

1986

## Effects of lifestyle variables on commuter student grade point average, satisfaction, attrition and personal growth

Steven Vincent Langerud  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©1986 Steven Vincent Langerud

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Langerud, Steven Vincent, "Effects of lifestyle variables on commuter student grade point average, satisfaction, attrition and personal growth" (1986). *Graduate Research Papers*. 2714.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2714>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

---

## Effects of lifestyle variables on commuter student grade point average, satisfaction, attrition and personal growth

### Abstract

Commuter students represent 80% of the undergraduate students in the United States (Stewart and Rue, 1983), and projections rise to 90% for the near future (Hardwick and Kazlo, 1977). While commuter students seek the same benefits from higher education as resident students, their lifestyles vary considerably. Programs developed for traditional, residential students fail to meet the needs of non-resident students, traditional or non-traditional. Stewart and Rue (1983) found commuter students easy to ignore, because they generally arrive on campus after student affairs personnel go home. Ignoring commuter student programming prevents the involvement Astin (1984) considers vital for student development. Involvement theory emphasizes the active participation of the student in the learning process. The learning process encompasses both the curriculum and the extracurriculum.

EFFECTS OF LIFESTYLE VARIABLES ON COMMUTER STUDENT  
GRADE POINT AVERAGE, SATISFACTION, ATTRITION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

---

A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Department of Educational Administration  
and Counseling  
University of Northern Iowa

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

---

by  
Steven Vincent Langerud

August 1986

This Research Paper by: Steven Vincent Langerud

Entitled: Effects of Lifestyle Variables on Commuter  
Student Grade Point Average, Satisfaction,  
Attrition and Personal Growth

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for  
the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

J. F. Kimball

6/24/86  
Date Approved

~~Adviser/Director~~ of Research Paper

Thomas W. Hansmeier

6/25/86  
Date Approved

~~Second Reader~~ of Research Paper

Robert Krajewski

6/25/86  
Date Received

~~Head, Department of Educational  
Administration and Counseling~~

Commuter students represent 80% of the undergraduate students in the United States (Stewart and Rue, 1983), and projections rise to 90% for the near future (Hardwick and Kazlo, 1977). While commuter students seek the same benefits from higher education as resident students, their lifestyles vary considerably. Programs developed for traditional, residential students fail to meet the needs of non-resident students, traditional or non-traditional.

Stewart and Rue (1983) found commuter students easy to ignore, because they generally arrive on campus after student affairs personnel go home. Ignoring commuter student programming prevents the involvement Astin (1984) considers vital for student development. Involvement theory emphasizes the active participation of the student in the learning process. The learning process encompasses both the curriculum and the extracurriculum.

This investigation is an attempt to identify, through a review of empirical studies, the lifestyle variables of commuter students that limit involvement in the learning process, and the effects of limited involvement on commuter student grade point average (GPA), satisfaction with education, attrition, and personal growth.

Sheer numbers suggest that commuter students deserve attention. Research has shown the value of involvement. If we are to suggest programs to increase commuter student involvement in the learning process, we must first understand commuter students' current status.

## Lifestyle Variables

Understanding the lifestyles of commuter students revolves around three interdependent variables:

1. The divided life that commuter students lead. Off-campus living forces commuter students to choose between home and college for reinforcement of their values and interests. They belong to groups related to work and community rather than to college (Alfred, 1976). Stewart (1983) found that the social, emotional, and intellectual development of commuter students occurs in settings outside the university. Personal schedules and environmental demands, involving social, work, and academic issues, compete with school and prevent greater involvement in the learning process (Wisner, 1984; Stewart, 1983; Glass and Hodgins, 1977).

2. The necessity for time management. Problems cited by commuter students include scheduling conflicts dealing with social, work, and academic commitments; conflicts arising from the lack of study time, due to job responsibilities; and the actual time spent commuting to and from school (Breen and Uguroglu, 1984; Lonabocker, 1982; Johnson, 1978).

3. The role of work. Reichard and McArver (1975) found that two-thirds of the commuter students worked at least part-time, as compared to one-third of the resident students. Schuchman (1974), Harrington (1972), and Kuh and Ardailo (1979) also found that commuter students were more likely to be employed than were

resident students.

In summary, these variables work together to limit the commuter students' time on campus. The result of this limited time is a reduction in involvement in the learning process as described by Astin (1984).

### Effects of Commuting

The reduction of involvement affects many areas of a student's life. For the purposes of this study, the effects on grade point average (GPA), satisfaction with the college experience, attrition, and personal growth are examined.

#### Grade Point Average

Generally, research reveals that commuter students have higher overall grade point averages than resident students. Lincoln, Graham, and Lane (1983) administered a questionnaire dealing with demographic and socioeconomic background, college major, motivation, satisfaction with the college experience, and participation in the college environment. They utilized two random samples with 250 students in each; one group was from a large non-urban residential state university and the other from a large urban commuter university. The t-test and regression analyses revealed that students at the commuter university had higher overall grade point averages than the residential university students.

Analysis of Covariance of questionnaire results dealing with living accommodations, distance commuted to school, age, sex, marital

status, religious affiliation, and with scores on the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test was performed by French, Klas, and Boak (1979). Results from a sample of 102 students (54 men and 48 women) demonstrated that students who lived at home with parents had significantly higher grade point averages than students in university residence halls, off-campus apartments, or in boarding houses.

Similarly, a study by Simono, Wachowiak, and Furr (1984) showed commuter students to have higher grade point averages than resident students. More specifically, data for 448 undergraduates (250 on-campus students and 198 commuter students) revealed that married commuter students had higher grade point averages than single commuter students, single commuter students had higher grade point averages than resident students, and married commuter students had higher grade point averages than either single commuter students or students in residence halls.

In contrast to the above studies, a study by Chickering (1974) indicated that resident freshmen had higher grade point averages than commuter freshmen. Chickering's findings were based on the questionnaire responses of 26,745 freshmen attending a wide range of two- and four-year, religious and non-sectarian, public and private institutions.

Related findings by Liu and Jung (1980) demonstrated that grade point average and satisfaction were modestly and positively related for commuter students. A total of 782 undergraduates in



38 randomly selected classes at a medium-size Midwestern commuter college were given the Pace and Associates Higher Education Measurement and Evaluation KIT. Path Analysis also showed that perception of educational benefits was positively related to commuter satisfaction.

### Satisfaction

Studies of overall student satisfaction generally show commuter students to be less satisfied than resident students. Pascarella (1984), for example, utilized the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Survey to study 4191 students (2220 women and 1971 men) attending 74 four-year institutions (49 private and 25 public). He found that resident students were more likely than commuter students to have higher levels of general satisfaction with college.

Similar findings were obtained by Davis and Caldwell (1977). They administered a questionnaire on student attitudes to 527 University of Nebraska-Omaha commuter students and to 927 Michigan State University resident students. Chi Square analysis showed that resident students, more than commuter students, agreed that they had received a good education at their university.

A third substantiating study was conducted by Sullivan and Sullivan (1980). A questionnaire on parent-son relations was administered to 318 senior boys from 12 high schools and to 127 mothers and 107 fathers. A follow-up questionnaire was administered to 242 of the 318 in the fall when they were boarders at, or

commuters to, college; 92 mothers and 65 fathers also participated. Questionnaire responses showed that boarders had higher levels of satisfaction than did commuter students.

Bare's study (1983) yielded conflicting results. A 50% random sample of students, registered at five commuter colleges of an eastern university, were given a questionnaire on student characteristics and perceptions of 30 aspects of the college environment. Statistical analyses revealed that overall student satisfaction was not related to any student characteristics.

Nelson's (1982) research involved a sample of 1150 full-time students and a questionnaire on demographic characteristics, ratings of services and activities, areas of concern, overall satisfaction, and academic ratings at a private university. Multivariate analysis of variance showed no significant difference between resident students and commuter students in overall satisfaction with the university. Further, resident students participated more in services and activities and were generally less critical, but they were not any more satisfied than commuter students.

Expanding on the participation theme, Rich and Jolicoeur (1978) found commuter student satisfaction to be linked with interaction with faculty. The researchers used multiple regression analysis with data on personal background, college environment, and student impact. A 56% response rate from 300 students enrolled at

12 colleges and universities in California made up the sample. Results showed that commuter students perceived faculty attention to be lower than did residential students, and commuters had a less positive attitude towards college. Astin (1977) found that satisfaction with student-faculty interaction and closeness to faculty were negatively related to living at home. These results came from an ACE-Carnegie follow-up study of 25,399 students. Lui and Jung (1980) reported that commuter students' perceptions of educational benefits are positively related to student satisfaction.

#### Attrition

Another area affected by faculty interaction is commuter student attrition. Bainum (1984) sent student questionnaires to 57 former and currently matriculated students and conducted interviews with 18 parents. She found that male persisters and non-persisters did differ in their level of interaction with faculty. Other findings related to attrition for commuter students were: family influences on persistence did not differ in persisters and non-persisters, both male and female; closest companions influences on college persistence did differ between male persisters and non-persisters; persister and non-persister students of both sexes did not differ in rate of on-campus involvement; and male persisters and non-persisters did differ in level of non-university involvement in cultural and personal activities.

Wisner (1984) expanded the view of commuter student attrition.

He studied the 1977 entering class at the University of Michigan-Flint, both freshmen and transfers, by examining personal characteristics and plans, expectations and perceptions of the university, integration into the university environments, and obligations outside the university. The results showed the traditional persister/non-persister dichotomy of retention studies did not reveal significant differences. Transfer-outs resembled traditional students on younger age, full-time enrollment, and ambiguous degree plans. These findings demonstrate the diversity of commuter student populations and highlights the need to account for diversity in the study of attrition with non-traditional student bodies.

A study that revealed no differences between resident and commuter students came from Pascarella (1984). Background information on 4191 students, gathered with the Cooperative Institutional Research Program survey, revealed that living on-campus had no indirect effects on either progress through college or plans to persist at the same institution.

However, other studies showed retention being enhanced by on-campus residence and residence in fraternity and sorority houses (Lenning, Sauer, and Beal, 1980); persistence being negatively affected by living with parents (Astin, 1977); and commuter students having significantly lower graduation rates than other students (Carney, 1980).

Lonabocker (1982) examined the reasons for attrition among commuter students withdrawing from Boston College during 1977-1978. The students cited time spent commuting, need for a break, lack of housing, job/study conflicts, and lack of motivation.

In an attempt to combat attrition among commuter students, Schotzinger, Buchanan, and Fahrenback (1976) studied the impact of a peer program on attrition among commuter students. One hundred four participants were compared with 105 non-participants. Participants were given a 60 hour training program and then facilitated an orientation course. Results showed the annual attrition rate of participants was 17% compared to 25% for non-participants.

#### Personal Growth

If students do not attend, due to attrition, they obviously forfeit the opportunities for involvement in the university. One opportunity found by authors to be greatly enhanced by involvement and on-campus residence is personal growth (Trathen, 1985; Winter, McClelland, and Stewart, 1981; Lincoln, Graham, and Lane, 1983; Sullivan and Sullivan, 1980; Stafford and Pate, 1979; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980).

While much research supports this finding, it is not without opposition. Pierog and Gloaninger (1981) administered the College Student Questionnaire Scale, measuring family and peer independence, social consciousness, and cultural sophistication, to a matched

sample of 50 students from resident and commuter colleges. The results showed commuter students significantly higher than resident students. The implication of these findings is that a residential environment does not always promote greater personal growth.

However, this finding is in the minority. Generally, resident students report more personal growth than commuter students. For example, Chickering (1974) studied 169,190 participants at 270 colleges of wide ranging types. He found commuter students expressed less interest in personal development than resident students, and felt the chief benefit of college was increased earning power.

Along these lines, Mahler's (1977) research on 75 subjects from an urban community college revealed a focus on careers. Community colleges were not discovered to be resources for personal growth and identity development for the commuter student.

In summary, commuter students generally have higher grade point averages than do resident students, are less satisfied with their educations, exhibit higher levels of attrition, and demonstrate less personal growth than resident students. In conjunction with the lifestyle variables that limit involvement, these are the outcomes of commuting as revealed in the research literature.

### Recommendations

Taken alone, the knowledge of lifestyle variables and effects of commuting will not change the lot of commuters. However, in combination with creative programming, perhaps the level of

involvement of commuter students can be increased. The literature provides a wealth of information about programs, both proposed and practiced, to enhance the experience of commuter students.

Student affairs personnel must be aware of the needs of commuters (Glass and Hodgin, 1977; Lackey, 1977; Hatala, 1977; and Carlson, 1981). Part of this recognition involves knowing who the students are. Hardwick and Kazla (1974) found this to be a major problem. They administered a 23-item questionnaire to 70 randomly selected institutions throughout the country (48% chose to participate). Analysis showed 10% didn't know the number of commuter students they had, less than 25% knew how far students commuted, 30% knew how students got to school, less than 50% knew how many commute from their own homes, and more than 60% could not report one program or service especially for commuters.

While specialized programs such as orientations (Saggaria, Higginson, and White, 1980) are helpful, making use of existing services may be more practical (Jacoby and Girrel, 1981). One means of accomplishing this goal is by extending the hours of institutions (Hatala, 1977; Cross, 1981; Carlson, 1981). As discussed previously, the divided life of commuting students often prohibits access to traditional daytime programs or services. Another way to increase involvement is with increased peer group and student/faculty interaction. Such interaction may occur in the classroom (Lackey, 1977), in a tutorial (Hatala, 1977), or in

cocurricular activities (Carlson, 1981; Glass and Hodgins, 1977; Arthur, 1977).

A final suggestion moves the focus away from campus. The community needs to be immersed in college affairs (Alfred, 1976; Hatala, 1977; Carlson, 1981). According to Frisz and Aylman (1980), this will require increased knowledge of the market to be reached and improved marketing techniques.

To summarize, there are many ways to increase commuter student involvement. However, none will prove effective unless we first recognize who the students are and determine what their needs are.



## References

- Alfred, R.L. (undated). "Impacts of the community and junior college on students." Iowa City: American College Testing Program, 78 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Fall 1976, 12(1), 44-45.)
- Andreas, R.A. (1983). Institutional self-study: Serving commuter students. In S. Stewart (Ed.), Commuter students: Enhancing their educational experiences (pp. 9-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Arthur, S. (1977). Designing ways to serve the commuting student. Liberal Education, 63, 316-321.
- Astin, A. (1977). Four critical years. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. Journal of College Student Personnel, July, 297-308.
- Bainum, R.S. (1984). Retention of the first-time, full-time, non-resident commuting student. Dissertation Abstracts International, 45(2). (Order No. DA8411833)
- Bare, A.C. (1983). "Profiling the needs of university commuter students: New instruments, methods and findings." Paper read at Association for Institutional Research, Toronto, Canada, 35 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Fall 1983, 19(1).)

- Breen, P.A. and Uguroglu, M.E. (1984). "Persisters versus adapters: A study in retention." Paper read at American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 20 pp. (In Higher Education Abstracts, Winter 1985, 20(2), 246.)
- Carlson, J. (1981). "Programming for the off-campus student." Bulletin of the Association of College Unions-International, 49, p. 4 ff. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Spring 1982, 17(3), 440.)
- Carney, M. (1980). "Persistence and graduation rates of Greek, independent, commuter and resident hall students: A nine semester study." Norman: Office of Student Affairs Research, University of Oklahoma. (In S. Stewart (Ed.), Commuter students: Enhancing their educational experiences (p. 53). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A.W. (1974). Commuter versus resident students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cross, K.P. (1981). Planning for the future of the student personnel profession. Journal of College Student Personnel, 22(2), 99-104.
- Davis, J.L. and Caldwell, S. (1977). An intercampus comparison of commuter and residential student attitudes. Journal of College Student Personnel, 18, 286-290.
- French, F.F., Klas, L.D., and Boak, R.T. (1979). Relative importance of personal and academic factors to satisfactory progress in university. College Student Journal, 13, 256-262.

- Frisz, R.H. and Aylman, C.E. (1980). Publicity and promotion of student activity programs at an urban commuter campus. Journal of College Student Personnel, 21(5), 460-462.
- Glass, J.C. Jr., and Hodgin, H.H. (1977). Commuting students and cocurricular activities. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 55, 253-256.
- Hardwick, M.W., and Kazla, M. (1974). Services and facilities available to commuter students. Journal of College Student Personnel, 15, 225.
- Harrington, T.F. (1972). The literature on the commuter student. Journal of College Student Personnel, 13, 546--50.
- Hatala, R.J. (1977). Some thoughts on reaching the commuting student. Liberal Education, 63, 309-315.
- Jacoby, B., and Girrel, K.W. (1981). A model for improving services and programs for commuter students. NASPA Journal, 18, 36-41.
- Johnson, E.E. (1978). "Student-identified stresses that relate to college life." Paper read at American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, 24 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Spring 1979, 14(3), 395.)
- Kuh, G.D., and Ardailo, F.P. (1979). Adult learners and traditional age freshmen: Comparing the "new" pool with the "old" pool of students. Research in Higher Education, 10, 207-219.

- Lackey, P.N. (1977). Commuter students' interaction in two types of class situations. College Student Journal, 11, 153-155.
- Lenning, O.T., Sauer, K., and Beal, P.E. (1980). "Student retention strategies." ASHE-ERIC/Higher Education Research Report No. 8, 60 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Summer 1981, 16(4), 471.)
- Lincoln, Y.S., Graham, L.L., and Lane, E.P. (1983). "Expectancy theory as a predictor of grade-point averages, satisfaction, and participation in the college environment." Research report, Center for Public Affairs, University of Kansas, 44 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Spring 1984, 19(3), 314-315.)
- Lui, R., and Jung, L. (1980). The commuter student and student satisfaction. Research in Higher Education, 12(3), 215-226.
- Lonabocker, L. (1982). "Can an institution construct a dropout profile?" College and University, 58, pp. 76-84. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Winter 1983, 18(2), 176.)
- Mahler, R.H. (1977). Identity confusion, satisfaction, and related variables as factors in participation or non-participation in student activities at an urban community college. Dissertation Abstracts International, 37(12-A, pt. 1), 7544-7545.
- Nelson, J.H. (1982). Institutional assessment of a private university by commuter and resident students. Dissertation Abstracts International, 43(1), 1A-287. (Order No. D 8213)

- Pascarella, E.T. (1984). Reassessing the effects of living on-campus versus commuting to college: A causal modeling approach. The Review of Higher Education, 7(3), 247-260.
- Pascarella, E.T., and Terenzini, P.T. (1980). Student-faculty and student-peer relationships as mediators of the structural effects of undergraduate residence arrangement. Journal of Educational Research, 73, 344-353.
- Pierog, J.J., and Gloaninger, C.E. Jr. (1981). "The attitudinal effects of resident and commuter status on the two year college student." Southern College Personnel Association Journal, 3, pp. 10-15. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Spring 1982, 17(3), 338.)
- Reichard, D.J., and McArver, P.P. (1975). "Demographic characteristics of commuting students." Unpublished Report, Office of Institutional Research, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 16 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Summer 1977, 12(4), 510.)
- Rich, G.E., and Jolicoeur, P.M. (1978). Student attitudes and academic environments: A study of California higher education. New York: Praeger.
- Sagaria, M.A.D., Higginson, L.C., and White, E.R. (1980). Perceived needs of the entering freshmen: The primary of academic issues. Journal of College Student Personnel, 21, 243-247.
- Schotzsinger, K.A., Buchanan, J., and Fahrenback, W.F. (1976). Non-residence advisors: A peer counseling program for commuter students. NASPA Journal, 13, 42-46.

- Schuchman, H. (1974). Special tasks of commuter students. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 52, 465-470.
- Simono, R.G., Wachowiak, D.G., and Furr, S. (1984). "Student living environments and their perceived impact on academic performance: A brief follow-up." Journal of College and University Student Housing, 14, pp. 22-24. (In Higher Education Abstracts, Spring 1985, 2(3), 357.)
- Stafford, T.H. Jr., and Pate, N.D. (1979). "Commuting versus resident freshmen at NCSU." Research Report, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, 20 pp. (In College Student Personnel Abstracts, Fall 1980, 16(1), 101.)
- Stewart, S. (1983). Commuter Students: Enhancing their educational experiences. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Stewart, S., and Rue, P. (1983). Commuter students: Definition and distribution. In S. Stewart (Ed.), Commuter Students: Enhancing Their Educational Experiences (pp. 3-8). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sullivan, K., and Sullivan, A. (1980). Adolescent-parent separation. Developmental Psychology, 16, 93-99.
- Trathen, J.J. (1985). An exploratory study of limited resident hall experience on freshmen commuting students. Dissertation Abstracts International, 45(10). (Order No. DA8429155)

Winter, D.G., McClelland, D.C., and Stewart, A.J. (1981).

Comparing institutional characteristics and student development at other colleges. Chapter 6 in A New Case for the Liberal Arts: Assessing Institutional Goals and Student Development. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 151-180.

Wisner, R.E. (1984). A longitudinal study of individual and environmental factors associated with student persistence at a public commuter university. Dissertation Abstracts International, 45(2). (Order No. DA8412283)