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Use of Academic Resources Among Different Socioeconomic Classes

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Abstract

Accessing academic resources is a significant factor in educational success at the college level. Based on Bourdieu’s concept of economic and cultural capital and Lareau’s theory of social inequality it is hypothesized that children from higher socioeconomic status access academic resources at a significantly higher rate than students from lower socioeconomic status. In a survey of 120 college students, the hypothesis was tested. Basic hypothesis testing showed no significant difference between students at different income levels in accessing academic resources. Advanced hypothesis testing did display a significant difference in males and undergraduate seniors from higher socioeconomic families. A more diverse and sufficient sample would be needed to further test this hypothesis. Further studies should focus on students with the same GPA in different socioeconomic classes, and take into consideration other factors contributing to the rate at which students access academic resources.

Introduction

Socioeconomic status can influence the rate at which a student accesses academic resources. The frequency at which students use the academic resources available to them, such as library databases, professor’s office hours, and career development centers, is an important aspect that can influence academic achievement. Access to academic resources is influenced by socioeconomic status. Based on the works of Bourdieu’s concept of economic and cultural capital and Lareau’s theory of social inequality it is hypothesized that student’s from high socioeconomic status would access academic resources at a significantly higher rate.

Background

Card and Krueger (1998) examine the performance of students in an institutional setting, based on the academic resources available, examining the connection between the schooling, quality of school, and the effects of these barriers have on students after they graduate from school. Their findings showed a positive and significant relationship between school resources and student earnings. Many studies have proven that school success is measured by education is associated with social backgrounds, influencing the resources available to students. Researchers have examined the different aspirational structures of other education of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Wilks & Wilson, 2012). They looked especially at the pathways and barriers that low income students face. The lack of access to educational opportunities can be seen as an intersection between both economic and cultural capital. The significance of an individual’s family helps determine the ease of an student’s access to resources.

Theory

In her work, Unequal Childhoods, Annette Lareau explains the differences in parenting styles as related to class distinctions and inequalities. She observed how socioeconomic status influences a child’s academic performance, interactions with adults in positions of authority. “Highly valued resources such as the possession of wealth; having an interesting, well-paying, and complex job; having a good education; and owning a home and not being evenly distributed throughout society. Moreover, their resources are transferred across generations” (Lareau 2003). From increased intellectual conversations to educated facilitated concerted cultivation, middle class children take these advantages and use them in future institutional settings. In a process called concerted cultivation, parents follow the guidelines of doctors and teachers on normative behavior, forming a “dominant set of cultural repertoires” for children. Middle class parents take the time to stimulate their children’s cognitive development and build their social skills.

As a social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu also focused on the intersection of social inequality, class and education. He conceptualized inequality stemming from the different amounts of economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital of individuals and the different economic classes (Dilllon 2014). Bourdieu argued social inequality was defined by a three dimensional hierarchy composed of these three capitals. Bourdieu looked at how economic and cultural capital produce and reproduce social inequality (Dilllon 2014: 432). Students from higher socioeconomic families are better prepared entering higher level education and may not need to access additional academic resources, which can be seen as an interconnection between both economic and cultural capital. The significance of an individual’s family helps determine the ease of an student’s access to resources.

Methods

It is hypothesized that student’s from higher socioeconomic backgrounds access academic resources at a significantly higher rate than student’s from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The independent variable:

The independent variable was self-identified socioeconomic status and approximate average household income for 2016.

The dependent variable:

The dependent variable measured the use of academic resources, including the library databases, CLA hours, professor office hours, wellness centers, and academic learning centers. A survey of 23 questions was constructed to measure the extent to which student’s access the academic resources available to them at their universities.

The control variables:

The control variables included basic demographics, such as gender and race, past exposure to educational resources, and parental involvement in education.

Research Design

The research design used for this research was quantitative, using a cross-sectional survey, examining the relationship between socioeconomic status and the use of academic resources.

Participants:

The participants in this study were 120 undergraduate college students. Diversity with gender and class was not achieved.

Discussion

There were no significant differences in basic hypothesis testing. Students from higher socioeconomic families are better prepared and do not need academic resources to achieve academic success. Alternatively, students from higher socioeconomic families feel entitled to academic success and do not seek out additional resources.

Academic year was used because it had the most diversity among participants. Seniors were seen to have a significant difference when the independent variable, self-identified socioeconomic status, was analyzed against the dependent variable, index of poverty, with a significant value of .024. As students’ progress through their undergraduate career, accessing resources could be developed habit. The use and access of academic resources could be a learned process.

For the males sample, there was a nearly a significant difference in the means for the help index between the income groups with a significance value of .082.

Conclusions

The academic level of a student could influence the rate at which they access academic resources. Students with the same GPA in different socioeconomic classes should also be examined to further test the predictions based on Bourdieu. A school’s effort on students’ education on resources available could also influence these results. Another survey with a larger, more diverse sample size would be needed to further test the hypothesis. An important limitation to note is internal validity, therefore cause and effect cannot be proven. Because the sample was not random, findings cannot be generalized to the overall population. Surveys have limitations such as close-ended questions, which can have lower validity rates, participants may not feel comfortable providing accurate, honest answers, data errors may occur due to participants not answering questions, and participants recall about childhood academic activities may be imperfect. Further studies should focus on students with same GPA in different socioeconomic classes, and take into consideration other factors contributing to the rate at which students access academic resources.

Table 1 One-Way ANOVA Test of Independent Variables against Help Index

Table 2 One-Way ANOVA test of independent variables against Access Index

Table 3 One-Way ANOVA against Help Index Selecting for Males

Table 4 One-Way ANOVA against Access Index Selecting for Seniors