbook, a method which is similar to that of Nonis, Philhours, & Hudson (2006), and Budden et al. (2007), both of which required the use of a diary by students.

MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

It is likely that many students are unaware of possible differences between how they spend their time, and how they think they spend their time. Such a perception gap may lead to a lower academic performance by students, because, according to one study at least, there is a relationship between study time and college outcomes (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2004). If students can be made aware of such a perception gap, by either faculty or advisors, or both, it should result in higher academic performance by the students. Moreover, results of such a study may also lead to students devoting more attention to developing their time management skills, which should enhance their personal development, and even their collaborative learning skills.

RESEARCH QUESTION

From the foregoing, our specific research question is as follows: How do students majoring in some area of business spend their time, relative to how they think they spend their time?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Few would argue that student learning in a university setting takes place when there is active participation by professor and student; and the roles of each are heterogeneous. The professor has the formidable task of delivering course material to students, and the students are expected to master the material, measured by their performance in the academic environment. A study by O'Toole, Spinelli, & Wetzel (2000) attempted to determine congruency of attitudes by business school professors and undergraduate business students regarding important learning dimensions. Both groups strongly agreed that the professor's presentation clarity, enthusiasm for teaching, and exam fairness and quality were most important for student learning. Students, for their part, seek to maximize their overall grade point average (GPA) for the semester—a goal that requires the (optimal) application of time (McFadden & Dart, 1992). It is this all-important time factor by students that we seek to understand better by way of our study.

A novel study done by Trueman & Hartley (1996), focused on time-management skills and their relationship to a student's age. In their study, first-year undergraduates at a British university were divided into three age groups: traditional-entry students (under 21 years of age); borderline mature students (between 21 and 25 years of age); and older mature students (greater

than 25 years of age). The results of their study indicate that there are significant differences in the time-management skills among the three age groups, with the older mature students making the greatest use of time-management strategies.

Unfortunately, merely requiring students to attend time-management workshops is inadequate, as indicated by the results of a study undertaken by Horstmanshof & Zimitat (2007). Optimality of time use by college students is eroded when non-academic activities serve as distractions from study time. Such "learning postponement" is addressed in a study by Dietz, Hofer, & Fries (2007), the aim of which is to somehow relate procrastination to a lack of "daily routines" associated with academic activities. Their results suggest that student planning is integral to the prevention of academic procrastination. A student's ability to plan is but one skill among several for student self-management, the training of which is studied by Gerhardt (2007). Specifically, Gerhardt (2007) compiled four self-management tutorials, used by a group of undergraduate students, which presented components of self-management skills; these included: (1) self-assessment; (2) goal setting; (3) time management; and (4) self-regulation. Students' self-management skills, both pre- and post-training, were assessed, with results that showed significant increases in students' self-management skills.

Many educators are likely to accept the notion that students' willingness to work in a particular course is based in large part on the desired final grade. Results from a study by Lammers et al. (2005) suggest that there is surprising agreement between faculty members and students on the amount of work required for success in university courses. The same study also suggests that students' perceptions regarding study time per week exceeded what faculty members considered necessary for success in university courses.

Despite its obvious necessity, students' study time is probably perceived as their least favorite requirement for learning. Trout (1997) makes the point that the problem of students who dislike studying is nothing new; however, what is new is the ever-increasing number of such students. In terms of students' time, Trout (1997) states that today's college student resents the "intrusion" of coursework on his or her personal time. Students' perception of "time intrusion" may be mitigated somewhat through the use of computer simulations as part of regular coursework, as indicated by Young, Klemz, & Murphy (2003), who found that such simulations actually led to an increase in the number of hours students reported studying for a class.

A series of studies that attempted to assess the relationship between the quantity (i.e., amount) of studying by students and their resultant grades was done by Schuman et al. (1985). Their results showed a virtually non-existent relationship between hours of study and earned grades. This, according to Schuman et al. (1985), was both unexpected and surprising. A subsequent study by Michaels & Miethe (1989) extended the study done by Schuman et al. (1985), as an attempt to discern whether specification errors may have contributed to the purported "weak relationship" (Michaels & Miethe, 1989) between hours of study and earned grades. Results of the Michaels & Miethe (1989) study suggest significant main and interaction effects of academic effort on academic performance.

Nonis & Hudson (2006) examined possible effects on academic performance by time spent studying and working. The results of their study, similar to that of Schuman et al. (1985), imply that neither the time spent studying nor the time spent working seemed to have a direct effect on academic performance. Nonis & Hudson (2006) hypothesize that academically strong students possess an innate work ethic, which is manifested in their academic studies, thereby leading to positive academic performance.

An examination of business and marketing students' use of time, as highlighted by use of a diary, is described in Nonis, Philhours, & Hudson (2006). In their study, student time use and its role in academic performance is explored. As with our study, student participants were asked to indicate the amount of time spent on various activities each day for a period lasting one week. In contrast to our study, however, the study done by Nonis et al. (2006) employs a clustering procedure that classifies students based upon how they spend their time. The two clusters include: (1) campus-centered students, or traditional students; and (2) life-centered students, whose focus also includes life outside of campus. The results of the study done by Nonis et al. (2006) suggest that academic performance may be the result of combinations of variables, such as time spent on the computer, watching television, and other forms of entertainment study time outside of normal class meetings, and part- or full-time employment.

A study similar to ours was done by Budden et al. (2007), which involved students' use of diaries, or journals, to track their usage of media during a one week period in a typical fall semester. The media tracked in this study included historical media such as radio and television, as well as Internet media like MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, email, and Blackboard. In contrast to our study, for which the research problem emphasizes understanding better college students' use of time in general, the study done by Budden et al. (2007) attempts to examine usage patterns and market usage of the Internet as a communication medium among college students. Results of the study done by Budden et al. (2007) indicate that both male and female students spend more time using historical media (radio and television) than that of Internet media. An exploratory study done by Cheung & Huang (2005) identified various factors that may enhance Internet use by students, with the goal of having a positive impact on university learning. Cheung & Huang (2005) suggest that such enhanced Internet use is not intended to replace traditional learning, but should be used as a supplement.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to determine how students majoring in some area of business spend their time, relative to how they think they spend their time. In order to assess this, undergraduate business students enrolled in the first or second business statistics course at UL-Lafayette were required to record in a logbook, for a period of one week, the number of hours they spent using YouTube, FaceBook, MySpace, the number of hours they watched TV, the number of hours spent studying, as well as several other items. The reason these students in these classes were chosen was because all business students, regardless of their major have to take these courses, and the researchers felt that this was the best way to get a representative group across majors. Data was collected from a total of 212 business majors. Additionally, before they started this one-week period, the students were asked to determine, to the best of their abilities, the amounts of time they thought they spent on these activities.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the students. As can be seen from the table, more than 53 percent of the respondents were males. With respect to race or ethnic origin, more than 84 percent were Caucasians. The majority of student respondents were classified as juniors and seniors, and almost 69 percent had a grade-point average of 2.80/4.00 or higher. The average age was slightly over 22 years old.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Percent of Respondents
Gender:	
Male	53.3%
Female	46.7%
College Classification:	
Freshman	0.5%
Sophomore	10.9%
Junior	58.1%
Senior	30.5%
Race/Ethnic Origin:	
Caucasian	84.9%
African-American	10.9%
Hispanic/Hispanic-American	1.4%
Asian/Asian-American	1.4%
Other	1.4%
Grade-Point Average:	
2.00 – 2.39	8.5%
2.40 – 2.79	22.6%
2.80 – 3.19	34.9%
3.20 – 3.59	22.2%
3.60 – 4.00	11.8%
Age:	
Range	19 to 50
Average Age	22.33
Median Age	21.00

As mentioned previously, tests of significance were used to determine if there were significant differences between the amount of time the students thought they spent on certain activities per week, and the actual amount of time they did spend on these activities. These results are shown in Table 2. As the table shows, ten (10) significant differences were found between the actual time spent on the activities selected, and the pre-conceived estimate of time spent on these activities. On nine of these significant differences, the students thought they spent more time on the specific activity than they actually did. This would seem to indicate that students need to improve their time management skills. For example, students estimated that they spent more than 1.5 times more time using FaceBook and MySpace, than they actually did and twice as much on Moodle (an open source course management system) as they actually did.

While they watched television about the same amount of time as they thought they did, the alarming aspect of this activity is that they watched television more than they studied, even though they studied significantly more than they thought they were studying. Along these same lines, they spent about as much time at work as they thought, but this time spent was again much more than the amount of time spent studying.

With respect to the use of the Internet for academics, shopping, recreation, or work, the students again thought they used the Internet for each of these activities more than they actually did use them. In fact, they thought they used the Internet for academics 2.8 more times than they actually did, the Internet for shopping 3.27 times more than they actually did, Internet for recreation 1.95 more times than they actually did, and Internet for work 2.88 times more than they actually did. While actual usage of Internet for each of these activities was not exceptionally high, the fact remains that their forecasts of time used were significantly off.

As was stated earlier, they actually studied 1.3 times more than they thought they did. However, the respondents went to class significantly less (1.25 times less) than they thought they did. Specifically, they thought they were attending classes for about fifteen hours per week, when in fact they only attended about twelve hours per week.

CONCLUSIONS

While the study sampled undergraduate students, its findings pertain to these students' time management practices as well as to the universities within which these students study. First, the results of this study suggest that undergraduate business students, without realizing it, may be sacrificing some aspects of their academics and study time, due mostly to contemporary "technological distractions," such as YouTube, FaceBook, and other similar WWW technologies. Our results may serve as motivation to these and other undergraduate business students to increase their awareness about and make improvements in how they make use of their time.

Second, the pedagogy of business faculty may benefit from these findings, since a realistic understanding about students' use of their time might serve to motivate discussion about the importance of good time management as important to success in a college course. As an instructor, setting realistic time on task expectations is always difficult. In developing expectations, these findings may help business faculty better understand how and where students are spending their time and may help faculty better facilitate discussions on course expectations.

Table 2
Results of Significance Tests between Pre-conceived Time Spent and Actual Time Spent on Selected Activities

Activity	Actual Time Spent		Perceived Time Spent		t-stat	p-value
	Means*	Std. Devs.*	Means*	Std. Devs.*		
1. Hours spent using You tube	0.49	2.04	0.66	1.42	-1.01	.314
2. Hours spent on FaceBook	1.06	2.01	1.64	2.63	-3.40	.000**
3. Hours spent on MySpace	0.85	1.72	1.32	2.88	-2.88	.004**
4. Hours spent on Moodle	1.40	2.18	2.83	2.59	-7.18	.000**
5. Hours spent watching TV	10.89	8.98	10.59	10.16	0.47	.640
6. Hours spent listening to the Radio	5.44	7.70	7.75	10.15	-3.61	.000**
7. Hours spent using the Internet for Academics	1.29	2.15	3.66	3.74	-8.43	.000**
8. Hours spent using the Internet for Shopping	0.33	0.86	1.08	1.76	-6.03	.000**
9. Hours spent using the Internet for Recreation	2.47	5.05	4.82	7.84	-5.27	.000**
10. Hours spent using the Internet for Work	0.86	3.98	2.48	5.95	-4.01	.000**
11. Hours spent Studying	9.66	6.62	7.40	6.57	4.58	.000**
12. Hours spent in Class	12.20	3.52	15.37	7.43	-6.37	.000**
13. Hours spent at Work	20.51	15.51	19.00	12.06	1.89	.060

*Hours Spent in One Week**
Significant at α = .05

Third, academic and career advisors may benefit from this study by developing a better understanding of student time allocation and student perceptions (or in this case misperceptions) of time allocation. Student mentors, equipped with these findings, should be able to better assess the time management skills of students by asking similar questions to those posed in this study. For instance, this study found that students actually spent fewer hours attending class than they anticipated. As a mentor, it is important that students attend class session and asking questions about their attendance could help identify symptoms which ultimately lead to poor performance.

Finally, universities across the country are attempting to increase their retention of students from semester to semester. Through a better understanding of student time management practices, university administrators can effectively position their institutions to build effective relationships with students. While attention has been given to activities like academic and career advising, universities are beginning to look at issues like student involvement, engagement, and campus pride. This study provides great insight into how students spend their time and how they believe they spend more time on activities (like Internet usage) than they do. The study also finds that students' perception of time spent on commitments, like work, was very accurate. This demonstrates that when provided with structure, students can effectively manage the task. Likewise, university administrators may be able to help students manage their academic/university task by strengthening attendance and in-class Internet usage policies.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Since this study focused solely on the students' perspective, future research might include an assessment of faculty perceptions of how they think students actually spend their time during a typical quarter or semester. Moreover, it may be interesting to compare such faculty perceptions against measures of how students actually spend their time. One issue involved in this type of study will be matching faculty respondents with those of their students. This type of matching will require the participation of faculty as a respondent and disseminator of the measurement instrument to their students. Methodologically this will be cumbersome, but the findings would be a great extension to the current study.

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