

Abstract/Methods

This poster presents the results of a study of university students' perceptions of educational training environments, which is typically limited to course evaluations. Relationships between program organization/structure, students' perceptions, and cumulative GPA will be examined considering race and gender. Findings will enhance understanding about the impact of program variables.

Packets (N = 227), which included a consent form and a researcher-developed Training Environment Survey, were completed bi-annually by a random sampling of currently enrolled undergraduate (n = 140; 61.7%), graduate (n = 56; 24.7%), and doctoral-level (n = 31; 13.7%) university majors in programs housed within a Department of Human Services in a state institution located in the southern USA, having a total student population of approximately 13,000: Special Education, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, School Psychology, Vision Impairment, Orientation and Mobility, Rehabilitation Services, Counseling, Communication Disorders, and Speech and Language Pathology. The Training Environment Survey (TES) assessed students' perceptions of: Faculty-Faculty Relationships, Faculty-Student Relationships, Student-Faculty Relationships, Student-Student Relationships and number of student services available (Policies).

Twenty-four(23.8%) percent (n = 54) of the participants reported racial/ethnic minority status; 76.2% (n = 173) reported having White or racial/ethnic majority status; 94.2 % (n = 210) were female; and 5.8% (n = 13) were male; 1.8% (n = 4) did not specify; 12.8% (n = 29) identified as African American; 9.3% (n = 21) identified as Latino American; 1.3% (n = 3) identified as Asian American; and .4% (n = 1) identified as International Student status.

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Results

Implications

1. Significant differences were found between students who reported racial/ethnic majority (White) and Minority status. Majority students were found to perceive faculty more positively (Student-Faculty Relations) and approached faculty more often for assistance than Minority students (Faculty-Student Relations). Differences between the two groups approached significance in perceptions of student-student relationships. No significant differences were found between perceptions of the number of student services available.
2. No significant gender differences were found in this sample of students for Student-Faculty Relations (F = 2.34; p = .13); Faculty-Student Relations (F = 1.02; p = .31); Student-Student Relations (F = .06; p = .81); and Faculty-Faculty Relations (F = 1.07; p = .30). However, significant gender differences were found in perceptions of available student services (# Policies) (F = 5.78; p = .02). Male students perceived significantly more policies available in the training environment (mean = 15.75; sd = 5.05) than female students (mean = 12.32; sd = 5.14).
3. The Pearson-Product Correlation Matrix for the total sample, indicated a significant relationship between students' cumulative GPA and the following responses: "Faculty provide me with opportunities to increase my competitiveness for employment" (Student-Faculty Relations item 4) (r = -.24; p = .01) and "I ask faculty to provide opportunities for interaction among students for the purpose of identifying strategies for academic success and professional development" (Faculty-Student Relations item 6) (r = -.22; p = .02). No other significant relationships were found between cumulative GPA and the items on this survey for the whole sample. Findings suggest that in this environment, students with lower GPAs tend to be those who receive more faculty engagement and seek more faculty engagement for the purpose of increasing academic success and future employment opportunities.
4. The Pearson-Product Correlation Matrix for the Racial/Ethnic Majority students indicated a significant relationship between students' cumulative GPA and "Faculty provide me with opportunities to increase my competitiveness for employment" (Student-Faculty Relations item 4) (r = -.24; p = .05). Findings suggest that in this environment, White students with lower GPAs tend to be those who receive more faculty engagement for the purpose of increasing academic success and future employment opportunities. No other significant relationships with cumulative GPA were found.
5. The results in a Pearson-Product Correlation Matrix for the Racial/Ethnic Minority students indicated a significant relationship between students' cumulative GPA and "I consider other students in the program as members of my support group" (Student-Student Relations item 1) (r = .45; p = .02). Findings suggest that in this environment, minority students with higher GPAs tend to be those who have established support networks with other students. No other significant relationships with cumulative GPA were found.

- Racial/Ethnic minority students may perceive the training environment differently than majority students. This is especially the case in the perception of support/guidance received from faculty members and their active engagement with faculty. The consequences of these more negative perceptions and tendency to avoid. This finding is especially noteworthy given the strong positive relationship found between Faculty-Student and Student-Faculty subscales for minority students (r = .796; p = .00) and the relationship of each of these subscales with perceptions of the number of student services available (r = .55; p = .00) (4 = 4.40; p = .00). Findings highlight the importance of training environments strategically attending to racial diversity within student bodies for the purpose of guidance, mentoring, and advisement.
- The significant gender differences in perceptions of available student services/opportunities within the training environment are noteworthy. However, the reasons for this findings remain unexplained. Do male students seek opportunities and/or information about student services more so than female students? Do faculty inadvertently provide male students with this type of information more so than female students? Findings suggest an advantage based on gender. Future research is warranted given the limited representation of male students within the sample.
- The significant relationship between specific aspects of the training environment and students' cumulative GPA for the total sample, majority group students, and minority group students highlights the importance of faculty members' and administrators' ongoing strategic monitoring and evaluation of the training environment climate. For example, fostering collaborative, cohesive relationships among students may be particularly important for racial/ethnic minority students. In the overall climate of increased required accountability within higher education, this type of information will provide not only focus for evaluation, but also a source of data that may guide the development of more effective programs that result in academic success for a greater number of students.

Limitations

- Limitation of sample to one institution and one academic department.
- Small representation of males within the sample.
- The collapsing of all racial/ethnic minorities into one group may mask significant within group differences yet to be discovered in future research.

Table 1. Majority Students

TES	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Student-Faculty Relations	155	21	85	43.6	9.01
Faculty-Student Relations	149	15	50	38.9	6.98
Student-Student Relations	154	11	25	22.7	2.80
Faculty-Faculty Relations	151	5	25	18.8	5.04
# Policies Perceived	158	0	23	12.3	5.15

Student-Faculty Relations
F = 4.579; p = .034

Faculty-Student Relations
F = 7.152; p = .008

Student-Student Relations
F = 3.49; p = .06

Table 2. Minority Students

TES	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Student-Faculty Relations	55	17	55	40.6	8.39
Faculty-Student Relations	54	16	50	35.8	8.42
Student-Student Relations	54	8	25	21.7	3.90
Faculty-Faculty Relations	52	12	25	19.9	3.74
# Policies Perceived	55	0	23	12.2	5.17

Faculty-Faculty Relations
F = 1.91; p = .17

Policies Perceived
F = .007; p = .93