

IS FREE TIME BAD FOR STUDENTS? MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF TIME PRESSURE ON MARKETING STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study is an exploratory examination of how time pressure affects university students. Recent news articles have focused on what appears to be an increasing amount of time pressure and stress felt by students (Weiss 2000; Wolgoren 2000). This study helps shed light for marketing educators on the scope and consequences of this trend.

The annual "American Freshmen Survey" conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute found in surveying the year 2000 entering freshman class that a record 30.2 percent felt "frequently overwhelmed by all I have to do." This continued the steady upward trend in agreement with this item from just 16 percent in 1985 when the item was first included on the survey (Weiss 2000).

Some articles reporting on time pressure among university students have focused on its injurious effects on physical health. Others have discussed negative emotional responses, including depression and rage; and corollary detrimental effects on the quality of educational experience (e.g., Scanlon 1999). For example, stressed out students have displayed such behaviors as shouting out rude remarks in class and threatening professors who gave them a bad grade. Such accounts paint a bleak picture of student life, and the limited academic research on the topic lends support to this picture.

This study explored the effects of time pressure on marketing students. Is working more than part-time detrimental to student performance and to student perception of university work? Is free time always a positive factor? What types of emotions does time pressure elicit in marketing students?

Students in consumer behavior, retailing, and marketing management courses were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their time availability and time pressure, and the effects of these on their university experience. Altogether, 181 students participated. Nearly all were juniors and seniors. After discarding incomplete questionnaires, 176 questionnaires were used in the analysis.

The study found that perceptions of time were affected by the amount of available free time reported. Measures of perceived time pressure and perceived time deprivation differed in the expected directions. Students in the "low free time" group reported feeling more time pressure and reported greater time deprivation than did students in the "high free time" group. However, the amount of free time affected university performance and other perception measures in unexpected ways. First, students in the "low free time" group reported a higher average GPA than did those in the "high free time" group. Second, students in the "low free time group" were more optimistic about their future careers and success than were the reportedly less time pressured and less time deprived students in the "high free time" group.

These results are provocative in that they suggest that less free time may actually be of some benefit. First, students who reported having less free time earned a higher average GPA than did those who reported having more free time. This result held even when the responses of just those who work long hours were analyzed. Perhaps scarce discretionary time has the effect of motivating students to maximize their time use. Second, those with less reported free time were more optimistic about their futures. Perhaps students with more free time use it to worry about the future rather than to plan and positively anticipate it.

REFERENCES

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