

The Importance  
of Attending Class,  
Studying, and Graduating

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UCSD

# 1. The Importance of Attending Class

**Robert M. Schmidt** (American Economic Review, 1983) analyzed how the allocation of time on various study activities affected class performance. He found that the highest productivity use of time was the time actually spent in class. This use led to the greatest improvement in student performance. The second most important use of time was time spent in discussion sections. Surprisingly, he found that one of the least productive uses of time was studying for the final.

(For more on this, see:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/cetl/teachingresources/articles/classattendance.html> )

**David Romer (J. of Economic Perspectives, 1993):** Studied class attendance and its effect on grades at Berkeley and other universities.

“estimates...suggest that attendance may substantially affect learning: considering only students who do all of the problem sets and controlling for prior grade point average, the difference in performance in a student who attends regularly and one who attends sporadically is a full letter grade.”

## 2. Time Spent Studying Affects Grades

Quasi-experimental evidence supports a causal effect of study time on grades:

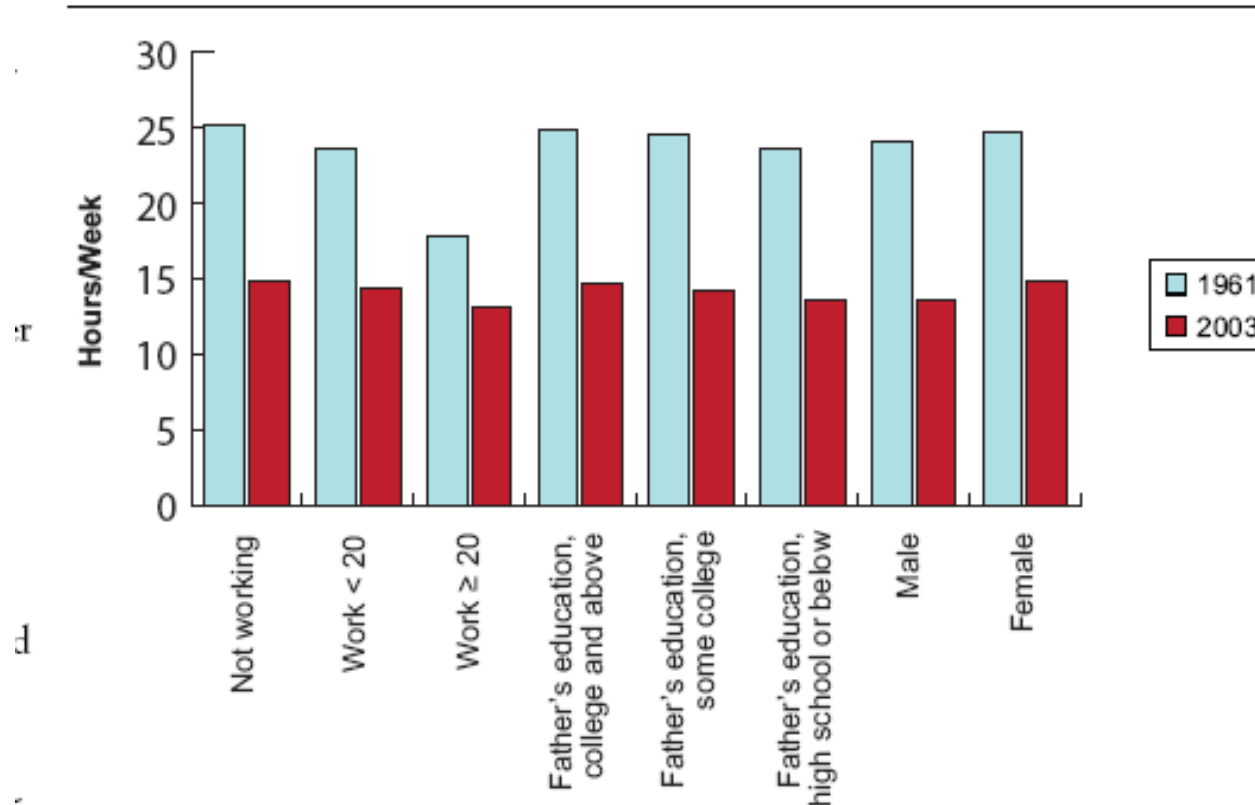
Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (BE Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy 2008) looked at the effect on **study time and GPA** of being randomly assigned to a roommate who had an **Xbox**.

They found that having a roommate with an Xbox reduced study time by 40 minutes per day and **reduced GPA by 0.24 points**.

### 3. Students don't study as hard as they used to

Philip Babcock and Mindy Marks, "The Falling Time Cost of College: Evidence from Half a Century of Time Use Data," forthcoming *Rev. of Economic Statistics*

FIGURE 2  
AVERAGE STUDY TIME FOR FULL-TIME STUDENTS  
AT FOUR-YEAR U.S. COLLEGES BY WORK STATUS,  
PARENTAL EDUCATION, AND GENDER, 1961 AND 2003



#### 4. Grade Inflation Appears to be a Culprit in the decline in study time

Philip Babcock (*Economic Inquiry*, 2010) analyzes the relationship between grade inflation and effort. Average grades have risen at the same time that effort has decreased. To determine whether there is a specific link he analyzes course evaluations from UCSD and finds that **when professors give easy A's, students expend less effort.**

Carrell and West (*Journal of Political Economy*, 2010) analyzed students randomly assigned to professors at West Point. They found that the **professors who got the better ratings from students (1) gave higher grades; but (2) appeared to teach their students less, because their students did worse in follow-up classes.**

## 5. Many students fail to graduate

### From “Once a Leader, U.S. Lags in College Degrees”

*NY Times*, July 23, 2010

- The United States used to lead the world in the number of 25- to 34-year-olds with college degrees. Now it ranks **12th among 36** developed nations.
- While almost 70 percent of high school graduates in the United States enroll in college within two years of graduating, **only about 57 percent of students** who enroll in a bachelor’s degree program graduate within six years.

## 6. Those who don't graduate earn a lot less than those who do.

From David Leonhardt, *NY Times*, based on BLS data

Real median weekly earnings for college graduates have trended up over time

