



On Academic Good Standing and Introduction to University Studies

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Perhaps the most unique course offered at UC Merced is Undergraduate Studies 10 (USTU010), Introduction to University Studies. It is a one credit, three-hour weekly lecture, introduction to college, taught most often by professional staff, that is centered on the new to college student and which emphasizes self-management and personal responsibility, learning effectiveness and study skills, and self-motivation and self-esteem consistent with academic success. The course does not **satisfy requirements for any major field of study but does satisfy course credit hour minimums** for graduation. It is primarily staffed by Student Affairs units and the curriculum was designed by Student Affairs units.

This report is a pilot exploration into student and instructional factors associated with academic success for USTU010 students in the fall semesters of 2013 and 2014. It was a collaborative project by Student Affairs (Assessment Coordinator Emily Langdon) and IRDS (Principal Analyst Steve Chatman). It is intended to identify variations in the delivery of USTU010 that have been associated with higher rates of academic good standing.

Study Factors

On the inputs side, this study included both student and course characteristics. Student factors included admissions scores (high school GPA and SAT), income (low income or not), major (declared or not), and Fiat Lux participation (yes or no). Course factors included enrollment size (moderate or small), course location (on campus or in residence halls), and writing intensive content (yes or no). The outcome examined was academic good standing in that first term. This study did not consider USTU010 courses taught in spring because spring courses included students on academic probation, a significantly different student population than the fall.

Results

Collectively, the results show one very clear outcome. Courses that took place in the residence halls were associated with higher rates of good academic standing.

1. Although low income students were less likely to be in good academic standing overall, that difference was ameliorated for residence hall classes.
2. Although low SES students were less likely to be in good academic standing overall, that difference was ameliorated for residence hall classes.
3. Students living in residence halls were more likely to be in good academic standing, but only if they took USTU010 in the residence halls.

4. Fiat Lux students who took USTU010 in the residence halls were more likely to be in good academic standing than Fiat Lux students who did not take the class in the residence halls.
5. Students with and without a declared major were more likely to be in good academic standing if they took USTU010 in the residence halls.
6. Better student preparation, as measured by either higher SAT or higher high school GPA, was associated with a higher likelihood of being in good academic standing. However, the advantage disappeared for students taking the course in the residence halls. The results were clearer for the SAT but apparent for both the SAT and high school GPA.

Discussion

There was a clear and consistent advantage experienced by students who took USTU010 in the residence halls, but was that difference due to class size or location? While small size would be consistent with research and conventional wisdom, the advantage might have been due to location alone. A course in the students' residence hall could have promoted social affiliation or a sense of attachment that extended beyond the curriculum of the course or the small class size. On the other hand, the most obvious class difference associated with course location was class size and we know that very small class sizes have been associated with better academic performance.¹ The average size of USTU010 sections in the residence halls was 12 students and the average enrollment of on-campus sections was 30. Beyond size and location, there were very likely many qualitative differences between the small classes in the residence halls and the moderately sized classes on campus. It was also possible that both attachment and small class size were necessary to cause the positive effects. How might we determine the causal factors? The simplest and most effective way would be to use experimental conditions.

Assuming that small sections could be offered throughout USTU010 ...

The first experimental condition described below is essential and would help to answer the importance of class size because it would test whether it was size or location that led to improved performance. It would not fully answer the question about class size and social attachment because the students would be from one residence hall, but that might not matter. That could remain undetermined if it were practical to assign small class sections on campus comprised of students from the same residence hall. The second condition would be necessary if mixed residence hall enrollments on campus was the only viable solution. In fact, if the second experimental condition, small sections on campus with students from various residence halls, was as successful as the experimental control condition of small sections in residence halls with students from one hall, then we would know that class size was the explanatory variable. The problem with using only the second experimental condition is that a result of better performance in the residence hall might occur, and if it did occur, then we could not be able to say that a small class on campus of students from the same residence hall (experimental condition 1) would have fared better. The third condition would help confirm the importance of attachment, especially if neither of the first two experimental conditions resulted in performance equal to the control (small section in residence hall and all students in the section from the same residence hall).

1. Small section on campus with students from one residence hall (20 or more students, two sections).

¹ Glass, G. & Smith, M. L. (1978). *Meta-Analysis of Research on the Relationship of Class Size and Achievement*. Boulder, CO.

2. Small section on campus with students from various residence halls (20 or more students, two sections).
3. Small sections in residence hall with students from various residence halls (20 or more students, two sections).

If the University could not possibly offer small sections throughout USTU010

Experimental conditions 4 and 5 would help to address the importance of location in the initial study and conditions 4 and 5 are especially important if the University could not offer small classes throughout USTU010. On the other hand, if students performed as well when attending a moderately sized class (about 30) in or very near a residence hall then instructional costs could be reduced without degrading the outcome. Again, while it would be helpful to know whether it was important that students be from the same residence hall, that might be impractical or impossible to implement on a larger scale.

4. Large section in the residence hall with students from one residence hall if possible (30 or more students, at least one section).
5. Large section in the residence hall with students from various residence halls (30 or more students, at least one section).

Limitations

There are limitations about which we are aware and undoubtedly many others about which we are unaware. For example, housing staff described an in-person recruitment process during move-in and the first few days of residence to find students for the small sections in the residence halls. That was not the case for sections on campus and students who responded to the residence hall appeals might not have even enrolled in USTU010 if not recruited. In addition, we have not considered commuting students, whether or not students dropped the course, instructor characteristics, interactions among variables, or many other factors.

Appendix:

Undergraduate Studies 10 (USTU010)

Undergraduate Studies 010 (USTU010) is a course designed to teach the qualities and fundamentals of becoming a successful university student. Aimed at first-year and transfer students, USTU010 takes pride in having the student as the center focus of the course. It stresses the importance in handling personal responsibility and helps students acknowledge that they are responsible for the choices that they make in college.

The Calvin E. Bright Success Center supports the Undergraduate Studies 010 course by providing resources and staff required to maintain the course. The course is instructed by professional staff from the Bright Success Center, the vice chancellor and associate vice chancellor of Student Affairs, and colleagues from other campus departments such as the Center for Career and Professional Advancement.

In addition, the Bright Success Center offers peer advising to those who take USTU010. The Peer Instructors of the course are undergraduate students who have peer educator experience and they facilitate class activities with the students that complement the instructor's lessons. These students offer a student voice and perspective to the class and serve as role models to motivate the students.

A Sample Syllabus

Welcome to USTU 010. Our goal in this course is to offer you one of the most empowering and valuable learning experiences of your college career. Please read this syllabus with care, because we can reach our goal only with your full commitment and cooperation.

- I. **Course Description:** USTU 010 Freshman Year Experience is for every kind of learner. This course is designed to help you create greater success in college and in life. In the coming weeks, you will learn many proven strategies for optimizing your effectiveness in every kind of class that you take. In addition, we explore the life applications of learning and success strategies, to help you develop habits that will enhance your personal and professional life, now and into the future.

Your textbook, *On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life*, has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of college freshmen across the country. You will see passages in it written by past students, who help to demonstrate the value of the course. You also will notice that the book is interactive, and it differs from most of your other course textbooks. Dedication to completing every book and class assignment – readings, exercises, and written reflections alike, is a requirement of this course, and is critical to keeping up with class discussions. You must enter the classroom on time every time, ready for a 5-minute quiz on the most recent reading assignment.

We meet just once a week, but you will find that this course’s topics blend into your daily existence, as you grow increasingly mindful of how each chapter applies to the choices you make, how you speak to yourself about your own potential, how you spend your time, and the steps that you take every day toward realization of your short-term and long-term dreams. Your weekly reflective writing assignments permit you the opportunity to track and acknowledge your growing awareness of what it means to be “on course.” Are you a *creator* or a *victim*? This course teaches you the meaning of these words, and techniques for adhering to the outlook, lifestyle, and learning methods of the former, even in the most challenging situations.

II. Course Goals and Outcomes:

<p>Course Goals: Students who participate fully and complete this course will learn and practice techniques revolving around:</p>	<p>Learning Outcomes: At the end of this course, students will be able to demonstrate the following:</p>	<p>i. Define terms relevant to self-awareness, goal setting, and academic and personal motivation. Apply the terms to your own experiences.</p>	<p>ii. Demonstrate techniques for effective learning and studying, and explain orally and in writing how they are accomplished and their perceived effectiveness.</p>	<p>iii. Collaborate with classmates and Peer Mentors in class discussions, exercises, and informal presentations.</p>	<p>iv. Adopt and articulate new positions on future goals, self-worth, self-talk, and self-acceptance.</p>	<p>v. Create a portfolio of reflective written pieces and exercises that demonstrate the meaning of being <i>on course</i> as a successful student and future professional.</p>
<p>Self-Management and Personal Responsibility: Effective methods for advancing and understanding emotional intelligence and time management.</p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>

<p>Learning Effectiveness and Study Skills: Understand current research about how the brain learns, discover your learning style, and try new techniques to accommodate your preferred learning methods.</p>			X	X		X
<p>Self-Motivation and Self-Esteem: <i>Create greater inner motivation by discovering your own personally meaningful values, goals and dreams; Begin to develop self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-respect, self-love, and a firm sense of self-worth, particularly in the academic setting.</i></p>		X		X	X	X