Are Students Stressed?: A Study of the Impact of Student Engagement on Student Stress

Titus Young

This research is a product of the graduate program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.

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Are Students Stressed?:

A Study of the Impact of Student Engagement on Student Stress

(TITLE)

BY

Titus Young

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2017

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

[Signatures and dates of committee members]
Are Students Stressed?: A Study of the Impact of Student Engagement on Student Stress

Titus Young

Eastern Illinois University
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine students' engagement and stress levels at Eastern Illinois University, a Midwestern mid-sized regional comprehensive university. The two statistical hypotheses for this study were: “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?” and “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least 6 hours per week and students who work less than 6 hours per week?” The Student-Life Stress Inventory was used to measure students' overall stress. There were 168 surveys collected, 161 of which were deemed useable. An independent t-test was conducted. Research findings failed to reject the first null hypotheses and rejected the second null hypotheses. The results indicated that students who work at least six hours per work have higher stress than students who work less than six hours per week. There was no statistical significance found between the stress levels of students who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO. Recommendations were made regarding how students can manage stress and how student affairs professionals can help students manage their stress. Also, recommendations were made for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The classroom is an important part of a college student’s experience, as are the activities in which students are involved. According to the American Time Use Survey (U. S. Department of Labor, 2015), full-time university and college students spend an average of 3.3 hours engaged in educational activities each day. They spend 2.4 hours per day working and 4.1 hours per day engaged in leisure and sport activities. A student is more likely to stay at an institution and more likely to graduate when they are involved in a registered student organization (RSO) (Astin, 1984; Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2013). There are many benefits that students gain from being involved in RSOs. One student identified, “I’ve learned... good communication skills and how to be an effective leader just by being involved on campus” (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005, p. 399). Another student stated, “I think the best thing for a student to do when they come to college is to get involved because they’re going to make friends, they’re going to find a niche, and they’re not going to get that homesickness that a lot of students get when they leave home” (p. 401). Also, a student who gets involved with recognized student organizations might have to deal with higher stress. With classes, exams, jobs, and co-curricular activities, students have a greater chance of experiencing a higher level of stress (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003).

In a person’s daily life, everyone deals with stress (Selye, 1976). Students’ stress can come from increased work load, new responsibilities, change in sleep habits, depression, anxiety, pressure, academic load, and self-imposed stress (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005; Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999; Misra & McKea,
2000; Zascavage, Winterman, Buot, Wies, & Lyzinski, 2012). Being involved on campus can cause additional stress to students. A student who was engaged stated that, “When it’s just getting asked to do a million and a half things. And you do that million and a half things, but you didn’t do the other you do all this and it’s still not good enough” (Brandt, 2013, p. 37). It is important for student affairs professionals to understand how student engagement impacts student stress.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine students’ engagement and stress levels at Eastern Illinois University, a Midwestern mid-sized regional comprehensive university. This study was designed to provide insight into college students’ stress related to engagement outside the classroom. This quantitative research study used the Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) to measure students’ overall stress. The study will help demonstrate how students’ engagement impacts their stress. The results could provide a better understanding for student affairs practitioners on how much stress students are experiencing.

**Research Question**

The research question addressed and answered through this study will help practitioners understand the impact of engagement on student stress.

The following research question guided this study:

RQ: Does engagement impact students’ stress levels?

- Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?
• Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are
employed at least 6 hours per week and students who work less than 6 hours per
week?

Significance of Study

Student engagement is an important part of the college experience. This study
examined the overall stress levels of students who are engaged outside the classroom and
compared their stress levels with those who are not engaged outside of the classroom. By
understanding student stress levels, student affairs professionals can better conceptualize
the impact of engagement on student stress.

Summary

Chapter I introduced the topics of student engagement and student stress. It also
outlined the reasons for conducting the study. Chapter II contains a detailed account of
the literature on stress, student stress, involvement, and the Student-Life Stress Inventory.
Chapter III details the methods that will be used in the study. Chapter IV will outline the
results of the study, and Chapter V will offer recommendations related to those results.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Previous research on student stress and student involvement has identified sources of stress and the benefits of being involved. In this chapter, the following headings are used: understanding stress, student stress, student involvement, and Student-Life Stress Inventory.

Understanding Stress

Selye (1976) explained stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand" (p. 55). Selye defined the stress syndrome, which is also known as general adaptation syndrome (G.A.S), which has three phases: the alarm stage, stage of resistance, and stage of exhaustion. The alarm stage is where the body recognizes some threat and physiological arousal rises or levels off when the body adapts to the stressors (Gadzella & Masten, 2005). In the stage of resistance, an individual fights the threat. When an individual cannot adapt to the stressors, the body's resources will continue to be taxed and lead to the stage of exhaustion.

Selye (1976) described two different kinds of stress: eustress (good stress) and distress (bad stress). He stated that both eustress and distress go through the same phases in the G.A.S. The eustress has no negative consequences and is beneficial to humans. The eustress does not lead the body to the stage of exhaustion, and the person learns how to adapt to the threat. The distress has negative consequences to one's body and is viewed to be harmful (Gadzella, Masten, & Zascavage, 2009). If one could not adapt to the stress and it is prolonged enough, the stage of resistance can lead to the stage of exhaustion, where the stressors become distress.
Whether stress is eustress or distress it is “how you take it that determines, ultimately, whether one can adapt successfully to change” (Selye, 1976, p.74). Selye also found “stressors effects depends not so much upon what we do or what happens to us but on the way we take it” (p. 370). Selye suggested that how we perceive a stressor determines if it becomes eustress or distress.

Selye (1976) stated that stress is in our everyday life. Selye also stated that humans’ most significant stressor is emotional stress. Selye spent his career defining stress; other researchers then used his work to further study stress (Dusselier et al., 2005; Gadzella & Masten, 2005; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004).

**Student Stress**

Stress is part of the daily life of a college student (Dusselier et al., 2005). There are many contributors to stress. Dusselier et al. found that depression, anxiety, and seasonal affective disorder were significant predictors of students’ stress. They also found that concerns for a troubled friend or family member, perceived conflict with a faculty or staff member, frequent use of alcohol, sleep difficulties, and students living at home with their parents all led to students reporting more stress. Jogaratnam and Buchanan (2004) found that full-time students had greater exposure to stressors, freshmen experienced the most stress, and stress decreased by years in school. Zascavage et al. (2012) found that traditional students, students who took more than 17 credit hours, and students who worked four hours or more per week had higher levels of stress.

**Academics and Pressure Causing Student Stress.** Reisberg (2000) found that incoming students felt more pressure. According to Reisberg, about 30% of freshmen felt overwhelmed. She compared data from the Higher Education Research Institute annual
survey from 1985 to 1999 and found that the percentage of freshmen feeling pressure had nearly doubled since 1985. Reisberg suggested that feeling pressure could be related to students planning on working more to help pay college tuition.

Brandt (2013) found that Resident Assistants (RA) felt pressure making deadlines, completing administrative tasks, and completing homework. In Brandt’s research, a student described when stress was felt: “When I do feel stressed it’s usually just when I have a bunch of projects or a big paper to write and I also have to deal with some RA stuff” (p. 37). One student stated, “There’s a lot of undue stress, especially around the time of year when everybody is leaving for summer, where you may have a final and your residents want to check out” (p. 38). Another student felt pressure from work: “When it’s just getting asked to do a million and half things. And you do that million and half things, but you didn’t do the other you do all this and still not good enough” (p. 37). The students felt pressure to succeed academically and to accomplish their duties of being a Resident Assistant.

Dusselier et al. (2005) found that the biggest factor causing stress for students was academics. Students identified tests, classes, homework, and examinations as causes of stress. One student identified the pressure of academic work load: “The amount of time that I have to spend working on my projects for class... there is not enough time to spend on all of the work I need to accomplish” (p. 21). Dusselier et al. found that students who were taking more credit hours felt more pressure and stress. One student detailed “loads of school work, all due around the same time, or same day” (p. 22). The academic pressure could be related to feeling the need to succeed.
Jogaratnam and Buchanan (2004) found that a significant stressor for students was time pressure with academics and daily life responsibilities. Nearly all the students reported “too many things to do at once, a lot of responsibilities, and struggling to meet your own academic standards” (p. 242). Ross et al. (1999) discovered that sources of stress were increased workload and daily academic hassles. Goff (2011) identified that students most frequently reported pressures such as turning in papers on time, devoting time to classwork, overloading things to do, and balancing grades with work and relationships. Misra, McKean, West, and Russo (2000) also reported that faculty and students perceived that students felt stressed due to pressure.

**Gender Differences.** Every student encounters daily stress during college, but each person experiences stress differently. Researchers have found differences in the way males and females experience stress. Dusselier et al. (2005) found that females experienced more stress than males, but also pointed out that the females in their study performed better academically than the males. The researchers suggested that “women’s stronger academic performance might also be a signal of women’s increased determination to succeed academically, which clearly might give rise to a greater level of stress” (p. 27). Female students also have higher stress and more sources of stress than their male counterparts due to academics, body image, and sleep (Beiter et al., 2015).

Lee, Wuertz, Rogers, and Chen (2013) found that females’ overall stress was associated with sleep disturbance, daytime sleepiness, depressive symptoms, morning fatigue, less nocturnal sleep time, and more physical symptoms. Poor sleepers experienced higher levels of stress, daytime sleepiness, and physical and depressive symptoms. Of the 103 female students who participated in the study, 46% experienced a
clinically significant daytime sleepiness and 61% experienced a clinically significant fatigue severity. Participants experienced moderate symptoms of depression. Only three students experienced no physical symptoms, and the other students experienced on average 5.5 symptoms such as fatigue (76.7%), headache (74.8%), trouble sleeping (52.5%), backache (52.4%) and upset stomach (50.4%). Participants experienced sleep disturbance about three nights per week, and none of the participants had good nightly sleep. They also found 68% of the students were classified as insomniacs.

Researchers have found that female students experienced higher levels of stress than male students (Dusselier et al., 2005; Goff, 2011; Gupchup, Borrego, & Konduri, 2004; Misra et al., 2000; and Zascavage et al., 2012). Gadzella, Pierce, and Young (2008) found that females tend to cope with stress by going to sleep, taking pain killers, crying, feeling the need of moral support, wanting to take out their frustration on others, and praying. Females reported experiencing more emotional feelings and appraising stressful events. Also, females experienced more time pressure, higher levels of depression, higher levels of stress in frustration, self-imposed stress, pressure, and psychological reaction to stress (Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004; Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004; Misra et al., 2000; and Misra & McKean, 2000).

**Student Involvement**

Astin (1984) described student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). A highly involved student would be a student who spends a great deal of time on campus, joins student organizations, and interacts with faculty members. Astin suggested that with more time spent being involved on campus, students will have higher satisfaction with
the college. Being more involved will help students achieve a higher grade point average (GPA) and make students more likely to return to college.

Webber, Krylow, and Zhang (2013) found that students who reported more engagement in academic and social activities earned higher GPAs and had higher satisfaction with their college experience. Students who spent more time studying, interacting with faculty in and out of the classroom, and participating in community service opportunities had higher satisfaction with their college experience. Overall, the researchers found that students who were engaged in numerous activities achieved higher GPAs and satisfaction with their college experience.

Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) reported students who participated in leadership programs had a better understanding of self, experienced more personal growth since entering college, were more likely to hold elected leadership positions, and were more likely to be involved in co-curricular activities. Students who participated in leadership programs reported more growth in 14 developmental outcomes. Students in leadership programs had higher developmental outcomes, such as ability to set goals and interest in developing leadership skills in others, than students who did not participate in leadership programs. Also, students in leadership programs showed significant gains four years after graduating college in areas such as leadership understanding and commitment. There were no significant differences among males and females, with both genders equally gaining from leadership development.

Dugan (2006) discovered that students that were involved had a better understanding and exemplified the social change model than students who were not involved. Students who were involved in student organizations and participated in formal
leadership positions scored higher in common purpose and citizenship. They also found that community service was the most influential form of involvement on students’ leadership development.

Foubert and Urbanski (2006) found that students’ development is noticeable from their first year to the end of their senior year. Students that had higher levels of involvement also had higher levels of development in areas such as: clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation. At the beginning of the students’ sophomore year, the students were in two vectors of Chickering and Reisser: moving through autonomy toward interdependence and establishing and clarifying purpose. At the end of their college experience, the students were in the establishing and clarifying purpose vector.

**Student-Life Stress Inventory**

This study will be using Gadzella’s (1991) Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) which measures students’ source of stress and reaction to stressors. Gadzella (1991) developed the Student-Life Stress Inventory to assess students’ stress. The inventory was created because there was no other instrument to measure students’ stress at that time. The nine categories were determined by a class project, where students discussed the types of stressors students experienced. From the class’s list of stressors, five sources of stress were determined. These five sources were frustration, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed. There were four reactions to stressors that were determined. These four reactions were physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. Gadzella (1991) conducted a study to determine if the items in the instrument were reliable. She found
that correlations between all nine sections were statistically significant and the internal consistency of correlations of all nine sections were also statistically significant.

**Research by Gadzella.** Gadzella (1994) found that female students experienced higher pressures and changes to stressors. Females also experienced higher physiological, emotional, and behavioral reactions to stress. Male students experienced higher scores for cognitive appraisal which suggested that males were less concerned about their stressors. The study found that students who indicated their perceived stress as severe experienced the highest stress, and students who indicated mild stress experienced the least.

Gadzella, Masten, and Zascavage (2009) found that when the students perceived their stress as severe, they had higher stress scores than the mild and moderate groups. The students who perceived their stress to be mild experienced the least amount of stress. The researchers interpreted that mild stress is eustress (good stress) and severe stress is distress (bad stress). When the students indicated mild stress, they scored higher in the learning processes. Participants who indicated severe stress reported lower learning processes scores.

Gadzella, Masten, and Stacks (1998) found that students who took more chances or depended on luck for their decisions experienced more frustrations, conflicts, changes, psychological reaction, and higher overall stress. Students who were deep processors were better organized, critically evaluated information, and did not experience much frustration. Students that had good study habits did not experience much stress when studying. The researchers found no significant correlation between stress scores and test anxiety.
When Gadzella and Masten (2005) asked students to rate their perceived overall stress, 81 reported mild stress, 194 reported moderate stress, and 61 reported severe stress. The internal consistency was .61 (Self-Imposed) to .86 (Conflict) and the total inventory had an internal consistency of .92. These results were consistent with results from previous research.

**Research by Others.** Other researchers have used Gadzella’s SSI to measure students’ stress. Zascavage et al. (2012) found that females experienced higher levels of stress, and freshmen experienced more stress than sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students. Students who were taking more than 17 credit hours had higher stress levels. Students who worked four hours or more had higher stress levels than students who worked less than four hours. They also found that students who participated in community service had lower levels of stress than students who did not participate. The researchers found that traditional students experienced more stress than non-traditional and graduate students. There was no significant difference related to grade point average and stress.

Misra et al. (2000) discovered that students experienced high stress levels due to pressure and self-imposed stress. Females experienced higher stress levels than males in frustration, self-imposed stress, and pressure. They found that students’ reactions to stress were emotional and cognitive. Females experienced more reactions to stress than their male counterparts. Researchers found that faculty members perceived students to have higher academic stress than students’ perceptions. Students and faculty both perceived that students experienced stress due to pressure. Female faculty and female students both
perceived females having higher self-imposed stress. The study found that freshmen and sophomores had higher mean levels of stress than juniors and seniors.

Other researchers also used Gadzella’s SSI along with other inventories. Misra and McKean (2000) reported that students experienced stress due to pressure and self-imposed stress. Students also experienced emotional and cognitive reactions to stress. Female students experienced more self-imposed stress and psychological reactions to stress. The researchers found that female students had better time management skills than their male counterparts. The researchers found that leisure activities and perceived control of time management reduced academic stress. Also, students’ trait anxiety was a good predictor of academic stress.

Gupchup et al. (2004) found a negative relationship between perceived student-life stress and the mental component of health-related quality of life. Also, Gupchup et al. found that higher stress levels among pharmacy students are related to lower levels of self-esteem and reduced perceptions of general health. The researchers found that females experienced higher stress than males. The researchers suggested that stress affects the academic performance of graduate and medical students.

Goff (2011) found that personal and academic stress did not predict academic performance. A majority of the students fell into the moderate stress range, with males having less stress than females. The top two stressors the study found were pressure and self-imposed stress. The students typically experienced emotional and cognitive stress reactions. Goff found no difference among race/ethnicity and academic performance; however, Goff found a positive correlation between age and academic performance.
Summary

In this chapter, the literature review provided an overview of stress, student stress, academics and pressures causing stress, gender differences with stress, student involvement, the Student-Life Stress Inventory, Gadzella's research using the Student-Life Stress Inventory, and the work of other researchers using the Student-Life Stress Inventory. The previous research indicated that female students have higher levels of stress than male students and that sources of students' stress are academics, pressure, and self-imposed stress. Also, the review of literature demonstrated the benefits of student involvement.
CHAPTER III

Methods

This chapter outlines the methodological framework that was used to conduct this study, including design, participants, research site, and instrument.

Design of the Study

This study examined students' engagement and students' stress levels. This research was conducted using the Student-Life Stress Inventory at Eastern Illinois University (EIU).

Participants and Research Site

This study was conducted at EIU, a Midwestern public regional comprehensive university. Total enrollment at EIU for the Fall 2016 semester was 7,415 students (Eastern Illinois University, 2016). Of those 7,415 students, 5,957 were undergraduate students and 1,458 were graduate students. The majority (60%) reported to be female. Class level populations were: 1,251 (16.9%) freshmen, 1,073 (14.5%) sophomores, 1,447 (19.5%) juniors, 2,138 (28.8%) seniors, 48 (0.6%) post-baccalaureate undergraduates, and 1,458 (19.7%) graduates. A pen and paper instrument was used to collect data on this population. I collected 168 surveys, 161 of which were useable after removing incomplete surveys and searching for outliers. The demographic information of the 161 participants is shown in Table 3.1. The 161 participants ranged in age from 18 to 31.
Table 3.1

Demographic Information of 161 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>29.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander/Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>50.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you work six or more hours a week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you participate in at least one RSO?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrument**

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire asked the participants information about age, gender, race/ethnicity, location of residence (on-campus vs. off-campus), and year in school (Appendix A). Descriptive data for the demographic information included frequencies and percentages.

**Student-Life Stress Inventory.** The study used Dr. Gadezella’s Student-Life Stress Inventory (Appendix A). The Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) is an instrument that measures student stress. The SSI measures five sources of stress, four reactions to stress, and overall stress levels. This study will be using the SSI overall stress score. The
internal consistency for the whole inventory is .92. Descriptive statistics for the overall SSI score were analyzed and included frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), ranges, and standard deviations.

**Data Collection**

The SSI was administered as a pen and paper survey. The survey was administered in locations such as the University Union food court and academic buildings. Surveys were collected from January 2017 to February 2017. Participants were invited to submit their name and phone number for a drawing from which four winners were randomly selected to receive a twenty-five-dollar Dining Dollars gift card from EIU Housing and Dining Services. Data were initially collected on paper surveys. Those paper surveys were stored in a box that was taped shut and kept at the principal investigator’s residence. The data collected did not include any personal identifiers. After survey collection was completed, the data was transferred into a digital Microsoft Excel file. The data in the Excel file was then transferred into a SPSS file. The digital files were kept on the principal investigator’s password-protected personal computer, with a back-up copy on a password-protected flashdrive. The individuals who had access to the data were the principal investigator, co-investigator, and thesis committee members. The data (paper surveys and electronic files) will be stored for three years and then destroyed. The paper data will be burned, and the digital files will be deleted.

**Data Analysis**

This study had one research question with two statistical hypotheses. A t-test was used to test the statistical hypotheses for the research question. Assumptions of the t-test were tested using the dependent variable scores. Data followed a continuous scale and
were collected from a random sample. A check for outliers was made through the use of SPSS; significant outliers were removed from the data sample. A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was analyzed on the revised dependent variable score to assure data results on a normal distribution. Lastly, a Levene’s test for homogeneity was performed.

The research question for this study was, “Does engagement impact student stress?” This research question had two statistical hypotheses. The first statistical hypothesis was, “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?” The null hypotheses was that there was no statistical difference between the stress level of students who are involved in at least one RSO and the stress level of students who are not involved in a RSO. The alternative hypotheses was that there was a significant difference on students’ stress who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO. This statistical hypothesis was tested using a t-test comparing two different means with $p \leq 0.05$. The dependent variable was the Student-Life Stress Inventory overall stress score; the independent variable was student involvement with an RSO (Yes = 1, No = 0). Using an online program, Cohens $d$ was analyzed to determine effect size.

The second statistical hypothesis was, “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least six hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week?” The null hypothesis was that there is no statistical difference between the stress level of students who work six or more hours per week and the stress level of students who work less than six hours per week. The alternative hypotheses was that there is a statistical difference between the stress level of
students who work six or more hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week. This statistical hypothesis was tested using a $t$-test comparing two different means with $p \leq 0.05$. The dependent variable was the Student-Life Stress Inventory overall stress score; the independent variable was working six or more hours a week ($\text{Yes} = 1$, $\text{No} = 0$). Using an online program, Cohen's $d$ was analyzed to determine effect size.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology that was used to examine students’ engagement and stress levels. The study used a quantitative approach to collect data at Eastern Illinois University. Chapter IV will outline the results of the study.
CHAPTER IV

Results

The study was conducted by collecting data on student stress by using the Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) to answer the research question: "Does engagement impact students’ stress levels?" A t-test was run to analyze the two statistical hypotheses: "Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?" and "Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least six hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week?" The study yielded 164 valid responses from undergraduate and graduate students. There were three responses that were removed from the data after searching for outliers, which resulted in using 161 responses to analyze the data. Below are the findings for the two statistical hypotheses and analysis of the data.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics (means [M] and standard deviation [SD]) was conducted on the data collected for all the participants’ overall stress score (n=150). Results can be found in Table 4.1. A Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to test normality of distribution, which revealed a normal distribution (df = 150, p > .496).
Table 4.1

Means and Standard Deviation of the Student-Life Inventory (SSI) Overall Stress Score

\(n = 150\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Stress Score</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>147.33</td>
<td>25.61</td>
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Independent Samples t-Test

An independent samples t-test was conducted on the first statistical hypotheses:

"Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?" The independent samples t-test revealed that students who participate in at least one RSO (\(M = 149.15, SD = 25.71\)) did not differ from students who did not participate in at least one RSO (\(M = 142.67, SD = 25.05\)) as predicted, \(t (148) = 1.4, p = .165, d = .28\) (see Table 4.2). Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses that there is no statistical difference between the stress level of students who are involved in at least one RSO and the stress level of students who are not involved in a RSO.
Table 4.2

Independent Sample t-Test Comparing Means Scores from Overall Stress Score of the Student-Life Stress Inventory Between Students Who are Involved in at Least One RSO and Students are not Involved in a RSO.

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<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Stress Score</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>[-2.69, 15.67]</td>
<td>.28</td>
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Note. MD = Mean Difference. CI = 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference. Items were rated on a Likert scale of: (1) corresponds never, to (5) corresponds most of the time. In Levene’s Test for Equal Variances, equal variances were assumed.

An independent samples t-test was conducted on the second statistical hypotheses:

“Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least six hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week?” The independent samples t-test revealed that students who worked six hours or more ($M = 150.68, SD = 25.44$) differ from students who worked less than six hours ($M = 142.32, SD = 25.26$) as predicted, $t(148) = 1.98, p = .05, d = .33$ (see Table 4.3). Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypotheses that there is a statistical difference between the stress level of students who worked at least 6 hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week. Further, Cohen’s d effect size was reported as 0.33, which indicated a small effect size.
Table 4.3

*Independent Sample t-Test Comparing Means Scores from Overall Stress Score of the Student-Life Stress Inventory Between Students Who are Employed at Least Six Hours Per Week and Students Who Work Less Than Six Hours Per Week.*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Overall Stress Score</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$MD$</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>Cohen's $d$</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
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<td></td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td>[0.007, 16.72]</td>
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*Note.* $MD =$ Mean Difference. CI = 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference. Items were rated on a Likert scale of: (1) corresponds never, to (5) corresponds most of the time. In Levene's Test for Equal Variances, equal variances were assumed.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the results of student stress levels and student engagement. After conducting the appropriate tests, I failed to reject the first null hypotheses: “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?” I rejected the second null hypotheses: “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least six hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week?” The following chapter will further discuss these findings and how they compare to literature themes from Chapter II.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

This research was conducted to study the impact of student engagement on students’ stress levels. In the previous chapter, data was analyzed to answer the research questions: Does engagement impact students’ stress levels? In this chapter, the findings from this study will be presented and compared to the research findings in the literature review. To conclude this discussion of the findings and how it relates to others’ research, I will discuss recommendations for students, recommendations for student affairs professionals, and recommendations for future research.

Comparison of Research Findings to Literature Themes

In this section, I will discuss the findings of the two statistical hypotheses: “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?” and “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least 6 hours per week and students who work less than 6 hours per week?” Those findings will be compared to the themes in the review of literature.

Impact of Involvement in a Registered Student Organization. The findings of the first statistical hypotheses: “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO?” indicated that there is no statistical difference in stress levels in students who are involved in at least one RSO and students who are not involved in a RSO. Two studies found that students who participated in community service and leisure activities had lower levels of stress than students who did not participate in either (Misra & McKean,
2000; Zascavage et al., 2012). This suggested that involvement can help students reduce and manage stress.

**Impact of Students Working.** The findings of the second statistical hypotheses: “Is there a significant difference in the stress levels reported by students who are employed at least 6 hours per week and students who work less than 6 hours per week?” indicated that students who work at least six hours per week have higher stress levels than students who work less than six hours per week. Another researcher found students who worked four or more hours per week had higher levels of stress (Zascavage et al., 2012). Other researchers found that pressure from work, daily responsibilities, daily academic hassles, and balancing work and academics were factors for causing stress (Brandt, 2013; Goff, 2011; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004; Ross et al., 1999).

**Recommendations for Students**

The first recommendation for students is to develop time management skills to help reduce the stress of work. When students have perceived control of their time, they have less stress (Misra & McKean, 2000). Students can use planners, calendars, reminders, and to do lists to help manage their time. Students should plan their time commitments each week and prioritize what needs to be accomplished. These techniques and skills can help students manage their time more effectively and help them have more control over their time.

The second recommendation for students is for students to get involved in a student organization. Being engaged in a student organization can help teach useful skills such as time management, coping skills, and leadership skills. Researchers from the literature review found that students who were involved in student organizations and
leadership programs developed more leadership skills, were better at goal setting, had higher GPAs and satisfaction rate at their institution, and were more engaged with their community than students who were not involved (Cress et. al., 2001; Dugan, 2006; Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2013). These skills and benefits from being involved can help students manage their time and reduce their stress (Misra & McKean, 2000).

The third recommendation is for students to seek out workshops and resources on how to manage stressors such as self-imposed stress and pressure. Previous research found that student stressors included self-imposed stress and pressure (Misra & McKean, 2000; Misra et al., 2000; Goff, 2011). Students can go to offices such as Career Services, Student Activities, and Health & Wellness to gather information on how to manage stressors. These offices can provide one on one, small group, and large group sessions on how to manage self-imposed stress and pressure from work, academics, and daily responsibilities. The offices can also assist and refer students to other offices or resources to help students manage their stressors.

**Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals**

The first recommendation for student affairs professionals is to develop programs and initiatives that focus on time management, balancing work and academics, and managing stress in the workplace. It is recommended that universities collaborate with Career Services, Student Activities, Health and Wellness, and Residential Life offices to conduct time management and stress management training for student employees. The institution should provide calendars or planners to their students to encourage them to manage their time better. The university should encourage students to seek the counseling
center to help manage severe stress. Student affairs professionals need to stay informed of evidence-based programs that affect stressors.

The second recommendation is to create a professional development plan for student employees. The professional development plan would include a weekly or monthly training or workshop on a variety of topics such as time management, stress in the workplace, goal setting, and study skills. The professional development plan should be with the students and should be tailored to each student.

The third recommendation for professionals is to be mindful of students’ time and academic demands. It is important that professionals identify stressors with their staff. As professionals, we need to adjust student work demands, depending on time of the academic year and student academic load.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The first recommendation would be to study the difference of stress levels between male and female students. In the literature review, other researchers found that females have higher stress levels than males (Dusselier et al., 2005; Goff, 2011; Gupchup, Borrego, & Konduri, 2004; Misra et al., 2000; and Zascavage et al., 2012). I recommend that future studies identify factors that cause females to have more stress than males. Future research should identify techniques and strategies to help reduce stress in females.

The second recommendation is that future research would identify what factors cause significant stress in students and how students’ stress impacts GPA. Identifying factors that causes severe stress can help professional staff members to develop effective strategies to reduce severe stress. Knowing if significant stress impacts academic
performance will help academic support offices develop techniques to help students be more successful.

The third recommendation is to identify whether level of engagement in student organizations affects students’ stress and academic performance. Studies should identify whether highly involved students who dedicate a significant number of hours to an organization has significant stress and if that stress impacts academic performance. The research should look to find if there is a threshold of how many student organizations or how many hours a student should dedicate before stress levels become significant and impact students’ academic performance.

Conclusion

I sought to determine if engagement impacts students’ stress levels. There was no significant difference in stress between students who are involved with an RSO and students who are not involved with an RSO. There was a significant difference in stress levels between students who work at least six hours per week and students who work less than six hours per week. Student affairs professionals need to be mindful of the demands and create a professional development plan for student workers. There needs to be further research on students’ involvement in student organizations and student stress levels. It has been recommended in the previous sections to research whether involvement, stress, and academic performance impact each other.
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stress on health related quality of life among doctor of pharmacy


APPENDIX A

Student-Life Stress Inventory
Gender: Male Female Other

Year: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Grad

Age = Race/Ethnicity =

Do you work six or more hours a week?: Yes or No

Do you participate in at least one Registered Student Organization?: Yes or No

Do you live on campus?: Yes or No

Rate your overall level of stress:

Mild  Moderate  Severe

Respond to each statement in the Student-Life Inventory by recording the level of your experience on the 5-point scale with 1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, and 5 = Most of the time.

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STUDENT-LIFE STRESS INVENTORY

Bernadette M. Gadzella, Ph.D., 1991 Copyright
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Note: Do #52 on scantron first.
Rate your overall level of stress as A=mild, B=moderate, C=severe.

This inventory contains statements dealing with student-life stress. Read it carefully and respond to each statement as it has related or is relating to you as a student. Use the 5-letter scale which indicates the level of your experiences with:

\[ A=never, \quad B=seldom, \quad C=occasionally, \quad D=often, \quad E=most \; of \; the \; time. \]

Record your responses on the accompanying answer sheet.

I. STRESSORS:

A. As a student:
1. I have experienced frustrations due to delays in reaching my goal.
2. I have experienced daily hassles which affected me in reaching my goals.
3. I have experienced lack of sources (money for auto, books, etc.)
4. I have experienced failures in accomplishing the goals that I set.
5. I have not been accepted socially (became a social outcast).
6. I have experienced dating frustrations.
7. I feel I was denied opportunities in spite of my qualifications.

B. I have experienced conflicts which were:
8. Produced by two or more desirable alternatives.
9. Produced by two or more undesirable alternatives.
10. Produced when a goal had both positive and negative alternatives.

C. I have experienced pressures:
11. As a result of competition (on grades, work, relationships with spouse and/or friends).
12. Due to deadlines (papers due, payments to be made, etc.).
13. Due to an overload (attemding too many things at one time).
14. Due to interpersonal relationships (family and/or friends expectations, work responsibilities).

D. I have experienced:
15. Rapid unpleasant changes.
16. Too many changes occurring at the same time.
17. Changes which disrupted my life and/or goals.
As a person:
18. I like to compete and win.
19. I like to be noticed and be loved by all.
20. I worry a lot about everything and everybody.
21. I have a tendency to procrastinate (put off things that have to be done).
22. I feel I must find a perfect solution to the problems I undertake.
23. I worry and get anxious about taking tests.

II. REACTIONS TO STRESSORS:

During stressful situations, I have experienced the following:
24. Sweating (sweaty palms, etc.)
25. Stuttering (not being able to speak clearly)
26. Trembling (being nervous, biting fingernails, etc.)
27. Rapid movements (moving quickly from place to place)
28. Exhaustion (worn out, burned out)
29. Irritable bowels, peptic ulcers, etc.
30. Asthma, bronchial spasms, hyperventilation
31. Backaches, muscle tightness, (cramps), teeth-grinding
32. Hives, skin itching, allergies
33. Migraine headaches, hypertension, rapid heartbeat
34. Arthritis, overall pains
35. Viruses, colds, flu
36. Weight loss (can't eat)
37. Weight gain (eat a lot)

When under stressful situations, I have experienced:
38. Fear, anxiety, worry
39. Anger
40. Guilt
41. Grief, depression

When under stressful situations, I have:
42. Cried
43. Abused others (verbally and/or physically)
44. Abused self
45. Smoked excessively
46. Was irritable towards others
47. Attempted suicide
48. Used defense mechanism
49. Separated myself from others

With reference to stressful situations, I have:
50. Thought and analyzed about how stressful the situations were.
51. Thought and analyzed whether the strategies I used were most effective.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE STUDENT-LIFE STRESS INVENTORY

1. If the students want to participate in the study, give them a copy of the Answer Sheet.

2. Ask them to fill out the information about themselves on the Answer Sheet. e.g., Name, course, age, etc. If the information doesn't apply to them, e.g., number of children, just indicate NA.

Then, ask them to rate their overall stress on the Answer Sheet (Check only one).

3. Then, give each student one set of the 2-page Student-Life Stress Inventory. Read the instructions on the Inventory Sheet.

Ask the students to record each of their answers on the Answer Sheet. There are 51 items. (Make sure they do not miss any item).

INSTRUCTIONS ON SCORING THE STUDENT-LIFE STRESS INVENTORY

1. When students rated their overall stress value on the Answer Sheet before responding to the Inventory, this is their perception prior to their responses and should be treated as such. (You can compare it to their total responses from the Inventory).

2. Add the values of each item and sum them up for each category. e.g. There are 7 items in the Frustration category. Add the value for each item and total it for the category. Do the same for the first eight categories. On the ninth category (Cognitive Appraisal), first reverse the values (e.g. 1 is converted to 5, and 5 is converted to 1). Then, sum up the values for Cognitive Appraisal category.

3. You now have scores for each of the nine categories. To get the total score, add up all nine values.
APPENDIX B

Written Permission
Mr. Titus Young
17 Avenue Blvd. Dr.
Lenoir, NC 28645

Dear Mr. Young:

I am to inform you that I received your letter requesting permission to use the Student Life Factors Inventory (SLFI) and 2000 for handling, copies and postage costs. Thank you!

I want to inform you, when I give permission to use the SLFI to an individual, I give it to a person who will not abuse it, that is, by giving it to others, sharing it, putting it on the computer or distributing it in any fashion. The SLFI is a copyrighted research tool. When I give permission to an individual it includes:

1. A copy of the SLFI answer sheet, how to administer and score the SLFI, and permission to use it in the study.

I am retired now, after many years of professional services. I got sick and had to retire. So, I did not prepare a manual for SLFI. However, information on SLFI, that is, its related validity, reliability, etc., are published in numerous professional journals which are available in libraries. (These will also help you with your review of literature for your thesis).

Please find enclosed:

1. A copy of the SLFI (original copy, 1997) and answer sheet. (You may reproduce as many copies as you need for your study).
After the study, destroy the consent!

2. A sheet informing your how it is administered and your rights.

3. A permission sheet to use the SCU in your study (you need it for your thesis).

Please ensure you get voluntary to participate in your study. These first tell us information about themselves, e.g., their present overall stress (perceived e.g., mild, moderate, severe), just one indicate these gender, etc. (refer to the inventory. Grant it on the nearest sheet).

I wish you the very best in your research and success in your career.

I wish to know what results you found. I wish students and researchers found results similar to mine.

Sincerely yours,

Karmelita M. Kusiyana, PhD.

Copy: filed
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO USE STUDENT-LIFE STRESS INVENTORY IN A STUDY
Copyrighted Material

Description:
Author's Full Name: Bernadette M. Gadzella

Title of the Instrument: Student-life Stress Inventory

Title of the Journal: Psychological Reports

Date: April 1994, Volume 74(2) Page: 395-402

Publisher of article: Psychological Reports

Permission is hereby granted for J*** Y***ng to use the instrument described above for her research study. It is understood that the use of this material is limited to the specified purpose and is limited to a one time use only basis.

Date: May 10, 2016

Signed: Bernadette M. Gadzella, Ph.D.
Bernadette M. Gadzella, Ph.D.
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