

The Who, What, and Where of Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This study uses data from the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement to explore whether there is congruence for academic disciplines in the student use and faculty encouragement of learning strategies. OLS regression models also suggest demographic and environmental predictors of student learning strategies.

Introduction

An important component of the classroom experience in higher education, learning strategies are specific patterns or combinations of academic activities that learners use to gain knowledge (Vermetten, Lodewijks, & Vermunt, 1999; Vermunt, 1996). Learning strategies contribute to regulating and monitoring time, concentration, and enhancing comprehension (McKeachie, Pintrich, & Lin, 1985). The use of learning strategies may be supported by aspects of the academic and sometimes even residential environment, such as learning communities. Furthermore, learning strategies, through their connection with enhanced metacognitive skills, are additionally relevant to interdisciplinary learning, where students move past declarative and procedural knowledge in a single discipline and apply concepts and themes in multiple areas (Ivanitskaya, Clark, Montgomery, & Primeau, 2002).

Methods

The data for this study are from the 2013 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). For this particular study, only those institutions that participated in both NSSE and FSSE could be included, so that meant the total number of participants was just about 16,300 first-year students, 30,000 seniors, 6,500 lower division faculty, and 7,400 upper division faculty at 121 institutions. The subset of students, faculty, and institutions mirrored those in the overall NSSE and FSSE administrations, which closely resemble the national landscape for both students and institutions (FSSE Overview, 2013; NSSE Overview, 2013).

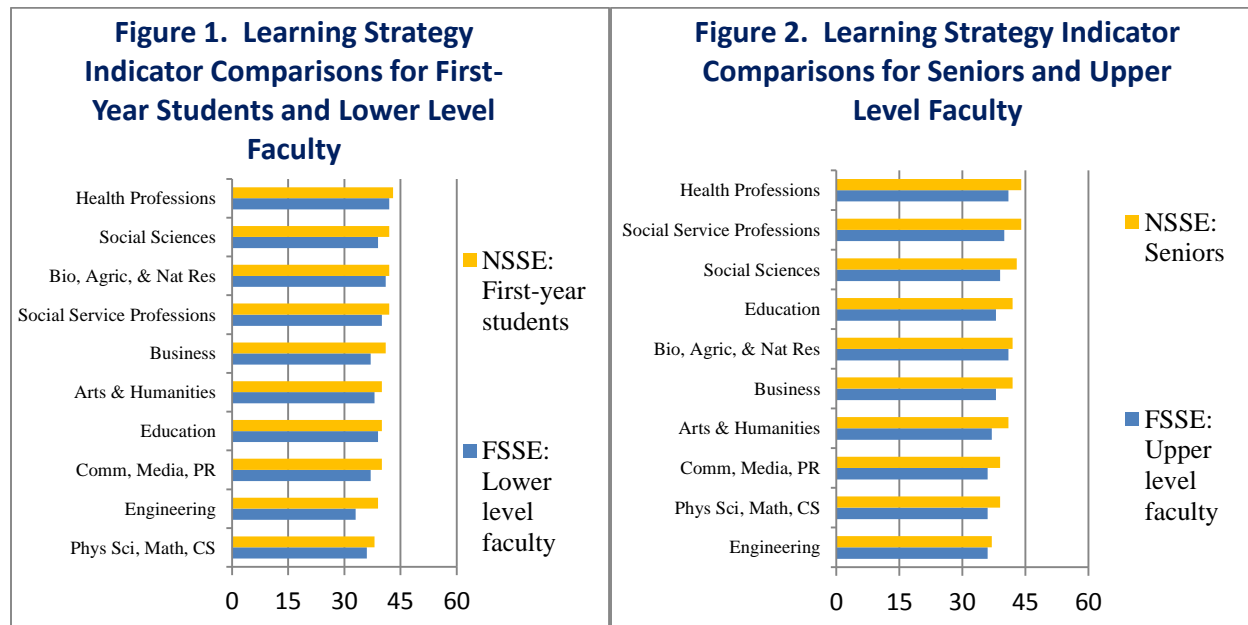


Table 1: OLS Regression Results: Effects on Students' Use of Learning Strategies^a

Independent variables	First-Year	Seniors
Step1: Student & Institutional Characteristics		
Online-learner	.068***	.062***
First-generation status	.026**	
Female	.069***	.071***
International	-.024**	
Greek affiliation	.023**	.021***
Living on Campus	-.06***	-.047***
Full-time		.026***
Transfer Status	.026**	.041***
Age	.060***	.122***
Grades: Mostly A's	.111***	.082***
Black or African American	.040***	.067***
Hispanic or Latino		.023***
Other race/ethnicity		.020***
Biological sciences	.057***	.032***
Social sciences	.036**	.022**
Communications		-.013*
Engineering		-.026***
Health professions	.064***	.030***
Research University (high)		-.041***
Private	.038***	
Institutional size		.037***
Step 2: Participation in a learning community	.078***	.110***
Step 3: Aggregated Faculty Emphasis on LS		.023***
Total R ²	.065***	.083***

^aAll non-significant coefficients have been removed. Rows for Athlete, Asian, Race: Prefer not to respond, Physical Sciences, Business, Education, Social service professions, Other major, Research University (very high), Doctoral/Research University, Masters (large), Masters (medium), Masters (small), and Baccalaureate Colleges – Diverse were moved because they were non-significant for both the first-year and senior models. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Conclusions

Although there are some limitations to this study, including reliance on self-reported data, the potential of institutional-level self-selection bias, and relatively low explained variance, this study makes a notable contribution to the higher education research on learning strategies. It provides support for disciplinary differences across both student use and faculty encouragement of learning strategies. Furthermore, it delivers additional endorsement of known trends in student engagement while offering information about the importance of supportive structured environments as well. Future research is needed to explore the nuances in learning strategies between different academic majors and curricular experiences.

References

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