

Campus Culture Impacts on Student Success

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**Abstract**

This study using college students at a midwestern large university attempted to find a link between acculturation of the students and their academic success, GPA. 190 students were asked a range of questions pertaining to the University culture, values, goals, and way of thinking. While no link was found, a successful measure was adapted from other acculturation measures to fit the student population. Moving forward, student satisfaction, levels of stress, and other success measures should be used to gain more of an understanding for how acculturation impacts individual students. Going forward more needs to be understood looking at university acculturation on a quantitative level.

Culture is something that influences behavior and attitudes of individuals. The way individuals learn and come to be influenced by culture was termed acculturation. The specific definition, coined in 1936 by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, is “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). The current study uses this definition to understand if students with higher campus acculturation do better in school.

Acculturation’s impact on individuals has yielded important results for understanding how individuals operate within larger society. Acculturation has been linked to decreased resistance to nicotine addiction and smoking habits among Mexican-Americans (Sabogal, Otero-Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Marin & Marin, 1989), and higher rates of drinking alcohol among Hispanics (Caetano, 1987) and Asian American youth (Hahm, Lahiff & Guterman, 2004). High acculturation stress, due to low acculturation, is linked to substance abuse from young Latinos (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2009), and increased risk for heart disease among Japanese Americans (Marmot & Syme, 1977). Assimilation positively correlates with higher depression

and stress among Korean Immigrants (Oh, Koeske & Sales, 2002), but, also, correlates higher with job satisfaction among Chinese immigrant restaurant employees in New York City (Au, Garey, Bermas & Chan, 1998), and increased diversity acceptance among Latinos (Simmons, Wittig & Grant, 2010). High acculturation was also related to higher GPA and lower mental strain for Vietnamese youth (Nguyen, Messe & Stollak, 1999). The different amounts of acculturation per individual can impact many things in an individual's life, negative and positive.

There are two different ways to measure acculturation as it is now understood. One way is using a Unidimensional Scale. This was the first way acculturation was understood and tested. The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA)(Cuellar, Harris, &Jasso, 1980) was one of the first acculturation scale and is understood as a Unidimensional model. Meaning, Mexican Americans with low scores on the scale are understood to be “Very Mexican”. Individuals with high scores are “Very Anglicized”, and individuals in the middle are understood to be bicultural. The Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) was modeled after the ARSMA. They retained the unidimensional scale but formatted the questions to work for Asian individuals who have migrated to the US. Individuals who scored high were considered Assimilated, individuals with low scores kept their original identity and ignored integration attempts, while participants who scored in the middle were understood as bicultural. Then acculturation began to be understood as a Bidimensional model or scale (BDM). Where, instead of an individual moving along a continuum toward Assimilation (Berry, 1986) and moving away from Separation (staying with original culture and denying new culture) with Integration (Berry, 1986) being in the middle. A BDM has an additional direction, Marginalization (Stonequist, 1935, 1937). Marginalization is when individuals leave their original culture to then also be rejected by the dominant culture. This model is used in the

Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (Cuellar, Arnold & Maldonado, 1995), Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (Chung, Kim & Abreu, 2004), and the East Asian Acculturation Measure (Barry, 2001), and was implemented to further understand individuals in a clinical context. These two different scales can be used for different things.

Unidimensional models are better for predicting and understanding behavior, and Bidimensional models should be used for in-depth understanding and research outcomes (Flannery, Reise & Yu, 2001).

Studies over campus culture/acculturation are labeled more as campus climate studies. These largely revolve around the desire for campuses to be inclusive and are qualitative (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). These studies also lack to come to a conclusive definition, but the definition set forth by Peterson and Spencer in 1990, who based their understanding off the definition of Hellriegel and Slocum in 1974. This definition is “a set of attributes which can be perceived about a particular organization and/or its subsystems, and that may be induced from the way the organization and/or its subsystems deal with their members and the environment,” (Hellriegel & Slocum, 1974). This definition applies not only to the students, but also to the faculty. Some definitions split campus culture and climate (Cress, 2002), while most use them to mean the same thing. Studies covering campus climate tend to be qualitative and look at diversity (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008) using interviews and open-ended questions. Hart and Fellabaum also call for more studies with consistent definitions and other impacts the climate has.

### **Current Study**

Acculturation was defined in 1936 as groups of individuals from a different culture coming into contact with an original culture and therefore a change in behavior in the original culture and potentially the new culture (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). This has been

identified and modeled in Mexican-Americans, Koreans, adolescent girls, and foreign students. Acculturation questionnaires have been used in a few of these, specifically Mexican-Americans. The consistency of these is largely ambiguous and rarely shows similar results to other acculturation models (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). For acculturation to be popularly understood as such a strong moderator of happiness, stress, and health, and a strong mediator to decisions and attitudes, the quantitative results are not as strong. Culture is seen as a strong part of University and Business identity (Stahl & Voigt, 2008). The importance of culture within these realms is rarely completely understated by companies, colleges, and individuals. The success of the two realms is often attributed to their cultures. So, the ability of employees and students to acculturate should be high, and lack of acculturation should show a lack of success within these realms. Acculturation is studied on macro-levels (country to country) between migrant groups fairly often. There are minimal quantitative studies of acculturation from micro-level (community to community) situations. This presents a lack of research in an area that is important to so many people. The goal of this study was to provide some research to this area. It is predicted highly acculturated individuals to the campus culture will do better academically than individuals that are less acculturated. The dependent variable in the research was GPA and the predictor variable was how acculturated the student was at Oklahoma State. If an individual has a higher acculturation amount then the student should have a higher GPA.

### **Method**

Unfortunately, there is no acculturation measure or model for smaller scale acculturation. This study modified existing acculturation measures to fit the college population at large. Drawing on the SL-ASIA, EAAM, and ARSMA questions were constructed that applied to the Oklahoma State campus. The EAAM contains questions applied to food consumption and where

it is bought. A corresponding question on The Oklahoma State Acculturation scale would be about eating on campus and at surrounding restaurants versus eating at home. The scale was comprised of 55 questions, 12 qualitative and 43 quantitative. The 12 qualitative questions were removed from the analysis. The questions consisted of four different areas all rated equivalently: involvement in athletics, clubs, appreciation of Oklahoma State, and social life questions. Some demographic information was also collected<sup>1</sup>. The scale is a Unidimensional model of acculturation, because there is a trade-off in previous culture, their city/high school culture and the new culture, Oklahoma State University culture. The measure can be viewed in the appendix. The survey utilized the SONA system and was taken by 202 college students for class credit. Qualitative data was discarded for this research, as well as participants who skipped a majority of questions or did not answer the consent question. After cleaning the data, 190 participants' data were able to be used. A total score was calculated by adding up the quantitative scores with equal weights. The high score being activities associated with being in tuned with Oklahoma State culture, i.e. an individual believing they are involved in the culture, thinking Oklahoma State has a culture, attending club and sporting events. Low scores were associated with disagreeing with Oklahoma State culture or not being involved in the culture and thinking that Oklahoma State did not have a culture. Bivariate correlations were run to assess how the scores connected with GPA.

## Results

Only a few scores significantly correlated with College GPA. High School GPA ( $r=.244$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and being in the Honors college ( $r=.256$ ,  $p<.01$ ) positively correlated with College GPA.

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<sup>1</sup> Scale can be seen in the appendix

Going to the bars ( $r=-.239$ ,  $p<.01$ ) negatively correlated with College GPA. Total score correlated positively ( $r=.028$ ,  $p>.05$ ) with College GPA but was not significant. People who scored themselves as being involved in the culture positively and significantly correlated with total score ( $r=.557$ ,  $p<.01$ , see Table 1).

### **Discussion**

Acculturation is very difficult to measure. There are different questionnaires studying different behaviors and norms of the same population (Cuellar, Arnold & Maldonado, 1995)(Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal & Perez-Stable, 1987). The field of acculturation has a lot of research for minorities and immigrants, but it is difficult to understand on a smaller scale. Acculturation is difficult to measure, not only because it is measured differently for so many groups, but also it is understood differently from researcher to researcher. This is seen in the way different measures seek to understand how behaviors, attitudes, and norms have changed from original culture to new culture. This can complicate problems within testing and application.

Barring issues with acculturation measures in general, the results of them can be important. Although, the results did not support the hypothesis, there were several notable things that came from this study. It is important to note that success within University is not purely measured by GPA. Club participation and leadership are also seen as a good marker of success, and they positively correlated with Overall Acculturation score. Culture, however, is not tangible like heartrate, cortisol, and monetary worth. Culture is even more difficult to understand when implementing it into models, surveys, and scales.

Also, many data points that could have helped within the scale were missed. Questions covering problematic substance use, stress, and satisfaction could have been addressed within the larger measure. Prior studies have found links between high acculturation and substance abuse (Sabogal, Otero-Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Marin & Marin, 1989) (Caetano, 1987) (Hahm, Lahiff & Guterman, 2004), and the only question in the study was bar attendance rather than alcohol consumption. Other questions involving smoking and substances should be involved in the future to understand how acculturation impacts the university population. Acculturation stress has also been linked with substance abuse (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2009), stress and depression (Oh, Koeske & Sales, 2002). While high acculturation may not directly affect GPA, there could be moderators which acculturation does affect. These could be an increase in satisfaction (Au, Garey, Bermas & Chan, 1998) and a decrease in mental distress (Nguyen, Messe & Stollak, 1999). Questions about ethnicity and gender were not included. It could have been interesting to see if Oklahoma State is inclusive in its acculturation and the impact, or lack of, these demographics had on participation and success.

Future directions for this would be to include demographic data and other measures of success while at University. A longer study with more quantitative data covering stress, diversity acceptance, drug and alcohol abuse, and depression would go further to explain missing data points within this study. A longitudinal study could do well to track different levels of involvement and acculturation, and how they impact the mental and physical health of individuals, and their success throughout University. Also, acculturation in business and university settings needs to be studied more. Businesses and Universities spend a lot of money to create a culture and spend a lot of money to acculturate students and help through college. The research that has been done is about inclusivity and diversity, while not necessarily noting direct

impacts on student success and retention rates. The research is also qualitative, and more needs to be done to make quantitative measures.

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## Appendix

Table 1

	College GPA	Honors College	Time Spent at Bars	First Gen Student	Acculturation Score	High School GPA	Involved in Culture
College GPA	-	.256**	-.239**	.164*	.028	.244**	.094
Honors College	.256**	-	-.212**	-.036	.000	.195**	.113
Time Spent at Bars	-.239**	-.212**	-	-.103	.116	-.077	-.117
First Gen Student	.164*	-.036	-.103	-	.085	.134	-.012
Acculturation Score	.028	.000	.116	.085	-	.061	.557**
High School GPA	.244**	.195**	-.077	.134	.061	-	.113
Involved in Culture	.094	.113	-.117	-.012	.557**	.113	-

**Scale**

1. What is your classification?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
2. How old are you?
  - a. 18-20
  - b. 21-23
  - c. 24-27
  - d. 28+
3. Do you live on or off campus?
  - a. On
  - b. Off, but within 5 miles
  - c. Off, but within 15 miles
  - d. Off, and outside of 15 miles
4. Where are you from?
  - a. Oklahoma
  - b. Border states to Oklahoma
  - c. Other states
  - d. Outside of the US
5. What was your GPA in High school?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your GPA at Oklahoma State?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Did you transfer to Oklahoma State from another college?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. Do you have an all sports pass?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. How often do you go to the football games?
  - a. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (on a sliding scale)
10. How often do you go to the basketball games?
  - a. 0 – 18 on sliding scale
11. How often do you attend the other sports? (i.e. tennis, soccer, baseball, softball, etc.)
  - a. Never
  - b. Once or twice a year
  - c. Multiple times a year, if so which sport and how much. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you attend art events on campus (i.e. performing arts, the arts museum, etc.)
  - a. Yes, if so which ones \_\_\_\_\_

- i. How often do you attend these events \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Never
- 13. Are you in any cultural clubs? (i.e. SUAB, habitat for humanity, etc.)
  - a. No
  - b. Yes, if so what? \_\_\_\_\_
    - i. How often do you attend these club's meetings?
- 14. Do you play intramural sports?
  - a. Yes, which ones? \_\_\_\_\_
    - i. How often do you go to games? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
- 15. Do you play on any club teams?
  - a. Yes, which ones?
    - i. How often do you attend games? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
- 16. Are you part of any clubs to have to do with your major?
  - a. Yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
- 17. Do you hold a position in any clubs?
  - a. Yes, if so what position/s? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
  - c. n/a
- 18. Are you in the honors college?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
- 19. Are you in a Fraternity or Sorority?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
- 20. DO you hold a position in your Sorority or Fraternity?
  - a. Yes, if so what position
  - b. No
  - c. n/a
- 21. Do you go to the bars on the strip?
  - a. Yes, at least twice a week
  - b. Yes, but only a couple times a month/semester
  - c. No, I am not old enough
  - d. No, I am not interested
- 22. Do you eat out at surrounding local restaurants? (i.e. Eskimo Joes, Hideaway, food trucks)
  - a. Yes, weekly
  - b. Yes, monthly
  - c. Once or twice a semester
  - d. Never
- 23. Do you have a meal plan?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
- 24. How often do you eat on campus?

- a. 10+ times a week
  - b. 6-9 times a week
  - c. 2-5 times a week
  - d. 1 or less times a week
25. How often do you go home throughout the semester?
- a. 12 or more times through the semester
  - b. 7-11 times
  - c. 3-6 times
  - d. 2 or less times throughout the semester
26. What did you do after coming home from school at high school?
- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
27. What do you do not when you are not taking classes or at school?
- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
28. What did you do on your weekend when you were in Highschool?
- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
29. What do you do on your weekends now?
- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
30. Do you have a job?
- a. Yes, I work more than 25 hours a week
  - b. Yes, I work 15-25 hours a week
  - c. Yes, I work 0-15 hours a week
  - d. No, I do not
31. Is Oklahoma State University doing anything to create a culture for students?
- a. No
  - b. Yes, if so what are they doing?
- \_\_\_\_\_
32. What, do you feel, are Oklahoma States goals for students while at Oklahoma State? Whether that be the students as a whole, or specifically the message the organization sends.
- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
33. Do these values align with your goals?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
34. What are your goals at Oklahoma State
35. Which of these most closely aligns with Oklahoma States values/goals?
- a. To get students to graduate with a degree
  - b. To teach students how to function as an adult after college in society
  - c. To create a culture for students to find their niche and grow as a person
  - d. To take money from the students and put that towards research and other financial motives
36. Why did you choose the answer above?

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

37. What are your goals while at Oklahoma State?

- a. To get a degree
- b. To find a group of people you enjoy spending time with and making connections
- c. To find your interests and enjoy extracurricular activities?
- d. To get good grades and get a job or go to grad school?

Please mark from 1 – 5 ranking how much agree with the statement with 1 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree.

38. Oklahoma State does a good job of creating opportunities for students to discover their interests?

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

39. Oklahoma State cares about the students.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

40. Oklahoma State cares more about research then students.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

41. Oklahoma State does a good job of creating an environment for students to be themselves.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

42. Oklahoma State cares more about athletics than academics.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

43. Oklahoma State cares more about academics than athletics.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

44. Oklahoma State cares more about The Arts than academics or athletics.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

45. Oklahoma State does a good job of creating a campus culture.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

46. I am involved in the culture at Oklahoma State

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

47. Oklahoma State does not do a good enough job of creating culture on campus.

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

48. Are you a first-generation student? (the first person in your family to attend college)

- a. Yes
- b. No

49. How likely are you to finish your degree at Oklahoma State? ( 1 definitely not, 5 being definitely)

- a. 1 2 3 4 5

50. Why did you answer Question 49 the way you did?

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your SONA credits will be given soon.