

Minimal Writing? No Problem

IHE insidehighered.com/news/2018/07/31/new-study-shows-few-students-see-need-more-writing-instruction



Only two-thirds of college students in the United States have ever written a paper that's 10 pages or longer.

This statistic is part of a new report by Primary Research Group, based on a survey of 1,140 college students at four-year institutions in the United States about the writing and grammar instruction that they've received and how much additional instruction they believe they need.

About 30 percent of student respondents have never been required to write a paper at or exceeding 10 double-spaced pages. The students' backgrounds correlated with their responses. Students whose families were more affluent, who were less religious or described themselves as liberal or "very left wing" were more likely to have been assigned a 10-pager than other students. Black students, male students and students who grew up abroad were also more likely to have been assigned one.

Grades also mattered. Student respondents with an A or A-minus grade average were more likely to have written a 10-page paper, as were those with higher SAT and ACT scores. The social sciences yielded more lengthy writing assignments -- students majoring in psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science were all more likely to have written one.

However, when asked about the need for additional writing instruction, many students in those same demographics said they didn't need any.

In general, students didn't think they needed any spelling or grammar help -- a slight majority of students said they had no need for any additional instruction, and 32 percent said they had a little need but could handle it themselves. Age seemed to play a role in student perception.

"Interestingly, and perhaps just a little sadly, those 19 years of age or younger were much less likely to believe that they needed help than did older students," the report read. "For example, less than 8 percent of those 19 years of age and younger felt they needed some or substantial instruction in this area while 14.51 percent of 21 year olds felt this way."

Seniors were slightly more likely than freshmen to think they need additional help. Political affiliations also played a role.

"Political conviction mattered; nearly 17 percent of conservatives felt that they needed more instruction while only 10.51 percent of liberals felt this way," the report says. Very few students -- about 9 percent -- in writing-heavy disciplines like English, philosophy and history said they needed any more spelling or grammar instruction, compared to 16 percent of business students.

In addition to spelling and grammar, respondents were asked about their need for general writing instruction. Similar to the results above, 46 percent of students felt they had no need at all for additional writing instruction. Thirty-three percent said they had a little need but could handle it themselves.

Again, it was seniors and older students who were more likely to see a need for writing help.

"By year of class standing, at least after freshmen years, the awareness of need for instruction seems to grow with seniority," the report read. "It is seniors who are most likely to say that they need some or a significant amount of instruction; more than 10 percent gave one of these two answers."

College grades negatively correlated with the need for instruction. Only six percent of students with A or A-minus grade averages felt they needed significant instruction, compared to more than 17 percent of C students who said they did. Self-perceived need for help also correlated with family income.

"About 10.6 percent of those from families with incomes of less than \$45,000 per year [said they needed] some or significant instruction while less than 4 percent of those from families earning more than \$150,000 annually felt the same way," the report read.

While many students didn't believe they needed any additional help with their writing, a majority -- about 60 percent -- of students were receiving some during college. Students who grew up in a rural area, who described themselves as liberal, who practiced religion or grew up in a household with an average income of \$150,000 or more were more likely to have received

writing instruction than other students. Male students, those who attend private colleges and those who major in writing-heavy disciplines like history, philosophy, English, classics or languages were also more likely to have received some.