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Study: Men learn more in college

By **Kathryn A. Ratliff**

Iowa City Press-Citizen

A study to discover how much students learn between their freshman and senior years in college gave this unexpected result: Women appear to learn only two-thirds of what men do during their college years.

The study, conducted by researchers in Iowa, Missouri and Florida, also showed there is little relationship between how prestigious a college and how much a student learns. Their findings appear in the latest issue of The Journal of Higher Education.

So are men getting more out of their college experience? Ernest Pascarella, study co-author and Mary Louise Petersen Chair in Higher Education at the University of Iowa, said the results are perplexing.

One explanation is that institutions may be structured in ways that are more accommodating to men's learning patterns, he said, although that doesn't fit with the results.

But he cautions that the public should not put too much weight on these findings. It is only one study, he said, and other researchers have not repeated the results.

"I'm very skeptical of any finding until it's replicated," Pascarella said. "What I think is more important is how much a person learns does not depend on going to a selected school. In other words, you can't guarantee you're going to get a better education because it's hard to get into the school you attend. This is consistent with a lot of literature."

Lola Lopes, associate provost for undergraduate education, said bright students with strong motivations can accomplish almost anything.

"For the students here who could've gone to, say, Harvard, I believe they get an education here that is every bit as good as they could get anywhere else," Lopes said.

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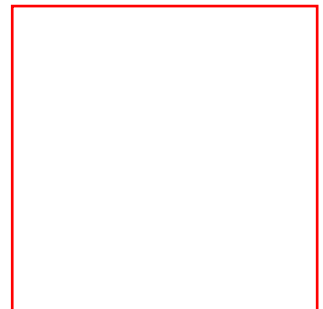
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Pascarella conducted the study with UI doctoral students Christopher Pierson and Lamont Flowers, who is now an assistant professor at the University of Florida.

The team used data collected between 1993 and 1998 by Steven Osterlind, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Missouri. At the time, Osterlind was developing an achievement test called the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination.

The team re-analyzed the results of achievement tests given to roughly 20,000 college students in 56 four-year institutions to come up with its findings.

The researchers wanted to estimate how much students learn in college and note any differences between freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. They reviewed five areas: English, math, science, social sciences and a composite.

After making a few statistical adjustments, the researchers found that men experienced an increase of about 27 to 32 percent on their test scores between their freshman and senior years of college. For women, however, the increase was less - 19 to 23 percent.

Other data show higher numbers of women participating in honors projects and graduating with distinction, Lopes said.

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