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ABSTRACT

A study was done to investigate the relative success in higher education of students who had a high school diploma as compared to those who had not graduated from high school but rather completed a General Educational Development (GED) certification. A review of the literature on research of this question indicated that either there was no significant difference or that the traditional high school graduates would attain a higher grade average. For this study, the population included 2,326 students enrolled in Kankakee Community College (Illinois) during the 1990 fiscal year. From this number, 50 GED recipients and 50 high school diploma recipients were randomly selected. Using data from transcripts the overall grade point averages (GPA) were tabulated for means and standard deviations. A t-test was employed to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between the mean scores. The analysis revealed that a significant difference existed between the two groups with the GED graduates having, on average, a higher GPA. One table and 10 references are included. (JB)

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Claire McElroy

The General Educational Development (GED) Testing Program was established in 1942 to provide persons with the opportunity of earning a high school equivalency diploma, making it possible for them to qualify for certain jobs, to gain promotions, and to pursue higher educational or other personal goals.

For several years a difference of opinion has existed regarding the potential for success of the General Educational Development Test graduate in post high school studies. Administrators, counselors, instructors, and employers often express concern about the academic ability of the GED Test graduate. Questions frequently arise concerning how well GED holders perform in higher education. Can people who qualify for a high school equivalency credential compete successfully with graduates of traditional high schools?

A large number of GED holders report that they pursue further education upon receiving a GED certificate. GED follow-up studies indicate that approximately fifty percent of all GED graduates participate in some type of educational program after obtaining their diploma. Many of these individuals become students at two-year community colleges.

Several research studies have investigated whether differences exist between the traditional high school graduate and the GED graduate in post-secondary educational settings. A study by Quinn and Haberman (1986) suggested that individuals with a GED certificate are much less likely to complete post-secondary programs than students with traditional high school diplomas, other studies have found no significant differences between persons with a GED and those with a traditional high school diploma for the

rate of persistence in college. Research also indicated that the college grade-point average (GPA) of GED graduates is equal to that of traditional high school graduates. Additional studies show that GED holders achieve the same level of success as high school diploma holders in post-secondary educational settings.

Any additional information gleaned from studies on this topic will benefit the student who for reasons beyond his/her control was forced to withdraw from school before obtaining his/her High School Diploma.

The quality of American education has undergone intense scrutiny. There is a major concern that persons are not being adequately prepared for further education or for life in general.

Questions about the adequacy of preparation in secondary education especially concern those persons charged with the admission policies of post-secondary education institutions. Concern is often heightened when applications are received from students who did not receive a high school diploma but who have a high school equivalency certificate obtained by passing the Tests of General Educational Development. Can people who qualify for a high school equivalency credential compete successfully with graduates of traditional high schools?

The study conducted by Sherril Colert on High School Equivalency and High School Diploma Students (1983) compared the levels of academic achievement of high school equivalency students and high school diploma students as measured by grade point averages and proportion of credit hours passed. The problem was whether students with a high school equivalency certificate could be as academically successful in a university program as high school graduates. Data collected were grade point averages, credit hours attempted, and credit hours passed of twenty six high school

equivalency and twenty seven high school diploma students attending Brandon University, on a first year basis in 1982-83. Results supported the findings of others pertaining to high school equivalency students achieving the same level of academic success as high school diploma students. No significant difference was found between the distribution of grade point average scores or average ratios of credit hours passed to credit hours attempted of the two groups of students.

Klein and Grise (1987) reviewed a report on a study sponsored by the Bureau of Adult and Community Education, Florida Department of Education. It was conducted by the Center for Needs Assessment and Planning (CNAP) at the Florida State University to compare the success of GED and traditional high school graduates at Florida's community colleges. Registrars of each of Florida's twenty eight community colleges were contacted and asked to complete a survey designed to gather information concerning students with a GED and those with a traditional high school diploma. Ten of the twenty eight community colleges in Florida responded. The overall GPA of GED and traditional high school graduates were obtained by the survey. Statistical analysis of these data revealed that a significant difference exists between GED and traditional high school graduates, with traditional graduates having, on the average, a slightly higher GPA ($t=3.94$, $p .05$). GPA's are significant at or beyond the .05 alpha level.

While the results of this study indicate a statistically significant difference between the GPA's of GED and traditional high school graduates, one must consider the implication of this finding in the real world. The average GPA's of both groups fall in the "C" grade range, and are only two tenths apart. Traditional diploma holders may have a slightly higher GPA than those with a GED, but this difference is not enough to be considered

practically important from an academic point of view.

Questions about the adequacy of preparation in secondary education especially concern those persons in charge of admissions at the post-secondary education institutions. Will students be capable of performing up to faculty expectations? Can people who qualify for a high school equivalency credential compete successfully with graduates of traditional high schools?

The Davis, Davis, and Wilson's (1981) study compared the success of students entering post-secondary vocational education with a high school diploma to that of students who had not completed a high school program but who had received a high school equivalency credential by passing the GED Tests. One of the questions addressed was is there a difference in community college grade-point average (GPA) between students who entered a post-secondary education institution with a high school diploma and those who entered with a high school equivalency (GED) credential? The results showed that the GED students earned a higher community college grade point average than did the diploma students (2.80 and 2.56 respectively). Since GPA may well reflect maturity the correlations between students age and GPA were examined. The covariance analysis resulted in adjusted GPA means of 2.67 and 2.60 respectively. Diploma and GED students do not differ markedly with respect to their community college grade point average. It was concluded that students earning high school equivalency credentials succeed as well as high school diploma students in post-secondary vocational education programs.

Klein and Grise (1988) in another study did additional research. The purpose of the paper was to present the results of a study conducted to compare the success of GED and traditional high school graduates. Registrars at several community colleges were contacted and asked to complete a

survey designed to gather information concerning students with a GED and those with a traditional high school diploma. The survey asked respondents to provide data on the admission, completion, graduation, enrollment, and success of GED and Traditional high school graduates. The results show no significant difference existed between the overall GPA of GED and Traditional high school graduates.

Ayers (1978) compared the academic success of the General Educational Development Test Graduates and the High School Graduates at Surry Community College for the 1977-78 academic year. It was conducted at Surry Community College in North Carolina to determine whether there was any significant difference between the academic success of those students who had passed the General Education Development Test (GED) and those traditional students who had graduated from a public or private high school. Study methodology involved a comparison of the college transcripts of the thirty seven GED students enrolled at Surry during the 1977-78 academic year with those of thirty seven randomly selected traditional students. Mean grade point averages (GPA's) were determined for each group and submitted to a "t" test to find out whether there was a significant difference (at the .05 level) between them. Findings indicate the GPA's for traditional students ranged from 4.00 to 1.15, while the range for GED students was 4.00 to 0.88. Though the mean GPA for traditional students was higher than that of the GED groups (2.93 compared to 2.75), the difference was not significant.

As far back as 1951 research was being conducted in the area of academic achievement of high school graduates and non-graduates. The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not students who drop out of high school before graduation perform as well in college as a matched group of students who do graduate from high school. The experimental group used in

this investigation was limited to: (1) non high school graduates who were admitted to the University of Utah between the fall quarter 1945 and the summer quarter 1950; (2) male students; and (3) those who completed at least one quarter of college work. The experimental group was then matched with a control group on the basis of: (1) sex; (2) age at time of entrance into college; (3) college in which enrolled; (4) quarter of admission to the university; and (5) scholastic index. Out of 248 non-high school graduates, it was possible to match 209 with a like number of high school graduates.

It is to be noted that as far as total grades are concerned, the high school graduates earned significantly more A's and B's and as many C's as did the non-high school graduates. They also earned significantly fewer D's, E's and incompletes. It is evident that the students allowed to enter the University of Utah who did not graduate from high school did not perform as well as high school graduates who were allowed to enter, against whom they were matched as to scholastic ability, age, sex, times of entering the University, and college of enrollment. From the data presented, it must be concluded that same or similar factors which cause students to drop out of high school before they graduate are still operating when they attend college. Non-high school graduates, therefore, perform at a significantly lower level than do matched individuals who succeed in graduating from high school.

The first semester college performances of 170 students who had received a GED high school certificate were examined by Rogers, Jr. in 1977. In addition, the usefulness of the GED for predicting college success during the first semester of enrollment was evaluated. A stepwise multiple regression procedure revealed that GED scores were not useful in predicting

academic success. The mean grade point average for GED recipients was 1.71 as compared to 2.11 for those students who had completed high school. Nearly sixty percent of those with GED's performed at or below the "D" level (1.99 or less). In essence, a GED certificate and four years of high school training are not equivalent regarding preparation for college. Rogers pointed out that one must consider the idea that GED recipients who wish to become college freshmen cannot equate a ten hour exam and four years of formal schooling.

The available literature suggested for the most part that there was not a significant difference in the achieved GPA between GED certificate holders and high school graduates.

Procedures

Population:

The population for this study will include 2,326 students enrolled during the 1990 fiscal year. The students attend Kankakee Community College located in Kankakee, Illinois which is sixty miles south of Chicago.

Sample:

From the 2,326 students the records show that 126 were GED recipients while 1,825 had received a high school diploma. Three hundred seventy five students had neither a GED nor a high school diploma. For this study, only the GED and high school diploma sub-populations were used. Fifty students were randomly selected from each of these sub-populations.

Method of Data Collection:

Two samples were randomly selected from the two identified populations of GED and high school diploma students. Data regarding education for both

samples were obtained from college transcripts. The post test only control group design was used.

Treatment of Data:

The finding will be tabulated in terms of means and standard deviations. The t test will be employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between the mean scores.

Findings of the Study:

The overall GPA of GED and traditional high school graduates were obtained from the transcripts of students at Kankakee Community College. Statistical analysis of these data revealed that a significant difference exists between GED and traditional high school graduates, with GED graduates having on the average, a slightly higher GPA ($t = 5.66$ $p < .05$). A summary of these results is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Means, standard deviations, and t tests for the experimental group and control group for GED and traditional graduate GPA's,

| GPA (N=50) | | | |
|------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | GED Experimental | Traditional Control | t |
| M | 2.93 | 2.76 | 5.66* |
| SD | .87 | 1.03 | |
| df = 98 | * Significant .05 level | | |

The fifty traditional high school graduates had a grade point average range from 4.00 to 1.17. The traditional group had a total mean GPA of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.03. The GED test graduates had a grade point average range from 4.00 - 1.37. This group had a total mean GPA of 2.93 and a standard deviation of .87. The level of significance selected to test the hypothesis was at the .05 level. The t-test for determining the significance between the two samples was used. At the .05 level of significance the critical value of "t" was 1.98. Since the calculated value of "t" was 5.66 and did exceed the critical value of "t" (1.98) the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant difference between the achieved GPA of the two groups.

The results were surprising in that the review of literature indicated that either there was no significant difference or that the traditional high school graduate would attain a higher GPA.

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