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“Senioritis:” An Analysis of Academic Motivation and Burnout in College Students through the Lens of Positive Psychology

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RUNNING HEAD: “Senioritis:” An analysis through Positive Psychology

“Senioritis:” An analysis of academic motivation and burnout in college students through
the lens of Positive Psychology

A thesis presented by

Chelsea T. Manning

To the Department of Psychology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Abstract

The current study re-examined Chickering’s (1967) Student Development theory, which suggests student development decreases as academic conditions become constant and the novelty of the academic environment fades. Additionally, the researchers examined whether the need to present a GPA after graduation could be associated with academic motivation, importance, or effort (the academic variables). Through the lens of positive psychology, the researchers also investigated whether a decrease in academic motivation, importance, and effort was detrimental to student happiness and well-being. Major findings among the 43 total participants were: 1, an overall difference in academic variables between freshmen and seniors did not exist; 2, a positive correlation exists between the likelihood of needing to present a GPA and the academic variables; 3, motivation was positively correlated with positive affect, while both motivation and effort were negatively correlated with negative affect. For exploratory purposes, the study also surveyed students on their opinions of the “senioritis” phenomenon and summarized those results according to class year finding few class differences in opinion.

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“Senioritis:” An analysis of academic motivation and burnout in college students through
the lens of Positive Psychology

How is it possible for a college senior to spend an entire day doing homework and get none of it done? Wasting time is the game; “Senioritis” is to blame. In the interest of this study, a working definition of this phenomenon is the decrease of academic motivation, importance, and effort upon entering the senior year of college — “burnout” may also be used as a synonym when referring specifically to college seniors. The study of this phenomenon of decreasing academic motivation is a relatively new focus among psychologists (e.g. Ashforth & Lee, 1996; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). Because “senioritis” is a widely acknowledged among American college students, the phenomenon may be common and could possibly be observed within many college communities. Thus, the topic may be an important and useful one to explore further.

The primary goal of this study was to examine differences between the academic motivation of college seniors and college freshmen in order to empirically examine whether the phenomenon of “senioritis” seems to exist among the student population. After answering this question, further analysis were aimed at determining whether this pattern is detrimental for the well-being of graduating seniors, ultimately shaping the study into two parts: one, does “senioritis” exist, and two, is “senioritis” a detrimental phenomenon? Scales to measure how students value academics as well as the actual effort each puts into his/her school work were included for part one of the study, and a number of Likert questions concerning elements of happiness and well-being were included to investigate part two.

While part one of the study was straight-forward in its intentions and measures, part two of the study had a much broader focus. Scales measuring levels of subjective well-being, including stress levels, affect scores, personality, and overall student happiness, were administered. A third goal of this study was to find out how freshmen and seniors individually define “senioritis,” and to identify each class’ overall opinions of the phenomenon. An open-ended questionnaire gave each participant the opportunity to share any individual thoughts about the effects of academic motivation and performance on their own happiness and success during college experiences.

The current study intentionally focused on academic adjustment and subjective well-being in college freshmen and college seniors because previous research on burnout is predominantly focused on burnout of high school students (e.g. Chickering, 1967) and working adults (e.g. Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). To remain consistent with previous research, this study hoped to demonstrate senior students’ tendencies toward lesser academic motivation and performance, and the possible relation to lower subjective well-being, compared to their freshman peers. Additionally, using a Likert-style questionnaire to ask students about their beliefs of the phenomenon, the current study hoped to summarize student opinions of “Senioritis.”

Theories of Academic Motivation

Chickering’s (1967) Student Development Theory served as the theoretical framework for the current study. This theory states that student development decreases as learning conditions become constant and novelty of college-life fades. Students’ learning environments and educational subjects are examples of such conditions which could

become constant and consequentially result in less novelty. For example, by their fourth year of college, students may feel that some class requirements are repetitive as students finish major requirements. Kubota & Olsta (2006) supported Student Development Theory by testing the exploratory behaviors and cognitive ability of sixth-grade students in a museum who had either been there before (the control groups) or were first-time visitors (experimental group). The children who were first-time visitors to the museum displayed greater enthusiasm in learning about the exhibits and better retained the information than the children who had already seen the museum. Like Chickering’s theory, this study of middle-school children suggests that novelty is an important and influential component of the learning process.

A number of researchers have developed differing theories of academic motivation in order to examine the variables that may affect academic motivation. A common theme among these theories is that expectancy often has a significant impact on the different aspects of academic motivation and performance, including instigation, direction, effort, and persistence (Bandura, 1986; Locke & Latham, 1990; Weiner, 1985). Schunk (1991), for example, discusses the specific expectancy effects of self-efficacy. She argues that self-efficacy may be an underlying mechanism for behavioral change and maintenance. Self-efficacy can be defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to perform at the level necessary to influence events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1986). Expectancy-value theories add to this notion of a link between efficacy and academic performance, stating that behavior is a function of both people’s expected outcomes and the extent to which they value those outcomes (Atkinson, 1957). It is important to note

that while expectancy and value certainly influence academic behaviors, they do not guarantee academic motivation or performance (Schunk, 1991).

Rewards, when connected to student accomplishments, can be an important determinant of self-efficacy since they are informative and motivational (Bandura, 1986). Gold stars in elementary school classrooms are often given to students for achieving various goals. If a child gets fewer stars than a peer, s/he knows where to focus efforts in the future in order to earn more stars. Earning stars is a motivator in the kindergarten classroom, but because students habituate to small rewards as they progress through school, gold stars and the like lose their novelty and no longer suffice in later academic years (Deiner & Lucas, 2009). Chickering (1967) suggests that a lack of novelty in the academic routine (e.g. repeating classrooms and teachers) may largely explain why high school students often display a decrease in academic motivation and performance as they progress through school. Because college students likely experience similar repetition of their academic environments, college seniors may also show a decrease in academic motivation and performance. Rather than depending on rewards to motivate academic effort, like gold stars do for kindergarteners, novelty of academia, including courses and environments, may play an influential role in academic success. Without novel rewards, it can be expected that students may become bored, and will therefore not achieve at their highest level.

Attribution theory is also relevant to academic motivation (Weiner, 1980). According to attribution theory, students’ perceptions of themselves will greatly influence how they interpret success or failure. Specifically, these attributions are made in ways which allow students to portray themselves in the best possible light more often

than not. An attribution can be defined as a persons’ explanation for the success or failure of a specific event or decision. Attributions can be categorized into internal and external attributions (i.e. self-owned or owned by sources other than themselves). A student’s explanation for passing a test, for example, could be studying, a controlled internal attribution, or luck, an uncontrolled external attribution. Observably, students sometimes use the term “senioritis” to attribute a lack of academic motivation to a force outside their control. The suffix, “-itis,” is used frequently in the names of medical conditions. When students attribute their academic performance and motivation to “senioritis,” therefore, they are essentially externally attributing their lack of success, removing blame from themselves.

A lack of academic progress and growth may be a major obstacle for maintaining high academic motivation. Alderfer’s (1972) Existence, Relatedness, and Growth (ERG) Theory of motivation and Dreze and Nunes’ (2006) Endowed Progress Effect both suggest that students who are achieving little or no progress toward academic goals are significantly more likely to abandon their efforts. The ERG theory states humans must fulfill their needs for a sense of self-worth, personal relationships, and progress toward success before they can grow (Alderfer, 1972), and the Endowed progress Effect states people who have made some progress towards a goal will be more likely to continue their efforts until accomplishing the goal (Dreze & Nunes, 2006). Although college seniors may not have reached their ultimate academic goals, they may have finished all undergraduate requirements, and, therefore, are unable to progress any further.

Christophel and Gorham (1995) investigated motivational changes in college students, as well as students’ perceived sources of demotivation. Through a test-retest

analysis, the researchers found that negative changes did occur in college students' motivational states over the course of the semester. Additionally, the researchers found that the students tested perceived motivation as a personally-owned state and demotivation as teacher-owned problem. This finding was consistent with Attribution theory (Weiner, 1980) in that individuals often attribute positive occurrences internally and negative occurrences externally.

Happiness

Aside from asking the basic question, “what is senioritis and does it exist among college students?” the current study was also designed to examine the influence of seniorities on life-satisfaction and overall academic performance. If a decrease in academic motivation occurs, is it necessarily a detrimental one?

One of the founders of the Positive Psychology movement, Martin Seligman (2002), suggests happiness and overall life-satisfaction play a significant role in successful performance in many different domains, including academics; in other words, a happy student will likely experience more academic success than an unhappy student. With this idea, Seligman laid the foundation for positive psychologists to explore possible causes and correlations of academic motivation and performance among college seniors. In a study which analyzed the happiness of Americans before and after winning the lottery (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978), researchers found that overall happiness levels remained constant after the initial shock of winning expired. Because the winners' success could not be traced to any effort or persistence of the self, the lottery prize caused only a small spike in overall happiness. This suggestion is consistent with

ERG Theory (Alderfer, 1972) in that success without growth has little to no impact on student happiness.

According to the *World Database of Happiness* (Veenhoven, 2009), Denmark is the happiest country in the world, with an overall happiness score of 8.3 out of 10, while the United States scored only 7.4 out of 10. This database is a collection of numerous findings which, together, make up a measurable analysis of “overall enjoyment of one’s life” across nations. Linnet (2010), described Danish happiness as being marked by contentedness — the Danes find satisfaction with the “good enough” rather than “the best” in every aspect of their lives. Moreover, he suggested that American happiness may be limited by cultural stressors including the Paradox of Choice, the tendency for a greater number of choices to be associated with greater stress (Schwartz, 2000), and the “hedonic treadmill,” the tendency for humans to habituate to high expectations (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). These theories of positive psychology are both aimed toward explaining factors that influence happiness and ultimately helping individuals reach their maximum potential. Both are explained in greater detail below.

Schwartz (2000) relates the Paradox of Choice to college-age students, suggesting that Universities, particularly those which are more prestigious, are turning into “shopping malls” where students are encouraged to spend the first two weeks of classes sampling as many options as possible, looking over syllabi, then later deciding which courses they will actually take. Schwartz points out that this trend of increasing choices appears everywhere including brands of cereal and cuts of jeans. While logically, he admits, a multitude of options would seem to allow for everyone to be fully satisfied, psychologically, that assumption seems to be incorrect. An increase in choice may often

mean an increase in the chances people will regret their decisions, feel they are missing out, or will blame themselves if choices fail. This may be evident in students’ course selections, club memberships, or social obligations. Scheduling conflicts make it impossible for each student to be involved in every student organization or every course that interests them — needing to make a decision between two equally appealing options may cause such feelings of missing out.

In addition to the paradox of choice, Brickman and Campbell’s (1971) Hedonic Treadmill may also be considered an obstacle to happiness in America. The hedonic treadmill refers to the tendency for Americans to habituate to high expectations. In America, the “best” has become the expectation when, in reality, the “best” is unique. There can only be one “best” while there can be a multitude of “good enough.” If Americans, like the Danes, were more often satisfied with the “good enough,” stress from constant disappointment and self-blame may significantly drop, increasing overall happiness across the nation.

Greater life satisfaction may be a strong determinant of academic motivation and success (Schunk, 1991). To achieve such life satisfaction, humans first need to fulfill a continuum of human needs, including existence (the basic need to feel safe and comfortable), relatedness (the need for relationships and personal identity), and growth (the need for achievement and fulfillment). This, of course, is Alderfer’s (1972) ERG theory. Although previously mentioned, this theory is also important to note in relation to student happiness because without happiness, the likelihood of academic success is lowered (Deiner, King, & Lyubomirsky, 2005).

The latter of the ERG’s three needs is perhaps most relevant to the findings of Chickering’s (1967) theory — what happens when students have reached the maximum level of achievement possible for their college career? Many seniors complete their major and general education requirements before beginning their final semesters. If these students have little room left to grow, leaving a basic need unsatisfied, overall happiness may be jeopardized. Along the same lines, Dreze and Nunes’ (2006) Endowed Progress Effect (described previously in this review) can have a negative effect on motivation in students who experience little or no progression in their academic efforts. According to the theory, without experiencing academic progress, which many seniors could lack as they may have finished their majors by their final semesters, it is possible that some students may only put forth the minimal effort necessary to grant them academic success. Certain students who have already accomplished the goals of their major requirements and general education requirements, for example, may experience the endowed progress effect because they may have no undergraduate goals to progress toward.

A link between life satisfaction and success was also supported through research by Lyubomirsky, King, and Deiner (2005) whose findings are likely applicable to the academic success of college students. While their research focused on success of employees in the workplace, the findings were generalizable, suggesting that the link may exist for two reasons: one, because success often makes people happy; two, because positive affect may stimulate success. Similar research notes that happier people are more likely to secure jobs and achieve high levels of productivity and job-satisfaction (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). According to these studies, it would appear that a relationship may exist between students with greater life

satisfaction and academic success rates. Motivation, effort, and value are all necessary components for academic success — the happier students are, the better they will perform in these three academic categories, ultimately showing greater academic success.

Subjective Well-Being

“Happiness” is difficult to define empirically as it is a personal experience rather than a physical state. To make the emotion as objective as possible, the Positive Psychology literature frequently refers to “happiness” as “subjective well-being” (SWB) because the latter is a more easily measurable construct. Various scales have been developed and tested for reliability and validity both inside and outside lab settings to measure SWB, and it has become an important measure even outside the realm of psychology (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006). Much of the research in positive psychology concerning SWB stems from work by Diener (2000). According to Diener, SWB is defined as people’s cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives — in other words, people’s overall satisfaction with life. To structure life-satisfaction analyses, Diener organizes SWB into four components: life satisfaction (the global judgment of life), domain satisfaction (work and school), level of positive affect (pleasant emotions and moods), and level of negative emotions (unpleasant emotions and moods).

Beginning in the early twentieth century, researchers began examining human moods and emotions, ultimately developing modern-day SWB (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The roots of a four-part theory of SWB can be seen in earlier work by Bradburn (1969), who suggested that a difference exists between the affect an individual experiences and the level to which that individual believes such affect is important to

his/her SWB. Lucas and Suh (1996) later measures of SWB to numerically express and further examine Bradburn's (1969) claim. The development of these measures is important to the field of positive psychology because subjective well-being takes an analysis of happiness one step further in a more structured and specified direction for examination. Decades of test-retest analyses suggest scales measuring SWB are valid and reliable, as scores tend to remain fairly stable year-to-year, despite life outcomes (Oishi & Sullivan, 2006). As noted previously, life satisfaction is positively correlated with success rates, and positive affect may prompt success (e.g. Lyubomirsky, King, & Deiner, 2005). As both life satisfaction and positive affect are crucial components of SWB (Deiner, 2000), a link certainly exists between SWB and the development of academic motivation in college students.

Stress and Burnout

A significant body of literature has described a phenomenon known as “burnout,” which seems to occur among adults in the workplace as well as students in the classroom (e.g. Ashforth & Lee, 1996). Burnout is defined as a “prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors,” (p. 189) and is typically preceded by exhaustion due to a lack of accomplishment or progress (Maslach, 2003). For example, in a correlational study of college students, Dreze and Nunes (2006) found that a lack of academic success was correlated with a lessening of happiness ratings, which in turn was correlated with lower academic motivation. Therefore, students who have reached their maximum collegiate accomplishment (if they experience stressors and lack of accomplishment) may experience burnout.

As a component of burnout, emotional exhaustion may be a reliable predictor of various academic outcomes including academic performance. A longitudinal study by Cropanzano and Wright (1998) examined the relationship of emotional exhaustion to job satisfaction, job performance, and job turnover among 52 welfare workers. The year-long study found that, while no significant relationship existed between job satisfaction and affect, both performance and turnover correlated positively with emotional exhaustion. Similarly, it is possible that students experiencing emotional exhaustion may display their burnout by a decreasing pattern of academic performance.

Howard (2008) suggests stress is perhaps the greatest inhibitor of academic success. Howard’s work is perhaps the most relevant to the “senioritis” phenomenon. According to Howard, stress is “the discrepancy between the demands on the [student] and his/her true or perceived capacity to respond,” (p. 106). Stressors may include total hours worked, low perceived control and payoff, increasing size of workloads, and lacking clarity among multiple roles. At Connecticut College, for example, many students strive to earn leadership roles in numerous extracurricular groups as well as maintain competitive academic marks, so stress-levels are likely to be high according to Howard’s research. She also suggests that frequent exposure to high stress levels often leads to “burnout” which she describes as “compromising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment,” (p. 106). This research is connects with Chickering’s (1967) Student Development Theory, because he also refers to depersonalization — the distancing of one’s self from something due to a lack of personal value — as a potential trigger of the “senioritis” phenomenon.

As discussed above, burnout may often be a major trigger for the lessening of academic motivation and is often brought about by students’ overloaded schedules and workloads. A longitudinal study of medical students (Gutherie, Black, Bagalkote, Shaw, Campbell, & Creed, 1998) illustrated this by utilizing the 12-Point General health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), finding that many medical students (although not a majority) do experience psychological distress, i.e. “burnout,” during their medical training. GHQ-12 scores were the best predictor of burnout, because, due to residencies and intern positions, the time demands on many medical students overtake normal health cycles (e.g. sleep). Activation theory, also known as Arousal theory (Berlyne, 1967; Duffy, 1962; Scott, 1966), states that students perform best when at a medium arousal level. Most colleges contain numerous student groups, so most students have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities simultaneously with academic schedules. While participating in a few groups could aid in bringing student arousal to the appropriate level, too many roles could potentially raise student arousal beyond optimal levels, which in turn could cause stress and burnout according to arousal theory.

As noted earlier, emotional exhaustion is a major predictor of academic burnout and dissatisfaction. This exhaustion may result from weak emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to consistently regulate one’s own emotions appropriately in accordance with social circumstances and expectations (Mayer, 1995). A study of 373 Spanish undergraduate students (Durán, Extremera, Rey, Fernández-Berrocal and Montalbán, 2006) examined Perceived Emotional Intelligence (PEI) and its relationship to burnout and academic engagement. This study found that emotional intelligence was used by students as a resource for fulfilling academic work-demands; i.e. students who were able

to outwardly manage stress were less overwhelmed by academic demands. Additionally, the study concluded that students who possess high PEI likely have higher emotional resources. However, students with low PEI who have low emotional resources become exhausted due to unmanageable work-demands, will likely experience burnout. This finding is connected with Hobfoll’s (1988) Conservation of Resources theory (COR) which states stress is induced when people are unable to build or maintain their resources (tangible and intangible).

The burnout-literature described in this review thus far has frequently used the term “emotional exhaustion,” referring to a generalizable psychological symptom of stress. The concept of emotional exhaustion has been used to explain changes in academic performance. As noted, however, students may take on multiple responsibilities beyond their coursework. “Emotional labor” is a term defined as displaying the emotions deemed appropriate, by society, for each role. Researchers have examined it relation to college students, and have found the inability to manage emotional labor to be a significant predictor of academic burnout (Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, and Holz, 2001). If students are unable to meet the demands of emotional labor as expected by society for each role, both in and out of the classroom, they could experience greater stress, likely resulting in burnout.

In addition to emerging from emotional labor, stress may also be induced when people are unable to build, protect, or maintain personal resources (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). This Conservation of Resources theory (COR) defines resources as objects (e.g. cars or homes), personal characteristics (e.g. enthusiasm or friendliness), conditions (e.g. health or financial well-being), and energies (e.g. time and effort) (McPadden, 2006). The

“energy” resources may be the most taxed by college students’ academic and non-academic commitments, as students often invest much time and effort in both.

The COR theory is unique in that it takes into account individual circumstances (e.g. class year or living situation) as a supplementary determinant of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). College seniors, for example, likely differ in their values and resources compared to their freshmen peers. By the time students enter their fourth year of college, they may have acquired a car, earned a leadership role, or gotten a job, likely further developing their object resources, characteristic resources, and condition resources relative to the resources available during their freshmen year. However, an increase in tangible resources most likely does not lessen the risk of burnout, as senior year is also frequently accompanied by more rigorous courses and/or more significant leadership roles in extracurricular groups, consequentially increasing the demands on seniors. In other words, while object and condition resources may increase as students mature, energy resources may waiver since they are greatly dependent on increasing time and energy demands (Ashforth & Lee, 1996).

This study by Ashforth and Lee (1996) also examined the relationships between job demands and personal resources, noting that emotional exhaustion could be a result of resource loss, which in turn could result in higher stress, referred to as demand-resource strain. A stronger correlation was observed between emotional exhaustion and demand-resource strain than between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, meaning that stress was more likely to occur in students who experienced resource loss than the students who experienced de-personalization due to lacking progress.

Jackson, Schwab, and Schuler (1986) further described the phenomenon of burnout, also suggesting the syndrome is comprised of three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment. In their analysis, the researchers surveyed individuals working in service jobs (e.g. hotel hospitality) and identified potential consequences of job burnout, including exhaustion and thoughts about leaving jobs. Also described in the meta-analysis noted above (Ashforth & Lee, 1996), emotional exhaustion is a frequent consequence of such imbalanced demands and resources (i.e. “burnout”). To counter-act such exhaustion, depersonalization may also be a coping mechanism. For example, if a student feels unhappy with his/her performance on coursework of a particular class, s/he may cope with the unhappiness by focusing on other classes or activities to redirect energies in ways which could increase positive affect. Clearly, these three components of job burnout are relevant to academic burnout. Because graduating college seniors are, by definition, leaving their present academic environments, thoughts of leaving are likely rampant, especially towards the final semester — an outcome consistent with that of job burnout.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory of burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) takes Hobfoll’s (1988, 1989) COR theory a step further, proposing that working conditions can be categorized into either job demands or job resources, each resulting in different potential outcomes. In this theory, job-demands refer to the aspects of work requiring sustained effort or skill (e.g. deadlines), and job-resources refer to the aspects of work leading to achieving goals or accomplishing personal growth (e.g. advisors or achievement awards). Following a series of self-report analyses from 374 working adults, the researchers found that high rates of job-demands

correlated positively with exhaustion, and low rates of job-resources correlated with disengagement. Essentially, the results show that high demands without recognition or reward may result in higher stress and depersonalization. Like the working adults surveyed in this study, college seniors may experience similar job-demands and job-resources. For example, collegiate job-demands include studying for exams or writing papers, and collegiate job-resources include grades or career-counseling.

Buunk, Dierendonck, and Schaufeli, (2001) examined the results from a collection of previous studies on the burnout phenomenon. The researchers used multi-group analysis and structural equation modeling to examine causal relationships among three dimensions of burnout: personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. Their review summarized the general findings of previous burnout literature, indicating that many studies suggest that low personal accomplishment influences depersonalization. This depersonalization may, in turn, influence emotional exhaustion, ultimately resulting in burnout.

To minimize the burnout process among college students, feelings of competence (Harrison, 1983), mastery (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993), and goal orientation (Hallsten, 1993), as well as self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991), are important as they relate directly to an individual’s sense of personal accomplishment. To accomplish academic goals, students must understand and report back on the material they are taught in order to receive grades which reflect success. With success, students may experience self-efficacy. Without success, students may experience burnout. The analysis suggests a high sense of personal accomplishment may serve as a way of coping with the daily stress of academic demands. For example, a student may justify daily stressors (e.g. homework) by

remembering that they will eventually accomplish academic goals. Students with a low sense of personal accomplishment, like those students who have reached maximum academic accomplishment by finishing major requirements, may, however, cope with the same stressors by distancing themselves from their work rather than exerting necessary effort.

Achievement and Success

To balance the burnout literature, Positive Psychology researchers have identified various circumstances in which individuals may reverse the downward academic trends of burnout, resulting rather with academic success throughout the college process. For example, a recent Positive Psychology study (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan, and Schwartz, 2002) found that employees with greater social support have been shown to have much lower rates of behaviors typical of burnout. The results of the correlational study of 211 traffic-control employees indicated that social support in the workplace in the form of supervisors, family, or co-workers was negatively correlated with burnout and positively associated with job satisfaction and productivity

Howard (2008) suggests well-functioning students who can effectively manage stress may experience greater life-satisfaction. The greatest predictor of low stress appears to be finding a balance between personal and professional lives (Lopez, Snyder, & Rasmussen 2006). For example, students who invest their efforts only on academics may not experience the same level of life satisfaction as students who are able to split their resources effectively between academic and extracurricular commitments.

Achievement goals, expectancy beliefs, values, and authenticity are suggested to be of equal importance to maintaining high academic performance (Pajares, 2002). To examine these components of academic behavior among students, Pajares (2002) summarized results from various self-report measures, finding that students whose academic efforts stemmed from an internal love of learning and without fear of making mistakes performed at significantly higher levels academically than their peers. According to this finding, college seniors who are academically successful in their final semesters likely also have high levels of intrinsic academic motivation. Additionally, this study revealed that self-efficacy was correlated with higher intrinsic motivation. As Diener (2000) notes, self-efficacy is often correlates with high SWB scores, so, according to this suggestion, life-satisfaction is likely greater in students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Numerous studies have observed that success, academic or otherwise, is generally preceded by or associated with such life satisfaction (Deiner, King, & Lyubomirsky, 2005). While causality between happiness and success is certainly bi-directional, an undeniable correlation exists between higher happiness and certain resources, characteristics, and circumstances which allow for academic success (Diener, Lucas, Smith & Suh, 1999).

Deiner, King, and Lyubomirsky (2005) demonstrated both correlational evidence and causal evidence by combining findings from cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies. In doing this, the researchers utilized the PANAS to develop a measure of participants’ subjective well-being, which they called the Conceptual Model. By comparing each individual’s affect to his/her quality of academic work, this model showed the positive relationship between happiness and success. Supplementing the

research examining the Conceptual Model, other researchers have suggested that happiness is a strong predictor of success. Employees with high positive affect ratings are generally given better evaluations by supervisors concerning work quality, productivity, dependability, and creativity (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). Wright and Corpanzano (2000) added to this finding, observing that overall positive affect is a better predictor of job performance than job satisfaction.

Present Study

Based on the literature examining academic motivation and burnout, this study examines “senioritis” among college seniors. It emphasizes Chickering’s (1967) claim that academic motivation decreases throughout college years as novelty of the college experience fades. The study was comprised of three major sections, the first investigating academic differences between freshmen and seniors, the second examining relationships between academic domains (i.e. motivation, importance, and effort) and subjective well-being (i.e. life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect and stress), and the third examining student opinions of the “senioritis” phenomenon and other exploratory items.

The first section of this study examined the question, “Is there a difference in academic motivation, value, and performance between freshmen and seniors?” Consistent with the literature, the researcher hypothesized that seniors and freshmen would differ in each of the academic domains. Specifically, it was expected that seniors would score lower than freshmen on all three academic categories. A scale was included to measure the effort students exert in academics as well the extent to which they value education. Another scale was included to measure the intrinsic academic motivation of each

participant. Knowing that success and progress are often associated with higher motivation (Dreze & Nunes, 2006), it was also expected that students who had higher rates of effort and value would show higher rates of motivation.

In addition to identifying academic differences between freshmen and seniors, the researcher examined the relationship between post-graduate plans and academic behaviors. It was hypothesized that a positive relationship would be found, such that the more likely a student is to need his/her GPA after graduation, the higher s/he will score in the academic variables. A Likert-scale measure was included in the current study inquiring about the likelihood that each senior participant would need to submit a GPA after graduation; this response was correlated with each academic outcome.

While the first section of hypotheses were based on Chickering’s (1967) Student Development theory, the second section of the study attempted to answer the question, “Is a decrease in the academic variables detrimental to student happiness?” Much of the literature suggests that academic progress is necessary for students to maintain their academic motivation; without progress, burnout is likely to occur (e.g. Dreze and Nunes, 2006). Additionally, the literature frequently notes that self-efficacy, stemming from academic success, is necessary for students to maintain motivation (Schunk, 1991). Expecting that many seniors would no longer progressing toward specific academic goals due to completed (or nearly completed) major requirements, the researcher hypothesized that seniors would score lower than freshmen in the academic variables as well as the SWB variables.

To determine whether a decrease in the academic outcomes is detrimental to student happiness, the researcher employed Deiner’s (2006) four-component theory of subjective well-being to measure overall happiness. Participants were asked to think about the current semester as they completed three surveys: one measuring stress levels, another measuring life satisfaction, and a final measuring both positive and negative affect. These four measures (life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, and perceived stress) were used throughout the study, and were referred to as the elements of subjective well-being.

The third section of the current study was largely exploratory. Primarily, the purpose of this section was to summarize participants’ responses to a survey which asked various questions about “senioritis,” including both Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions. Student opinions were collected regarding their beliefs of how “senioritis” could be defined and to what extent it affects college students overall.

Additional relationships between various demographic items and the academic outcomes were examined for exploratory purposes, with the goal of suggesting future research. One question the researcher examined was, “Do any personality traits predispose students to experiencing a decrease in academic outcomes?” Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extroversion, and neuroticism) were measured and correlated with each academic motivation and academic effort to examine these relationships.

Other exploratory items, specifically extracurricular and athletic involvement, were also examined and correlated with the academic outcomes, again to examine

whether non-academic commitments might predispose students to “senioritis.” Consistent with the literature, which suggests burnout may occur if non-academic commitments become burdensome (exceeding personal resources; e.g. Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, & Isik, 1999), the researcher expected negative correlations between number of extracurricular commitments and academic outcomes, where greater commitments would be associated with lower academic element scores.

Method

Participants

The current study collected data from 43 total participants — 20 freshmen and 23 seniors at Connecticut College. 30 participants identified their gender as female and 13 as male. Of the women, 26 identified their race/ethnicity as “white,” 2 as “Latina,” 1 as “black,” and one chose not to identify. Of the men, 10 identified as “white,” two identified as “black,” and 1 identified as “Asian.” Participants were asked to note at what level, if any, they participated in college athletics. Of all 43 participant, 7 play club-level sports, 11 play varsity-level sports, and 6 play both club and varsity level sports. Six of the students were first-generation students. The researcher recruited participants by posting signup sheets on the participation board in Bill Hall and by tabling outside Freeman dining hall during lunch hours, gathering primarily freshmen on the signup sheets and seniors by tabling.

Materials

As a measure of intrinsic academic motivation, the researcher developed the *Generalized Student Opinion Scale* (“GSOS”) (see Appendix C) by modifying Sundre’s *Motivation Scale* (“MS”), revised from Wolf and Smith’s (1995) original *Student Opinion Scale* (“SOS”). The original test was created to measure the perceived importance of a specific academic exam and effort put forth by the respondent. The revised MS adapted Wolf and Smith’s SOS for the present study by adding two questions and modifying the wording of certain questions. Because the purpose of this study was to look at motivation across the academic and extracurricular spectrum, the researcher took the 10 exam-specific MS items and simply changed the wording so they would assess broader academic perceptions. This was done without changing sentence structure. For example, “Doing well on this test is important to me,” was changed to “Doing well academically is important to me.” As in the original, total motivation was measured by summing up the 1-5 Likert-Scale responses for all questions, where Importance of academics was measured by questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8, and Effort in academics was measured by questions 2, 6, 7, 9, and 10. Questions 3, 4, 7, and 9 were reversed prior to scoring. Cronbach’s alpha for importance was $\alpha = .80$ and Cronbach’s alpha for effort was $\alpha = .84$.

Vallerand, Blais, Brière, and Pelletier (1989) developed the *Academic Motivation scale* (AMS, see Appendix D) as a means of measuring intrinsic motivation. This 28 item scale assessed seven constructs of motivation, including three intrinsic constructs involving motivations for attending college: “to know (items 2, 9, 16, 23),” “toward accomplishment (items 6, 13, 20, 27),” and “to experience stimulation (items 4, 11, 18, 25);” three extrinsic constructs: “identified (items 3, 10, 17, 24),” “introjected (items 7,

14, 21, 28),” and “external regulation (1, 8, 15, 22);” and the construct of amotivation (items 5, 12, 19, 26). It asked participants to rate each statement on a 1-7 Likert scale to indicate whether or not each is characteristic of why s/he attends college. Examples of statements include, “In order to have a better salary later on,” and, “Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.” The scale was scored by summing all responses. Cronbach’s alpha for the AMS was $\alpha = .83$.

John’s (1991) *Big Five Personality Inventory* (see Appendix E) measured participants’ levels of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism. This 44-item personality scale yields five individual scores, one for each trait. The scale asked participants to circle a response from a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” which corresponded best with the extent to which they agreed with the statement. Each statement began with “I see myself as someone who...” followed by various items, such as “Can be somewhat careless,” or “Can be somewhat tense.” To score the Big Five Personality Inventory, statements 2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 18, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31, 35, 37, 41, and 43 were reversed, then all items were totaled within their respective categories. Extraversion was totaled from statements 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, and 36. Agreeableness was totaled from statements 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37, and 42. Conscientiousness was totaled from items 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, 38, 43. Neuroticism was totaled from items 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, 39. Finally, openness was totaled from items 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 41, 44. Cronbach’s alphas for the five personality traits were $\alpha = .89$ for extraversion, $\alpha = .87$ for neuroticism, $\alpha = .86$ for openness, $\alpha = .83$ for conscientiousness, $\alpha = .81$ and for agreeableness.

The commonly used *Perceived Stress Scale* (“PSS”) (see Appendix F), developed by Cohen (1983), measured participants’ perception of stress in the last month. Examples of questions include, “In the last month, how often have you felt you were unable to control the important things in your life?” or, “In the last month, how often have you felt you were on top of things?” From these questions, participants were asked to circle their responses from a five point Likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Very Often.” To score the PSS, responses for questions 2, 4, 5, and 10 were reversed, after which, all scale items were totaled. Cronbach’s alpha for the PSS was $\alpha = .79$.

Two scales were included to analyze participants’ subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, 2000) which totaled from four major components: general life satisfaction, domain satisfaction (i.e. work, school, family, etc.), positive affect, and low negative affect. The first scale, measuring general life satisfaction and domain satisfaction, was Deiner’s *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (“SWLS”) (see Appendix G). This five-item scale included questions concerning how participants viewed their lives as a whole; for example, “The conditions of my life are excellent,” or “If I could live my life over, I would change nothing.” For each question, participants were asked to circle the seven-point Likert-Scale number corresponding with the answer that best suited their view, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” To score the SWLS, responses were totaled for a life-satisfaction result ranging from “highly satisfied” to “extremely dissatisfied.” Cronbach’s alpha for the SWLS was $\alpha = .93$.

The second scale, measuring positive and negative affect, was the *Positive and Negative Affect Scale* or “PANAS” (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; see Appendix H).

The researcher modified the scale by changing the instructions from “how you feel at the present moment” to “how you feel about your current academic semester” in order to more specifically measure participants’ perceptions of his/her academic semester rather than unspecified day-to-day affect. This scale included 20 words describing various feelings and emotions, such as “Excited,” “Irritable,” and “Inspired.” Within the 20 words, 10 were positive affect words and 10 were negative affect words. For each word, participants were asked to select a response from a five-point Likert-Scale ranging from “Very slightly or not at all” to “Extremely,” describing how s/he usually felt about his/her current academic year. The scale gave each participant two individual scores, one for positive affect, one for negative affect, and it was scored by totaling the responses for the corresponding result category. Cronbach’s alpha for positive affect was $\alpha = .86$, and the Cronbach’s alpha for negative alpha was $\alpha = .84$.

The “*Senioritis*” *Questionnaire* (see Appendix I) was designed by the researcher to collect responses from participants about their beliefs about the “senioritis” phenomenon. The questionnaire asked three open-ended questions each with a blank space for participants to answer from their own thoughts rather than directed opinions. The questions included, “Please write your own definition for ‘Senioritis’ below,” “Is ‘Senioritis’ experienced by students in all grades or only seniors?” and “When does ‘Senioritis’ begin and how long does it last?” Because the small sample-size made reliably coding responses impossible, however, these open-ended questions were dropped from statistical testing. Additionally, the researcher included eight 5-point Likert-Scale questions asking participants to what extent they agreed with certain statements (with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”); for example, “‘Senioritis’ is a

real issue among college students,” and ““Senioritis’ is detrimental to student performance.” Finally, participants were asked to describe how motivated they are at the beginning of a semester and at the end of a semester by circling the corresponding response on another 5-point Likert-Scale (with 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “extremely”).

Because this study focused primarily on academic motivation, the researcher designed the *Academic Information Sheet* (see Appendix J). Questions included items such as major/minor, estimated GPA, course load, and whether students felt that they had challenged themselves academically. The *Academic Information Sheet* also asked participants if and where their parents/guardians attended college to see if first-generation students differed from others.

To gather information about participants’ post-college plans, the researcher developed the *Post-College Information Sheet* (see Appendix K) as a supplement to the *Academic Information Sheet*. This document was filled out by Senior participants only. Examples of items included in the information sheet were “What are your current plans for next year, after graduating from Connecticut College?” “Have you already applied to graduate school?” and, “How confident are you that you will be accepted?”

The final document was the *Demographics* sheet (see Appendix L), also designed by the researcher. In addition to typical demographic information, such as gender, ethnicity, and age, the document included information about social class, extracurricular activities, and both varsity and club level athletics. Extracurricular activities were scored for each participant based on the number of clubs in which s/he was a member. Athletic

participation was scored for each participant where 0 was no participation, 1 was club participation, 2 was varsity participation, and 3 was both club and varsity participation.

Procedure

Since it was expected that “Senioritis” would more likely emerge in the second semester than in the first, data collection began immediately upon returning from winter break in February, 2011. To recruit freshman participants, the researcher posted a sign-up sheet on the Psychology 101/102 participation bulletin board listing sessions throughout the week, beginning at 4:30 pm in Bill Hall, room 410. When slots were filled, participants were asked to attend a 30-minute session to fill out the data collection materials described above in the *materials* section. While all participants were aware that the current study was about academic motivation and burnout, none were made aware of the researcher’s specific hypotheses until receiving the debriefing form after completing the survey packets. Participants who requested credit were compensated for their time with 30 minutes of credit-hours.

After participants were seated in the classroom, they were each given an Informed Consent document (see Appendix A). Once the Informed Consent documents were signed and returned, each participant was given a packet to fill out at their own pace including the following in this order: the GSOS, the AMS, the *Big Five Personality Inventory*, the PSS, the SWLS, the PANAS, the “*Senioritis*” *Questionnaire*, the *Academic Information Sheet*, the *Post-College Information Sheet* (completed by Seniors only), and the *Demographics* document.

Upon completing the packets, participants were asked to return all questionnaires and were given a debriefing form, further explaining the purpose of the study, as well as supplying them with sources for further research and contact information to express any concerns about the project. To recruit all senior participants, the above procedures were repeated by handing out surveys outside of Freeman dining hall during lunch hours.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the Demographic and Academic Information items (see Table 1) were summarized for various items measured in the current study and separated into the categories of “freshmen” and “seniors” to make comparing the two easier. T-tests were run to compare the academic variables between each class (reported in detail below). Preliminary descriptive statistics were also calculated for the academic and subjective well-being variables for each class (see Table 2).

Tests of Hypotheses

To test the hypothesis that there would be a difference overall in the academic motivation, academic importance, or academic effort between freshmen and seniors, with seniors showing lower scores in all three categories, a series of independent samples t-tests was conducted. There was no significant difference in academic motivation between freshmen and seniors (see Table 2), $t(41) = .084, p > .05$, with each showing medium levels of motivation. Similarly, in the comparison of academic importance, there was no significant difference between freshmen and seniors (see Table 2), $t(41) = .091, p > .05$, with each showing moderately high levels of importance. Finally, in the comparison of each class’ academic effort, there was again no significant difference between freshmen

and seniors (see Table 2), $t(41) = .275$, $p > .05$, with each showing medium levels of effort.

To test the hypothesis that the more likely seniors were to need to present a GPA (referred to as “Present-GPA”) after graduation, the higher they would score on all three academic variables, the researcher ran a series of one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients. The results yielded a marginally positive correlation between Present-GPA and academic motivation, $r = .289$, $n = 23$, $p = .09$, suggesting the higher the likelihood of a student needing to present a GPA, the higher that student’s academic motivation. There was a positive, moderate correlation between Present-GPA and academic importance, $r = .525$, $n = 23$, $p = .005$, with the likelihood of needing to show a GPA after graduation associated with a higher rating of academic importance. Finally, there was a positive, moderate correlation between present-GPA and academic effort, $r = .488$, $n = 23$, $p = .009$ with the likelihood of needing to show a GPA after graduation associated with a higher level of academic effort.

Life satisfaction and positive affect were expected to correlate positively with the academic elements, whereas perceived stress and negative affect were expected to correlate negatively with the academic variables. A correlation matrix (see Table 4) was calculated to test these hypotheses. Results are described next for academic motivation, importance, and effort.

Academic motivation had no correlation with life satisfaction, $r = .140$, $n = 43$, $p = .186$. In contrast, academic motivation had a moderately positive, correlation with positive affect, $r = .464$, $n = 43$, $p = .001$, higher levels of academic motivation were

associated with higher ratings of positive affect. Academic motivation was not significantly correlated with perceived stress, $r = -.153$, $n = 43$, $p = .163$. There was a negative correlation, however, between academic motivation and negative affect, $r = -.310$, $n = 43$, $p = .022$; high levels of academic motivation were associated with low ratings of negative affect. Ultimately, academic motivation was related to both positive and negative affect.

No correlation existed between academic importance and life satisfaction, $r = -.037$, $n = 43$, $p = .408$, nor between academic importance and negative affect, $r = -.083$, $n = 43$, $p = .298$. Moreover, academic importance was not correlated with positive affect, $r = -.139$, $n = 43$, $p = .187$. Academic importance was correlated, however, with perceived stress, $r = .288$, $n = 43$, $p = .030$, showing that stress is greater when academics are highly important to students. Thus, academic importance had no significant relationships with any of the SWB variables, with the exception of perceived stress.

Academic effort negatively correlated with negative affect, $r = -.318$, $n = 43$, $p = .019$, where high levels of academic effort were associated with low ratings of negative affect. Academic effort was not correlated with any other measure of SWB, as the correlation between academic effort to positive affect were $r = .163$, $n = 43$, $p = .148$, and the correlation scores of academic effort to perceived stress at, $r = -.003$, $n = 43$, $p = .491$. Again, academic effort had no correlation with life satisfaction, $r = .212$, $n = 43$, $p = .086$; however it did illustrate a tendency toward significance, suggesting greater life satisfaction could be associated with greater academic effort.

Exploratory Analyses

Student Opinions

Exploratory data was collected which summarized the Likert-style student opinion items of “Senioritis,” and descriptive statistics were measured to identify common themes (see Table 3). Each question on the “Senioritis” Questionnaire was answered in a five-point Likert scale, with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. T-tests were conducted for each question to investigate differences between freshmen and seniors. For the statement, “Senioritis is a common phenomenon,” freshmen ($M= 4.10$ ($SD= .447$)) had higher levels of endorsement than seniors, 3.91 ($SD= .900$), $t(41)= -.842$, $p = .018$; as the t-value was too small, this statement had no difference in opinion. The mean for the statement, “Senioritis is a real issue among college students,” was 3.61 ($SD= 1.076$) for the seniors, 3.50 ($SD= .761$) for the freshman, but there was no significant difference, $t(41)= .327$, $p >.05$. The statement, “Senioritis is detrimental to student performance,” also showed no significant difference between seniors ($M= 3.61$, $SD= .891$) and freshmen ($M=3.50$, $SD= 1.000$) $t(41)= .377$, $p >.05$. Freshmen ($M= 4.20$, $SD= .616$) endorsed the statement “I have experienced Senioritis,” slightly more strongly than seniors ($M=3.74$, $SD= .915$), but this was not a significant difference, $t(41)= -1.906$, $p >.05$. For the fifth and sixth questions, there were again no significant differences. The statement, “Currently, I feel more motivated to complete extracurricular work than academic work,” had a mean score among seniors of 3.13 ($SD= 1.254$) while the mean among freshmen was 2.80 ($SD= 1.005$), $t(41)= .943$, $p >.05$. Finally, the mean opinions of the statement, “All students experience Senioritis during their college career,” was 2.74 ($SD= 1.251$) among seniors and 2.90 ($SD= 1.021$) among freshmen; again this had no significant difference, $t(41)= -.457$, $p >.05$. In

summary, the only difference in opinion between freshmen and seniors was that freshmen felt “senioritis” is a common phenomenon more so than seniors.

Academics and Personality

To examine whether certain personality traits could predispose students to decreasing academic variables, each of the “Big Five” personality traits (as measured by the Big Five Personality Test) was correlated with academic motivation and academic effort. Because no significant overall difference was found for academic variables between the classes, the final exploratory tests were run across the entire sample. Academic motivation was not correlated with any of the Big Five traits, including Openness, $r = .231, n = 43, p = .136$, Conscientiousness, $r = .153, n = 43, p = .329$, Extroversion, $r = .059, n = 43, p = .705$, Agreeableness, $r = -.054, n = 43, p = .729$, or Neuroticism, $r = .011, n = 43, p = .944$.

Academic effort also had no correlation with Openness, $r = .141, n = 43, p = .367$, Extroversion, $r = .173, n = 43, p = .269$, Agreeableness, $r = .157, n = 43, p = .313$, or Neuroticism, $r = .006, n = 43, p = .971$; however, there was a medium-strength significant positive, correlation between academic effort and Conscientiousness $r = .481, n = 43, p = .001$, with high academic effort scores associated with high ratings of Conscientiousness.

Extracurricular and Athletic Commitment

Further exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate relationships between academic outcomes and participation levels in extracurricular activities and in athletics.

Again, because no overall academic difference was found between each class, the exploratory tests were run across the entire sample. The researcher ran one-tailed Pearson’s tests, expecting moderate positive correlations between the total of extracurricular commitments and the academic elements. Academic motivation was marginally correlated with overall extracurricular participation in freshmen, $r = .251$, $n = 20$, $p = .055$. A somewhat stronger result was observed for seniors, $r = .377$, $n = 23$, $p = .038$; showing that high academic motivation ratings could be associated with more extracurricular participation.

The relationship of academic effort to extracurricular participation differed slightly from that of academic motivation in that academic effort was not correlated with overall extracurricular participation in freshmen, $r = .118$, $n = 20$, $p = .228$, but showed a moderate negative correlation among seniors, $r = -.401$, $n = 23$, $p = .029$. While extracurricular participation in freshmen showed no relation to academic effort, seniors’ high academic effort ratings were associated with low extracurricular participation. Academic importance, however, was significant in both classes. The number of extracurricular commitments in freshmen was positively correlated with academic importance, $r = .283$, $n = 20$, $p = .034$, suggesting freshmen who were involved in more non-academic activities found academics to be more important; however, the same correlation was found to be negatively significant in seniors, $r = -.442$, $n = 23$, $p = .022$, suggesting the busier seniors are with non-academic commitments, the less important they find academics to be.

A final set of Pearson correlation coefficients investigated the relationships between two academic elements (motivation and effort) and levels of athletic

participation (athletic participation was scored such that 0 indicated no athletic participation, 1 indicated club-level participation, 2 indicated varsity-level participation, and 3 indicated both club and varsity-level participation). Neither academic motivation, $r = -.175$, $n = 43$, $p = .261$, nor academic effort, $r = -.230$, $n = 43$, $p = .139$, showed any significant correlation with athletic participation.

Discussion

The original purpose of the current study was to investigate “senioritis” — defined as a decrease in academic success throughout college years — by examining whether there were differences in three major academic variables (motivation, importance, and effort) between freshmen and seniors. The first section of the current study re-examined Chickering’s (1967) student development theory, hypothesizing that seniors would score lower than freshmen on all three academic categories. Additionally, the current study examined the relationship between post-graduate plans and academic behaviors, expecting that that a positive correlation would be found, such that the more likely a student is to need his/her GPA after graduation, the higher s/he will score in the academic elements.

The current study also investigated the degree to which academic behaviors might be related to the four elements of SWB (stress, life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect), expecting a positive correlation to exist between academic and SWB outcomes.

The final investigations of current paper were largely exploratory, employing no formal hypotheses. Student opinions of the Likert-style “senioritis” phenomenon were

summarized, and the Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extroversion, and neuroticism) were correlated with academic outcomes to investigate whether any pre-dispositions exist that elevate students’ risk for “senioritis.” Extracurricular and athletic involvement were also correlated with academic outcomes for the same purpose. Open-ended questions were included in the survey packets asking students to record their own definitions of “senioritis” and record the timeline in which it may occur. Due to a limited sample size, reliably coding these responses to test them statistically was impossible. Examples of responses were interesting, however. Student opinions of when “senioritis” began and ended ranged from “Every semester of college, even for students who are not seniors,” to “Never — senioritis does not exist.” One example of a student’s definition of “senioritis” is, “When a spring semester senior is either overwhelmed with work or bored of it to the point that they do not want to do it anymore.”

Interpretation of Findings

ERG theory (Alderfer, 1972) states that humans have a need for growth; this need may be satiated by observable progress toward a goal, according to Endowed Progress theory (Dreze & Nunes, 2006). Thus, a measure to inquire into the post-graduate plans of college seniors was included in the data collection materials. While the original claim, suggesting that a lack of academic novelty would correspond with a decrease in academic performance (Chickering, 1967), was not supported by the results, the researcher’s expectation that certain post-graduate plans which require students to uphold their current academic performance levels (i.e. post-graduate plans that would require the presentation of GPAs) may have some effect on academic variables was supported. This section of the

study was successful in that the hypothesis that a positive relationship would exist between the likelihood a student needed to present a GPA and each academic element was upheld significantly across the board.

Understanding that suggests that life satisfaction and positive affect are unlikely without success and/or progress (Dreze & Nunes, 2006), the second purpose of the current study was to examine whether a decrease in academic outcomes would be detrimental to student happiness. The researcher hypothesized that seniors who experienced lower academic motivation and performance than their freshmen peers would also experience lower ratings of subjective well-being. Results yielded four significant correlations: greater academic motivation was associated with lower negative affect; greater academic motivation was associated with greater positive affect; greater academic importance was associated with greater stress; greater academic effort was associated with lower negative affect. While the first two relationships did not support the hypothesis, the last relationship was supportive of expectations. Although exerting more effort in academics may not increase positive affect, according to the results of the current study, it may decrease negative affect, allowing room for happiness to grow. Also, low levels of negative affect may allow for students to desire exerting greater effort, also perhaps increasing happiness.

Exploratory data, discussed in the final set of analyses, were examined with no specific hypotheses, but yielded some interesting results nonetheless. Recall that a major purpose of the study was to define “senioritis” as it relates to college students today. To better understand what individuals thought of “senioritis,” (i.e. whether it is a real phenomenon, when it begins, and by whom it is experienced), the researcher summarized

participants’ responses to items asking about “senioritis.” It is possible that some participants’ responses may have been due to a lack of clarity since the question did not specify whether “senioritis” should be thought of in regards to high school or college. On numerous surveys, participants added a note next to the statement, “I have experienced ‘senioritis’” that they had experienced it in high school but not in college. This could have been a highly influential confounding variable.

One other interesting statistic of student opinions was that, although freshmen ranked slightly below seniors in both questions, each class rated the statements, “Senioritis is a real issue,” and “Senioritis is detrimental to student performance,” exactly the same, with the mean response of seniors at 3.61 and the mean of freshmen at 3.50. Recall, each of the “senioritis” questions were on a 5-Point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This observation suggests that students found the statements calling the phenomenon an “issue,” as well as “detrimental,” to both be relatively true statements.

Another exploratory question asked whether certain personality traits might predispose students to “senioritis.” Academic motivation and effort were both examined in relation to each of the Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism); however, the only relationship found to be significant was between effort exerted and conscientiousness. This finding was not surprising—conscientiousness is typically defined as showing great care, attention, and industriousness in carrying out a task or role. A conscientious person exerts great effort in completing tasks; the higher a conscientiousness score a person has, the more likely s/he is to show high levels of academic effort.

Since many college students are involved in activities outside the realm of academics, the last two objects of exploratory analysis examined the relationships between extracurricular commitment (i.e. the number of non-academic activities a student is involved in at once), athletic participation (i.e. the level to which students participated in a sport, including club and varsity athletics) and academic values. Understanding that a certain level of daily arousal is necessary to function at optimal levels (Berlyne, 1967; Duffy, 1962; Scott, 1966), the researcher expected that some correlation would exist between the academic values and extracurricular involvement.

Correlations indicated that academic motivation among both freshmen and seniors was positively correlated with the number of extracurricular commitments. Academic effort, however, had no relation with extracurricular involvement among freshman, but a negative correlation with extracurricular involvement among seniors. Academic importance was positively correlated with extracurricular commitments in freshmen, but negatively correlated in seniors. These results indicate that many non-academic commitments may increase a student’s motivation to do well academically, but (in seniors) may consequentially decrease both the amount of academic effort they exert as well as the extent to which they value academics. In freshmen, however, a greater number of extracurricular commitments correspond with an increase in both motivation and importance. Athletic participation had no relationship with any of the academic outcomes.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Limitations

While the present study did yield a number of interesting results, the main hypothesis — that seniors would experience a decrease in the academic variables — was not found to be significant. The original purpose of this study was to re-examine Student Development Theory, and use it to identify potential causes and outcomes of “senioritis.” It was, therefore, surprising that the hypothesis derived from Student Development theory was not supported, and the findings suggested that “senioritis” does not exist.

While it is certainly an important finding that seniors do not seem to show a pattern of decreasing academic motivation and performance, limitations to the study could have been responsible for the lack of support. For example, recruiting senior participants was difficult. Part of this difficulty may have been due to the timeline in which the researcher collected data. Inferring that “senioritis” would be most evident in the spring semester, the researcher waited until late in the thesis-process to recruit participants. This time-constraint led the researcher to move ahead with testing, despite the small overall sample-size. Although the total of senior volunteers was small, the return rate was fairly good with 23 returned of 29 total surveys given to seniors. Recruiting seniors was also difficult because the survey was long and senior participants had no pressing reason or reward to finish the survey. This issue resulted in a likely imbalanced senior sample where 18 of the 23 senior participants were friends of the researcher, and therefore were quite similar in attitude and campus involvement. These issues could have been overcome by including some tangible incentive for seniors to participate, such as a raffle.

Another limiting factor which lowers the generalizability of this study is that the seniors whose data was collected were all students at Connecticut College. As a small

liberal arts college, many seniors have the opportunity to earn titles and roles which identify them as student leaders for various student-groups. Coincidentally, every senior participant held a leadership role at Connecticut College, ranging from athletic captains and club presidents to student activities chairs and student government representatives. Had the researcher been able to recruit a larger sample of seniors who had not held significant leadership roles during college, the hypothesis that freshmen would have higher academic outcomes than seniors may have been supported.

Also, scoring and summarizing the raw data, it became clear that certain sections were left blank by most students. Few seniors, for example, were able to remember every class they took their freshman year, and very few participants had any idea of their family’s estimated income. Additionally, within the GSOS, the statement, “I do not give academics my full attention when completing work,” was frequently answered as neutral and accompanied with a star or question mark, suggesting many participants were confused by it. Another issue with scoring the data was found when attempting to summarize the open-ended questions included in the “Senioritis” Questionnaire. Because the sample size of each class was so small, reliably coding the data for statistical testing was essentially impossible.

Future Research

Given these limitations, it could be interesting to repeat the study at a larger school without such frequent leadership opportunities to gauge whether this academic equality between freshmen and seniors occurs in all college students or only among students at small private colleges. Recruiting senior participants with a low likelihood of

needing to present their GPA would also be useful in repeating the study, as they could be expected to better support the hypotheses. Perhaps this could be done by collecting data towards the end of a senior spring semester rather than at the beginning, since some seniors could have been offered jobs or graduate school acceptance by then.

Another interesting finding was that extracurricular involvement correlated positively with academic motivation but negatively with academic effort in seniors only, suggesting that responsibilities beyond academics may raise seniors’ intentions of doing well but distract them from accomplishing such success in the classroom. Freshmen, however, are relatively unaffected by extracurricular commitments. Further exploration of this topic could yield interesting results, perhaps identifying potential causes of changes in college academic behaviors.

Additionally, further exploration could be done to examine relationships between subjective well-being and academic behaviors. While the current study found moderate correlations between affect and academic motivation and performance, no correlations were found with perceived stress or life satisfaction. Re-testing these correlations with a much larger sample group, assuring a greater variety of senior participants are involved, could yield more representative results.

Conclusion

Although Chickering’s (1967) Student Development theory may still hold true for high school students or students at larger universities, it was not supported among the college students tested in the current study. No overall academic difference was found between freshmen and seniors. While novelty had no effect on seniors’ academic

performance, as Student Development theory claimed it would, extracurricular commitments seemed to be a relatively reliable determinant of the academic variables among seniors. Non-academic roles had no relationship with motivation, but corresponded with lower academic effort and importance. Additionally, the trend that most of the seniors expected that they would need to present GPAs after graduation may have been significant in not supporting Student Development theory since positive correlations existed between Present-GPA and all three academic variables. While the current study was not conclusive enough to develop any of its own theories pertaining to academic motivation, it is clear that not all college students experience “senioritis.”

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Table 1

Means of Demographic and Academic Information Items in the Current Study

Demographic Item	Freshmen	Seniors
Athletics level (0-3)	1.25	1.27
# of Extracurricular	2.40	3.22
GPA	3.439	3.595
Difficulty of 1 st Class	1.07	2.33
Difficulty of 2 nd Class	1.02	2.14
Difficulty of 3 rd Class	1.15	2.43
Difficulty of 4 th Class	1.13	2.11
# Dropped courses	0.50	0.39
First generation (No/Yes)	1.10	0.17
Challenge overall (1-5)	3.86	4.22
Openness	31.20	25.57
Conscientiousness	33.60	29.83
Extroversion	27.60	25.57
Agreeableness	32.65	25.57
Neuroticism	23.15	17.70

Table 2

Mean Scores for Academic Elements and Subjective Well-Being Elements

Element	Freshmen	Seniors
Academic importance	22.20	22.26
Academic effort	17.70	18.00
Academic motivation	61.20	61.52
Perceived stress	30.40	30.52
Life satisfaction	18.95	21.61
Positive affect	39.05	36.65
Negative affect	19.30	21.17

Table 3

Means Opinion Scores of Likert Questions on the “Senioritis” Questionnaire

Senioritis Item	Freshmen	Seniors
It is a Real issue	3.50	3.61
It is Detrimental	3.50	3.61
It is Common	4.10	3.91
Personally experienced	4.20	3.74
Motivation source	2.80	3.13
All students experience it	2.90	2.74

Table 4

Correlation Matrix of Relationships between Academic Elements and SWB Elements

	PSS	+ Affect	- Affect	SLS
Importance	$r = .288$ $p = .030$	$r = -.139$ $p = .187$	$r = -.083$ $p = .298$	$r = -.037$ $p = .408$
Effort	$r = -.003$ $p = .491$	$r = .163$ $p = .148$	$r = -.318$ $p = .019$	$r = .212$ $p = .086$
Motivation	$r = -.153$ $p = .163$	$r = .464$ $p = .001$	$r = -.301$ $p = .022$	$r = .140$ $p = .184$

Appendix A

Informed Consent Document

I hereby consent to participate in Chelsea Manning’s research about motivation among college students.

- I understand that this research will involve completing a series of questionnaires.
- I understand that this research will take about 30 minutes.
- I have been told that there are no known risks or discomforts related to participating in this research.
- I have been told that Chelsea Manning can be contacted at x4001 or cmanning@conncoll.edu.
- I understand that I may decline to answer any questions as I see fit, and that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time.
- I understand that all information will be identified with a code number and NOT my name.
- I have been advised that I may contact the researcher who will answer any questions that I may have about the purposes and procedures of this study.
- I understand that this study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals and that my responses will be combined with other participants’ data for the purpose of statistical analyses.
- I consent to publication of the study results as long as the identity of all participants is protected.

I understand that this research has been approved by the Connecticut College Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Concerns about any aspect of this study may be addressed to Professor Jason Nier, Chairperson of the Connecticut College IRB (x 5057 or jason.nier@conncoll.edu).

I am at least 18 years of age, and I have read these explanations and assurances and voluntarily consent to participate in this research about motivation in college students.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in this thesis research of motivation among college students.

In this study, I am attempting to re-examine Chickering’s (1967) finding from his Student Development Theory that motivation decreases in later college years. I also hope to more clearly define “Senioritis” as it exists in the Connecticut College community, and determine whether this phenomenon is a detrimental one and whether certain traits predispose students to succumb to it. I will examine this through the lens of positive psychology, which puts greater focus on human strength and potential than other fields of psychology. Additionally, I am investigating whether post-college plans affect how seniors perform in their second semesters, hypothesizing that those planning on options requiring strong GPAs will have higher intrinsic academic motivation, therefore performing better academically and achieving greater life-satisfaction.

To my knowledge, little empirical evidence actually exists to explain the frequent phenomenon, “Senioritis.” Chickering’s (1967) Student Development Theory suggests that development decreases as conditions become constant. In other words, as the excitement of college life fades, academic motivation consequentially falls. Later, a Canadian study (Cote & Levine, 2000) compared attitude and aptitude, finding that motivation better predicted academic achievement than did intelligence. Studies have investigated differences in college students’ academic motivation and performance, but I found it surprising that few actually used the term, “Senioritis.” Because the term is so commonly used and understood today, I thought it important to add into the current body of motivation research.

If you have any concerns about the manner in which this research was conducted please contact, Professor Jason Nier, IRB chairperson (x 5057 or jason.nier@conncoll.edu).

If you are interested in this topic and want more information pertaining to existing literature in this area, please contact me, Chelsea Manning (x4001 or cmanning@conncoll.edu).

Listed below are two sources you may want to consult to learn more about this topic:

Chickering, A. (1967). Institutional objectives and student development in college. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 3, 287-304.

Cote, J., & Levine, C. (2000). Attitude vs. aptitude: Is intelligence or motivation more important for positive higher-education outcomes? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15, 58-80.

Appendix C

Generalized Student Opinion Scale

Please circle the answer that best represents how you **currently** feel **this semester** about each of the statements below.

1. Doing well academically is important to me.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. I engage in good effort throughout my classes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. I am not curious about how I do academically relative to other activities.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. I am not concerned about my grades.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. My grades are important to me.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. I give my best effort in every class.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. I could work harder in my classes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. I would like to know how well I do in my classes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. I do not give academics my full attention while doing school work.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. While doing school work, I am able to persist to completion of the task.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Appendix D
Academic Motivation Scale

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to college

Does not correspond at all	Corresponds a little	Corresponds moderately	Corresponds a lot	Corresponds exactly			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because with only a high school degree I would not find a high paying job later on.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because I think that a college education will help me better prepare for the career I've chosen.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Honestly, I don't know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my college degree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the pleasure I experience when I read interesting authors.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I once had a good reason for going to college but now I wonder whether I should continue
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments

Does not correspond at all	Corresponds a little		Corresponds moderately		Corresponds a lot		Corresponds exactly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because of the fact that when I succeed in college I feel important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because I want to have “the good life” later on
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the pleasure I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects that appeal to me
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the pleasure I experience when completely absorbed by what certain authors have written
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I can’t see why I go to college, and frankly I couldn’t care less.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the satisfaction I feel when in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	To show myself that I am an intelligent person.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	In order to have a better salary later on
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because I feel that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	For the “high” feeling I experience when reading about various interesting subjects.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because college allows me to achieve a personal satisfaction in a quest for excellence in studies
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.

Appendix E
Big Five Personality Inventory

Please circle the number that corresponds with the answer that best represents how you feel about each of the statements below.

- 1 = Strongly Agree**
- 2 = Agree**
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree**
- 4 = Disagree**
- 5 = Strongly Disagree**

I see myself as someone who...

- 1 2 3 4 5 Is talkative
- 1 2 3 4 5 Tends to find fault with others
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does a thorough job
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is depressed, blue
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is original, comes up with new ideas
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is reserved
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is helpful and unselfish with others
- 1 2 3 4 5 Can be somewhat careless
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is relaxed, handles stress well
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is curious about many things
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is full of energy
- 1 2 3 4 5 Starts quarrels with others
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is a reliable worker
- 1 2 3 4 5 Can be tense
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is ingenious, a deep thinker
- 1 2 3 4 5 Generates a lot of enthusiasm
- 1 2 3 4 5 Has a forgiving nature
- 1 2 3 4 5 Tends to be disorganized
- 1 2 3 4 5 Worries a lot
- 1 2 3 4 5 Has an active imagination
- 1 2 3 4 5 Tends to be quiet
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is generally trusting
- 1 2 3 4 5 Tends to be lazy
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is inventive
- 1 2 3 4 5 Has an assertive personality
- 1 2 3 4 5 Can be cold and aloof
- 1 2 3 4 5 Perseveres until the task is complete
- 1 2 3 4 5 Can be moody

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Values artistic, aesthetic experiences |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Is sometimes shy, inhibited |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Is considerate and kind to everyone |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Does things efficiently |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Remains calm in tense situations |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Prefers work that is routine |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Is outgoing, sociable |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Is sometimes rude to others |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Makes plans and follows through |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Gets nervous easily |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Likes to reflect, play with ideas |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Has few artistic interests |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Likes to cooperate with others |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Is easily distracted |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature |

Appendix F

Perceived Stress Scale

Please circle the answer that best represents how you feel about each of the statements below.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

9. In the last month, how often have you been angered by things that were outside your control?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very Often

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Fairly Often Very often

Appendix H

PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Scale)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Please circle the number that corresponds with the response that indicates how you feel about **your current academic semester**.

- 1 = Very slightly or not at all**
- 2 = A little**
- 3 = Moderately**
- 4 = Quite a bit**
- 5 = Extremely**

Interested.....	1	2	3	4	5
Disinterested.....	1	2	3	4	5
Excited.....	1	2	3	4	5
Upset.....	1	2	3	4	5
Strong.....	1	2	3	4	5
Guilty.....	1	2	3	4	5
Scared.....	1	2	3	4	5
Hostile.....	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiastic.....	1	2	3	4	5
Proud.....	1	2	3	4	5
Irritable.....	1	2	3	4	5
Alert.....	1	2	3	4	5
Ashamed.....	1	2	3	4	5
Inspired.....	1	2	3	4	5
Nervous.....	1	2	3	4	5
Determined.....	1	2	3	4	5
Attentive.....	1	2	3	4	5
Jittery.....	1	2	3	4	5
Active.....	1	2	3	4	5
Afraid.....	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix I

“Senioritis” Questionnaire

Please write your response in as many or few words you would like.

1. Please write your own definition for “Senioritis” below.

2. Is “Senioritis” experienced by students in all grades or only by seniors? Please explain.

3. When does “Senioritis” begin and how long does it last?

Please circle the answer that best represents how you feel about each of the statements below.

1. “Senioritis” is a real issue among college students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. “Senioritis” is detrimental to student performance.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. “Senioritis” is a common phenomenon.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

---- OVER----

4. I have experienced “Senioritis.”

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. Currently, I feel more motivated to complete extracurricular work than academic work.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. All students experience “Senioritis” during their college career.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. Typically, how motivated are you to complete your academic work at the beginning of each semester? Please circle your response.

Extremely motivated 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Unmotivated

8. Typically, how motivated are you to complete your academic work at the end of each semester? Please circle your response.

Extremely motivated 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Unmotivated

Appendix J

Academic Information Sheet

Class Year: 2014 2013 2012 2011 Other _____

Major(s): _____

Minor(s): _____

Estimated GPA's: (please fill out each year as applicable)

Estimated Freshmen GPA: _____

Estimated Sophomore GPA: _____

Estimated Junior GPA: _____

Estimated Senior GPA: _____

Please list any academic awards you have received in college. Please include the year.

Name of Award

Academic Year Received

Please list the classes you have taken/are taking in the corresponding blanks (Note: if classes were taken at a school other than Connecticut College, please still include below):

Freshman Fall Semester:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
- (5) _____

Freshman Spring Semester:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
- (5) _____

Senior Fall Semester:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
- (5) _____

-----OVER-----

Senior Spring Semester:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- (5) _____

Have you dropped any classes at Connecticut College? Yes No

If yes, what was the class and why did you drop it?

Class	Reason for Dropping
_____	_____
_____	_____

Are you first generation in your family to attend college/university? Yes No

If your parents/guardians attended college, where did they attend?

Name of Institution	Year of Graduation
Mother(s): _____	Year of Graduation: _____
Fathers(s): _____	Year of Graduation: _____
Other Guardian(s): _____	Year of Graduation: _____

Please circle the number that corresponds with your response for the following question:

How frequently would you say that you have challenged yourself each year?

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

1 2 3 4 5 Freshman year

1 2 3 4 5 Sophomore year

1 2 3 4 5 Junior year

1 2 3 4 5 Senior year

Appendix K
----- SENIORS ONLY -----
(Freshmen, please continue to the next page)

Post-College Information Sheet

In the space below, please describe your current plans for next year, after graduating from Connecticut College?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely is it that you will need to present your transcript and/or GPA for any of your post-graduation options?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very Likely

On a scale of 1 to 5, how concerned are you that your academic work from the current semester, will affect your post-college success?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very Concerned

On a scale of 1 to 5, how well does your academic performance this semester reflect how well you have performed academically throughout your college career?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very Well

Have you already applied for jobs? Yes No

(If applicable) On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you in getting a job you want?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very Much

Have you already applied to graduate school? Yes No

(If applicable) On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you in getting into the graduate school you want?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very Much

Appendix L
Demographics

Please circle the response that best represents you. If the correct answer is not available, please write your response next to the question.

Date: _____

Age: _____

Gender: Male Female Other _____

Ethnicity: White Black Asian Latino/Latina
 Native American Pacific Islander Other _____

In the blank, please indicate your family’s estimated annual income: _____

Are you a Varsity-Level Athlete at Connecticut College? Yes No

If so, please list the sport(s) you are involved with and the years(s) in which you participate:

Sport	Academic Years participated
_____	_____
_____	_____

Are you a Club-Level Athlete at Connecticut College? Yes No

If so, please list the sport(s) you are involved with and the season(s) in which you participate:

Sports	Academic Years participated
_____	_____
_____	_____

----- OVER -----

In the space below each corresponding year, please list all extracurricular activities in which you have participated **during your college career**.

Senior year:

Junior year:

Sophomore year:

Freshman year: