

University students' motivation and attitudes when beginning their degree program. Are they different when they leave school?

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Abstract

Introduction. The objective of this paper is to define what factors affect a subject's decision when he or she decides to pursue university studies, as well as to discover attitudinal patterns that lead to the subject's continuance in the institution.

Method. Focusing our study on motives for choice of university major and on attitudes toward the University (beliefs about the context and conception of the student's role), we selected two sample groups: newly enrolled students and students nearing completion of studies. We applied a survey made up of 32 items measured on a scale, performing different statistical analyses and classifying students as a function of variables such as gender and branch of specialization of their degree program.

Results. After applying different data analysis techniques (descriptive and inferential), we have verified the motives which guide students in the process of choosing their university major -- personal and professional preferences being the most prominent. On the other hand, we found no statistically significant evidence as to an evolution of students' attitudes toward the University over time, looking only at attitudes regarding context and objectives of the institution.

Discussion. Completion of this study allows us to confirm the existence of a set of motivations and attitudes which are so decisive both in the students' choice of degree program as well as in their quality of life over the course of their study program. By being aware of these, and by giving students the opportunity to have influence over their academic life, we can correct possible deficiencies in guidance processes currently underway in secondary and university education.

Keywords: motivation, attitudes, educational evaluation, higher education.