

HOW DO TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS AT UW-EAU CLAIRE VIEW SCHOOL POLICIES RELATED TO CLASS PERFORMANCE?

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PURPOSE

The goal of the current exploratory study was to become better-informed about the potential disparities that exist between traditional and non-traditional students in terms of university and classroom policies implemented on campus. For example, attendance policies may place non-traditional students at a disadvantage given their often greater traveling distance.

HYPOTHESIS

We predicted that student criteria for non-traditional status would differ from those of the university, as would the criteria accepted for an excused absence.

We also predicted that non-traditional students would express more dissatisfaction with various university and classroom policies (such as the policy regarding excused absences) when compared to traditional students.

Lastly, we predicted that the perceived degree of fairness of university and classroom policies toward traditional and non-traditional students would differ such that non-traditional students would view the policies as being less fair than would traditional students.

METHOD

A random sample of one thousand University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students was asked to complete our online anonymous survey. Of the 133 viable responses, 109 identified as traditional students and 24 identified as nontraditional.

Using Qualtrics Survey software, we designed a survey in which we asked questions that were targeted at observing attitudes towards university and classroom policies such as excused absences, attendance, and grading of attendance.

	Student Status	N	Mean
Gender	Nontraditional	24	1.54 (SD=.51)
	Traditional	109	1.73 (SD=.44)
Age	Nontraditional	24	27.21 (SD=11.27)
	Traditional	109	20.19 (SD=1.35)
Grade	Nontraditional	24	3.00 (SD=1.45)
	Traditional	109	2.50 (SD=1.23)

REFERENCES

Jenkins, R. (2012). The new "traditional student." The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-New-Traditional-on/135012>

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We ran a 2(Participant Status: Traditional, Non-Traditional) x 2 (Policy Type: University, Classroom) x 2 (Policy Impact: Traditional, Non-Traditional) mixed with participant status as the between-subjects variable along with separate Chi-Square tests of independence.

As expected, students identified criteria of non-traditional status that were not represented in the university's definition (see below). We also found a high degree of disagreement with the university's excused absences policy, particularly with regard to familial obligations (see below).

Lastly, traditional students were rated as being treated more fairly by the university and in classrooms regardless of participant status. This supports our hypothesis that university and classroom policies are perceived as biased against non-traditional students. Not only did we find that students (regardless of their own status) view traditional students as being favored by policies, but also all students answered similarly to questions pertaining to specific policies. For these questions, the Chi-Squares tests were not statistically significant but they showed an overall trend that reflected similar negative attitudes regarding various university and classroom policies.

We were interested in conducting this study due to the increasing student diversity on the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire campus. Previous research suggests that the non-traditional populations on campuses across the United States is steadily rising with an average of about 1/3 of students considered as non-traditional (Jenkins, 2012). Future research can be directed toward enhancing non-traditional students' experiences on campuses nationwide, as it is estimated that by 2019 the presence of non-traditional students will increase by over 20% (Jenkins, 2012).

First Asked to Participants:

How do you define a nontraditional student?

	Student Participant Status	
	Traditional	Nontraditional
Takes time off/Older*	51.4%	24.5%
Younger	8.0%	6.1%
Married*	5.1%	14.3%
Has Dependents	8.7%	18.4%
Part Time/Online	11.6%	10.2%
Super Senior	2.9%	0.0%
Has Disability	2.2%	0.0%
Foreign Exchange	3.6%	2.0%
Works Full Time	2.9%	8.2%
Commutes	2.2%	2.0%
Military	1.4%	2.0%

Note: *p < .05 for comparison

University Definition of Nontraditional Student Criteria (For Context)

- Took a year or more off between high school and college
- Is married
- Is a parent
- Served in the military
- Live off-campus (more than a 5 mile distance from campus)

First Given to Participants: University Excused Absences Policy

- Illness or injury with a doctor's note
- University-related field trip or activity
- Labor Day employment
- Active military service
- Accommodation for a student's religious beliefs
- Jury duty

Second: Asked why they agree or disagree with criteria

	Student Participant Status	
	Traditional	Nontraditional
Agree with Policy	57.4%	50.0%
Disagree with Policy (Reason)		
Personal/Vacation/Mental Health	7.4%	0.0%
Funerals*	3.2%	15.0%
Doctor's Note Not Needed	12.8%	15.0%
Family Emergency	12.8%	10.0%
Job Interviews	1.1%	0.0%
Volunteering	1.1%	5.0%
Jail Time	1.1%	0.0%
Pregnancy	1.1%	0.0%
Weather	1.1%	5.0%
Work	1.1%	5.0%
Parental Obligations*	0.0%	5.0%

Note: *p < .05 for comparison

Participants Asked: How fair are (university / classroom) policies toward (traditional / nontraditional) students?

