The Effects of the Academic Motivation of College Students on School Policy Violations

Kristen Goersch

McKendree University

The Effects of the Academic Motivation of College Students on School Policy Violations

College is a place for students to develop their education, and each institution has policies in place to ensure the learning process occurs in a safe, conducive environment. For most students, college is expensive, time-consuming, and requires an immense amount of work in order to do well. However, even when considering all of the time and resources that students put towards their education, many still violate the policies that campuses put in place to improve the learning experience. There is limited research on these kinds of violations among college students or the variables that influence a student's decision to commit them. This study specifically looks at academic motivation of college students and predicts higher levels of motivation will correlate to lower frequencies of policy violations committed.

There are numerous studies that have considered different aspects of academic motivation on college campuses. Academic motivation has been defined as a student's desire to partake in the learning process or engage in the experiences of college (Hulleman et al., 2016). This study will examine three different types of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Intrinsic is when a student wants to engage in a task out of pleasure or interest, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external forces, like rewards, escape from punishment, or recognition/popularity from others (D'Lima et al., 2014; Levpuček & Podlesek, 2019; Paul et al., 2014; Wu, 2019). Both of these types of motivation are predicted to negatively correlate with the average frequency of policy violations. Amotivation is the opposite of motivation, and in the academic setting it refers to a student's disinterest in engaging in the learning process or campus experiences of a college or university (Levpuček & Podlesek, 2019). Amotivation is predicted to positively correlate with the frequency of policy violations in this survey. When considering academic achievement, studies have found that women tend to outperform men in college (Berings et al., 2013; D'Lima

et al., 2014). Research has also shown that, while men tend to score higher in self-efficacy, women usually score higher in motivation than men, and this remains true in the higher education setting (D'Lima et al., 2014). This makes sense, considering studies have also found that higher levels of motivation lead to better academic achievement (Gangolu, 2019; Grabau, 2019; Hulleman et al., 2016; Wu, 2019). Another study tested whether a student's living arrangement (on campus versus at home) impacted their education, and found that those who learned from home in an online format or commuted focused more on academic achievement than social inclusion (Pokorny et al., 2017). So, they engaged less in campus activities and social pastimes and placed more value on their academics, which could indicate a relationship between academic motivation and living arrangement. This relationship is tested in the present study and it is hypothesized that those who live off campus have higher academic motivation than those who live on campus. The role of technology in giving off-campus students easier access to academic resources and assistive tools may also support this hypothesis (Graham et al., 2018). While these studies help gain a better understanding of the academic motivation of college students, they give us no insight on how academic motivation affects the policy violations of those students.

The research that has been conducted on student violations revolves more around specific policies than conduct violations in general, like alcohol consumption and plagiarism, both of which are considered in this study. Multiple studies have linked alcohol use to negative physical and social side effects, especially among college students where heavy drinking is considered a norm (Cronce & Larimer, 2011; Cronce et al., 2018; Prince et al., 2018). These negative side effects could be academic, interpersonal, or physical, just to name a few. Some studies have found that there is no clear indicator as to which alcohol-related side effects a student will

experience when drinking because there is too much variability (Prince et al., 2018). Another study examined colleges and universities that were given a list of research-supported drinking intervention strategies for their students, as well as a list of strategies that were not supported by evidence or even shown to be ineffective. Of these schools, 23% did not implement any of the supported interventions, and 45% only implemented a single intervention (Cronce et al., 2011). So not only are a large portion of college students participating in heavy drinking, but it is difficult to predict how each student will be affected, and the institutions are doing little to combat the substance abuse. The majority of research involving college drinking revolves around intervention and prevention methods, and much less on characteristics that indicate why a student might engage in this sort of behavior. To my knowledge, academic motivation has not been used as a predictor of alcohol use in research thus far. This study predicts that academic motivation will be negatively correlated to alcohol use.

Plagiarism, while it has no physical side effects like substance use, is considered a serious offense on many college campuses and can result in disciplinary action, possibly even suspension or expulsion. One study showed that nearly 84% of college students have admitted to plagiarising during their college career, whether it was using a textbook when they were not supposed to, working together on an assignment meant to be completed individually, or copying answers off another student's assignment/test (Baran & Jonason, 2020). It is fair to say that plagiarism is fairly common, and these statistics do not take incidents of accidental plagiarism into account. This same study found that boldness, disinhibition, and a goal of mastering the learning material were all correlated with plagiarism. When considering the connection between academic motivation and plagiarism, one study by Rettinger (2014) and his associates showed

that intrinsic motivation correlated with lower self-reports of plagiarism, and the data in this study is expected to support Rettinger's findings.

Prescription drug use, like alcohol use, is another policy violation that could have serious negative physical or psychosocial repercussions for the student. Prescription drug use has significantly increased on college campuses in the years since 2003 (Parks et al., 2017). One study showed that 61.8% percent of the students participating were offered prescription stimulants, and 31% had used prescription stimulants for non-medical purposes. When the students were asked about their reasoning for using stimulants, the most common motive was to improve studying or grades, while curiosity was also a popular answer (Garnier-Dykstra et al., 2012). This is supported by other research, which states that prescription drug use is most common in schools that are more competitive or have higher admission standards, and the students gave similar reasonings for their behaviors, like improved concentration or simply getting high (Parks et al., 2017). To my knowledge, academic motivation has not been used as an indicating variable of prescription drug use in research, but it is predicted to negatively correlate with prescription drug use.

While there is plenty of research on academic motivation and college policy violations respectively, there is little research about how the two interact. This study focuses on academic motivation, including intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation, and is testing them against specific college policy violations and the average frequency of violations in order to see if there are correlations or differences between the variables. It will also compare the demographics between various amounts/types of motivation or violations in order to see if either are affected by age/year in school, gender, living arrangement, or employment status. The conclusions drawn from this study may help colleges and other organizations implement intervention/prevention

programs in schools and the community, which could lessen the occurrence of policy violations on campus and create a more productive, safe learning environment.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were chosen using a convenience sample from the student population of a small, private Midwestern University. There were a total of 150 participants (26% male, 74% female) between the ages of 18 and 50 years old, with the mean being 21.81. Race was not included in the demographics information following IRB's suggestion that it could be used as an identifying factor in such a small sample size. GPA was also collected, which ranged from 2.0 to 4.0 on a 4.0 scale. 18.79% of the participants were freshman, 22.82% were sophomores, 25.5% were juniors, 28.19% were seniors, and the remaining 4.7% were super seniors. Living arrangement (65.1% on campus, 34.9% off campus) and employment status (59.73% employed, 40.27 unemployed) were also collected.

Data Collection & Measurement of Variables

The study was conducted using an online survey. Professors were asked if the researcher could distribute the survey to their classes. The classes chosen were those that were readily available to the researcher. If the professor consented, then the students were asked if they would like to participate, and if they agreed, they were sent a link to the survey. The survey consisted of four sections, the first of which contained an explanation of the study and asked the participants for informed consent of their participation. The next section asked for the participants' demographic information, including age, gender, year in school, GPA, living arrangement, and employment status. The third section used the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C 28) -

College Version, created by Robert J. Vallerand and his associates (1993), to measure the intrinsic, extrinsic, amotivation, and overall motivation of the participants. There are three different types of intrinsic motivation: motivation toward gaining knowledge, motivation towards accomplishment, and motivation towards experiencing stimulation. There are also three types of extrinsic motivation: motivation towards identification (the value that the individual attributes to the activity), motivation toward introjection (attempting to avoid internal conflict/pressure), and external regulation (outside rewards and constraints). The scale contains 28 statements (4 dedicated to each subtype of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and 4 more dedicated to amotivation) pertaining to an individual's college experience, and then has the participants rate how much each statement corresponds to them on a seven point scale (1 = Does Not Correspond at All... 7 = Corresponds Exactly). The final section asked participants how frequently they engage in 8 different types of college policy violations: alcohol use, tobacco use, marijuana use, hard drug use, prescription drug use, vandalism, plagiarism, and stealing. This used a six point scale that ranged from "Never" to "5-7 days a week". This allows for the participants' motivation scores to be compared to the frequency of the violations that they commit, which can help reveal which violations are most influenced by academic motivation, and in turn which ones might be most impacted by motivational intervention/prevention programs.

Results

The first test was used to analyze the relationship between motivation and policy violations in general. A bivariate correlation was run comparing the overall average motivation score and average frequency of policy violations of each participant. The results did not reach

statistical significance, $r(142) = -.15$, $p = .067$, which may be because the sample size was not large enough for significance to be established. However, though there was not a correlation between overall motivation and policy violations, a few significant correlations can be found when analyzing the relationships between certain types of motivations and different kinds of violations.

For example, a bivariate correlation was run between prescription drug use and the intrinsic motivation of knowledge, the results of which showed a significant negative correlation, $r(145) = -.16$, $p = .048$. So, as intrinsic motivation towards knowledge increases, prescription drug use decreases. The same negative correlation was found after running a bivariate correlation between vandalism and the identified regulation type of external motivation, $r(145) = -.19$, $p = .021$, which is when an individual attributes value to an object or activity. Vandalism was also positively correlated to amotivation, $r(146) = .19$, $p = .023$. These results suggest that a person who attributes value to the object/focus of the vandalism and rates low in amotivation (high in motivation) is less likely to engage in an act of vandalism against that object. The extrinsic motivation of identification was also negatively correlated to overall average violations of each participant, $r(144) = -.17$, $p = .038$, so the participants attributed value to the object of the violation, and this made them less likely to commit the violation.

The correlation between the policy violation of plagiarism and intrinsic motivation was the most robust when analyzed through a bivariate correlation. Not only did frequency of plagiarism negatively correlate with the average intrinsic motivation, $r(144) = -.20$, $p = .017$, plagiarism also negatively correlated with each distinct type of intrinsic motivation (See Table 1). Intrinsic motivation towards knowledge, $r(145) = -.17$, $p = .038$, intrinsic motivation towards accomplishment, $r(145) = -.18$, $p = .032$, and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation,

$r(146) = -.16$, $p = .047$, are all negatively correlated to the frequency of plagiarism. So as

intrinsic motivation increases, the frequency of plagiarism decreases.

Table 1

Correlation of Variables to the Frequency of Plagiarism:

Variable	n	r	p
1. Avg. Intrinsic	146	-.20	.017*
2. Intrinsic - Knowledge	147	-.17	.038*
3. Intrinsic - Accomplishment	147	-.18	.032*
4. Intrinsic - Stimulation	148	-.16	.047*

* $p < .05$

Some common demographics among the participants were also correlated with their

motivation and frequency of college policy violations. A bivariate correlation was used to

examine the relationship between the student's year in college and their intrinsic motivation to

experience stimulation, and the two variables were found to be positively correlated, $r(145) =$

$.17$, $p = .039$. This suggests that the longer a student is in college, the more motivated they are to

experience stimulation. Another test was run to differentiate between the motivation of students

who live on-campus and off-campus. A t-test was conducted using living arrangement as the

grouping variable and amotivation as the test variable, and a significant difference, $t(145) = 2.71$,

$p = .008$, was found between the amotivation scores of those who live on campus ($M = 1.92$, SD

$= 1.30$) and those who live off campus ($M = 1.41$, $SD = .98$). This suggests that students who live

on campus are more likely to be amotivated than students who live off campus. Another t-test

was run with amotivation as the testing variable, but used employment status as the grouping

variable. A significant difference, $t(146) = 3.57$, $p = .001$, was found between the amotivation scores of employed students ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .95$) versus unemployed students ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.43$), which means that students who are unemployed show significantly more amotivation than those who are employed.

A t-test was conducted using gender as the grouping variable and average motivation, average violations, average extrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation towards identification (attributing value to certain tasks/objects) as the test variables (See Table 2). A significant difference, $t(143) = 2.13$, $p = .035$, between the average motivation of men ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.03$) and women ($M = 5.14$, $SD = .92$) was found, meaning that the women are more likely to be motivated than men. A significant difference, $t(145) = 2.09$, $p = .039$, was also found between the average frequency of policy violations for men ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .57$) and women ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .44$). This means that women commit college policy violations less frequently than men. The t-test also showed a significant difference between men ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.23$) and women ($M = 5.57$, $SD = .96$) for average extrinsic motivation, $t(145) = 2.02$, $p = .046$, and between men ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.30$) and women ($M = 5.96$, $SD = .92$) for extrinsic motivation of identification, $t(145) = 2.65$, $p = .011$. These results suggest that women are more extrinsically motivated overall, and that they are more likely than men to attribute value to certain activities or objects and then act based off of those values.

Table 2

Variable	Male		Female		$t(145)$	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Avg. Motivation	4.76	1.03	5.14	0.92	2.13	.035*
Avg. Violations	1.58	0.57	1.39	0.44	2.09	.039*
Avg. Extrinsic	5.18	1.23	5.57	0.96	2.02	.046*
Extrinsic - Ident.	5.35	1.30	5.96	0.92	2.65	.011*

*p < .05

Discussion

The results of this study showed that the main hypothesis being tested, which stated that the motivation of college students would influence the frequency at which they commit college policy violations, was not directly supported. However, the relationship was negative,as predicted, meaning that violations decreased as motivation increased. When the other correlations between specific types of motivation and violations are taken into account, it offers compelling evidence that the topic at least warrants further investigation. One of the limitations of this study that may have influenced the significance of the overall hypothesis is the sample size. Since the study is only composed of 150 participants that were conveniently sampled, the small sample size may have skewed the accuracy of the results. Also, following a recommendation from the IRB, race was removed from the demographic information on the survey because they suggested that race could potentially be used as an identifier of minority participants in such a small, exclusive sample. Because of this, the variable of race was unable to be accounted for in this study, which may also have impacted the accuracy of the results.

Even though the general correlation between overall motivation and average frequency of violations was not directly supported by the data, there is other evidence that supports the relationship. There were multiple examples of specific types of motivation that were significantly correlated to particular policy violations, the most compelling of which is the relationship between intrinsic motivation and plagiarism. Rates of plagiarism not only shared a significant, negative correlation with the average overall intrinsic motivation of each participant, but with all three specific types of intrinsic motivation as well. This was as expected, and it follows the same line of thinking as the overall hypothesis in the sense that those with higher rates of intrinsic motivation are less likely to commit plagiarism. This was also found to be true with prescription drug use, which was significantly lower in people who rated high in intrinsic motivation towards knowledge. College students who are truly motivated by learning new things, gaining information, and possessing knowledge are less likely to abuse prescription drugs. With vandalism, the results suggested that a student who has low levels of amotivation is less likely to commit vandalism. They are also less likely to commit vandalism if they have attributed value to the object of the vandalism. In the case of higher education, this means that students are less likely to vandalize school property if they value the school or the property.

All of the relationships between these variables indicate that increasing the motivation of the students should decrease the amount of college policy violations that occur on campus. The analysis of the demographic information also revealed some significant findings. Students who are employed are generally more motivated than those who are unemployed. A way to increase motivation of students on campus might be to create more opportunities for student work-study. Most colleges have career centers that help upperclassmen procure jobs after college, but maybe these facilities could be adapted so that they can also be used for incoming students looking for

part-time jobs in the community. Also, while living on campus does have numerous social benefits, this study actually indicates that students who live on campus tend to be more amovitated than those who live off campus. A way to account for this might be to create more on-campus spaces where students can get away from the social aspect of college. This would allow them a private space for personal time where they can focus on their studies without distractions from roommates, friends, or campus activities. Of course social interaction is important for student development, and campus events help integrate the students into the college environment, but everything is only good in moderation. If they become over stimulated by campus activities and social interactions, then their academic motivation may begin to decline. It might also help to alleviate some of the more rigorous living requirements for students so that they can live off-campus if they choose, and to make education and resources more accessible to these types of students. Considering that the extrinsic motivation of identifying regulation (attributing value to tasks/objects) was significant in multiple cases, another method to decrease policy violations might be to find a way to make the students attribute more value to the school and their education. This is especially true for students who score high in amotivation, because most of these students display disinterest in higher education or the learning process. One option might be to have all students complete the AMS-C upon entry to the school, and if a student scores high in amotivation they can be assigned to a counselor or study group to help them see the value in education/the school. If programs like these or others were implemented on college campuses and could improve student motivation, the rates of plagiarism, vandalism, and prescription drug use should decrease.

Conclusion

Academic motivation and college policy violations interact in a variety of ways, and a correlation between these two variables has been supported in this research. Applying this correlation to higher education could result in the implementation of programs that increase academic motivation of students, therefore decreasing the frequency of policy violations. This is especially true since intervention programs alone, like those for alcohol abuse, have been shown to not be very effective on campuses (Cronce et al., 2011). When conducting future research, a larger, more diverse sample size may help to improve the accuracy of the results and solidify the relationship between academic motivation and college policy violations. Further research should also focus on finding methods of increasing academic motivation on college campuses, whether it be through the implementation of assistive programs or by other means.

References

Baran, L., & Jonason, P. K. (2020). Academic dishonesty among university students: The roles

of the psychopathy, motivation, and self-efficacy. *PLoS ONE, 15*(8), 1–12.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238141

Berings, D., De Feyter, T., Van den Broeck, A., Brebels, L., & Proost, K. (2013). A threefold

differentiation in academic motivation to disentangle the complex relationship between

gender, personality and academic performance. *Journal of Education Research, 7*(2),

111–134.

Cronce, J. M., & Larimer, M. E. (2011). Individual-focused approaches to the prevention of

college student drinking. *Alcohol Research & Health, 34*(2), 210–22.

Cronce, J. M., Toomey, T. L., Lenk, K., Nelson, T. F., Kilmer, J. R., & Larimer, M. E. (2018).

NIAAA's college alcohol intervention matrix. *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews, 39*(1),

43–47

D'Lima, G. M., Winsler, A., & Kitsantas, A. (2014). Ethnic and gender differences in first-year

college students' goal orientation, self-efficacy, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Journal of Educational Research, 107(5), 341–356.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.823366

Garnier-Dykstra, L., Caldeira, K., Vincent, K., O'Grady, K., & Arria, A. (2012). Nonmedical use

of prescription stimulants during college: Four-year trends in exposure opportunity, use,

motives, and sources. J*ournal of American College Health, 60*(3), 226–234.

https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2011.589876

Gangolu, K. R. (2019). Academic motivation and adjustment as predictors of academic

  achievement among adolescents. *Journal of Psychosocial Research, 14*(2), 393–402.

  DOI: 10.32381/JPR.2019.14.02.17

Grabau, L. (2009). Academic motivation and student development during the transition to

  college. *Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching & Learning, 7*, 8–20.

Graham, P. A., Hurtado, S. S., & Gonyea, R. M. (2018). The benefits of living on campus: Do

  residence halls provide distinctive environments of engagement? *Journal of Student*

  Affairs Research and Practice, 55(3), 255-269. DOI: 10.1080/19496591.2018.1474752

Hulleman, C. S., Barron, K. E., Kosovich, J. J., & Lazowski, R. A. (2016). Student motivation:

  Current theories, constructs, and interventions within an expectancy-value framework. In

  A. A. Lipnevich, F. Preckel, & R. D. Roberts (Eds.), *Psychosocial skills and school*

  systems in the 21st century: Theory, research, and practice. (pp. 241–278). Springer

  International Publishing.

Levpuček, M. P., & Podlesek, A. (2019). Links between academic motivation, psychological

  need satisfaction in education, and university students' satisfaction with their study.

  Psihologijske Teme / Psychological Topics, 28(3), 567–587.

  https://doi.org/10.31820/pt.28.3.6

Parks, K. A., Levonyan-Radloff, K., Przybyla, S. M., Darrow, S., Muraven, M., &

  Hequembourg, A. (2017). University student perceptions about the motives for and

  consequences of nonmedical use of prescription drugs (NMUPD). *Journal of American*

  College Health, 65(7), 457–465. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2017.1341895

Paul, H., Subalukshmi, S. S. S., & Mala, V. (2014). Resilience, academic motivation and social

  support among college students. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology, 5*(4), 430–434.

Pokorny, H., Holley, D., & Kane, S. (2017). Commuting, transitions and belonging: the experiences of students living at home in their first year at university. *Higher Education, 74*(3), 543–558. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0063-3.

Prince, M. A., Pearson, M. R., Bravo, A. J., & Montes, K. S. (2018). A quantification of the alcohol use-consequences association in college student and clinical populations: A large, multi-sample study. *American Journal on Addictions, 27*(2), 116–123. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajad.12686

Rettinger, D.A., Jordan, A.E., & Peschiera, F. (2004). Evaluating the motivation of other students to cheat: A vignette experiment. *Res High Education, 45*, 873–890.

Zebing Wu. (2019). Academic motivation, engagement, and achievement among college students. *College Student Journal, 53*(1), 99–112.