

The Recreational Reading Habits of Agricultural Communications Students

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Abstract

There is an assumption that students who read for pleasure are more successful students, but there is little academic literature to support this assumption (Gallik, 1999). A survey was conducted to assess the recreational reading habits of agricultural communications students at Oklahoma State University to determine if there is any relationship between self-reported reading habits and students' grade point average. Data was collected using Gallik's (1999) instrument, "Survey of recreational reading habits." Participants recorded how much they read during vacations and while school is in session as well as what types of materials they read. A statistically significant relationship was not found between reported GPAs and how much time students spent reading for pleasure while school is in session or during vacations. Participants reported reading more during vacations than while school is in session, but the majority of students spend less than six hours per week reading for pleasure, regardless of whether or not school is in session.

Keywords

Recreational reading, academic success, reading habits, agriculture, communications

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill for learning, particularly in the college and university setting. Reading for classes is beneficial for reading development, but recreational reading, or reading for pleasure, is also important for reading development. There is an assumption that students who read for pleasure are more successful students, but there is little academic literature to support this assumption with regard to college students (Gallik, 1999). Clark and Rumbold (2006) defined reading for pleasure as

reading that we do of our own free will anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else's request we continue because we are interested in it. It typically involves materials that reflect our own choice, at a time and place that suits us. (p. 6)

Krashen and McQuillan (2007) found that students who do free reading “read better, write better, spell better, have better grammatical competence, and have larger vocabularies (p. 1),” and Gardiner (2001) said reading for pleasure helps increase vocabulary development, comprehension and reading rates for high school students. Reading is also important for test performance, as Williams (1998) notes.

Students must be able to understand the materials read and analyze and synthesize it for application and transference into other learning activities of which testing is included...[Reading] involves a constant search for meaning and the broadening of language usage for the purpose of expanding the student's tools of communication.” (p. 5)

Time spent on leisure reading is positively related to reading achievement, overall achievement and participation in discussion for children (Akman & Alagoz, 2018; Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Smith, 1990). Research also shows that reading has a negative relationship with distractibility for college students, the opposite reaction of activities such as instant messaging (Levine et al., 2007).

College students believe recreational reading is important and enjoyable (Mokhtari, Recihard & Gardner, 2011). However, researchers have found that students, particularly college and university students, are reading less – both for academic and pleasure purposes (Huang, Capps, Blacklock, & Garza, 2014; Joliffe & Harl, 2008). With the advancement of the Internet,

students are reading more online and changing how they read (e.g. listening to audiobooks) (Huang, Capps, Blacklock, & Garza, 2014). The time college students spend online does not necessarily displace their recreational or academic reading (Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2011), but Huang et al. found that “part-time jobs and social networking websites possibly decreased the amount of time the students spent on both academic and pleasure reading.” (2014, p. 456)

Research shows varying statistics on how much college students read. Students surveyed by Mokhtar, Reichard and Gardner (2011) reported reading an average of 7.98 hours per week of recreational reading and 15.19 hours per week of academic reading. Joliffe and Harl said students reported spending “an average of 2 hours and 43 minutes reading each day, almost evenly divided between academic and nonacademic reading.” (2008, p. 606) More recently, Huang, Capps, Blacklock and Garza found that the American college students they surveyed spent 7.72 hours doing academic reading, 4.24 hours doing extracurricular reading and 8.95 hours on the Internet weekly (2014).

Gallik (1999) surveyed college students to discover what types of reading materials they read. Then, newspapers and magazines were the most common reading material for students and comic books were the least popular reading material. However, college students’ newspaper use has changed. In 2007, a study by Wilson indicated that only 8.2% of college students prefer newspapers for receiving news or current events information.

There has been much research into the benefits of reading, including reading for pleasure for elementary and secondary students, but not much has been done for college students (Gallik, 1999; Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2011). Although there have been recent studies on how

much college students read and what they read, there has not been a focus on how reading habits relate to students' academic success (Gallik, 1999; Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2011).

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine agricultural communications students' recreational reading habits and if there is any relationship between self-reported reading habits and GPA. Agricultural communications students at Oklahoma State University must complete a four-semester writing sequence. Knowing how much students read for pleasure and what type of materials students read will allow instructors in writing-based courses to better evaluate the role of recreational reading in writing education. Answering the following questions could help instructors begin to understand the role of recreational reading in academic success.

This research will include the following research questions:

1. How much do agricultural communications students read for pleasure?
2. What types of materials do agricultural communications students read?
3. Is there a relationship between students' self-reported GPA and reading habits?

METHODS

Institutional Review Board

The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board approved this research February 8, 2018.

Instrument

The instrument for this research included a survey designed to investigate how much students read, if they want to read, and what they read, in addition to their overall GPA. The researcher modified Gallik's (1999) instrument, "Survey of recreational reading habits," for data

collection. Two OSU agricultural communications faculty members helped ensure the validity and usefulness of the instrument.

Data Collection

Using a modified version of Gallik's instrument (1999), the researcher set up an electronic survey using Qualtrics software. The researcher sent three emails with the instrument link, including an initial invitation to participate and two follow-up emails (see Appendix). The emails were distributed through the OSU Department of Education, Communication and Leadership listserv to all agricultural communications majors. The researcher also visited six agricultural communications classes to recruit students through using an IRB-approved prepared statement (see Appendix). The link for the instrument was also posted in a classroom used exclusively by agricultural communications students. The survey remained open for three weeks. Two of the surveys included in the data were not used because the participants only completed half the instrument.

Participants

Participants in the research were OSU agricultural communications students. The participants voluntarily participated in the research by filling out an online instrument, which was distributed through email on a departmental listserv. The researcher recruited participants by visiting agricultural communication classes, sending emails, and posting the instrument link in an agricultural communications classroom. The participants did not receive any compensation for their participation in the research.

FINDINGS

Demographics

A total of 74 surveys were initiated, but only 71 were used for data analysis. One participant opened the instrument but chose not to participate in the research, and two participants began but did not complete the instrument. Of the 71 responses, 61 respondents were women and 10 were men. Six freshmen, 12 sophomores, 27 juniors and 21 seniors participated in the survey as well as two respondents who were master’s students and one faculty member (Table 1). Two participants chose not to disclose their student status. The age breakdown was as follows: four participants were 18 years old, 10 were 19 years old, 17 were 20 years old, 23 were 21 years old, six were 22 years old, six were 23 years old and one was 41 years old (Table 2). Four participants chose not to disclose their age.

No participants recorded a GPA below 2.0, and the majority of respondents (57%) reported having a 3.6 to 4.0 GPA. See Table 3 for the full report of the participants’ GPAs. Nine (13%) of the participants said they are active members of the OSU Honors College program.

Table 1
Participant Student Status

Student Status	Number of Students
Freshman	6
Sophomore	12
Junior	27
Senior	21
Other	3

Table 2
Participant Age

Participant Age	Number of Students
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18	4
19	10
20	17
21	23
22	6
23	6
41	1

Table 3
Participant GPA

Answer	Percentage of Students	Number of Students
< 1.5	0%	0
1.6 to 2.0	0%	0
2.1 to 2.5	3%	2
2.6 to 3.0	10%	7
3.1 to 3.5	29%	20
3.6 to 4.0	57%	39

The participants reported reading material choices are displayed in Table 4. Reading comic books/graphic novels or poetry were the least common reading choices. Only eight students reported reading the newspaper (online or paper) frequently, and even fewer ($n=5$) said they read magazines frequently. Social media was the most frequently read materials listed on the survey.

Table 4
Reading Material Choices

Reading Material	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
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<i>Newspaper (paper or online)</i>	15	24	21	8
<i>Magazines (paper or online)</i>	9	24	30	5
<i>Comic books or graphic novels (paper or online)</i>	57	9	2	0
<i>Poetry</i>	47	11	8	2
<i>Blogs</i>	11	20	25	11
<i>Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)</i>	1	5	7	55
<i>Novels</i>	11	14	26	17
<i>Nonfiction</i>	17	22	14	14

Fifty-three participants specified the type of novels they prefer to read. Mystery ($n=21$), romance ($n=18$) and science fiction ($n=16$) novels were the most popular type of novel read by participants. Eight liked historical fiction, four liked young adult novels, four liked fantasy novels and three liked classic literature.

Forty-seven participants specified the type of nonfiction books they prefer to read. Religious ($n=22$), self-help ($n=20$) and biographical/autobiographical ($n=18$) books were the most popular nonfiction books read by participants. Eight liked historical books, three liked leadership books, and eight said they liked to read various types of books including research books, political books, and how-to books.

Only one participant reported reading for pleasure for more than six hours a week while school was in session, and that participant said he reads more than 10 hours per week. Most students (43%) reported reading for pleasure less than an hour each week. See Table 5 for a detailed breakdown of students reported reading habits while school is in session.

Table 5*Time spend reading when school is in session*

Hours per week	Percentage of students	Number of Students
< 1 hour	43%	29
1-2 hours	35%	24
3-5 hours	21%	14
6-10 hours	0%	0
> 10 hours	1%	1

Participants read more frequently during school vacations than while school is in session, as shown in Table 6. Four said they read for pleasure more than 10 hours per week during the school year, 19 said they read six to 10 hours per week, 12 said they read three to five hours per week, 15 said they read one to two hours per week, and 18 said they read less than one hour per week. Eighty-four percent (57 participants) of the participants claimed that they would read more if they had more free time for reading.

Table 6*Time spend reading during school vacations*

Hours per week	Percentage of students	Number of students
< 1 hour	26%	18
1-2 hours	22%	15
3-5 hours	18%	12
6-10 hours	28%	19
> 10 hours	6%	4

The researcher used Kendall's tau-b correlations to determine the relationship between GPA and the time spent reading for pleasure during vacations and while school is in session. The relationship between the amount of time participants spent reading for pleasure while school was in session and their GPA was not statistically significant ($r_{\tau}=.151, p = .176$) The relationship between the amount of time participants spent reading for pleasure during vacations and their GPA was also not statistically significant ($r_{\tau}= .298, p = .111$).

The researcher used chi-square calculations to see if there were any statistically significant differences between different groups and the amount of time spent reading for pleasure. Chi-square calculations were conducted for the following groups: student classification, gender, age and honors college participation. There were no statistically significant differences for any of the groups.

DISCUSSION

The survey showed that the participants do read for pleasure, but they do not spend a large amount of time reading for pleasure each week. The survey results are most consistent with Gallik (1999), who reported that 63% of her respondents read less than two hours per week. With few exceptions, participants in the survey indicated that they do not read for pleasure more than five hours per week when school is in session. Seventy-eight percent of the participants read less than two hours per week.

It seems that college students do not read for pleasure because they do not have time. Eighty-four percent of participants said they would read more if they had more free time. During vacations, when students have more free time, they spend more time reading for pleasure. They also do not have to spend time reading for classes on vacations, which frees up time for

recreational reading. The survey showed that only 49% of the participants reported spending less than two hours reading for pleasure while on vacation, and 34% read more than six hours each week. This is consistent with Gallik's research (1999), which reported that 48% of students read less than two hours each week and 25% read more than six hours each week while on vacation. Interestingly, the amount of students who reported reading 6-10 hours jumped from 0 students while school is in session to 19 students during vacations, which was the highest ranking time frame for that data set.

Only 12% of participants reported reading newspapers frequently, and even fewer (7%) reported reading magazines frequently. This is not surprising given Wilson's (2007) research that showed that only 8.2% of college students prefer newspapers for receiving news or current events information. This is much different than the results of Gallik's survey in 1999. Then, 42% of students read newspapers frequently and 54% read magazines frequently. The change in newspaper and magazine readership could possibly be attributed to the rise of social media and the Internet. Social media was by far the most popular type of pleasure reading done by the participants in this study, with only 18% of participants reading social media less than frequently. In contrast, Gallik (1999) reported that 60% of participants said they read on the Internet frequently.

Participants reported reading novels and nonfiction books the second and third most frequently, respectively. Magazines and blogs typically fell into the "rarely" or "sometimes," categories. Seventy-nine percent reported reading magazines rarely or sometimes, and 67% reported reading blogs rarely or sometimes.

The data collected in the survey can help university instructors fully evaluate the role of recreational reading in education. Instructors can look at how much students read for pleasure

and what type of materials students read to determine reading assignments and effective teaching methods.

Although there was not a statistically significant correlation between time spent reading for pleasure and GPA in this study, the relationship between recreational reading and academic success is still worth investigating. Due to the limitations of this study, similar studies could be conducted with larger populations. Also, future studies could study the relationship of adolescent reading habits on academic success in college and investigate whether what types of materials students read affects their academic performance. Other recommendations for future studies include specifically looking at the impact of recreational reading on writing skills, investigating whether students primarily read for pleasure during vacations and read for academic purposes during the school year and studying how much time agricultural communications students spend reading for classes versus reading for pleasure.

Limitations

The results of the survey were limited due to the smaller, concentrated sample size. A larger number of participants would make the findings more robust. While the information on what students read is helpful, it is strictly limited to OSU agricultural communications students.

The OSU agricultural communications student population is mostly female, so while the data was accurate to the agricultural communications population, it is skewed toward the female participants. This could be affect the results of the study because women tend to read more than men (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2011). In addition, because the survey was voluntary, it is not an exact representation of the agricultural communication student population at OSU.

The survey did not specify what constitutes reading for pleasure on social media (e.g., reading articles found on social media versus scrolling through a news feed), which could affect the results of how often students say they read for pleasure on social media.

APPENDIX

Participant Information Form

Title: Recreational Reading Habits of Agricultural Communications Students

Investigator(s): Abigail Arthaud, agricultural communications undergraduate student.

Dr. Angel Riggs, assistant professor of agricultural communications.

Purpose: The purpose of the research study is to determine the recreational reading habits of agricultural communications students at Oklahoma State University and to determine if there is any relationship between self-reported reading habits and GPA.

What to Expect: This research study is administered online. Participation in this research will involve completion of a questionnaire. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You will be expected to complete the questionnaire once. It should take you about 15 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain an appreciation and understanding of how research is conducted.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this research.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Angel Riggs, Ph.D., 440 Hall, Dept. of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405 -744-5133. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

If you choose to participate: Please, click I Agree to Participate if you choose to participate. By clicking I Agree to Participate, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily and agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.

Copy of Survey

Q1 Do you agree to participate in this survey?

- I Agree to Participate (1)
- I Do Not Agree to Participate (2)

Q2 Please indicate your gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q3 Please indicate your student status:

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- Other (specify) (5) _____

Q4 Please indicate your age:

Q5 Please indicate your cumulative GPA:

- Less than 1.5 (1)
- 1.6 to 2.0 (2)
- 2.1 to 2.5 (3)
- 2.6 to 3.0 (4)
- 3.1 to 3.5 (5)
- 3.6 to 4.0 (6)

Q6 Are you in the Honors Program?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q8 Please indicate the amount of time you spend each week on recreational reading (not required for classes when school is in session):

- Less than 1 hour (1)
- 1-2 hours (2)
- 3-5 hours (3)
- 6-10 hours (4)
- Over 10 hours (5)

Q9 Please indicate the amount of time you spend each week on recreational reading (not required for classes) during vacations:

- Less than 1 hour (1)
- 1-2 hours (2)
- 3-5 hours (3)
- 6-10 hours (4)
- Over 10 hours (5)

Q10 If you had more free time, would you read more?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q11 Please indicate how often you read each of the following:

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Frequently (4)
Newspaper (paper or online) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines (paper or online) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comic books or graphic novels (paper or online) (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poetry (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blogs (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Novels (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonfiction (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12 Please specify the kind of novels you read (science fiction, mystery, etc.):

Q13 Please specify the kind of nonfiction books you read (biography, self help, religious, etc.):

Recruitment Materials

Initial email sent to agricultural communications students through departmental listserv.

Hello Agricultural Communications Students,

I am conducting research for my Honors thesis project about the recreational reading habits of agricultural communications students. I am interested in knowing whether there is a link between recreational reading and GPA. I also want to learn whether students read for pleasure and, if so, what they read. You could help further this research by taking this online survey: -survey link-

Participation in this research is voluntary.

Thank you for considering this request,

Abigail Arthaud

Follow-up email sent to agricultural communications students through departmental listserv.

Hello Agricultural Communications Students,

I am conducting research as part of my honors thesis. Last week, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in my research study. This follow-up email is to remind you to please complete the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so.

I am interested in knowing whether there is a link between recreational reading and GPA. I also want to learn whether students read for pleasure and, if so, what they read. To participate, use the following link to access the online survey: -survey link-

Participation in this research is voluntary.

Thank you for considering this request,

Abigail Arthaud

Script used for class announcements.

Hello,

My name is Abigail Arthaud, and I am an agricultural communications and agribusiness senior. This semester I am working on completing my honors thesis. I am interested in studying whether there is a link between recreational reading and GPA. I also want to learn whether you read for pleasure and, if so, what you read.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate, you can use the link displayed on the board to access the survey.

Thank you for your time.

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