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# CUTTING COLLEGE CLASSES: AN INVESTIGATION

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The purpose of this study was to develop a profile of the undergraduate college student who is frequently "illegally" absent from class, and to identify the important factors that cause students to cut class. A survey of 300 undergraduate students at a major university indicated that students who frequently cut class feel that education is of little importance to their future careers, have a need to socialize, have less interest in school organizations, and are likely to consume alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs. Major factors in students' decision to cut classes were: finding class boring, outside employment, dislike of the professor, considering the class of no use to their future careers, and beautiful weather.

A serious problem facing many colleges and universities is that of students who cut classes frequently. The purpose of this study was to develop a profile of the undergraduate student who is "illegally" absent from class. Illegal absences were defined as those due to reasons other than illness or personal/family crises.

This study was conducted at a major university in the metropolitan New York area. The university's full-time undergraduate enrollment is 10,000 students, of which approximately 6,000 are male. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed about the campus at various times and places.

The questionnaire consisted of our parts. In the first part, respondents were presented with nine statements reflecting various attitudes towards education, grades, attendance, study habits, socializing, drinking, and drugs. Subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree/disagree ("strongly agree" = 1 . . . ,

"strongly disagree" = 5) with each statement.

The second part was concerned with the importance of various factors which would cause a student to intentionally miss a class. Students rated each factor on a 4-point scale ranging from "extremely important" (1) to "not important" (4). These factors included outside employment, extracurricular activities, disinterest in the class, importance of the class to career, dislike of professor, having easy access to another student's notes, staying out late the night before, use of alcohol, marijuana or drugs, and the weather.

The third part attempted to measure the number of illegal class absences per typical month. The response categories were 0, 1-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-16, 17-20, and 21+. This Question served as the second variable in each of the correlations. This section also attempted to measure the quality of alcohol, marijuana, and drugs consumed in a typical month.

The last part consisted of various demographic questions including, sex, class, and grade point average.

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Results

Table 1 indicates those variables which showed a significant correlation with number of illegal absences. Nonparametric correlation (Spearman and Kendall) yielded essentially the same results as did the parametric procedure (Pearson). This was due to the large sample size ( $n = 300$ ). Therefore, the Pearson correlation coefficient is the one presented in the table.

Regarding the attitudes listed in part 1 of the questionnaire, students who missed class more often, as compared with those students who missed less often, were more likely to agree that they would rather socialize with friends than study. These students also felt that class attendance was not necessary in obtaining good grades and were more likely to agree that they enjoyed drinking alcoholic beverages. Those respondents who cut more

TABLE 1  
Correlation of Various Factors with Number of Illegal Absences

PART 1: ATTITUDES		CORRELATION
Rather socialize than study		-.40***
Attendance necessary to obtain good grades		.40***
Enjoy drinking alcoholic beverages		-.34***
Leave to last minute rather than pace study habits		-.32***
Good grades are important		.31***
Enjoy taking drugs		-.27***
Enjoy smoking marijuana		-.21***
College important to future career		.21***
No interest in school organizations		-.19***
PART II: IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF FACTORS		
Beautiful weather		-.38***
Class is boring		-.38***
Dislike the professor		-.35***
Dislike the class		-.32***
Having access to missed notes		-.27***
Class is of no use to future career		-.24***
Drinking alcohol		-.22***
Bad weather		-.19***
Out late the night before		-.16**
Taking drugs		-.16**
Outside employment		-.11*
Smoking marijuana		-.10*
PART III: SOME OBJECTIVE MEASUREMENTS		
Quantity consumed of alcohol		.37***
Frequency of drug usage		.28***
Frequency of marijuana usage		.26***
Grade point average		-.11*

\*\*\*Significant at .001 level  
\*\*Significant at .01 level  
\*Significant at .05 level



TABLE 2  
Importance of Various Factors in the Decision to Cut A Class

FACTOR	IMPORTANCE	
	MEAN	MEDIAN
Finding class boring	2.39	2.36
Outside employment	2.50	2.44
Dislike professor	2.50	2.55
Class of no use to future career	2.50	2.56
Beautiful weather	2.52	2.63
Disliking class	2.53	2.44
Having easy access to another students notes	2.71	2.75
Staying out late the night before	2.93	3.18
Bad weather	2.98	3.21
Responsibilities to school club, team, etc.	3.05	3.18
Drinking alcoholic beverages	3.30	3.71
Smoking marijuana	3.57	3.87
Using drugs	3.70	3.91

Note: 1 = Extremely Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Slightly Important, 4 = Not Important

frequently believed that they tend to leave things to the last minute rather than pace their study habits. These students also placed less importance on the achievement of good grades, enjoyed smoking marijuana, felt that college is less important to their future career and had a lesser interest in school organizations. It should be noted, however, that although the correlations are statistically significant, many may have little practical importance because of their low magnitude.

Regarding the importance of various factors listed in part 2 of the questionnaire, beautiful weather, finding the class boring, and dislike for the professor or class correlate most strongly with number of illegal class absences. These are followed by having access to missed notes, finding the class of no use to future careers, drinking alcohol, and bad weather. Following these are being out late the night before, taking drugs, outside employment, and smoking marijuana.

Table 2, based on the mean and median responses of all 300 subjects to part 2 of the questionnaire, indicates that the most important factors in causing one to cut a class are finding the class boring, outside employment, dislike for the professor, finding the class of no use in future careers, beautiful weather, and dislike of the class. The means for the above factors on importance ranged between 2.39 and 3.53. The least important factors were drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking marijuana, and using drugs (means ranging from 3.30 to 3.70). These results are consistent with the results obtained from studying the correlations.

With respect to parts 3 and 4 of the questionnaire, Table 1 indicates that the quantities of alcohol, marijuana, and drugs consumed were significantly larger for those students who cut classes more often. Also, there was an inverse correlation between grade point average and number of illegal absences. As expected,



the more a student cuts class, the poorer the academic performance.

It is interesting to note that there was no significant difference in number of cuts between the sexes or among the classes. In addition, the day most likely to be cut was a Friday.

### Conclusion

The profile of students who cut classes often appears to be the following: They find education to be of little importance to their future career; they have a need

to socialize with peers, yet have less interest in school organizations; they are likely to have a higher consumption of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs. The major reasons for cutting class were "beautiful weather," "finding the class boring," "disliking the professor," and "disliking the class."

This study was exploratory in nature; it only dealt with students from one major university. Future research should use a probability sample of colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Peter G. Northouse, and Laurel L. Northouse (1985). *Health Communication. A Handbook for Health Professionals*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. The book is written from a dual perspective of nursing and communication. The author seeks to describe how communication functions in health care settings. Emphasis is placed on such factors as: empathy, control, self-disclosure, trust, and confirmation in health care. Such communication must of necessity involve professional-professional, professional-client, professional-family, and family-client personnel. The following major points are involved: (1) shows how concepts of communications can be applied directly to the complex problems that occur in health care settings, (2) cites recent and relevant research findings that are indispensable to understanding human interaction in health care, (3) discusses interviewing, nonverbal communication, small group communication, and conflict resolution, (4) includes an extensive bibliography, (5) contains 79 tables and figures, and (6) concludes each chapter with a summary.

Graham Wootton (1985). *Interest Groups: Policy and Politics in America*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. The author maintains that this is a teaching book in more senses than one. It provides a substantial amount of basic information about the whole range of interest groups that concern themselves with national domestic policy. It also contains basic information about the methods and techniques used by groups in pursuing their objectives. It starts with the concrete and proceeds to the abstract or conceptual, drawing on stimulating and even provocative statements that gradually receive the proper qualification. It seeks to develop "critical awareness" among readers. The author maintains that social power needs to be differentiated from the political order. The significance of election results on interest group achievements suggest that the individual can not do too much to change one's situation, only the big lobbies can do it." A subject suggested for debate is "We don't have a democracy of the people now. We have a special-interest democracy. The individual has no way of appealing to the government. The true democracy is where the individual is able to affect his own situation. That is not true in this country anymore, only the big lobbies can do it. Chapter 4 deals with "The constitution," and Chapter 5 deals with "Congress" Part III, for example, deals with "Groups and public policy."

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