

## Abstract

Szafran, R., Stephen, F. (2002). The Effect of Academic Load on Success for New College Students: Is Lighter Better? *The Journal of the National Academic Advising Association*, 22, 2, 26-38.

This empirical study investigates the effect of course load on the academic success of first-year college students at a regional teaching and research university. Contrary to popular belief, first-year college students attempting heavier academic loads tend to achieve higher year-end GPAs and to be retained at higher levels than students enrolled less units. The methodology included controls for multiple other factors affecting GPA and retention, such as course difficulty, academic integration and motivation. The idea that less academically prepared students might achieve higher grades with a lighter workload and higher achieving students would thrive with a heavier workload was also taken into consideration. The authors hypothesize that positive academic encounters lead to greater academic integration, validating the student's educational goals, promoting retention.

A correlation matrix indicates the relationships between numerous variables including: sex, student's high school rank, SAT score, minority status, credit load, course difficulty and year-end GPA. Rank in high school, SAT score and attending orientation were all positively correlated with year-end GPA. Both heavier course loads and work hours were negatively correlated with being a female or being a minority and year-end GPA; there is a relationship between the variables. A linear regression model was used to compare academic preparation, employment, course hours, course difficulty, with each semester-end GPA and retention as the dependent variable. The regression model

accounted for 28% of the variance in semester-end GPA and for 29% of semester-end retention. The study concluded that multiple factors affect academic success. Students requiring remedial coursework first term achieved higher grades with lighter workloads, but 'on track' students achieved greater academic success while enrolled in more units as demonstrated by year-end GPA and retention to second-year. Students' academic and career goals were not assessed as a component in academic achievement in this study and students with strong goals may attain higher GPAs and remain in college for reasons unrelated to the rigor of their course load.