

# Student Conduct Administration: How Students Perceive the Educational Value and Procedural Fairness of Their Disciplinary Experiences

Rachel Heafitz King

*For this study, 1,884 adjudicated college students provided their impressions of the educational value and procedural fairness of their disciplinary experiences. Results indicated that a strong correlation exists between perceived fairness and educational value. Differences in students' perceptions emerged in regards to age, gender, and GPA, among other characteristics. The value students assigned to the disciplinary hearing they attended with a student affairs professional best predicted the degree to which they believed their involvement in the process would cause them to avoid future violations of university policy and change their behavior.*

The increasingly legalistic climate of college student discipline (Giacomini & Schrage, 2009; Lake, 2009) has sparked interest in the due process rights granted to students on college campuses (Bostic & Gonzalez, 1999; Janosik & Riehl, 2000) and the formality of institutions' disciplinary procedures (Fitch & Murry, 2001; Gehring, 2001; Martin & Janosik, 2004; Stoner, 2000). In comparison to the body of research on student conduct practices (Dannells, 1990, 1991; Lancaster, Cooper, & Harman, 1993; Lowery, Palmer, & Gehring, 2005) or the impact of relevant legislation (Gregory & Janosik, 2003; Janosik, 2004), limited data have been generated directly from adjudicated students to better understand whether they consider their discipline experiences educational (Howell, 2005; Lewis & Thombs, 2005; Mullane, 1999). This imbalance in the literature and

the trend of procedural rigidity conflict with the priorities of the student affairs profession, namely, the commitment to facilitating college student learning and development (Woodward, Love, & Komives, 2000).

In light of the paucity of studies investigating adjudicated students' perspectives, the purpose of this study was to ascertain this population's perceptions of the procedural fairness and educational value of their institution's student discipline process. Following a review of relevant literature pertaining to college student discipline, the methods for obtaining and analyzing the data are provided. In conclusion, the findings regarding students' perceptions are reviewed and implications presented.

## THE STUDENT DISCIPLINE PROCESS

Higher education administrators establish standards of conduct for students to ensure the safety of the campus community and to facilitate the pursuit of the institution's educational mission. They also create discipline systems, in part, to allow students to demonstrate their capacities for accountability, responsibility, and respect for others (Healy & Liddell, 1998). In an effort to prevent significant disruptions or harm to the university community and the individuals, student affairs professionals use their institution's discipline process to intercede in student misbehavior before it escalates.

Student conduct administrators hold disciplinary meetings, often one-on-one with

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Rachel King is Associate Dean of Students at Curry College.

college students, to address alleged violations of university policy and, ideally, to identify the developmental needs of each student while reaching a resolution (Zdziarski & Wood, 2008). These policies and the systems in place for addressing alleged violations look similar on many college campuses, in part due to the prominence of model codes of student conduct. Stoner and Lowery's (2004) model code, while not the only one published (Pavela, 1997, 2006), has heavily influenced the structure of disciplinary processes at institutions of higher education. Codes of conduct delineate behavioral expectations and the means for holding students accountable when allegations of misconduct arise. They also afford students certain rights designed to ensure due process at public universities and the basic rights granted at private institutions through contractual obligations (Footer, 1996; Lowery, 2008). Commonly issued student rights include a letter of notice of a hearing, an opportunity to be heard at the hearing, and the opportunity to be accompanied by an advisor, among others (Stoner & Lowery, 2004).

Though the degree of student rights offered during the discipline process has been analyzed (Bostic & Gonzalez, 1999; Janosik & Riehl, 2000), how adjudicated students themselves perceive the fairness of the process is not well known (Mullane, 1999). In fact, students are rarely included in research on college student discipline, due in part, perhaps, to the confidentiality protections that inhibit access to adjudicated students' identities or educational records. Nevertheless, several characteristics are known to be associated with participation as a charged student in the discipline process. An overview of these attributes, along with a review of the few accounts of students' experiences, follows.

## DISCIPLINED STUDENTS

Examinations of commonalities among the adjudicated college population have considered

students' gender and age, along with their backgrounds and academic performance. Analysis of differences between those students found in violation of conduct policies and those who have not encountered the discipline process reveals that more men and first-year students violate university policies (Dannells, 1997; Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005; Polomsky & Blackhurst, 2000). When comparing adjudicated first-year men with their nonadjudicated counterparts, the former were more likely to have come from higher income families, to have engaged in heavy alcohol consumption, and to be White (LaBrie, Tawalbeh, & Earleywine, 2006). Evidenced through a positive correlation, high school lawbreaking behavior may also serve as a predictor of university lawbreaking behavior (Low, Williamson, & Cottingham, 2004). Research on the relationship between disciplinary action and GPA is limited and conflicting (Dannells, 1997), though it has been shown that students found responsible for repeated disciplinary violations assigned lower ratings on perceptions of the quality of available academic and vocational experiences than those students without judicial histories (Polomsky & Blackhurst, 2000).

Efforts to better understand adjudicated college students have also questioned the relationship between students' discipline referral and their moral development. Foundational theorists researching moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Rest, 1986; Gilligan, 1982) have considered how individuals approach moral reasoning, of relevance when considering college students' decision-making and transgressions. In a study of the levels of moral development of 30 undergraduate students, as determined by the Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest, 1986), students presumed at higher levels of moral development by the DIT participated in fewer violations of university policies than the less morally

developed students (Chassey, 1999). This trend is reinforced by a more recent investigation involving a greater number of participants. Over 200 adjudicated and nonadjudicated college students were issued the updated DIT2 (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999), with results demonstrating that students who violated the institution's conduct code reasoned at a lower level of moral judgment (Cooper & Schwartz, 2007).

In spite of the informative identification of these characteristics distinguishing adjudicated students from their nondisciplined peers, very little is known about how the experiences of students facing discipline differ based on demographic characteristics. A review of the narrow body of literature regarding students' perceptions of their disciplinary experiences appears below.

## DISCIPLINED STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

The impact of students' experiences in a conduct process, including participation in any subsequent sanctions, has been considered through both qualitative and quantitative inquiries. One of the few explorations into how students make meaning of their interactions with hearing officers revealed that adjudicated students advised incoming students of the judicial process to be honest, appear remorseful, and tell the judicial officer what they want to hear (Howell, 2005). Additionally, the participants expressed an intention to discontinue the behavior that brought them into the process, but also maintained they would not likely alter their use of alcohol.

To gauge disciplined student opinions and better understand their connection to moral development, 34 undergraduate students sanctioned for committing low-level violations of university policy completed the DIT and a survey regarding the perceived fairness

and educational value of their disciplinary process (Mullane, 1999). The results indicated that students' perceptions of the process as educational was in fact a function of moral development, with a significant correlation existing between DIT scores and ratings of educational value,  $r(34) = .41, p < .01$ . Furthermore, those students with lower levels of moral development, based on the DIT, were less inclined to find educational value in the process, even when they considered it fair. The study also revealed a significant correlation between perceived fairness and educational value,  $t(34) = .51, p < .01$  (Mullane, 1999).

Given that participation in any mandated sanctions also represents a significant component of students' discipline experiences, research on the impact of sanctions serves to inform practitioners' work in the area of college student discipline. Students required to complete community service or write a reflection paper at one medium-sized, private university demonstrated lower rates of recidivism than those assigned to passive sanctions, such as warnings or probation, or the active sanction of an educational class (Kompalla & McCarthy, 2001). Categorically, active and passive sanctions yielded equivalent recidivism rates.

The above review of the body of research on higher education discipline processes, the adjudicated college student population, and their perceptions of the conduct process, highlights the fact that significant gaps remain in the literature on student conduct administration, namely with respect to data obtained from students themselves. Consequently, this study, inspired largely by Mullane's (1999) investigation into students' perceptions of the fairness and educational value of the discipline process, is intended to contribute to a greater understanding of this area of college student affairs from the students' perspective.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To investigate students' perceptions, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of the educational value and procedural fairness of their discipline process?
- Do any of their disciplinary circumstances (university attending, type of violation, number of times through the discipline process, sanctions received, time elapsed since process, or residence on campus or off campus) relate to students' levels of perceived fairness and/or educational value of their discipline process?
- Do any of their demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, family members' level of education, GPA, or number of credits completed) relate to students' levels of perceived fairness and/or educational value of their discipline process?
- Do the demographic characteristics and disciplinary circumstances, along with perceived fairness, explain the level of educational value students attribute to their discipline experiences?

## METHODS

The purpose of this research was to investigate the extent to which college students perceive their discipline process to be fair and educationally valuable, accounting for differences in students' disciplinary circumstances and demographic characteristics. A post-positivist framework guided this study, meaning the research paradigm supported acquiring knowledge through a deductive process, and well suits the survey methodology employed (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). An adaptation of Mullane's (1999) instrument was administered to a sample of adjudicated college students at 3 public universities in a Western

state. While Mullane's research investigated the relationship between educational value and fairness in the discipline process, the survey was completed by only 34 students at one institution, and students' perceptions were analyzed in relation to their level of moral development, rather than their demographic or disciplinary characteristics.

In this study, limited data on students' assessments of their discipline experiences hindered speculation as to how their perceptions may vary with respect to differing demographic characteristics. Based on the aforementioned literature, however, it was hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between the perceived fairness and educational value students ascribe to the discipline process (Mullane, 1999). As a secondary purpose, this study also is intended to enhance student affairs practitioners' knowledge of the educational value that students ascribe to various commonly assigned disciplinary sanctions. As a result, this study serves to aid practitioners in designing successful preventative and reactive interventions to foster student growth.

## PARTICIPANTS

Research participants included 1,884 students in attendance at a Western U.S. state's three largest residential, 4-year, public universities, labeled State University (SU), West University (WU), and Mountain College (MC). The selected institutions offered ideal academic environments for exploring students' disciplinary experiences, as each campus faced significant challenges in its recent history, including alcohol-related student deaths and athletics scandals, putting pressure on university administrators to establish effective preventative and responsive disciplinary programs. SU enrolls approximately 25,000 students, WU 28,000, and MC 13,000. Located roughly 45 to 60 miles apart, each of

these institutions has a predominantly White student body, with SU, WU, and MC enrolling 12%, 14%, and 15% ethnic minority students, respectively. Forty percent of MC students are considered first-generation. With respect to disciplinary processes, WU differs from the other two colleges in that it implements more rigid systems for sanctioning and explicitly articulates zero tolerance policies for violations of certain sections of the student code of conduct, imposing a minimum sanction of suspension. Additionally, for several years prior to this study, WU enforced a system imposing suspension for alcohol or drug violations after 3 strikes and at one point after 2 strikes.

Despite their noteworthy distinctions, all three institutions utilize similar and fairly traditional techniques to address student misconduct, especially with respect to low-level violations of university standards. Most alleged violations result in one-on-one meetings between the student and a professional staff member, and students found responsible for any number of infractions, predominantly substance use, receive an assortment of educational sanctions and perhaps a probationary status. Typical sanctions include alcohol or drug courses, substance use assessments, community restitution, and letters of parental notification, among others. The educational sanctions imposed at these public institutions appear consistent with those assigned at other colleges and universities across the country, as evidenced through student affairs professional organization resources and conferences.

SU students made up 23.6% of the 1,884-person sample, WU students 60.3%, and MC students 16.1%. Though the varying sizes of sampling frames at each institution led to disproportionate representation of WU attendees, each individual campus yielded similar response rates. Study participants had a mean age of 19 ( $SD = 2.1$ ) at the time

of the disciplinary incident; 57.0% were male and 0.4% identified as transgender. The overall racial composition of the sample was representative of the three campuses with students self-identifying as follows: 85.1% Caucasian/White, 6.4% multiracial, 3.0% Latino/a, 2.3% other, 2.2% Asian / Pacific Islander, 0.6% African American / Black, and 0.4% American Indian / Alaskan. The multiracial category was applied to respondents who selected more than one racial category to describe themselves. Classified as first-generation college students for the purposes of this study, 18.4% of the sample reported having no parents or guardians who attended college. In terms of their own advancement through higher education, participants indicated an average of completed coursework between 31 and 60 hours with the mean GPA within the 2.5–2.9 range.

## DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Only those students who participated in their institution's discipline process, charged with violating the code of conduct, whether found responsible or not, and who were classified as current students by the universities' judicial database records were deemed eligible participants. The students may have been charged with any violation, though all three institutions adjudicate predominantly cases involving alcohol and drug violations. To maintain anonymity, students received an e-mail from an administrator at their institution inviting them to complete a survey by clicking on a link to an external website, which was identified as being unaffiliated with any of the participating universities. Respondents were given the option of entering to win an incentive, either a \$25 iTunes® gift card or a \$25 Starbucks® gift card, at their discretion. E-mails were delivered to a total of 14,659 students (3,301 at SU, 9,144 at WU, and



2,214 at MC). Participants received one reminder e-mail from staff members at two of the three institutions, with WU electing not to issue the follow-up request, in part due to the scale of that institution's sampling frame. The final total ( $N = 1,884$ ) constituted a response rate of 12.9% overall, 13.5% for SU, 12.4% for WU, and 13.7% for MC.

## Instrument

The measures described below were explored using an adaptation of a questionnaire designed by Mullane (1999) to assess adjudicated undergraduate students' judgment of their discipline process as fair and educational. Reliability and validity evidence for the original questionnaire were established through a pilot study at a private, Southeastern university enrolling approximately 14,000 students (Mullane, 1999). The resulting modified instrument distributed in this study consisted of 40 items, collecting information in four categories: disciplinary circumstances, value of sanctions, educational value and fairness, and demographic data. The questionnaire was administered in a pilot study at MC one semester prior to this research, resulting in minor alterations based on participant feedback.

One modification eliminated the need for students to frequently indicate items that were not applicable throughout the survey, especially when identifying the nature of their violations or sanctions received. Instead, the web-based survey program permitted skip patterns or branching, a means of directing online participants to relevant items based on their responses, without their awareness. Consequently, the number of total responses per question varied and students were not omitted on the basis of what would traditionally be interpreted statistically as missing data since the unanswered items did not apply. The survey design allowed for most

questions to elicit valuable information from students involved in disciplinary processes independently of other survey items.

*Disciplinary Circumstances.* Several factors were examined to gain a clear depiction of respondents' disciplinary circumstances. This category of items primarily required participants to select the most appropriate option in a multiple choice question. The survey requested students to disclose the university they attend, their residential status on or off campus at the time of the conduct incident at issue, the number of times they had gone through the discipline process, whether they attended a hearing with a conduct officer, and how much time had passed since the proceedings occurred. Those who attended their hearing were also asked to rate the value of that meeting. Respondents also specified the type of violation allegedly committed, whether they were determined responsible, and if so, whether they completed any assigned sanctions.

*Value of Sanctions.* The second measure pertained to the value of sanctions issued as a result of violating university standards. Students selected the sanctions they received from among 14 consequences, such as community service or alcohol education, and rated the applicable items using a 3-point Likert-type scale, including response options of 1 (*very valuable*), 2 (*somewhat valuable*), and 3 (*not at all valuable*).

*Educational Value and Fairness.* These dependent variables were assessed, again using a Likert-type scale which ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*) and afforded no neutral response option, as was the design of the original instrument (Mullane, 1999). The dependent variable of educational value was measured by responses to the following three items: first, students indicated whether or not their experience in their institution's discipline process will help them to avoid future violations

of university policy; second, they rated whether their involvement will lead them to alter their choices; and third, students denoted their level of agreement with a direct statement asserting the perceived educational value of the process. Additionally, eight items required participants to reflect upon the extent to which they felt fairly treated throughout their discipline experience. These items, which targeted students' understanding and awareness of various rights throughout the hearing process, such as being accompanied by an advisor or offered the opportunity to provide names of witnesses, were adapted from a section of the original instrument (Mullane, 1999).

Factor analysis was conducted to verify the relationship between the constructs used to measure fairness and educational value (Creswell, 2002). Using principal component analysis, two factors emerged, both satisfying the criterion of at least three variables per factor. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency with the sample, with Cronbach's alpha estimates of  $\alpha = .855$  for educational value and  $\alpha = .833$  for those items measuring perceived fairness.

*Demographic Data.* Lastly, the questionnaire collected demographic data such as respondents' age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Additionally, this section of the survey inquired about the students' college grade point averages (GPA), number of credits completed, and familial level of education. Findings generated in a pilot study in preparation for this research suggest an inverse relationship between GPA and perceived educational value. Though this seems counterintuitive initially, students reported a desire to have their grades taken into consideration when receiving sanctions for misconduct, to a degree that may not materialize (Janosik, 1995). Students struggling academically may be better positioned to see the connections between their disciplinary referral and scholastic difficulties

and the potential benefits of utilizing campus resources. As for the exploration into familial educational status, first-generation college students often experience unique challenges at an institution of higher education and any significant differences between this population and other adjudicated students may illuminate an area in need of further research in the field of college student discipline.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive and inferential data analyses were employed to interpret the survey results. To investigate whether differences existed in how students rated the conduct process based on their demographic characteristics or disciplinary status, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted at the .05 significance level. Each attribute was analyzed twice: once to explore its relationship to students' sense of procedural fairness of the conduct system and a second time to look at how the variables may relate to the educational value respondents ascribed to their experiences. Lastly, this study investigated whether the demographic variables and disciplinary status, along with perceived fairness, predicted the level of educational value students assigned to their discipline process. To answer this question, a stepwise multiple regression analysis (SMRA) was conducted in order to create a model containing the independent variables that best predict educational value (Freed, Ryan, & Hess, 1991).

## LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations which may impede the generalizability of the findings. Part of a state system of higher education, the three public universities selected possess differing limitations than private institutions in administering student discipline (Dannells

& Lowery, 2004). Consequently, participants' views may not reflect the experiences of students attending private colleges and universities. Furthermore, the three institutions studied enroll predominantly White, traditional-age students and may not represent the perceptions of students at private institutions or those with substantially different cultural, social, or economic backgrounds. The composition of the sample also included a disproportionate number of students from West University, which houses a less flexible conduct process that may have evoked more antagonism from students than the other two institutions. This college also enrolls a larger percentage of out-of-state students and charges higher tuition, which can facilitate a climate of entitlement.

The study's reliance on self-report data may lower confidence in the validity of the findings; however, similarities to the results of the pilot study and existing literature reinforce the conclusions. Additionally, students self-selected to participate in this study, which can create nonresponse bias, should those individuals who responded to the survey differ from those who did not. Evidence of potential response error includes the fact that 23.9% of participants stated they were found not responsible for violating the code of conduct. This percentage likely exceeds the proportion of students found not responsible in the overall adjudicated student population, a discrepancy that may reflect that students found not responsible expressed more interest in completing the survey.

Though the electronic method of data collection produced a large sample of nearly 1,900 students, the response rate of 12.9% could also contribute to nonresponse bias. It is difficult to determine how representative the sample was of the adjudicated student population at the participating universities, not only in terms of students' perceptions, but also in their biographic and demographic

characteristics, as that information was not obtained nor easily accessible.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

*Disciplinary Circumstances.* Descriptive data pertaining to disciplinary status revealed that the majority of participants (72%,  $n = 1,357$ ) disclosed going through the conduct process one time, nearly 43% ( $n = 807$ ) within the last 5 months of taking the survey, and 54% ( $n = 1,017$ ) between 6 months to more than 2 years prior. Sixty-six percent of the sample ( $n = 1,249$ ) lived on campus at the time of their most recent conduct incident, and as expected, 75% of students ( $n = 1,312$ ) reported that the disciplinary matter in question involved alcohol, constituting the most frequent type of violation. Most students (82%) did attend a meeting with a hearing officer, and of the 1,451 students asked to rate how valuable they considered that meeting, 17% ( $n = 248$ ) said it was very valuable, 38% ( $n = 555$ ) deemed it somewhat valuable, and 45% ( $n = 648$ ) declared it not at all valuable. Almost one quarter of the sample (24%,  $n = 396$ ) reported they were found not responsible during their process and therefore, received no disciplinary sanctions. More than two thirds of the students surveyed who did receive sanctions (70%,  $n = 883$ ), had already completed them.

*Value of Sanctions.* As for the perceived value of sanctions received, the data indicated that more students found no value in the majority of sanctions than the contrary. Although several of the sanctions received nearly even ratings between at least some value and no value, such as the in-person drug class and an alcohol or drug assessment, only three sanctions earned more positive responses than negative from those students who received the respective sanction: in-person alcohol class at 63%



( $n = 474$ ), counseling session at 55% ( $n = 327$ ), and community service at 54% ( $n = 781$ ).

*Educational Value and Fairness.* After summing the three items used to measure educational value, scores ranged from 3.00 to 12.00 with a mean of 6.95 ( $SD = 2.61$ ). The large variance,  $\sigma^2 = 6.80$ , demonstrates the wide spread of the data with a high frequency of responses at the extremes, suggesting a proportionate ratio of students describing their discipline experiences positively and negatively. Summing the eight survey items measuring perceived fairness generated a similar finding, with a mean score of 21.57 ( $SD = 4.82$ ,  $\sigma^2 = 23.22$ ) out of a possible range of 8.00 to 32.00. For both fairness and educational value scales, the higher the score the fairer and more educational the student considered their process.

### Relationship Between Educational Value, Fairness, and Disciplinary Circumstances

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between the two dependent variables, educational value and fairness,  $r(1,667) = .497$ ,  $p < .01$ . To comprehend the relationships between students' disciplinary circumstances and their ratings of the educational value and fairness of the process, one-way ANOVAs at the .05 significance level were conducted, with the results listed in Table 1. Across institutions, respondents at SU and MC ranked their discipline processes higher in educational value than those in attendance at WU,  $F(2, 1,666) = 10.625$ ,  $p = .000$ . Residence on or off campus contributed to how fair students regarded their discipline process, with higher ratings among on-campus students,  $F(1, 1,666) = 13.565$ ,  $p = .000$ .

The one-way analysis of variance illustrated that the type of violation for which participants entered their institution's conduct process related to both their beliefs about

the educational nature,  $F(9, 1,666) = 5.441$ ,  $p = .000$ , and the fairness of their experiences,  $F(9, 1,666) = 2.925$ ,  $p = .002$ . Post hoc comparisons showed that individuals classified into the academic misconduct group scored higher on educational value of their process than groups involved with alcohol, drugs, noise, and numerous combinations. Conversely, respondents adjudicated for other violations—which included an assortment of misconduct ranging from residential life policy violations to health and safety concerns—supplied lower ratings of educational value and fairness than those students confronting alcohol charges. The five categories containing violations of substance use policies (those constituting the greatest percentage of student misconduct) did not significantly differ from one another.

The more frequently students participated in the conduct process, the less educational value they gained,  $F(4, 1,666) = 9.771$ ,  $p = .000$ . In terms of fairness, differences appeared between those who had gone through the process once or not at all and those who participated more than three times, with the latter describing the process as less fair than the former,  $F(4, 1,666) = 4.419$ ,  $p = .001$ . With respect to students' receipt of and progress completing sanctions, respondents found not responsible, who therefore received no sanctions, yielded higher fairness scores than those who had either previously fulfilled their requirements or who had not begun their sanctions,  $F(3, 1,653) = 13.569$ ,  $p = .000$ . Furthermore, those students in the process of carrying out their assignments at the time they took the survey reported a greater sense of fairness than did those who had already satisfied their institution's expectations. Similarly, the more recently students attended a hearing, the more educational,  $F(4, 1,666) = 13.133$ ,  $p < .001$ , and fair,  $F(4, 1,666) = 14.756$ ,  $p < .001$ , they considered their college's conduct system. A statistically significant divi-

TABLE 1. Perceived Fairness and Educational Value and Disciplinary Circumstances

Disciplinary Circumstance	Response Options	n	Educational Value			Perceived Fairness		
			M	SD	F (df)	M	SD	F (df)
Academic Institution	State University	409	7.20	2.55	10.625** (2)	21.63	4.64	0.334 (2)
	West University	1,007	6.72	2.61		21.50	4.82	
	Mountain College	251	7.46	2.60		21.76	5.09	
Residence	On Campus	1,174	6.97	2.58	0.174 (1)	21.85	4.79	13.565** (1)
	Off Campus	493	6.91	2.67		20.90	4.83	
	Alcohol	880	6.95	2.56	5.441** (9)	21.59	4.67	2.925* (9)
Type of Violation	Drugs	128	6.67	2.43		21.05	4.40	
	Noise	59	7.25	2.35		20.81	4.85	
	Fighting	18	6.94	2.73		22.89	4.89	
	Sexual Misconduct	10	8.60	3.72		24.50	4.55	
	Academic Misconduct	29	9.17	2.77		21.66	5.72	
	Other	171	6.25	2.91		20.56	5.44	
	Alcohol and Drugs	120	6.58	2.58		21.54	5.17	
	Alcohol and Noise	231	7.30	2.35		22.58	4.45	
	Alcohol and Fighting	21	7.62	3.35		21.00	6.38	
		0	74	7.80	3.04	9.771** (4)	22.23	6.26
Number of Times Through the Process	1	1,240	7.09	2.56		21.74	4.73	
	2	267	6.31	2.58		20.98	4.62	
	3	66	6.26	2.46		21.15	4.46	
Sanction Status	More Than 3	20	5.55	2.42		18.15	5.99	
	No Sanctions Received	396	7.02	2.75	0.819 (3)	22.73	5.10	13.569** (3)
	Sanctions Not Started	102	6.82	2.60		21.25	5.02	
	Still Completing Sanctions	273	7.12	2.63		22.03	4.70	
	Completed Sanctions	883	6.87	2.54		20.96	4.61	
Time Passed Since Hearing	< 1 Month Ago	312	7.43	2.61	13.133** (4)	22.91	4.78	14.756** (4)
	1 to 5 Month Ago	421	7.47	2.52		22.24	4.88	
	6 Months to 1 Year Ago	469	6.65	2.51		21.06	4.67	
	1 to 2 Years Ago	297	6.39	2.64		20.62	4.81	
	> 2 Years Ago	168	6.56	2.65		20.52	4.39	

\*  $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE 2. Perceived Fairness and Educational Value and Demographic Characteristics

Disciplinary Circumstance	Response Options	n	Educational Value			Perceived Fairness		
			M	SD	F (df)	M	SD	F (df)
	17	24	7.71	2.66	2.027 (6)	22.71	5.78	3.754* (6)
	18	723	7.15	2.50		22.09	4.82	
	19	477	6.74	2.61		21.36	4.67	
Age at Time of Incident	20	221	6.73	2.55		20.71	4.46	
	21	86	7.17	2.92		21.80	5.18	
	22	37	7.11	2.77		20.24	4.31	
	23 and Older	51	6.71	3.32		20.73	6.22	
Gender	Male	931	6.62	2.65	19.706* (2)	21.18	4.90	8.485* (2)
	Female	687	7.43	2.45		22.15	4.64	
	Transgender	6	7.17	4.07		19.83	8.26	
	African American / Black	10	8.40	2.91	6.779 (6)	21.90	5.51	.638 (6)
	American Indian / Alaskan Native	7	8.00	4.24		19.86	6.94	
	Asian / Pacific Islander	35	6.83	2.37		20.91	4.29	
Ethnicity	Caucasian/White	1378	6.96	2.61		21.60	4.85	
	Latino/a	48	7.31	2.15		22.46	3.76	
	Other	37	6.00	2.83		21.05	4.82	
	Multiracial	104	6.99	2.59		21.38	4.97	
Family Level of Education	First to Attend College	195	7.15	2.67	.809 (2)	21.82	4.75	1.416 (2)
	Sibling Attended College	104	7.10	2.71		22.24	5.21	
	Parent Attended College	1325	6.92	2.59		21.50	4.81	
	< 2.0 GPA	38	6.92	2.98	4.487* (4)	20.45	5.58	1.559 (4)
	2.0–2.4 GPA	126	7.15	2.75		21.34	4.78	
GPA	2.5–2.9 GPA	500	7.21	2.59		21.60	4.47	
	3.0–3.4 GPA	647	6.99	2.52		21.86	4.83	
	3.5–4.0 GPA	313	6.44	2.64		21.22	5.27	
	0–30 Hours	582	7.46	2.56	8.482* (5)	22.69	4.77	11.128* (5)
	31–60 Hours	393	6.66	2.50		21.05	4.55	
	61–90 Hours	281	6.96	2.48		21.30	4.80	
Credit Hours Completed	91–120 Hours	185	6.66	2.53		20.99	4.61	
	> 120 Hours	150	6.47	2.97		20.29	5.02	
	Don't Know	33	5.76	2.81		19.91	5.90	

\* p < .001.

TABLE 3.  
Predictors of Perceived Educational Value of Conduct Process

Model	Predictor Variable Added	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig. F Change	β Last Step
1	Perceived Value of Meeting with Hearing Officer	.396	.396**	.499**
2	Perceived Fairness	.450	.054**	.254**
3	GPA	.455	.005**	-.079**
4	Gender	.461	.005**	.067**
5	Number of Times Through the Process	.464	.003**	-.059*

\*  $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

sion occurred between participants involved in conduct proceedings within the last 5 months and those affiliated over 5 months ago.

### Relationship Between Educational Value, Fairness, and Demographic Characteristics

Each demographic attribute's relationship to both educational value and procedural fairness was analyzed using one-way ANOVAs, as well, with statistics provided in Table 2. The results showed that differences in participants' perception of educational value by age did not satisfy the confidence level ( $p = .059 > \alpha = .05$ ), though further tests using a relaxed tolerance level may produce greater information. A significant difference was visible with respect to fairness,  $F(6, 1,618) = 3.754, p = .000$ . Post hoc comparisons indicated that students age 20 at the time of their disciplinary incident perceived their experience as significantly less fair than those students who were 18 years old. For both dependent variables—educational value,  $F(2, 1,623) = 19.706, p = .000$ , and fairness,  $F(2, 1,623) = 8.485, p = .000$ —women rated their university's process more highly than did men. No significant differences in student perceptions of educational value or fairness were detected based on ethnicity or

students' family members' level of education.

By collecting GPA and college credit hours data, the survey permitted comparisons of students' thoughts on their institution's discipline process across a wide range of academic achievement. Although no significant differences surfaced in how fair participants believed their school's conduct system to be according to their GPA, within the three GPA categories of 2.5–2.9, 3.0–3.4, and 3.5–4.0, the higher students' GPA, the less educational value they assigned to their discipline process,  $F(4, 1,623) = 4.487, p = .001$ . Similarly, inverse relationships occurred between the number of credit hours participants completed and the scores they provided on items measuring the dependent variables. The data established a negative correlation, with the participants who earned the fewest credit hours, less than 30 total, reporting the highest levels of perceived fairness,  $F(5, 1,623) = 11.128, p = .000$ , and educational value,  $F(5, 1,623) = 8.482, p = .000$ , when compared to their peers farther into their education.

### Predictive Factors of Educational Value

A stepwise multiple regression analysis identified five variables significant in predicting the extent

to which students perceived their university's process as educationally valuable, shown in Table 3. The independent variable measuring how valuable students perceived their meeting with a university hearing officer explained 39.6% of the variability in educational value scores. Utilizing stepwise multiple regression techniques, variables were added to the model one at a time, resulting in the identification of four additional independent variables that significantly contribute to the predictability of the model, though the latter three did not enhance the predictive model much when compared to the first equations. The level of perceived fairness students reported about their discipline experience represented the next most significant predictor of educational value (5.4%). The other three variables deemed statistically significant—GPA, gender, and the number of times through the discipline process—each contributed less than 1.0% to the model in explaining students' appraisal of their process as educational. As evident by the beta scores in Table 3, students' GPA and their number of involvements in the discipline system maintained a negative correlation to educational value. However slight, the strengthening of the models by including these characteristics proves critically informative in understanding the developmental efficacy of a conduct process.

## DISCUSSION

The findings uncovered in this study serve to inform college administrators' work with adjudicated students when assigning sanctions, considering the perspectives of demographically diverse students, and conducting hearings regarding differing disciplinary circumstances. Students assigned little value to the majority of the sanctions they received, suggesting a strong need to evaluate their perceptions of sanctions upon completion. With administrators report-

ing increasing caseloads and attempting to expedite their processes (Janosik & Riehl, 2000), follow-up meetings may be difficult to arrange; however, collecting assessment data, even through increased communication with drug and alcohol programs to better understand students' substance use, can be instrumental in implementing effective educational interventions for adjudicated students (Freeman, 2001; Howell, 2005).

Respondents did indicate more positive than negative ratings for the sanctions of counseling and community service. Increasingly, colleges are requiring *disciplinary counseling* as a sanction, though many campus counseling center directors oppose such mandated counseling (Consolvo & Dannells, 2000). The favorable rating of this sanction implies that students may voluntarily attend counseling, or at least ultimately find a benefit to this service, as is supported by the increased number of students accessing college counseling centers annually (Gallagher, 2009). As for community service, the positive responses students provided may help explain previous research linking this sanction to lower rates of recidivism when compared to other active sanctions (Kompalla & McCarthy, 2001). This finding also coincides with the classification of the present traditional-age student population as inclined to give back to their communities (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Students' perceptions of the educational value and fairness of their overall experience in the discipline process was found to correlate to numerous disciplinary and demographic characteristics. The sense of procedural fairness was felt less among students age 20 at the time of their incident than those who were 18. Twenty-year-olds face alleged violations less often than 18-year-olds (Dannells, 1997) and may have unique needs that are going unaddressed, especially given that they may be legally eligible to consume alcohol shortly



thereafter. Likewise, students living on campus and having completed fewer than 30 credit hours, most of whom were 18 years old while fulfilling their mandatory first year in residence, had more favorable impressions of the conduct process. Younger students, those living in residence halls, likely have more exposure to and familiarity with campus policies and practices than those living independently in apartments or houses off campus.

Women rated their experiences as fairer and more educational than did male respondents. Not only are women less likely to engage in violations of university policy to begin with (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005; Polomsky & Blackhurst, 2000), but they approach moral decision-making from a more relational, care-oriented perspective than do men (Gilligan, 1982). Male college students demonstrate comfort conceptualizing morality in terms of justice, as discerned through fairness and rules, and less as a function of one's level of care and respect for others (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981). Furthermore, the discipline process may not create an environment in which to foster college men's emotional development (Ludeman, 2004) or address their gender identity with respect to behavioral expectations and misconduct (Harris & Edwards, 2010). Given the theoretical foundations regarding women's gender identity, specifically arguing they show increasing concern for connection to others as they develop (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), the disciplinary intervention, with its emphasis on empathy and community standards, may provide a setting conducive to an educational process.

Students at WU rated the educational value of their experience lower than did students attending the other two participating institutions. This is noteworthy in that WU embraced a distinct disciplinary philosophy at the time many respondents were referred for

misconduct, one that upheld a fixed sanctioning structure with a low threshold for suspension. In terms of the type of violation alleged, the finding that research participants referred for academic misconduct found the discipline process more educational than those charged with other violations, such as substance misuse, strengthens the argument for incorporating academic integrity into the purview of student affairs professionals administering discipline (Drinan & Gallant, 2008).

Predictably, students who participated repeatedly in the conduct process reported less educational value in their experiences. Given that educational value was defined, in part, as students' self-reported likelihood to change their choices as a result of their involvement in the process, this is a logical conclusion. Also surfacing through this research, students' perceptions of their experiences unveil a recency effect, characterized by more positive impressions during and shortly after going through a conduct proceeding. Individuals adjudicated within the 5 months prior to the study portrayed their disciplinary experience as fairer and more educational than those for whom a longer period of time had passed. Similarly, participants in the midst of completing their sanctions judged the overall discipline process more favorably than those who had already satisfied the requirements. This discovery implies that while actively fulfilling assignments, whether attending a class, volunteering with a nonprofit organization, or engaging in other methods of self-exploration, students recognize the value of the conduct process; yet, it also illuminates the fleeting quality of the lessons delivered.

Highlighting the weight of student-staff contact during the conduct process, the multiple regression analysis revealed that the most influential factor affecting the overall educational value gained was how favorably students rated their disciplinary

hearing. Moreover, consistent with previous research (Mullane, 1999), a significant positive relationship existed between educational value and fairness. Perceived fairness emerged as the second most influential factor in predicting the amount of educational value students associated with their discipline experience. The study's findings communicate that by playing a significant role in predicting the educational value of the conduct process, students' perceptions of fairness can affect the likelihood they will engage in the prohibited behavior in the future. Student discipline literature supports the notion that the type of fairness characterized by modifying the sanctions for misconduct to reflect individual student needs delivers a more educational experience (Mullane, 1999). Furthermore, minimizing any unnecessary formality inherent in the discipline process mirrors best practice recommendations from scholars in the field of student judicial affairs (Lowery, 1998).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

If the value students associate with their discipline hearing best predicts how educational they consider the overall experience, student affairs professionals have great power to shape students' conclusions and ultimately their future decisions. Yet, roughly half of the students felt their discipline proceedings were not fair or did not possess educational value. Better understanding of the varying factors that correlated to students' perceptions can help inform administrators' practice when working with referred students. Utilizing a one-size-fits-all approach to address student misconduct will undoubtedly fail to foster a learning experience for segments of the adjudicated college student population (Fischer & Mattman, 2008). Ensuring that students feel heard and valued as individuals, even in instances when their behavior merits

separation from the institution, requires practitioners to embrace self-awareness, remaining present and cognizant of their own biases. Administrators maintain a familiarity with institutional policies and procedures that students do not possess. Efforts to confirm students' comprehension of their role in the discipline system can help strengthen their assessment of the process as fair.

Respondents who indicated a more positive experience in their university's process were earlier along in their academic career, younger, and lived on campus. These findings imply the importance of tailoring the developmental conversation in a discipline hearing in accordance with students' unique characteristics. For example, offering 20-year-old students leadership opportunities through which to educate younger students, rather than addressing their misconduct identically to that of 18-year-olds, may produce a more beneficial outcome. Similarly, discrepancies in the ways in which college men and women perceive the fairness and educational value of their discipline experiences support the need for keen attention to male students' approach to moral reasoning.

The notion of meeting students where they are applies not only to considering how students' unique demographic characteristics intersect with their development, but also to attending to their academic and personal well-being. The finding that students struggling academically rated their conduct experience more highly reinforces that a discipline hearing offers an opportune time to connect students to resources to aid in their academic persistence and foster their community engagement (Zdziarski & Wood, 2008). Additionally, students' positive feedback on the receipt of counseling services speaks to the need for conduct administrators to establish effective partnerships with counseling resources on and off campus. Participants' perception of community service as valuable should

also encourage hearing officers to identify institution-affiliated service opportunities so students can contribute constructively directly to their campus community. Finally, to perpetuate the potential benefits inherent in a discipline process, this research suggests that follow-up meetings with hearing officers within the 5 months following students' incidents may inform administrators' comprehension of sanction efficacy and perhaps even reduce recidivism.

### Recommendations for Future Research

This research brings to light students' willingness to share their impressions of the college discipline process. Further research efforts to understand students' experiences can only enhance practitioners' ability to create effective conduct programs. Investigation into what college students believe they should learn through involvement in disciplinary proceedings would help to identify how their perspectives compare to what practitioners believe students should gain. With institutions of higher education no longer comprised primarily of full-time, traditional-age students (Baldizan, 1998), this study's findings accentuate the need to better understand why older students, even those within the traditional college-age range, benefit less through the current methods of disciplinary action than younger students. The noticeable rise in concerns for students' mental health and campus safety also suggests the necessity for research on the use of counseling and other psychological services as elements of a discipline process (Dickstein & Nebeker Christensen, 2008; Gallagher, 2009). A better appreciation

for the way in which therapy aids adjudicated college students could lead to alterations of other components of a university's conduct system. Lastly, student affairs professionals are increasingly devoting attention to alternative dispute resolution practices such as mediation and restorative justice. The ways in which these progressive techniques for responding to problematic behavior interact with more traditional disciplinary systems still requires a great deal of exploration.

### CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this study was to gauge whether college administrators' ambitions of facilitating a developmental student discipline process come to fruition by examining the degree to which students perceive their conduct process to be educationally valuable and fair. Large discrepancies emerged in students' perceptions on the basis of age, gender, and GPA, among other characteristics. Ultimately, the factor that best predicted whether students found their discipline experience educational was the value students assigned to their hearing with a student affairs professional. By ensuring adjudicated students' comprehension of their rights and being cognizant of each student's unique attributes, practitioners have the opportunity to transform a potentially adversarial disciplinary proceeding into a developmental intervention that fosters student learning.

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*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rachel King, Associate Dean of Students, Curry College, Office of Student Affairs, 1071 Blue Hill Avenue, Milton, MA 02186; RKing0611@curry.edu*

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