

Using High School Academic Variables to Predict GSP Test Scores of Entering Agricultural Communications Students

Introduction

Being knowledgeable of the English language is essential to undergraduate college majors who are enrolled in writing courses. The Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation (GSP) Test is a three part, 99-question, multiple choice test that determines a student's grasp of English fundamentals to verify potential success in the writing curriculum. All first year students of a southwest agricultural communications program are required to take the GSP and receive a passing score of 70 or higher before enrolling in News Writing JOUR 2310, which is a prerequisite for subsequent writing classes within the program and in the university's mass communications college. Horton, Whitehead, Henderson and McBride (1997) found that high school class rank and standardized examination scores have proven to be strong indicators of future success in college while Tam and Sukhatme (2004) added that they are heavily weighted variables when being considered for college admission.

This study sought to identify certain elements from an entering college freshman's high school academic background that could predict their success on the GSP. By identifying these predictors, adjustments in high school writing curriculum can be made to adequately prepare students for writing success at the college and professional levels. Student GSP success is important not only to address accreditation standards, but also to ensure curriculum integrity (Horton et al., 1997).

The purpose of this study was to determine GSP success predictors from high school academic success. The two objectives of this study included:

- Identify a relationship between high school rank, ACT, and GSP score.
- Identify predictors of GSP success.

Methodology

The target population of this study was all first year agricultural communications students enrolled in the entry level Texas Tech agricultural communications class ACOM 2301 during the 2002, 2003, and 2004 fall semesters. All data from first year students to the program were collected, including transfer students and upper classmen. The following student data were recorded: verbal, reading, and composite ACT scores; reading and composite SAT scores; high school rank; GSP grammar, spelling, punctuation, and composite scores; and the number of times the GSP was taken by the student. After obtaining ACOM 2301 class rosters from the desired semesters, student information was accessed through an unobtrusive measure, using the university's student information database. Data was collected and recorded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Following data collection, students that were no longer a part of the university's agricultural communications program were eliminated from the sample population to increase the study's validity. After elimination, a total of 68 cases of student data were

analyzed with 31 students in 2002, 18 in 2003, and 20 in 2004. It should be noted that 42 of the 68 students reported a complete GSP score, while others had either not yet taken the test, or their information was unavailable at the time of the data collection. Once data collection was complete, data was entered into SPSS for analysis.

Findings/Conclusions

The mean score of all students (n=42) who took the GSP was 71.62, ranging from a failing score of 50 to a passing score of 87. Using the Davis (1971) conventions for describing relationships, this study discovered a very strong association of 0.73 between ACT English score and GSP composite score, while ACT Reading score possessed a moderate association of 0.38 with GSP composite score. In addition, high school class rank was a substantial variable having a 0.63 association with GSP composite scores. From the data collected, ACT English score and class rank proved to be the likeliest predictors of a passing GSP composite score. It can be concluded that while reading is an essential portion of standardized test taking success, comprehension of English mechanics is a stronger predictor of GSP test success.

Recommendations

A broadened version of this study would further reveal the relationships that exist between each variable that affects GSP score. To strengthen the results, more students should be studied. With the addition of student data, a year by year comparison could be made to identify the effectiveness of English and writing curriculum as determined by GSP composite scores from 2002 to 2004. In addition, removing all incomplete data sources that lacked GSP composite and/or ACT scores would further increase the validity of this study. Further statistical analysis to determine regression is also recommended. Further implications of this study would be for agricultural communications faculty to refer students with low ACT scores and high school rankings to tutoring or review to further prepare them for the GSP.

References

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