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References

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A STUDY OF NON-TRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN TERMS OF THEIR TIME MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS, STRESS FACTORS, AND COPING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Non-traditional students have been returning to colleges and universities at a rapidly growing rate. This study investigated the stress factors and methods of coping of these non-traditional students during their university experience as compared to traditional students. A survey was conducted at a four-year southwestern state university that was projectable to the entire student population. Respondents were queried with regard to demographics, attitudes, behaviors and outcomes, such as grade point average, levels of stress and coping strategies in the college experience. The research indicates that non-traditional students bring different expectations for the college experience, were less involved in various college social activities and were less interested in "having a good time" in college than traditional students. Non-traditional students experienced differing levels of motivation, campus involvement, and participation in social activities from their traditional counterparts which related to time management issues and lead to differing levels of stress and methods of coping between the two groups of students.

INTRODUCTION

From the demographic and involvement standpoint, the study was similar to previous research (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010). This examination built upon the previous research by exploring time management characteristics, the origins of stress in traditional and non-traditional students, and the coping strategies employed. This paper is of value in adding to the existing knowledge base of the consequences of time management issues for non-traditional and traditional students.

The size of the non-traditional student population has been on the increase (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010). These students represent a variety of characteristics such as being over 24 years of age, working full time, and often having dependents to support. Many non-traditional students attend college part time. Between 1996 and 2006, the number of non-traditional

undergraduate college students increased at a rate of 30% to 50% (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007). The National Center for Education reports that 73% of all students have some characteristics of the non-traditional student (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006). These students bring with them desires and needs that are different from their traditional counterparts on campus (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2009). The shifting campus population toward non-traditional students necessitates that colleges and universities understand and adapt to these changing student needs in order to improve student satisfaction and involvement with the college experience and their persistence toward degree attainment.

While the demographic characteristics of the non-traditional student are reasonably well-understood, the sources of their stress with college life and the coping strategies they employ have not been as thoroughly researched. Take, for example, a hypothetical institution that is slow to recognize their growing non-traditional student base, and thus does not appropriately modify its offerings, policies and procedures to better meet the needs of the growing non-traditional student base. One might reasonably expect that the non-traditional students would be, at a minimum, inconvenienced, and, at times, disadvantaged relative to their traditional counterparts (Mehta, Newbold, & Forbus, 2009). This would result in various stress coping behaviors, negative attitudes about the institution and the college experience, and lower grade point averages on the part of the non-traditional students. It might also result in non-traditional students who were unable to persevere in their quest for a degree. Time management skills have been identified as one indication of higher performance and lower stress and anxiety (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between non-traditional and traditional students with regard to stress factors and coping strategies. A projectable survey was conducted at a four-year southwestern state university. Students were asked about such attitudinal issues as motivation for attending college, degrees of involvement in college-sponsored activities, school/work life balance, and feelings of academic stress. In addition, coping behaviors were investigated. It was hoped that the findings of this research would contribute to the expanding body of work related to non-traditional students, and provide guidance to administrators and educators alike to better meet the needs of their constituencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on non-traditional students generally defines them as those who have not followed a continuous educational path into college (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010). Consequently, they tend to be typically older than traditional students (Evelyn, 2002). Mature students tend to be more diverse than younger students in their expectations of the college or university and in their motivations for attending (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010). Adult students have had experiences in life and in their careers that have broadened their general outlook. Over the past fifty years, U.S. employment has gradually shifted from manufacturing

blue-collar oriented jobs to white-collared service related professions, bringing more adults to institutions of higher education to allow them to be prepared for career adjustments. Non-traditional college students have significantly more time and role tensions than traditional college students (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003). The external demands and differing responsibilities create time limitations that traditional students may not encounter (Lundenberg, 2003). With the increase in non-traditional students attending college, there is a need to understand how balancing of the multiple demands and roles of work, school, and life affects adult students.

Stress and apprehension are complex occurrences that can have both positive and negative results. Anxious students do not perform well in unstructured, independent study projects where less anxious students might excel (Nicolson & Bess, 1997). Having to deal with new and challenging information and ideas is likely to trigger a number of responses from the students including stress, uncertainty, and anxiety (Papanastasiou & Zembylas, 2006). Coping can be a partial moderator signifying that the student does have some control over the negative impact of stress (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009).

Stress emerged as an important variable with relationships to grade point average (GPA) and intent to persist along with goal commitment. Non-traditional college students with lower levels of academic stress and more satisfaction with their academic experiences also manage their time well (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007). Two additional areas of stress are related to non-traditional students: the extent of apparent demands within work, school, and personal life, and the role conflict between work, family, and school (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). Unlike traditional students, non-traditional students have responsibilities related to their work and personal lives that may lead to demand overload and role conflict when merged with school. These additional demands and responsibilities can create time limitations that traditional students are not apt to experience. Non-traditional students have reported the greatest tension between work and school, and these work stresses were a direct predictor of general well-being (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). This may be because of the fundamental role that work plays in the life on a non-traditional student. Combining a degree with employment can have negative consequences with students missing classes, doing less reading, and experiencing higher levels of stress (Robotham, 2009).

Studies indicate that many students who postpone their enrollment into colleges or universities are married and have dependents (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2010 and Leonard, 2002). Returning to school is an added obligation that impacts family interaction. Some couples report a renegotiating of the household division of labor and childcare to accommodate changes in schedules and workloads (Sweet & Moen, 2007). Balanced with the stress of the added responsibilities, students have reported spending time with their families as the biggest stress reducer (Canales-Gonzales & Kranz, 2008). The time management experience of non-traditional students has the effect of improved functioning and alleviation of feelings of stress (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007).

Academic performance and completion objectives might be related to a student's style of coping. It has been suggested that, even though non-traditional students are more apt to work full time, these students are not affected by working, commuting, or time limitations because they have more experience at time management (Lundberg, 2003). These students with more time management behaviors considered themselves to be more effective at work, had higher levels of moral and lower levels of stress (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007). However, recent research has suggested that work stressors may play a greater role than personal or academic stressors for non-traditional students (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). These stressors are potential reasons for non-traditional students relying more often on task-oriented coping strategies which focus on the problem. Students engage in direct action to modify the situation and reduce the amount of stress it causes. Task-oriented coping action might include engaging a tutor, setting aside more study time, or other active ways to solve the stress-causing problem. The possibility of having multiple roles increases task-oriented strategy out of necessity in supporting the focus on learning for its own sake (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003). For non-traditional students, task-oriented coping is related to learning goals and to higher GPAs (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003).

Studies indicate that adaptive coping can predict a positive outcome such as greater well-being and greater satisfaction with life (Kohler & Munz, 2006). Non-traditional students have reported using more adaptive coping strategies, such as planning, and less on maladaptive strategies, such as denial and substance abuse (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). In studying student drinking, it has been found that the root causes of excessive drinking revolve around depression, anxiety, peer pressure, and the desire for social acceptance (Gilroy, 2009).

Affective factors seem to play a crucial role in success or failure, and anxiety is one of the affective factors which play an important role in the learning process (Tasnimi, 2009). To help better understand the issues, concerns, and needs of non-traditional students, a study was conducted at a southwestern four-year state university with a significant proportion of non-traditional students.

RESEARCH METHODS

Exploratory Research

To facilitate the development of the survey instrument, a focus group was conducted with a convenience sample of non-traditional students. The results of the focus group clearly demonstrated that the needs of non-traditional students may be significantly different from those of traditional students.

The Survey Instrument

The instrument developed for the study was a self-administered, structured, and undisguised questionnaire. Besides the fact that this type of instrument is the fastest, least expensive, and most popular (Aldrek & Settle, 2004), our primary motivation for selecting this form of instrument was that it was the most appropriate methodology (given our sampling frame, targeted sample size, time frame, etc).

Recognizing the fact that the instrument was meant to measure ideas and concepts that are abstract and non-observable, extra care was taken in designing the questionnaire in terms of proper phrasing of the questions, and a neat layout of the various sections. Face validity was conducted with three researchers in the Marketing Department. A pilot study was conducted with a sample of the population to determine the accuracy of instructions, the best wording of the questions, the appropriateness of scales, etc. Since the topic under investigation was somewhat sensitive, extra care was taken to eliminate any ambiguity in the questionnaire. Seven-point Likert scales were used extensively to assess Student's time management strategies, their attitudes toward stress, and their stress coping strategies.

Approximately 3-4 items were developed to represent each construct under investigation. Nominal to ratio scales were used to obtain classification information. The survey took between 10 and 12 minutes to complete. To encourage participation from respondents, all completed responses were eligible to participate in a random drawing.

Operationalizing "Non-Traditional"

Non-traditional status has been operationalized a number of different ways in the preceding research. One commonality of all definitions is the requirement that the student be over the age of 24. Some researchers have added other requirements, such as marital status, presence of children or dependents, and work status. For purposes of this research, "non-traditional" was operationalized simply as over 24 years of age. Of the overall ending sample of 471 respondents, 97 are classified as "non-traditional".

Sampling and Data Collection

The study was conducted among a projectable sample of the student population at a mid-sized southwestern four-year university. The general demographic of the students attending this university include 42% male and 58% female; Whites=67%, African-Americans=15%, Hispanics=14%, and Others=4%; and Freshmen=21%, Sophomores=18%, Juniors=21%, Seniors=27%, and Others=13%.

In order to create the ability to generalize the responses and to eliminate any type of bias in the responses, students of an undergraduate marketing research course were trained to obtain 5

completed surveys each. To ensure accuracy of data collection and completion, 5% of each student's course grade was tied into this process. A stratified sampling plan was deployed, with strata controlling for both year in school (i.e., freshman, sophomore, etc.) and college attending (College of Business Administration, College of Education, etc.). The ending sample was found to represent student population as a whole with a margin of error of $\pm 4.5\%$. The validity of the sample was examined by a Chi-square goodness-of-fit test where the sample was compared to the population of the institution on key demographic variables. All Chi-squares were determined to be non-significant at the 0.05 level. This is an indicator that the sample is projectable to the population under study.

Data Quality

The items in the survey were developed based upon the literature review, focus groups, and the special circumstances of the institution where the research was conducted (Churchill & Brown, 2007). Since this was primarily an exploratory study, a minimum factor loading of 0.30 (Nunnally, 1978) was used as a guideline for including items in a factor. The reliability of each factor was evaluated utilizing an internal consistency measure. Factors with Cronbach Alpha less than 0.70 were not used for the analysis. In some cases, the analysis was performed utilizing individual items.

HYPOTHESES

Demographic

Many earlier studies have reviewed the characteristics of non-traditional students (Mehta, Newbold, & Forbus, 2009; Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2010; Bye, et al, 2007; Leonard, 2002; Berker, et al, 2003; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Choy, 2002; Evelyn, 2002; Sweet & Moen, 2007; Lundberg, 2003; Lundberg, 2004). In this research, we sought to establish whether non-traditional students were significantly diverse from traditional students particularly in the area of stress and methods of coping. Work may be a stronger source of stress due to its integral role in the life of a non-traditional student. Of the three spheres of influence (personal, work, and school), students may have the least control over their work situation (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). Thus, the first three hypotheses are as follows:

Non-traditional students are more likely to be married or living with a significant other than traditional students

Non-traditional students are more likely to be commuter students than traditional students

Non-traditional students are more likely to work more hours than traditional students

Attitudes/Involvement

Differences between traditional and non-traditional students suggest that they will have different expectations of their experiences with higher education institutions. Non-traditional students have a high level of desire for developing as a person and for preparing for career goals (Chao & Good, 2004). Attitudes toward academic difficulties will differ between traditional and non-traditional students. More mature students are expected to display a more serious attitude toward their motivation for attending college; and, therefore, adult students are projected to participate less in school activities, campus social events, and be less involved with fellow students and faculty, although adult students are affected positively by social and academic integration variables (Lundberg, 2003).

Involvement relates to how integrated the students are in various activities associated with the university (Mehta, Newbold, & Forbus, 2009). Involvement generally refers to time and effort invested in participation in organized activities offered by an institution of higher education. Because of the demands of their lifestyle, non-traditional students are expected to be too busy with work, families, and school to take advantage of the opportunities which lead to involvement in campus activities. The next four hypotheses are as follows:

Non-traditional students are less concerned about having a good time in college than traditional students

Non-traditional students are more interested in graduating as soon as possible in order to start a career than traditional students

Non-traditional students are not as active and involved in various on-campus and off-campus activities as traditional students

Non-traditional students do not feel a part of the college environment as traditional students

Stress and Coping

The hypotheses posed thus far measure the disparity between non-traditional and traditional students' life styles along with their reported expectations and experiences with the college environment. The variations between the two groups of students steers one toward the belief that, for traditional and non-traditional students, there is a variation in levels of stress and

coping strategies in the college experience. Studies have shown that stress levels were perceived as moderately high, and financial issues are one of the biggest contributors to stress (Canales-Gonzales & Kranz, 2008). The responsibilities associated with employment increases students' stress levels, but a majority of working students report that they feel the obligation to work (Robotham, 2009). The commuting student tackles challenges that the non-commuting student typically doesn't face, especially feelings of isolation, multiple life roles and different support systems (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010a). It is felt that these differences are a source of greater stress for non-traditional students. Another source of increased stress is linked to the fact that non-traditional students have more time limitations associated with academics and campus activities because of a more complex lifestyle than traditional students (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010a).

Stress and academic performance are universal issues in college students' lives. A coping style is the typical manner in which an individual will confront a stressful situation. It has been found that non-traditional and traditional students utilized different coping styles with active coping skills being utilized more often by non-traditional students. (Morris, Brooks & May, 2003). Active coping involves addressing the stress directly with such techniques as time management, planning, and developing solutions. A passive coping style is associated with skipping classes or meetings and going to a party or bar (Palmer & Rodger, 2009). Thus, the hypotheses dealing with these variables are as follows:

Non-traditional students have a higher level of stress related to money issues than traditional students

Non-traditional students have a higher level of stress related to work issues than traditional students

Non-traditional students have a higher level of stress related to commuting issues than traditional students

Non-traditional students have a higher level of stress related to a general lack of time than traditional students

Non-traditional students are less likely to utilize active stress management methods than traditional students

Non-traditional students more likely to utilize passive stress management methods than traditional students

Outcomes

Hypotheses dealing with key outcome measures were also tested. These include GPA (grade point average), overall levels of stress experienced, and overall satisfaction level with the college experience. With the factors defining non-traditional students, they are placed on a gamut from “minimal risk” to “ultrahigh risk” for persistence toward their degree or certificate (Ashburn, 2007). Thus, the hypotheses dealing with key outcome variables are as follows:

Non-Traditional Students are generally more “stressed out” than traditional students

Non-traditional students more likely to have a higher overall satisfaction level with the university experience than traditional students

Non-traditional students more likely to have a lower grade point average than traditional students

RESULTS**Demographics**

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results of the hypotheses. The first hypotheses addressed students’ marital status. Hypothesis 1 proved to be statistically significant. Of the 97 non-traditional students, 38.5% recorded their status as married or living with a partner. Only 8.7% of the traditional students noted that they were married or living with a partner. Thus the hypothesis was accepted.

The next two hypotheses have to do with students’ status related to commuting and working full-time. The second hypothesis, associated with commuter status, was accepted. A simple cross-tab shows that 66.0% of non-traditional students commuted a greater distance than five miles while only 32.5% of traditional had an equal commute. Results are seen in Table 1. The Chi-square was significant. Thus, non-traditional students were more likely than traditional students to commute to school.

The number of hours worked per week for non-traditional students was compared to that of traditional students. A cross-tab showed that 52.6% of the non-traditional students worked more than 21 hours per week and 32.8% of the traditional students worked more than 21 hours. Support was found for hypothesis 3.

Attitudes/Involvement

Hypotheses dealing with students' expectations, involvement, time spent on campus and participating in social activities were also tested. Hypothesis 4 focused on students' interest in having a good time and making money while at college. Non-traditional students are less concerned about having a good time in college than traditional students. The mean importance level of having a good time at school was 5.1 for traditional and 4.1 for non-traditional students on a scale from 1 to 7. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

With regard to hypothesis 5, there was a difference between the non-traditional student and the traditional students in their expressed desire to graduate as soon as possible and prepare for career goals. On a 7-point scale, the mean expectation level was 5.5 for traditional and 5.8 for non-traditional students. That is, traditional students were more prone to consider college as a time to develop as a person and prepare for the future. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 6 was concerned with non-traditional students being less involved in various college social activities than traditional students. To test this, we again used a test of the means. When asked to respond to the questions, "I participate regularly in social events," non-traditional students' average response was 3.1. The traditional student reported an average response of 4.1. This shows that non-traditional students are less interested in social events than traditional students. The test is significant with a t-score of 5.375 and p-value of .000. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

The next hypothesis described how students sense that they fit in and were a part of the college environment. The mean of hypothesis 7 was 5.6 for traditional and 4.9 for non-traditional students. This shows that non-traditional students feel that they fit in less than traditional students in the college social life. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Stress and Coping

Non-traditional students were predicted to experience more stress related to the three main stress factors of work, family, and school. Of these three, students may have the least control over their work situation. With regard to hypothesis 8, the mean level, on a 7-point scale, of money related issues was 4.9 for traditional and 5.6 for non-traditional students. It was expressed that this stress stemmed from obligations associated in part with rent, tuition, and vehicle payments. A simple cross-tab shows that 58.3% of non-traditional students relied on their personal income alone while only 27.4% of traditional depended on their personal income. Results are seen in Table 2. The Chi-square was significant. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

The next three hypotheses dealt with the stress associated with work, commuting, and a general lack of time. The means of hypotheses 9 and 10 on a 7-point scale were 4.7 for non-traditional students and 4.2 for traditional students associated with work factors and 4.2 for non-traditional and 3.0 for traditional students relating to commuting issues reflecting that non-

traditional students feel more stress associated with co-workers, bosses, and scheduling along with commuting to and from work, school, and home. Representing the feelings of a general lack of time, hypothesis 11 garnered a mean of 5.3 for non-traditional students and 4.8 for traditional students. The hypotheses were accepted.

Hypotheses 12 and 13 measured students stress management methods. Non-traditional students reported a mean of 4.1 on the use of active stress management while traditional students reported a mean of 3.3. Active stress management methods include putting things in a broader perspective, organizing, and prioritizing. Traditional students were more apt to use passive stress management methods associated with skipping group meetings, homework, and classes. The non-traditional mean for passive stress management was 4.9 and the traditional mean was 5.3. The hypotheses were accepted.

Outcomes

The outcome hypotheses 14, 15, and 16 tested for differences in overall stress, satisfaction, and academic success measured by GPA between non-traditional students and traditional students. Stress and coping methods were statistically different between non-traditional students and traditional students; however, when asked about considering themselves to be “stressed out”, the mean for non-traditional and traditional students were similar at 4.5 and 4.4 respectively. It is felt that this similarity is representative of the stresses associated with different lifestyles. It is recognized that non-traditional students are stressed by work, school, and families. Traditional students, because they are less mature, experience stress from academic and social concerns (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2010). Hypothesis 14 was not supported.

Hypothesis 15 measured students overall satisfaction level with the university experience. It was expected that non-traditional students would be less satisfied with their experience because of the lack of support for many of their needs. However, a difference was not evident from this study. The mean for non-traditional students was 5.9 and the mean for traditional students was 5.7 on a 7-point scale. This hypothesis was not supported.

Academic success was measured by GPA (grade point average) with hypothesis 16. A simple cross-tab shows that 28.3% of non-traditional students earned a GPA higher than 3.5 while only 14.7% of traditional had an equal grade point. The Chi-square was significant. Thus, hypothesis 16 was not supported.

Related Hypotheses	Item	Non-Trad Students	Trad Students	Chi-Square	P-Value	Accept	Reject
H ₁	Married/Living with significant other	38.5%	8.7%	99.727	.000	√	
H ₂	Commuting greater than 5 miles	66.0%	32.5%	36.046	.000	√	
H ₃	Working more than 21 hours per week	52.6%	32.8%	19.930	.000	√	
H ₁₆	GPA between 3.51 – 4.00	28.3%	14.7%	15.479	.001		√

Related Hypotheses	Item	Non-Trad Students	Trad Students	p-value	Accept	Reject
H ₄	Having a good time in college	4.1	5.1	.000	√	
H ₅	Interested in graduating as soon as possible	5.8	5.5	.074	√	
H ₆	Involved in on- and off-campus activities	3.1	4.1	.000	√	
H ₇	Feel a part of the college environment	4.9	5.6	.000	√	
H ₈	Stress related to money issues	5.6	4.9	.001	√	
H ₉	Stress related to work issues	4.7	4.2	.068	√	
H ₁₀	Stress related to commuting issues	4.2	3.0	.000	√	
H ₁₁	Stress related to a general lack of time	5.3	4.8	.018	√	
H ₁₂	Utilize active stress management methods	4.1	3.3	.002	√	
H ₁₃	Utilize passive stress management methods	4.9	5.3	.006	√	
H ₁₄	Generally more “stressed out”	4.5	4.4	.450		√
H ₁₅	Overall satisfaction level with the university experience	5.9	5.7	.231		√

Means are based on a scale from 1 to 7.

DISCUSSION

Relative to demographic factors, Table 1 shows that non-traditional students are more apt to be married or living with a significant other and are more apt to be commuter students. They are also working more hours than traditional students. Non-traditional students are expected to be involved in career work supporting their families and lifestyles while traditional students are more apt to engage in less permanent, part-time jobs to support their free time activities. Interestingly, while non-traditional students were working more hours and dealing with more stress than traditional students, they also had higher academic success levels as measured by GPA. Their maturity and life experiences as described by Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus (2009) explain why they are better time and stress managers allowing them the greater level of success.

When one considers attitudes and involvement, non-traditional students have different expectations for their college experience as it relates to having a good time, as well as utilizing college for personal development and preparation for careers. This is not surprising, given that non-traditional students are more likely to come to college with an existing career and with their lives already “developed”. Non-traditional students are less likely to participate in social activities.

Non-traditional students are presented with stressful situations more often during their higher education endeavors because of their work, social, and domestic situations along with additional time constraints and less involvement in the campus life. They would seem to be squeezed for time because of the responsibilities associated with work and family. Financial stress is expected to be a greater concern as non-traditional students balance tuition, rent, vehicle, and other burdens on their resources. Non-traditional students are predicted to experience more stress related to co-workers, bosses, scheduling, and commuting issues to and from work, school, and home.

There is a difference between the coping styles of traditional and nontraditional students. Using active coping methods, non-traditional college students more often supported learning goals and utilized task-oriented coping through time management and study methods, than did the younger traditional college students who relied more on passive coping methods associated with cutting class, leaving homework undone, and drinking more (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003).

Students who reported more effective problem solving skills were more likely to use coping strategies aimed towards task-oriented or problem solving focused. Learning goal orientations were associated with increased use of task-oriented coping that may imply, for example, that a student, who chooses to cope with stress more actively, setting up plans and mapping out solutions (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003).

It has been suggested that, even though non-traditional students are more apt to work full time, these students are not as affected by working, commuting, or time limitations because they have more experience at time management (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2010). Non-traditional

students are more mature and motivated toward their career goals. They are more serious toward their studies. These characteristics explain many of their attitudes and involvement behaviors given that they bring a more serious focus to their university experience.

Finally, with regard to key outcome measures, there is a difference in overall grade point average, stress and student coping, and satisfaction with the university experience between non-traditional students and traditional students. Because of their experience and maturity, non-traditional students are better at time management. Time spent studying explains a variation in academic success (Nonis & Hudson, 2006).

Preceding research might lead one to believe that a non-traditional student would experience more stress and, therefore, display less satisfaction with the university experience. This study, however, proved that this is not true. There is no significant difference between a non-traditional student's overall satisfaction with the institution than that of a traditional student. There are several factors that could have led to these results.

While it was expected that non-traditional students are working more hours than traditional students, our study found this to be the case. Research shows that working does not have a negative effect on learning (grade point average), but also shows that working hinders involvement, which has a positive effect on learning (Lundberg, 2004) and is the greatest source of stress for the non-traditional student. One thought to attempt to explain these findings is that non-traditional students are perhaps more self-sufficient than traditional students. They are dealing with different factors than the traditional student, namely experiencing multiple life roles, practicing time management behaviors, and using more adaptive methods for handling stress. Adaptive coping behaviors lead to constructive, healthy outcomes in stressful situations. Non-traditional students tend to employ task-oriented coping and report higher grade point averages (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003). These factors would lead to the conclusion that non-traditional students are quite capable of adjusting to factors in their environment. Their coping methods lead to fewer missed classes, more reading and more often completing homework assignments (Robotham, 2009).

From the study, it is known that traditional students are working, just not as much. Non-traditional students are more likely to work full-time and attend class part-time (Berker, et al, 2003). The lifestyles of non-traditional and traditional students are dissimilar from this viewpoint and, thus, do not share the same experiences in their college career (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2009a).

Students who look positively on the openness of administration tend to be more satisfied with the campus environment. (Nicolson & Bess, 1997). Non-traditional students have stronger relationships with administrators and place a greater value on faculty interaction than their traditional equivalent (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2010). Students reported that interacting with faculty and staff was helpful in reducing stress.

Limitations and Future Research

The research conducted concerning traditional and non-traditional students' attitudes about having a good time during their college careers was addressed by a single item construct. This is a limitation which could be addressed in future research. Additional constructs should be included to allow more data to be collected leading to stronger conclusions.

Future research is needed to better understand the balance of work lives and school for both non-traditional and traditional students. It is difficult for universities to implement campus activities and programs when they don't fully understand the lives of either group. Students, in theory, are sharing much of the same burden of work and school commitments and have less time for school functions. Perhaps research should be done on why non-traditional students and traditional students share the similar stress factors, and have divergent coping methods.

Research has shown that some universities are developing a framework and assessment tool to evaluate their effectiveness in serving non-traditional students (Compton et al, 2006). In fact, some universities are specifically targeting and catering to the needs of a sub-set (i.e., senior citizens) of the non-traditional students (Brandon, 2006). Along with this, it is pertinent for universities to reexamine the programs and methods for informing students of the programs that could be helpful in managing time and stress more proactively. Even if there is no statistical difference in satisfaction between the groups, perhaps satisfaction as a whole could be increased once the university knows what is desired by each group.

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