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ABSTRACT

An anonymous questionnaire was circulated among Harcum Junior College female students and students at six community colleges of the City University of New York (CUNY) in order to obtain answers to the following questions: (1) What do Harcum students read? (2) How well do they read? (3) What are their reading preferences? (4) What are their self-evaluated reading habits and skills? and (5) How do these compare with the skills and preferences of a sample of community college students? Responses of 594 Harcum students and 492 CUNY students, male and female, were summarized and compared. The most striking statistically-revealed finding was the consistently high degree of similarity in the self-evaluated reading preferences, skills, and habits of the student groups. The Harcum Reading Development Program is evaluated in RE 003 453. Tables and references are included. (DH)

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READING PREFERENCES, SKILLS AND HABITS  
OF HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE  
and  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES STUDENTS

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HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE

BRYN MAWR, PENNA. 19010

READING PREFERENCES, SKILLS AND HABITS OF  
HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE  
and  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES STUDENTS

1. Reading is the key tool that eventually affects proficiency in all academic learning. Also, in college, students face a more difficult reading task than in high school as their education moves in the direction of more learning from books rather than from teachers. "Philip Shaw states in his review of research pertaining to college reading that a majority of entering freshmen lack the reading-study skills requisite for academic success." (Bossone; pp 2-3)

2. What do Harcum students read? How well do they read? What are their reading preferences; their self-evaluated reading habits and skills? And how do these compare with the skills and preferences of a sample of community college students?

3. To answer these questions, an anonymous questionnaire (Appendix A) was circularized among Harcum students (all females) in November 1970. The responses of the 594 who completed usable questionnaires are summarized in the following paragraphs and compared with those of 492 students at 6 community colleges of the City University of New York (of whom approximately 42% were males; 58% females) and all of whom were enrolled in English classes, remedial English classes and reading classes (Bossone, 1970) All percentages reported are rounded off; therefore total percentages reported for any item may not equal 100%.

4. Since September 1966, Harcum incoming freshmen, as part of their Freshmen Battery of Tests and Inventories, have been administered the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. Their achievement is revealed in Figure 1. It is expressed in the percentile ranks of their "Total" scores when compared with the norm group of some 4000 college freshmen, who were selected as a random sample from freshmen enrolled in universities, liberal arts colleges, teachers colleges, junior colleges and technical schools. In accordance with the rationale of the Nelson-Denny, a "Total" score below the 30th percentile indicates a high probability of a reading problem. Therefore, since September 1966 all Harcum freshmen falling into category have been required to attend a Reading Development Course offered by the College Reading and Study Skills Clinic.

					Legend	
		86%			A = 1966	C = 1969
		C			B = 1967	D = 1970
100-						
90-						
80-						
70-	68%					
60-	A	61%	C	53%		
50-	A	B	C	D		
40-	A	B	C	D		
30-	A	B	C	D		
20-	A	B	C	D		
10-	A	B	C	D		

Figure 1:- Percentages of Harcum Freshmen Scoring at 30th and above Percentile: Nelson-Denny "Total" Scores.

5. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test provides a very useful measure of this key academic skills area, both in terms of vocabulary knowledge and comprehension capability. It furnishes helpful, objective information for academic achievement prediction; screening; screening and broad diagnostic purposes.

6. "Research with the Nelson-Denny indicates a close relationship between the test scores and scholastic achievement - an average correlation of  $r = .67$ . For such a pair-wise, linear association, the Coefficient of Determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the strength of association between two populations or measures of population attributes. For example, the  $r = .67$  between the two criterion variables of Nelson-Denny scores and scholastic achievement reveals that 45% of the variations between the two criterion variables may be attributed to these two criterion variables. In other words, almost half of the variation between 'high' and 'low' academic achievement is associated with 'high' or 'low' Nelson-Denny scores. This is a substantial degree of association or correlation, making Nelson-Denny scores very valuable predictors of academic success." (Blair-(2) )

7. Statistically interesting results and comparisons for the Harcum and CUNY student samples are summarized in the following paragraphs. All figures relating to the CUNY students are in parentheses. The reading preferences of the Harcum and CUNY student samples, listed in descending order of preference of the Harcum group are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1:- Reading Preferences of Harcum and CUNY Students

Type	Preferred	Less Preferred	Dislike
1. Short stories	80%(65%)	11% (25%)	9% (3%)
2. Magazine articles	69 (60)	18 (25)	13 (8)
3. Novels	69 (68)	24 (22)	4 (4)
4. Newspaper articles	54 (57)	31 (30)	10 (6)
5. Mysteries	53 (46)	30 (31)	12 (13)
6. News	47 (55)	36 (29)	12 (9)
7. Plays	43 (38)	35 (39)	13 (17)
8. Biographies	39 (41)	41 (36)	19 (17)
9. Poetry	35 (35)	41 (30)	23 (29)
10. Comic books	27 (14)	29 (28)	41 (50)
11. Literary classics	26 (24)	40 (41)	23 (22)
12. Essays	18 (24)	39 (45)	39 (24)
13. Sports writers	13 (21)	33 (30)	46 (39)
14. Tech. books and articles	12 (22)	36 (32)	46 (36)

Fractional percentages of less than 1%, reflecting individual preferences and dislikes, were itemized by 14 Harcum students. They are not included since they are obviously non-representative of the sample.

8. It is noted that a greater variation in 'strengths' of "Preferred" reading tastes exists among the Harcum group than the CUNY group; approximately 8 times as great for short stories vs technical books as contrasted with 3 times as great for the CUNY sample. The converse is true regarding "Dislikes"; a variation of 5 times as great for the Harcum sample in contrast with 12 times as great for the CUNY group. However, as a group, the Harcum sample has only very slightly more similar "Preferred" reading tastes. Of a possible 1400% — selecting all 14 items as their "Preferred" reading 100% of the time, some 585% did so, in contrast to 570% for the CUNY sample. Evidently there is a high degree of similarity in the general reading preferences of these two groups.

9. Among the 14 different types of reading materials included in Table 1 above, those items "Preferred" or "Disliked" by a majority of the Harcum and/or CUNY samples are summarized in Table 2, listed in descending order of preferences among the Harcum sample.

Table 2:- Majority Reading Preferences and Dislikes of Harcum and CUNY Students

Type	Preferred	Disliked
1. Short stories	80% (65%)	
2. Magazine articles	69% (60%)	
3. Novels	69% (68%)	
4. Newspaper articles	54% (57%)	
5. Mysteries	53%	-
6. News		(55%)
7. Comic books	-	- (50%)

A high degree of similarity in preferences between the two groups is noted; with higher percentages being evident among the Harcum sample in 4 of the 5 items.

10. Least-expressed preferences and dislikes, listed in ascending order of preferences and dislikes among the Harcum sample include:

Table 3:- Least-desired Reading Preferences & Dislikes of Harcum & CUNY Students

Type	Preferred	Disliked
1. Technical books & articles	12% (22%)	
2. Sports writers	13% (21%)	
3. Essays	16% (24%)	
4. Literary classics	26% (24%)	
5. Comic books	27% (14%)	
6. Novels		4% (4%)
7. Short stories		9% (3%)
8. Newspaper articles		10% (6%)
9. Mysteries		12% (13%)
10. News		12% (9%)
11. Magazine articles		13% (8%)

11. Again, it is noted that a high degree of similarity exists between the two groups in that both select the same five types of reading matter as being among their least preferred. Additionally, both groups are internally consistent in that the same five items selected by both groups as "Majority Preferred" reading (see Table 2) are also noted to be the least disliked reading items (see Table 3).

12. The moderate or "Less Preferred" reading preferences of the two groups, listed in descending order of preference for the Harcum sample, are summarized in the following tabulation:

(1) Biographies 41% (36%)	(8) Plays 35% (39%)
(2) Poetry 41% (30%)	(9) Sports writers 33% (30%)
(3) Literary classics 40% (41%)	(10) Mysteries 30% (31%)
(4) Essays 39% (45%)	(11) Comic books 29% (28%)
(5) News 36% (29%)	(12) Novels 24% (22%)
(6) Tech. books 36% (32%)	(13) Magazines 18% (25%)
(7) Newspaper articles 35% (30%)	(14) Short stories 11% (25%)

It is noted that in no case does a majority of either group select any of the 14 items as being their moderate ("less preferred") type of reading matter. A majority of both groups expressed strong preferences or dislikes for each of the 14 different types of reading matter.

13. The reading preferences of these two groups (combining the "preferred" and "Less Preferred" percentages), listed in descending order of preference of the Harcum group, reveals:

1st - Novels = 93% (90%)	8th - Plays = 78% (77%)
2nd - Short stories = 91% (80%)	9th - Poetry = 76% (76%)
3rd - Newspaper articles = 89% (87%)	10th - Literary classics = 66% (65%)
4th - Magazine articles = 87% (85%)	11th - Essays = 57% (69%)
5th - Mysteries = 83% (77%)	12th - Comics = 56% (42%)
6th - News = 83% (84%)	13th - Tech. books = 48% (46%)
7th - Biographies = 80% (77%)	14th - Sports = 46% (51%)

Evidently sizable numbers of both groups have catholic reading tastes for it is noted that a majority of both groups expressed preferences for 12 of the 14 types of reading matter.

15. Figure 2 below, summarizes time spent in reading by the two groups.

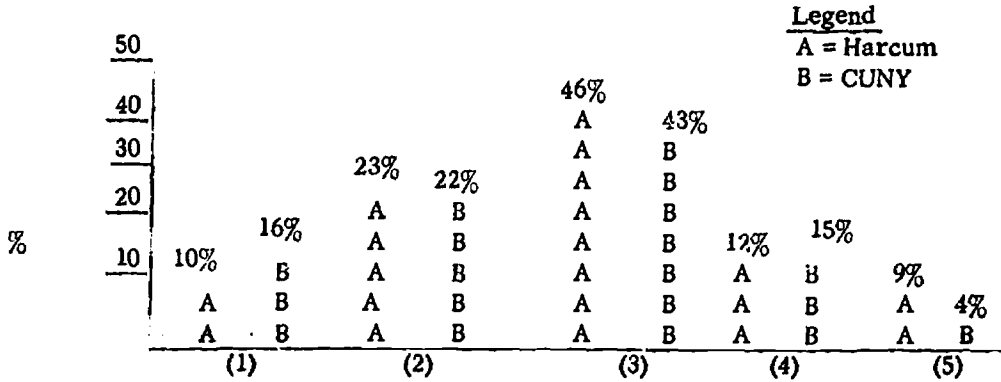


Figure 2 - Time Spent Reading: Harcum & CUNY Students

- (1) Always reading -----
- (2) Much of the time -----
- (3) Occasionally -----
- (4) Seldom -----
- (5) Hardly at all -----

Scanning Figure 2 quickly reveals the substantial degree of similarity between the two distributions. In no case is there more than a 6 % spread for any of the 5 items reported.

16. The time spent by the two groups in serious study for school subjects is summarized below:

Table 4:- Time Spent in Serious Study by Harcum and CUNY Groups

Item	Harcum	CUNY
1. Most of my spare time	11%	18%
2. Quite a lot, but I do have some recreation	57%	49%
3. Once in awhile; recreation comes first	13%	12%
4. Very little, I just can't get down to it	15%	12%
5. None, I don't seem to care at all	-	.2%

The consistency pattern noted in previous comparisons is once again evident, there being less than a 10% difference between the two groups in any of the items, with a substantial majority of both groups (Harcum = 68%; CUNY = 67%) indicating that they spend either "quite a lot" or "most of spare time" in serious study for school subjects.

17. In the area of comprehension-study skills, the following table summarizes the self-evaluated views of the two groups.

Table 5:- Comprehension-Study Skills of Harcum and CUNY Groups

Item	Yes	Sometime or Somewhat	No
1. Have you received training in how to read textbooks?	28% (38%)	29% (13%)	38% (50%)
2. Do you know the purposes of the various parts of books?	79 (85)	16 (11)	4 (5)
3. Have you learned to skim?	41 (53)	38 (21)	20 (26)
4. When you read, do you have a well-defined purpose?	34 (48)	52 (43)	19 (9)
5. Can you find the main idea of a paragraph?	50 (60)	35 (30)	15 (10)
6. Do you know how to read for detail?	48 (56)	40 (32)	11 (12)
7. Are you able to see relationships between ideas?	43 (54)	49 (39)	7 (7)
8. Can you read tables, graphs, charts, maps?	49 (65)	37 (28)	7 (6)
9. Can you read at different rates?	28 (41)	41 (39)	23 (19)
10. Do you remember what you read?	27 (42)	63 (53)	10 (6)

18. Some of the significant facts revealed in Table 5 are:

(1) A significant number of both groups (Harcum = 57%; CUNY = 51%) report having little or no training in how to read textbooks.

(2) A substantial majority of both groups (Harcum = 79%; CUNY = 85%) claim to know the purpose of the various parts of books; despite their answers to question 1 above.

(3) Only 41% of the Harcum students indicated they had learned with a sense of assurance the skill of skimming; for CUNY, some 53% so indicated.

(4) Lesser percentages (Harcum = 34%; CUNY = 48%) indicated they were certain that when they read they had a well-defined purpose.

(5) A significant number of these students felt uncertain about comprehension skills, such as finding the main idea of a paragraph (Harcum = 50%; CUNY = 60%); knowing how to read for details (Harcum = 48%; CUNY = 56%); and seeing relationships between ideas (Harcum = 43%; CUNY = 54%).

(6) A sizeable number of both groups, (Harcum 49%; CUNY = 65%) expressed a sense of difficulty in coping with tables, graphs, charts and maps.

(7) Only 28% of the Harcum students were fully confident that they know how to apply different rates of reading according to the purposes and the nature of the materials read. For CUNY, the percentage is 41.

(8) Only 27% of the Harcum group categorically stated that they remember what they read: For the CUNY group, 42% so indicated.

(9) A majority of the Harcum and/or CUNY students expressed the positive view that they were capable in the following comprehension study skills areas:

- a - Know purposes of various parts of books - 79% (85%)
- b - Have learned how to skim - X (53%)
- c - Can identify main ideas of a paragraph 50% (60%)
- d - Know how to read for detail X (56%)
- e - Can see relationships between ideas X (54%)
- f - Can read tables, graphs, charts, maps X (65%)



(10) In all instances lesser percentages of the Harcum group expressed confidence in their comprehension-study skills than did the CUNY group.

19. For the 10 items of comprehension-study skills cited on Table 5, out of the theoretical 1000% that would have resulted if all of the group answered "yes" to each item; among the Harcum group some 427% so responded - or better than half of them thereby indicated that they experienced some difficulties in these various skills areas. For the CUNY sample, some 542% responded affirmatively, indicating that less than half of this group expressed difficulties in comprehension-study skills.

20. The final area investigated, Critical Reading, is summarized in the following tabulation.

Table 6:- Critical Reading Skills of Harcum and CUNY Groups

Item	Sometimes or		
	Yes	Somewhat	No
1. Do you consider the author qualified to write on special subject?	34% (42%)	52% (51%)	9 (8%)
2. Do you know author's purpose in writing?	25 (39)	66 (53)	9 (8)
3. Can you determine difference between fact and opinion?	52 (66)	40 (30)	8 (5)
4. Can you distinguish between informative and emotional word use?	47 (55)	43 (35)	10 (10)
5. Can you identify propoganda techniques?	40 (51)	51 (38)	9 (11)
6. Do you question accuracy of statements you read?	28 (47)	51 (39)	21 (14)
7. Can you evaluate critically writer's ideas and logic?	9 (27)	70 (56)	21 (17)

The statistics in Table 6 reveal:

(1) Less than a majority of each group (Harcum = 34%; CUNY = 42%) feel certain about appraising the author's qualification to write on a subject.

(2) Only 25% of the Harcum group expressed confidence that they knew what the author's purpose was in writing. For the CUNY group some 39% expressed this view.

(3) Higher percentages (Harcum = 52%; CUNY = 66%) believed with certainty that they could differentiate between fact and opinion.

(4) Almost as high a percentage (Harcum = 47%; CUNY = 55%) expressed the certain belief that they could distinguish between words used in a more informative than emotional way.

(5) Slightly less (Harcum = 40%; CUNY = 51%) believe they can identify specific propoganda techniques.

(6) Only 28% of the Harcum group believed with certainty that they questioned the accuracy of statements they read (CUNY = 47%); and a considerably lesser number (Harcum = 9%; CUNY = 27%) expressed the confidence that they always know how to critically evaluate the writer's ideas and logic.

(7) A majority of the Harcum and/or CUNY groups self-evaluated their Critical reading skills to be affirmative at all times in the following areas:

- a - Determining differences between fact and opinion - 52% (66%)
- b - Distinguish between informative and emotional word use - X (55%)
- c - Can identify specific propaganda techniques - X (51%)

(8) In all instances lesser percentages of the Harcum group expressed confidence in their critical reading skills than did the CUNY group.

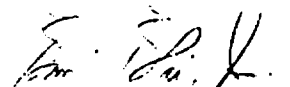
(9) For the 7 critical reading skills items cited in Table 6, out of the theoretical 700% that would have resulted if all of the group answered "yes" to each item; among the Harcum group some 235% so responded - or considerably more than half of them thereby indicated that they experienced some difficulties in these various areas of critical reading. For the CUNY sample, some 327% responded affirmatively, indicating that approximately half of the group expressed difficulties in the critical reading skills area.

22. Perhaps the single most striking statistically-revealed fact in this comparison-survey study is the consistently high degree of similarity in the self-evaluated reading preferences, skills and habits of these two sizeable (Harcum N=594; CUNY N=492) student groups at 7 two-year colleges. This fact is of even greater significance when it is recalled that almost half of the CUNY sample was male, in contrast to the 100% female Harcum group:

- (1) Majority-expressed Reading Preferences - same five items selected by both groups
- (2) Least-desired Reading Preferences - same five items selected by both groups
- (3) Least disliked Reading Preferences - same six items selected by both groups
- (4) Most-disliked Reading Selections - same seven items selected by both groups
- (5) Ranked Reading Preferences - same nine items selected by both groups
- (6) Time Spent Reading - less than 6% difference between the two groups
- (7) Time Spent in Serious Study - less than 10% difference between the two groups
- (8) Comprehension-Study Skills - on a scale of 100% there is only a 12% difference between the two groups

- (9) Critical-Reading Skills - on a scale of 100%,  
there is only a 9% difference between the two groups

23. From the above-cited facts, it is concluded that reading patterns, skills and habits readily cross sex lines, and that among this group of 1086 young men and women there is a substantial degree of unanimity in self-evaluated views.

  
Boris Blai, Jr. (Ed.D.)  
Director of Research

December 1970

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Appendix A

Harcum Junior College

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE RELATED TO READING

Please consider each question thoughtfully. Do NOT sign your name. By answering each question honestly you will greatly assist us in planning instructional programs which, through more effective reading achievement, can better contribute to collegiate-level education.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to the questions - hence no judgments are being made other than comparing Harcum students' views with those of some 496 community college students of the City University of New York.

Our interest in this survey is to learn more about your reading preferences, habits and skills so that we may possibly develop future program improvements.

Thank you for your helpful assistance.

Boris Rai, Jr. Ed.D.  
Director of Research

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A - Please check EACH of the following, indicating your reading preference level

	<u>Preferred</u>	<u>Less Preferred</u>	<u>Dislike</u>
1. Novels	_____	_____	_____
2. Short stories	_____	_____	_____
3. Essays	_____	_____	_____
4. Biographies	_____	_____	_____
5. Plays	_____	_____	_____
6. Poetry	_____	_____	_____
7. News	_____	_____	_____
8. Newspaper articles	_____	_____	_____
9. Magazine articles	_____	_____	_____
10. Technical subjects-Books or articles	_____	_____	_____
11. Comic books	_____	_____	_____
12. Sports writers	_____	_____	_____
13. Mysteries	_____	_____	_____
14. Literary classics	_____	_____	_____
15. Other. Specifically what? _____	_____	_____	_____

B - How much do you read (outside of school work)?

Check only one

- 1. Read everything that looks interesting: always reading \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Read during a large part of my free time \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Read occasionally \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Read seldom \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Hardly read at all \_\_\_\_\_

C - How much time do you spend in serious study for school subjects?

- 1. Most of my spare time \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Quite a lot, but I do have some recreation \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Once in awhile: recreation comes first \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Very little, I just can't get down to it \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. None, I don't seem to care at all \_\_\_\_\_

D - Reading Skills:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Sometimes or Somewhat</u>	<u>No</u>
1. Have you received training in how to read textbooks?	_____	_____	_____
2. Do you know the purposes of the various parts of a book, such as introduction, table of contents, ;index, glossary, and how they make studying easier?	_____	_____	_____
3. Have you learned the skill of skimming?	_____	_____	_____
4. When you read, do you have a well-defined purpose?	_____	_____	_____
5. Do you know how to find the main idea of a paragraph?	_____	_____	_____
6. Do you know how to read for details?	_____	_____	_____
7. Are you able to see relationships between ideas?	_____	_____	_____
8. Do you know how to read tables, graphs & charts in your readings?	_____	_____	_____
9. Do you know how to apply different rates of reading according to the purposes & nature of the materials read?	_____	_____	_____
10. Do you remember what you read?	_____	_____	_____

B - Critical Reading:

- 1. Do you consider the author qualified to write on a special subject? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Do you know what the author's purpose is in writing? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. As you read, can you determine the difference between fact and opinion? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Are you able to distinguish between words that are used in a more informative than emotional way? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Are you able to identify specific propaganda or techniques: name calling, use of catch phrases, testimonials and the like? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Do you question the accuracy of statements which you read? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Do you know how to evaluate critically the \_\_\_\_\_