

College Student Development: A Review of the Literature

Megan Mallon

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Dr. Christy Craft

Kansas State University

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There are many factors that impact a college student's development. One of the most important factors for 21st century students is technology. Studies show that technology can have an effect on both the social and academic development of a student. While technology has some negative impacts, such as causing distractions from academic studies (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006), overall, technology positively influences the development of college students.

In a research study of college students at a 4-year mid-Atlantic university, Gemmill & Peterson (2006) used a survey (with a Likert-type scale) to explore the impact of technology on student stress, as well as the role of technology in the disruption of a college student's academic life. The results show that technology is a source for coping with stress in a student's social life. Students used technology to develop and foster relationships with family members and friends living at a distance, and were likely to use technology (the Internet or social media) to reach out when feeling stressed. Gemmill & Peterson (2006) report only 25 percent of the sample group responded that technology-related disruptions impeded academic progress. While this study shows some disadvantages of technology, it also reinforces the impact of technology on a college student's social development.

Loyd, Dean, & Cooper (2007) also studied the correlation between technology and the psychosocial development of college students. They found that the 21st century college student uses the Internet in both academic and social circumstances. In a survey administered to undergraduate college students at a large research institution in the southeast, a statistically significant relationship was found between students' level of psychosocial development and technology use (Loyd, et. al, 2007). The effect of

technology on students' social development outweighs the effect on academic development. One negative aspect of students' social use of technology is that it may result in the student retreating from face-to-face social interactions (Loyd, et. al, 2007).

Not all studies show that students rely completely on technology for social interactions, however. Miller, Pope, & Steinmann (2005) administered a survey (with a Likert-type scale) to a group of students at an urban community college in the western United States, to determine the use of technology while enrolled at the college. One result of the study is that students still seek social interactions outside of technology, such as attending a guest speaker on campus (Miller, et. al, 2005). This study also shows the influence of technology on academic development; community college students used the Internet to facilitate coursework, although they did not report using technology for anything too technical, such as creating a website (Miller, et. al, 2005).

Costen (2009) designed a qualitative study in which undergraduate students at a university in the southeastern United States participated in a survey, in short answer format, over the impact of discussion boards and online course management systems. Overall, the results showed that online course management systems tend to facilitate student-centered environments, allowing students to take control of their learning (Costen, 2009). Students felt they were able to remain connected to faculty and classmates with the use of discussion boards, all while extending their learning beyond the classroom walls. Online course management systems also allowed students to experience a broader knowledge of course content (Costen, 2009). Costen's (2009) study supports the link between positive student social and academic development and technology.

Other studies explore the effect of computer and information technology (C & IT) on college students. Kuh & Hu (2001) administered a questionnaire at a 4-year college in the United States to determine the effect of C & IT on undergraduate students, using socioeconomic status and academic preparation as the control variables. The authors found that students' experiences in college (such as personal qualities, job-specific abilities, and so on) were enhanced by C & IT (Kuh & Hu, 2001). While the results of this study show that technology can sometimes overshadow academic studies, for the majority of students, computer and information technology positively enhances the college academic experience.

The literature shows a consensus of positive aspects in regard to the impact of technology on college student development. While there are some negative effects of technology on college students, such as distraction from academics or a withdrawal from face-to-face social interactions (Loyd, et. al, 2007), most studies show a positive affect of technology on a college student's social and academic development.

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