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Writing for the Sciences

Group Lab Report

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The Impact of Residence on College Students' Health and Behaviors

ABSTRACT

Throughout the world, students at different universities face challenges as they complete their education. These challenges include commuting time, lifestyle habits, and external environmental factors. A study conducted at the City College of New York assessed different aspects of students' lives and their lifestyles. The study included a questionnaire given to students who commute and those who live on campus. The survey consisted of questions relating to dietary habits, frequency of meals, commuting time, and sleep. Results yielded answers such as commuters finding their meals to be less frequent and at random times than commuters. Commuters found that they had few similarities in distractions from schoolwork at home, and some major differences with those that dorm on campus. Commuters had a higher number of students sleeping for 4-6 hours than the people who lived at the dorms. The results demonstrated the differences of lifestyles led by students who live on campus versus the students who commute to class.

INTRODUCTION

A major challenge for many post-secondary students is managing their physical, emotional, and mental health. As students spend most of their time studying, researching, and completing academic tasks, it becomes difficult to manage their time effectively and maintain healthy habits throughout the semester. Sleeping patterns, stress levels, daily nutrition, and learning environment are strong factors that influence and ultimately indicate students' overall health. However, the general behaviors and daily habits of students who commute to college are very different from those of students who live on campus. For example, students who live at home and constantly commute to college usually have to wake up earlier to get to their institution and sometimes face many distractions while studying at home. On the other hand, students who live on campus most likely have a hard time meeting their basic needs while socializing with their peers. Therefore, the residence of many college students affects their daily activities. But what effect does it have on the students' overall health? Which group of students, the ones who live on campus or commute to college, maintain better overall health?

The main objective of this study is to determine whether or not there is a significant difference in general academics and health between students who reside in dorm buildings versus those that commute to college. Additionally, we hypothesized that post-secondary students who commute to college reflect better overall health.

METHODS

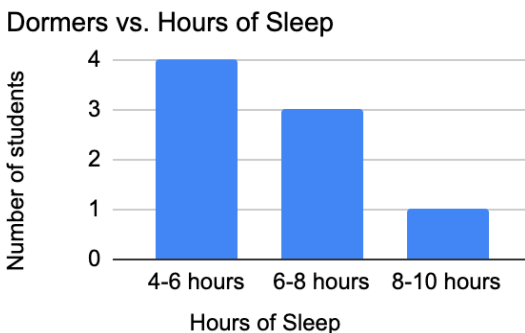
The study was conducted at City College of New York (CCNY), a mid-sized institution with approximately 13,000 enrolled undergraduate students. Participants were recruited from a Writing for the Sciences class.

The sample consisted of 19 volunteering participants, ranging from their first to second year of undergraduate study. 11 of the participants commuted from home to CCNY, whereas 8 participants resided at the dorm building on campus. Ten participants were female and nine participants were male. 10 students had science-related majors, 3 had health/clinical science-related majors, 2 students were undecided, and 4 students respectively were Biomedical Science, Mathematics, Business Communication, and Psychology/Sociology majors.

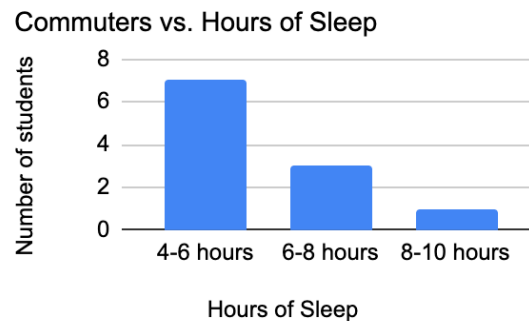
Participants were given a questionnaire to answer regarding their general behaviors and health. Interview questions were broad, in order to allow college students to specify the general reasons for their habits. Survey data was gathered and analyzed to determine the correlation between residence status and general health of the participants.

RESULTS

From the eight participants that resided at the dorm building on campus, only half of them (4 students) received approximately 4-6 hours of sleep per day (Graph 1). On the other hand, from the 11 participants that commuted to college, the majority (7 students) received 4-6 hours of sleep per day (Graph 2). Sleep amount remained quite consistent between college students of this study, regardless if they were commuters or dormers.



Graph 1



Graph 2

Most participants (5 students) from the group that resided at the dorm building on campus were not sure about the frequency of their meals (graph 3). However, more than half of the participants that commuted to college (6 students) consumed approximately 1 meal every 6 hours (graph 4). These results reveal that commuter participants at CCNY consumed meals more regularly than dormers.

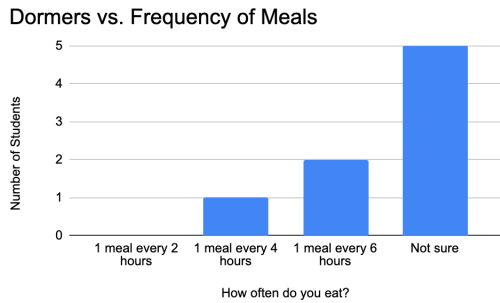


Figure 3

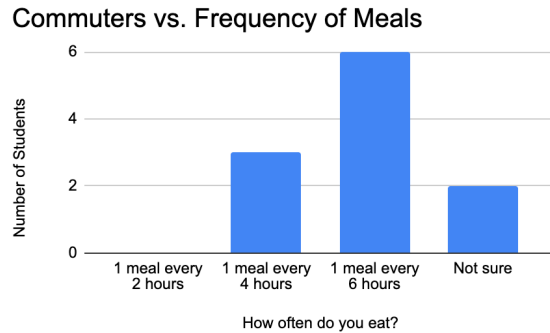
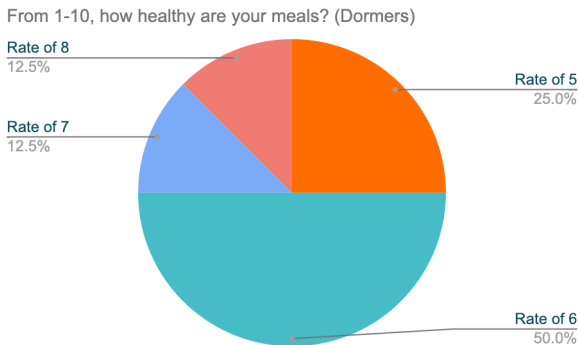
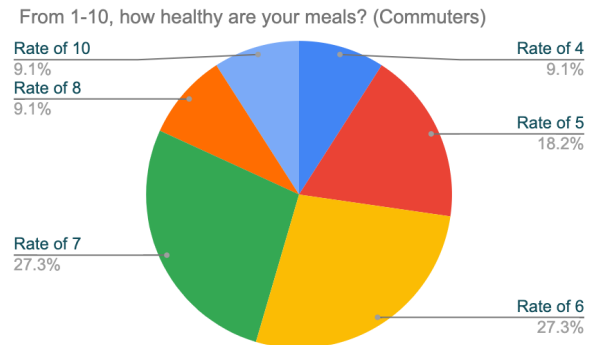


Figure 4

Precisely 50% of participants that commuted to CCNY considered the healthiness of their meals to be a 6 out of 10 (Graph 5). Although the results for commuters varied a lot more in comparison, 27% of them considered the healthiness of their meal to be a 6 out of 10 and another 27% of them considered the healthiness of their meals to be a 7 out of 10 (Graph 6).



Graph 5



Graph 6

Moreover, Table 1 shows that the most frequent distractions for students who resided on campus were social media (4 students) and spending time with friends (4 students). On the other hand, for commuters, the most frequent distractions were social media (6 students) and workload (2 students).

Table 1

What activities/distractions prevent you from sleeping enough hours?

Individual Responses from Dormers	Individual responses from commuters
Social media	Video games
In the dorms I am distracted by friends and life responsibilities (cleaning, laundry, cooking)	Studying and work
In the dorms, just talking and hanging out with friends	Social media
Friend distractions and noise	Poor room layout
Studying	Social media
Social Media, hanging out with friends, schoolwork	Social media
Social Media	Work load
Social Media	Social media
	Social media

	Take care of younger siblings
	Social media

DISCUSSION

The results yielded several conclusions, as the commuters and students who lived on campus had similar and different results. For example, for hours of sleep, the majority of the commuters fell between the 4-6 hour range while the people who lived on campus fell more into other ranges than commuters did. Another area where both groups differed was distractions. Commuters said that workload and taking care of siblings posed more of a distraction than hanging out with friends which was a more prevalent one in students who lived on campus. The frequency of meals were also significantly different in commuters in comparison to students living in dorms. People who commuted ate meals every 6 hours while the majority of students who lived on campus had a more scattered frequency at which they ate.

The recommended hours of sleep for an adolescent should be around 8 hours, and studies have shown that students receiving 8 hours of sleep was the smallest percentage of individuals studied. First year college students are quite sleep deprived, with around 25% of students getting less than 6 hours of sleep per night. This statistic is alarming, given that the average 18-year-old requires approximately 8.5 hours of sleep for optimal functioning (Adams SK 1). This statistic aligns with our data and shows how little sleep students get on a daily basis. Sleep affects college students' daily lives and their lifestyle. Distractions such as social media, socializing with peers, spending time with family, and other activities also play into students' lack of sleep.

There are several limitations to the results. The small sample size, solely including freshman and sophomore students at CCNY, cannot be easily extrapolated to include all college

students ranging from freshmen to seniors. Moreover, most participants had science-based majors, and this could have skewed results towards one direction. Future research should accommodate a wider variety of college students including but not limited to various liberal arts majors, architecture and engineering students, athletes, and those who are employed. Sleep quality and amount of daily studying was not recorded as a part of this survey, which would have been beneficial in order to determine a potential correlation between residence, academics, and overall health. Future research warrants the exploration of sleep patterns and quality through the use of smartwatches, especially on the premise that college students report issues of sleep deprivation. Overall, these traits and individual factors should be analyzed in order to determine its effects on the general academics, mental and physical health, and the emotional state of college students.

References

Adams SK, Williford DN, Vaccaro A, Kisler TS, Francis A, Newman B. 11 May 2016. The young and the restless: Socializing trumps sleep, fear of missing out, and technological distractions in first-year college students. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*. 22(3):337-348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1181557>.