

A Survey of Two-Year College African-American Students on First year of College

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Abstract

Twenty-five Georgia Perimeter College students were surveyed with a 15-question survey about their opinions on their first-year college experience. Many of the respondents were African-American males between 18 to 20 years old. The survey participants responded to three inquiries about their opinion on how well they adjusted during the first year, whether they were stressed the first year, and if so, what coping mechanism did they use. The data suggest that most students adjusted well but had a stressful first year. The data suggest that food was most used to cope with stress.

Chapter One: Overview

The first year of college is a time for students to explore their passions and learn who they are, where they are, and where they want to be. While college can be fun and exciting, many first-year students face issues. The first year of college can be a very stressful time for students. Especially those who enroll in four-year and out-of-state colleges. To cope with this stress, many students turn to alcohol, drugs, sex, or food. Due to the inability to deal with stress positively, along with not being able to balance school, jobs, and family, is the number one reason students drop out of college. Approximately 30% of freshmen drop out after their first year of college (Atlas, 2018). This paper will survey two-year college students on their first-year college experience, how well they adjusted if they became stressed, and if so, what coping mechanisms they use.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The first year of college, called Freshman Year, is a transitional time for students from their teenage years to adulthood. During this time, many students gain weight, known as the Freshman 15, due to poor eating habits. Research shows that "one in four freshmen gain at least 5% of their body weight, an average of about 10 pounds, during their first semester" (Warner, 2009). According to researchers Heidi J. Wengreen and Cara Moncur of the department of nutrition and food sciences at Utah State University in Logan, "Almost one-quarter of students gained a significant amount of weight during their first semester of college" (Warner, 2009).

Due to their newfound friends' freshmen students often abuse alcohol and drugs. As Heffernan and Wallace put it, "alcohol has long been a staple of the college experience," from frat parties to homecoming and everything in between, alcohol has remained an "essential" part of the college experience. Research at The University of Harvard showed that while alcohol-related visits to health clinics have decreased since 2011, over 50 percent of those visits are by freshmen students (Conway, 2013). According to students, the freedom from parental restrictions and societal expectations that everyone parties in college contributes significantly to the freshmen drinking culture. Such culture leads to dangerous habits such as binge drinking, defined as four drinks for women and five drinks for men in two hours or less. (Conway, 2013).

Most first-year students are inexperienced drinkers upon arrival to college. Due to stress, peer pressure, and societal expectations, many first-year students turn to the preferred drink of college students, shots. According to Dean of Freshmen Thomas A. Dingman, freshmen who drink "often want to hide it from their proctors"; therefore, they resort to hard alcohol "that you can conceal" and "consume in a rapid-fire way"(Conway, 2013) A standard drink contains about

0.6 fluid ounces of pure alcohol. Some approximate drink equivalents are "12 oz. of beer, 8-9 oz. of malt liquor, 5 oz. of table wine, 3-4 oz. of fortified wine, 2-3 oz. of cordial, liqueur or aperitif and 1.5 oz. of brandy or spirits" (College Parents of America, 2006). Overconsumption of alcohol has often led to premature death, sexual assault, and expulsion.

Portraying what they have seen in films and societal expectations, first-year students also tend to turn to and abuse drugs. Since the 1970's drug and alcohol abuse has been a major concern on college campuses. Students often cop with social pressure and partake in drugs during campus parties. Some demographics at a higher risk of abusing drugs are fraternity and sorority members, campus athletes, students with mental health issues, residents of on-campus housing, and students facing extreme stress (Facts and Statistics of College Drug Abuse, 2018).

Stress, peer pressure, course load, and curiosity are the main reasons why students turn to drugs. First-year college students often take prescription medication such as Adderall to help them concentrate. Though not illegal to use without a prescription, it is known as the "study drug." Adderall is used to treat the symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Adderall abuse occurs when taken in higher doses than prescribed, for non-medical reasons, and through a non-approved method such as snorting (Patterson,2017).

Improper consumption of Adderall causes headaches, anxiety, excessive fatigue, shortness of breath, and other side effects. Abusing this drug can lead to tolerance, dependency, and addiction, leading students to harder drugs such as heroin and cocaine. (Patterson,2017). To relax, students often reach for marijuana. The consumption of marijuana may lead to a decline in GPA and expulsion.

Along with being vulnerable to abusing alcohol and drugs, “Freshman year is a period of vulnerability for some mental disorders, like major depressive episodes, because of the high-stress levels of adjustment. More than half of all college students report feeling “overwhelming anxiety,” and over a third feel “so depressed that it was difficult to function” (Heffernan and Wallace, 2016).

A national "survey of freshmen found that fifty percent reported feeling stressed most or all of the time and 36 percent did not feel as if they were in control of managing the stress of day-to-day college life." (Jaschik, 2015). Students with higher stress levels were among the ones with lower grades. The rise in college expenses has added more stress to students. To pay for college, most first-year students must also work.

High-stress levels have often led students to a mental break, drop out and even commit suicide. While programs in high school prepare students for the academic part of college, they do not prepare students for the mental and emotional aspects of college. It is essential for students to maintain open communication with family members and friends. Students can seek counseling services that are provided on campuses. These services help students with managing stress levels in a positive way.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The Survey of First Year College Experience consists of 16 questions. The first three are demographic questions. They are age, gender, and ethnic background. The remaining 13 statements query the respondents on their first-year experience of college. These statements are: my first year was easy; my first year was stressful; I made friends in my first year; I considered dropping out in my first year; I worked during my first year; I was happy my first year; I lost weight my first year; I adjusted well my first year; I used alcohol to cope with my stress; I used drugs to cope with my stress; I used food to cope with my stress, and I used sex to cope with my stress. All statements will be in a strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree format.

The data for the survey will be gathered from surveying students from Perimeter College. The survey instrument will be issued to students between 11:30 AM and 3:30 PM on Tuesday and Thursday. Twenty-five instruments will be issued. The surveyor will provide a pen or pencil and randomly ask each third person to complete a survey instrument. The surveyor will wait while the respondents complete the instrument and return it to the surveyor. All data will be tabulated using descriptive statistics.

Chapter Four: Results

Table 4.1 Age of Respondents

Age	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
18-20	20	80.0	80.0
21-23	2	8.0	88.0
24-26	2	8.0	96.0
27-29	0	0	96.0
30-aove	1	4.0	100
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.1, 20 (or 80%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 20, two (or 8.0%) of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 23, two (or 8.0%) of the respondents were between the ages of 24 and 26, zero of the respondents were between the ages of 27 and 29, and one (4.0%) of the respondents were 30 years of age or older. The data suggest that a majority (80.0%) of the respondents were between 18 and 20 years of age.

Table 4.2: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Male	14	56.0	56.0
Female	11	44.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 14 (or 56%) of the respondents were male and 11 (or 44%) of the respondents were female. The data suggest that a majority (56%) of the respondents were male.

Table 4.3: Ethnic Background of Respondents

Ethnic Background	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
African-American	23	92.0	92.0
Asian-American	1	4.0	96.0
European-American	0	0.0	96.0
Hispanic	0	0.0	96.0
Other	1	4.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 23 (or 92.0%) of the respondents were African-American, 1 (or 4.0%) of the respondents were Asian-American, none of the respondents were European-American, none of the respondents were Hispanic, and one (or 4.0%) of the respondents were in the other category. The data suggests that most of the respondents (92.0%) of the respondents were African-American.

Table 4.4: My first year was easy

My first year was easy	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	4	16.0	16.0
Agree	10	40.0	56.0
Disagree	10	40.0	96.0
Strongly Disagree	1	4.0	100
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement 'my first year was easy'. Four (or 16%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 10 (or 40%) of the respondents agreed, 10 (or 40%) of the respondents disagreed, and one (4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (56%) of the respondents strongly agree or agree their first year was easy.

Table 4.5: My first year was stressful

My first year was stressful	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	7	28.0	28.0
Agree	12	48.0	76.0
Disagree	5	20.0	96.0
Strongly Disagree	1	4.0	100
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘my first year was stressful.’ Seven students (28%) strongly agreed, 12 (or 48%) agreed, five (or 20%) disagreed, and one (or 4%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (76%) of the respondents strongly agree or agree their first year was stressful.

Table 4.6: I made friends in my first year

I made friends my first year	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	8	33.3	33.3
Agree	10	41.7	75.0
Disagree	4	16.7	91.7
Strongly Disagree	2	8.3	100
Total	24	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 24 students responded to the statement ‘I made friends my first year’. Eight students (33.3%) strongly agreed, ten (or 41.7%) agreed, four (or 16.7%) disagreed and two (or 8.3%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (75%) of the respondents strongly agree or agree they made friends in their first year.

Table 4.7: I considered dropping out my first year

I considered dropping out	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	2	8.0	8.0
Agree	6	24.0	32.0
Disagree	5	20.0	52.0
Strongly Disagree	12	48.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I considered dropping out my first year. Two (8.0%) strongly agreed, six (or 24.0%) agreed, five (or 20.0%) disagreed, and 12 (or 48.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (68%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree they considered dropping out their first year.

Table 4.8: I worked during my first year

I worked my first year	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	7	28.0	28.0
Agree	6	24.0	52.0
Disagree	7	28.0	80.0
Strongly Disagree	5	20.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I worked during my first year.’ Seven students (28.0%) strongly agreed, six (or 24.0%) agreed, seven (or 28.0%) disagreed and five (or 20.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (52.0%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree they worked during their first year.

Table 4.9: I was happy my first year

I was happy my first year	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	7	28.0	28.0
Agree	13	52.0	80.0
Disagree	4	16.0	96.0
Strongly Disagree	1	4.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I was happy my first year.’ Seven students (28.0%) strongly agreed, 13 (or 52.0%) agreed, four (or 16.0%) disagreed, and one (or 4.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (80%) of the respondents strongly agree or agree they were happy in their first year.

Table 4.10: I gained weight my first year

I gained weight my first year	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	4	16.0	16.0
Agree	7	28.0	44.0
Disagree	11	44.0	88.0
Strongly Disagree	3	12.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I gained weight my first year.’ Four students (16.0%) strongly agreed, seven (or 28.0%) agreed, 11 (or 44.0%) disagreed and three (or 12.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (56.0%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree they gained weight during their first year.

Table 4.11: I lost weight my first year

I lost weight my first year	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	1	4.0	4.0
Agree	8	32.0	36.0
Disagree	10	40.0	76.0
Strongly Disagree	6	24.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.11, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I lost weight my first year.’ One (4.0%) strongly agreed, eight (or 32.0%) agreed, ten (or 40.0%) disagreed and six (or 24.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (64.0%) of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree they lost weight during their first year.

Table 4.12: I adjusted well my first year

I adjusted well my first year	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	9	36.0	36.0
Agree	14	56.0	92.0
Disagree	2	8.0	100.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I adjusted well my first year.’ Nine students (36.0%) strongly agreed, 14 (or 56.0%) agreed, two (or 8.0%) disagreed and zero strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (56%) of the respondents agree they adjusted well in their first year.

Table 4.13: I used alcohol to cope with my stress

I used alcohol to cope with my stress	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	0	0.0	0.0
Agree	0	0.0	0.0
Disagree	4	16.0	16.0
Strongly disagree	21	84.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I used alcohol to cope with my stress.’ Zero strongly agreed, zero agreed, four (or 16%) disagreed, and 21 (or 84%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (100%) of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree they used alcohol to cope with their stress.

Table 4.14: I used drugs to cope with my stress

I used drugs to cope with my stress	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	0	0.0	0.0
Agree	1	4.0	4.0
Disagree	4	16.0	20.0
Strongly disagree	20	80.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I used drugs to cope with my stress.’ Zero strongly agreed, one (or 4%) agreed, four (or 16%) disagreed, and 20 (or 80%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (80%) of the respondents strongly disagree they used drugs to cope with their stress.

Table 4.15 I used food to cope with my stress

I used food to cope with my stress	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	3	12.0	12.0
Agree	6	24.0	36.0
Disagree	11	44.0	80.0
Strongly Disagree	5	20.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I used food to cope with my stress.’ Three (or 12.0%) strongly agreed, six (or 24.0%) agreed, 11 (or 44.0%) disagreed and five (or 20.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (64.0%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree they used food to cope with their stress.

Table 4.16: I used sex to cope with my stress

I used sex to cope with my stress	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	3	12.0	12.0
Agree	2	8.0	20.0
Disagree	9	36.0	56.0
Strongly Disagree	11	44.0	100.0
Total	25	100	

As indicated in Table 4.5, 25 students responded to the statement ‘I used sex to cope with my stress.’ Three (or 12.0%) strongly agreed, two (or 8.0%) agreed, nine (or 36.0%) disagreed, and 11 (or 44.0%) strongly disagreed. The data suggest that a majority (80%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree they used sex to cope with their stress.

Chapter Five: Summary and Discussion

Two-year college students were surveyed about their first-year college experience. This survey sought to find out how well students adjusted if their first year was stressful and what coping mechanism was used to cope.

The typical respondent was an African-American male between 18-20 years of age. When asked how well they adjusted during the first year of college majority of the respondents reported they adjusted well.

This survey had three inquiries. The first inquiry focused on how well they adjusted during the first year. The data suggested that the majority of the respondents (56%) agreed they adjusted well during the first year of college.

The second inquiry sought to find out if they were stressed the first year. The data suggest that a majority (76%) of the respondents strongly agree or agree their first year was stressful.

The third inquiry sought to find out what coping mechanism they used. The data suggest that a majority (100%) of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree they used alcohol to cope with their stress. The data suggest that a majority (80%) of the respondents strongly disagree they used drugs to cope with their stress. The data suggest that a majority (64.0%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree they used food to cope with their stress. The data suggest that a majority (80%) of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree they used sex to cope with their stress.

During surveying, the surveyor ran into difficulty when one of the surveyors did not return the survey immediately after responding. The surveyor had to print a new survey and hand it to a different surveyor. The responses appear to be valid with the exception of the

Asian-American ethnic background. The surveyor does not recall handing a survey to an Asian-American.

The surveyor recommends future researchers doing to define specific drugs when asking college students about drug use.

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