

[▲ Home](#)[◀ Contents](#)**Effective Study Skills for Post-Secondary Education***by Marcus Simmons***Abstract**

Most instructors and administrators will refer to a student's lack of study and organizational skills to explain why so many freshmen students drop out or fail to continue with their educational goals. Often students graduate high schools without having to vigorously study and apply themselves in order to pass. As a result, many students enter post secondary education with a severe lack of knowledge and ability to study and learn effectively. Considering that population of non-traditional students has and is still growing on the post-secondary level, an Effective Study Skills class or program is needed on the college level.

The survey was conducted by electronic email to all Itawamba Community College students on the Fulton, Mississippi campus (residential) and Tupelo, Mississippi (city commuter campus). The total student population of Itawamba Community College is approximately 3,000 full time students. Itawamba is an institute that offers two year associates degrees in most technical, vocational, and health related fields; as well as, pre-four year degrees in liberal arts, business, and health related fields. Of the 254 students answering the survey, 10 students identified themselves as having special needs and receiving services through the Office of Supportive and Disability Services, OSDS. OSDS has approximately 60 to 75 students each semester that register with the office and request and receive special accommodations. Itawamba Community College has implemented a class to try to address the needs of students and their need for instruction on improving study skills and techniques. The class is a reading improvement and essential skills class that will emphasize study skills, note taking, test taking techniques, and reading for information

**Effective Study Skills**

Most students that enter post secondary institutions never finish or obtain a terminal degree. This seems to be information that is argued very little. Of course, the reason for this failure is often questioned and debated. There can be numerous reasons for a student failing to succeed in college. Regardless of the underlining reasons, not passing classes is the ultimate reason for this failure. Though other activities and blame can be distributed by a multitude of experts, many instructors and professionals believe that students are not prepared and not taught appropriate and useful study skills prior to entering the college ranks.

During the 1989 and 1990 school year, only about thirty-seven percent of those students entering a community college obtain some

type of degree by 1994. Of those students starting college in that academic school year and that eventually dropped out or withdrew from school, they spent an average of about fourteen months in school. Another interesting statistics concerned the students' ages. Of the students completing a degree, students eighteen years or younger when they started completed degrees at a rate of fifty-one percent. Those students between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine, only about nineteen percent completed degrees. Students in the age range between nineteen and twenty-nine were more likely to complete degrees as much as five times higher than students at the age of thirty and older. This article does not speak specifically about the causes of these drop out rates, but of course some generally ideas can be deduced. In considering study skills, one would think an eighteen year old student would be more familiar with studying than an older student. But even with the eighteen year old students continuing at much higher rates than older students, the eighteen year old students were still only completing to terminal degrees at a rate of fifty-one percent. (Educational 1999).

Numerous educators and respected journals have commented on the importance of study skills in education. In 1986 a national survey of 204,000 students entering college, 40.3% of the students commented that one reason for choosing a college to attend was the fact that they wanted to improve their reading and study skills. (National 1987). In one study with 301 freshmen students; the students rated the reasons for their low grades as being a lack of motivation, poor study habits, and inattention to school work. (Hart 1980). Johnson states in his article found in *Journal of Reading*, "Clearly, student retention is related to academic success. If learning skills programs could be implemented more widely, there would be a significant reduction of attrition rates". (Johnson 1989). In a study conducted with 6,140 college students, some participating in a college reading-study program and the others not; some interesting findings were made. The students participating in the reading-study were found to be 83% "better off" than the non-participating students. The study concluded that the participating students achieved a significant positive difference in reading rate, comprehension, and overall grade point averages. The participating students actually achieved a .37 grade point average advantage over their non-participating counterparts. (Sanders 1980). In another study, 681 academically "at risk" students entered in a semester long study skills course. These students were on academic probation for low grades. At the conclusion of the study skills course, the 681 students who had completed the study skills course earned higher grade point averages than similar students on probation who did not take the study skills course. The students completing the course earned higher first and second semester grade point averages than student not completing the course. Further the students who completed and passed the study skills course: remained in higher education longer with more success than those who did not complete or pass the course. (Petrie 1996).

Study skills seem to be one thing that most students need and can benefit from greatly. In creating an "Effective Study Skills" course for Itawamba Community College. It would seem that an understanding of how students and instructors at that particular

institution feel about the need for an “Effective Study Skills” course.

Two online surveys were conducted to survey the responses and determine a need for a study skills course. One survey was conducted with instructors and one survey was conducted with students. Both surveys were aimed at getting information concerning attitudes towards students’ ability to study and the need for study skills instruction. (Simmons 2006).

The first survey was emailed to all of the instructors at Itawamba Community College. 71 instructors responded to the survey and completed the survey online. Some of the results were interesting. When asked if they felt students came to college knowing how to study appropriately, 70 or 98.6% of the 71 instructors replied no. When asked if they felt students came to college prepared to take good and useful notes, 54 or 71.1% replied no. Instructors were asked if they felt students could read for content material in the textbooks and 52 or 74.3% of the instructors answered no. Instructors were also asked specifically if they thought students would benefit for a study skills course of seminar and 67 or 94.4% of the instructors answered yes. (Simmons).

Almost 254 students responded to the survey. The student make up on the survey was: 54 males, 196 females, 125 were sophomores, 93 were freshmen, 128 were 21 years of age or younger, 56 were between the ages of 22 and 30, and 54 were over the age of 30. Of the 254 students that replied; 200 graduated high school with a High School Diploma, 5 graduated with a Mississippi Occupational Diploma, 16 were transfer students, and 31 had completed the Graduate Equivalency Diploma. 52 were full time students living on campus, 173 were full time students living off campus, 24 were part time students, and 5 students did not respond to this question. The make up of students was generally diverse. The students’ answers were very telling. Some of the questions and response were as follows:

Question: In high school I received training in a class or seminar in “how to study effectively”.

Yes I did	No I did not	Do not know
34 or 13.4%	205 or 81%	14 or 5.5%

Question: How would you rate your study skills and ability to study?

I know how to study very well	I know how to study somewhat well	I know my study skills are not good
54 or 21.3%	147 or 58.1%	46 or 18.2%

Question: If a study skills course or seminar was offered at this community college I would....

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Definitely attend	May attend	Would not attend	Not sure
65 or 25.6%	127 or 50%	40 or 15.7%	22 or 8.7%

Question: I think a study skills course should be offered at community colleges.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not sure	I disagree	I strongly disagree
103 or 40.9%	114 or 45.2%	32 or 12.7%	3 or 1.2%	0 or 0%

Question: I think students would benefit greatly by having a study skills course or seminar.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not sure	I disagree	I strongly disagree
89 or 35%	112 or 44.1%	44 or 17.3%	9 or 3.5%	0 or 0%

(Simmons 2006)

It seems clear that the majority of students felt they could benefit from improved study skills and a course or seminar teaching study skills. Both instructors and student felt there was a need for improved study skills and habits. Students were also asked in the survey this question. "I think a study skills course or seminar should include all of the following skills". Several categories were provided and they students were to mark the things they felt should be included in such a course.

Taking notes	223 or 87.8%
Outlining	136 or 53.5%
Ways to study	236 or 92.9%
Techniques to take exams	209 or 82.3%
Organizational skills	190 or 74.8%
Time management skills	216 or 85%
Listening skills	200 or 78.7%
Reading for comprehension skills	192 or 75.6%
Other	12 or 4.7 %

(Simmons 2006)

Considering past information, current information, and documented opinions of students and instructors; a study skills course or seminar would be an excellent way to improve student success. Designing a program to cover note taking, outlining, study methods, test taking, organization skills, time management, listening skills, and reading for comprehension would only be in the students', instructors', and schools' best interest. The aim of higher education should always be to educate students and educating students on how to learn and study

seems like a reasonable concept.

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**Marcus Simmons** is the Coordinator for the Office of Supportive and Disability Services for Itawamba Community College – Tupelo Campus. He has 15 years of teaching experience with students with special needs and has his BAE and MAE in Special Education from the University of Mississippi. He may be contacted at: 662-620-513 or [mgsimmons@iccms.edu](mailto:mgsimmons@iccms.edu)

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