Living Arrangements, Academic Motivation and Academic Achievement of First-year Students

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether the living arrangements or academic motivation of first-year college students has a greater impact on their academic achievement. After controlling for race, first generation college student status and ACT score, neither living arrangement or academic motivation was related to first year college students' academic achievement (GPA) at (a) the end of the first semester and (b) at the end of the first year. A possible conclusion is that academic motivation in their first year of college might have more influence on their academic achievement in their later years in college.

Method

All students in the College of Agriculture (CoA) at a southern university take a one-hour introductory course (AG 101) in the first semester of their first year. Students who live in the Agriculture Residential College (ARC) were enrolled in their own section. At the beginning of the 2012–13 academic year, the class of CoA first-year students comprised 330, with 113 (or 34%) living in ARC. On the first day of class, students completed a survey that included an assessment of academic motivation.

Academic motivation was measured by an adapted 16-item version of Vallerand et al.'s (1992) Academic Motivation Scale with a seven-point response set that ranged from "does not correspond at all' to "corresponds exactly." Item scores were summed into a single variable.

Following survey data collection and after their first year of college, data about selected personal/family characteristics and GPAs, as the indicator of academic achievement, were obtained from the Office of the University Registrar and merged with the survey data. Living arrangement was identified by the section number of the previously mentioned AG 101 course.

A correlational analysis was conducted to ascertain personal/family characteristics that were significantly related to the dependent variables. Race, first generation college status and ACT score were retained for the regression analyses as control variables.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of All Variables (n= 321)*

Variable	M	SD	%	Range
Race, White			78	
First Generation College			25	
Living Arrangements, ARC			35	
ACT Score	25.90	3.36		18-34
Academic Motivation	68.95	9.30		34-94
Academic Achievement- End of First Semester	2.70	0.86		0.00-4.00
Academic Achievement- End of First Year	2.75	0.78		0.00-4.00

Table 2. *Predictors of Academic Achievement (n=321)*

| | GPA, End of First Semester | | GPA, End of First Year | |
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 |
Variable	B SE B β	B SE B β	B SE B β	B SE B β
Race	.60 .13 .26**	.59 .13 .26**	.63 .12 .30**	.63 .12 .30**
First Generation College	-.21 .11 -.11*	-.22 .11 -.11*	-.24 .10 -.13*	-.23 .10 -.13*
ACT Score	.05 .01 .19**	.05 .02 .20**	.05 .01 .23**	.05 .01 .23**
Living Arrangements		-.05 .10 -.03		.00 .09 .00
Academic Motivation		-.00 .00 -.03		.00 .01 .03
R^2	.15	.15	.21	.21
F for change in R^2	16.84	.25	23.71	.14

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Findings

The majority of the students were female and White and were not the first generation in their families to attend college. The mean of their academic motivation scores were above theoretical mean of 56, which may indicate higher levels of academic motivation.

The hypothesis was not supported. Neither living arrangements or academic motivation were related to the academic achievement of first year college students as measured by GPA at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first year.

As expected, race, first generation college status and ACT score were significant predictors of academic achievement both at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first year. The strongest predictor was race indicating that White students had higher GPAs than non-White students. Race was also correlated significantly with ACT score (*r* = .24), although not at a strong enough degree to indicate multicollinearity in the regression results.

A limitation is that the living arrangements of the students who did not live in ARC is unknown. Some students lived on campus, some students lived 'at home,' and others lived in off campus residences.

A possible conclusion is that academic motivation in their first year of college might have more influence on academic achievement in the later years in college.