

An Example of Undergraduate Research in Organizational Behavior

Abstract:

Undergraduate research is an important approach to improve educational value and enrich students' educational experience. This article summarizes one undergraduate research conducted in the organizational behavior research area and in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The review of the research procedure (including the IRB application) and the discussions on the potential benefits of conducting such research are included.

Keywords:

Undergraduate research; organizational behavior; covid-19

Introduction

Universities perceive undergraduate research as an approach to equip students with research method and independent research experience and believe that such experience has positive educational value for the research participants (Hunter, Seymour, Laursen, Thiry, & Melton, 2010; Linn, Palmer, Baranger, Gerard, & Stone, 2015). Our university hosts Undergraduate Research Symposium every year to promote experiential learning. In Spring 2020, one honor student in my Organizational Behavior (OB) class, double majored in Psychology and Business Administration, reached out to me and wanted to write a paper for her honor program. Due to her background on Psychology, she selected one topic in the OB class—stress—to write for her research paper.

Shortly after we discussed the topic and I assigned several papers for her to read, the COVID pandemic spread over the world. Universities moved to virtual teaching, which, among other factors, has a profound effect on students' stress level. This particular event provides a unique setting to study student stress level at a private university.

I advised the student to conduct the research, including reviewing relevant literature, submitting an IRB application, collecting data, analyzing data, summarizing the findings, and presenting those findings at our university's Undergraduate Research Symposium in Spring 2021. The conduct of this undergraduate research not only has implications on OB course teaching but also contribute to the student's personal learning experience and educational value.

In the following sections, I will discuss (1) how the research was designed and conducted and (2) what the findings indicate.

Theoretical Foundation

Stress is an important topic in OB course teaching. According to *Organizational Behavior: Improving Performance and Commitment in the Workplace* (Colquitt, Lepine, & Wesson, 2016), stress is ubiquitously experienced by individuals and can have physical and psychological consequences. The chapter reading of the textbook (Chapter 5 Stress) provides students basic understandings on stressors, strains, the consequences of stress, and the coping strategies to manage stress.

In addition, researchers have studied university students' perceived stress, the causing factors, and the coping strategies. For example, using data of undergraduate students' response to a self-

reported questionnaire, Stoliker and Lafreniere (2015) find that there is no significant gender difference in academic stress, but females show higher levels of social support coping. Researchers also find that stress plays a role in first-year undergraduate students' weight gaining, and this phenomenon is observed not only in the United States but also in other countries such as the United Kingdom (e.g., Anderson, Shapiro, & Lundgren, 2003; Serlachius, Hamer, & Wardle, 2007).

Learning Objectives

Since prior studies have found that college students experience a variety of stressors, many of which may have been exacerbated due to the Coronavirus pandemic, there is a need to understand what the major stressors are for students at our university, how the Coronavirus pandemic has affected them, and whether the university's resources are being used by our students when they experience stress. By doing this research, we will have a better understanding of our students' perceived stress and how the students use the resources provided to them to cope with the stress.

Research Design Overview

First, I advised the student to focus on organizational support and students' perceived stress and set the research topic as "Organizational Support and Student Stress at ** University" (the name of the university is not included due to the anonymous requirement of MOBTS submission).

Second, the student conducted a brief literature review in Spring 2020. The chapter reading of the textbook helps the student understand various stressful life events and different types of stressors (e.g., hindrance stressors and challenge stressors). In addition, I assigned the student several research papers to read (e.g., Serlachius, Hamer, & Wardle, 2007). Reading those research papers gives the student a sense of using the survey data to conduct research.

Third, based on the readings, I mentored the student to create a survey questionnaire before the Spring 2020 semester ended.

Fourth, since we planned to participate our university's Undergraduate Research Symposium and may present the findings at other conferences, I advised the student to submit an IRB application (Exempt Research Category 2). This process took time, and the application was finally approved in October 2020.

Then, we use Qualtrics to collect data. The survey was available to all students from October 2020 to March 2021. To help the students get the access to the survey, we put up a physical poster by the university's Student Engagement Office on campus, and students can participate using QR Reader app and scanning the barcode on the poster. Our university's Student Engagement Office also sent the flyer to students via email with the weekly newsletter. Only after obtaining consent students were able to take the survey. For added safeguards, we understand that Qualtrics can collect personally identifiable data like IP addresses, we chose the anonymize option in the survey to minimize the collection of identifiable data like IP addresses. We did not collect participants' name and other personal information. All data were collected electronically and stored on password-protected computers connected to campus servers. Participation for all participants were purely voluntary. Data collection was completed by March 2021.

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After data collection, I advised the student to analyze data using software SPSS. Of the 112 participants, we analyzed 46 valid responses in a quantitative manner to obtain insight on students' experienced stressors and discover how often the students use university resources. We use charts and graphs to present the findings of the survey.

The findings were presented at our university's Undergraduate Research Symposiums in April 2021. The key findings include:

- Top 3 socially related stressors
 - Meeting expectations
 - Decision making
 - Loneliness & making new friends/getting along with friends
- Top 3 school related stressors
 - Too many things to do and not enough time
 - Assignments
 - Concerns about future
- Top 3 personally related stressors
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Career
 - Self-confidence
- How much the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has heightened their stressors?
 - Socially, the percentages reported were primarily in the ranges of 41%-60% and 0%-20%
 - School related, the percentages reported were primarily in the ranges of 0%-20% and 81%-100%
 - Personally, the percentages reported were very close but primarily in the ranges of 0%-20% and 21%-40%
- Top 5 resources that are most frequently used by the students:
 - Blackboard
 - Financial aid
 - Academic Calendar
 - Academic Advising
 - Dolphin1 Card & Fitness Center

Session Description

This example of undergraduate research provides several insights to OB teaching. If this submission is accepted by MOBTS conference session, I will present this example in 25 minutes and use 20 minutes to have open discussions on:

- Background of the research (**Who**: this undergraduate research was conducted by an honor student in an Organizational Behavior class; the context: **when** the COVID-19 had a wide impact on individual work and life; **who** may be the potential participants for undergraduate research in a different research context?)
- Overview of undergraduate research design (the procedure: **how** to conduct undergraduate research in the OB/management area; whether IRB application is needed; etc.)

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- Benefits of advising undergraduate research (**Why** conduct undergraduate research? **Who** are benefited from undergraduate research?)

The open discussions on those questions will inspire instructors to seek possible approaches and solutions on advising undergraduate research to enrich student research experience and enhance their educational value. The audience will be encouraged to ask questions and provide suggestions as well.

References:

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