As an extension of current instructional research, this study explored students’ proactive personality and academic locus of control (ALOC), along with perceived instructor clarity and nonverbal immediacy as predictors of willingness to talk in class (in-class involvement) and self-regulated learning (out-of-class involvement). Results found verbal and nonverbal messages function differently in the instructional process. Teacher clarity predicted out-of-class involvement, while nonverbal immediacy predicted in-class involvement. However, proactivity and ALOC consistently predicted students’ willingness to talk in class and their self-regulated learning. Thus, a sense of ownership over one’s learning environment fosters student involvement.

Keywords: Academic Locus of Control; Nonverbal Immediacy; Proactive Personality; Student Involvement; Teacher Clarity
traits impact students’ classroom experience. Following the general model of instructional communication (McCroskey, Valencic, & V. P. Richmond, 2004), it is crucial to consider the roles both teachers and students play in regard to student success. Turman and Schrodt (2006) noted that “teachers and students work together to fulfill a variety of individual and educational goals” (p. 265). Instructors work toward enhancing affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning while also trying to establish positive relationships in the classroom (Booth-Butterfield, 1992). Students’ goals may be more complicated (Turman & Schrodt, 2006), in that they are trying to figure out who they are, and how to succeed in the college setting (Ellis, 2004). Regardless of differing goals, instructors and students should work toward a common outcome. Baer (1997) suggested given teaching and learning are on the same side of the coin, not opposite sides, instructors and students should work together to develop a positive learning environment. Therefore, this study investigates students’ proactive personality and academic locus of control (ALOC) and perceived teacher clarity and nonverbal immediacy as predictors of willingness to talk in class (in-class involvement) and self-regulated learning (out-of-class involvement).

Student Involvement

Astin’s (1999) theory of student involvement framed involvement as the physical and psychological efforts students put forth toward their academic experiences. Astin stated involved students devote a great deal of energy to studying, spend a lot of time on campus, participate in student organizations, and regularly interact with faculty and peers. Thus, Astin’s theory of student involvement centers on the behavioral aspects of involvement. As he puts it, “it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (p. 519). Astin offered a list of active terms (e.g., “participate in”) that reflected his notion of student involvement as a behavioral construct that center on the classroom experience. Ultimately, the classroom is the major component of a student’s educational experience (Tinto, 1997). Tinto noted students only formally experience education in the actual classroom. Hence, this study frames in-class involvement as students’ willingness to talking in class (e.g., responding to instructors’ questions), and out-of-class involvement as students’ self-regulated learning (e.g., reading assigned chapters).

Tinto (1997) stated student involvement matters and leads to greater acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. Involved students are more apt to learn and succeed (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2005; Kuh, 2007). Students who are involved with their instructors demonstrated higher levels of learning gain (Astin, 1993; Endo & Harpel, 1982) and positive personal growth (Huang & Chang, 2004). Milem and Berger (1997) advocated early involvement with faculty since it tends to have a positive influence on student persistence in college. Moreover, students who participate in class discussions develop higher level cognitive skills (Wade, 1994). Students who are willing to talk in class and engage in class discussions contribute to their own learning (Frymier & Houser, 1997) and to the learning of
their peers (Webb, 2009). Wade (1994) stated that an ideal class discussion happens when almost all students are engaged and interested, are learning and are listening attentively to their peer’s comments and suggestions. Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) referred to students speaking in class by asking and answering questions, making comments, and participating in discussions as class participation. Overall, students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are given opportunities to think about and to apply what they learn in different educational settings (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Thus, the purpose of this study was to further explore how student characteristics and perceived instructor communication behaviors are related to students’ self-reports of their willingness to talk in class and self-regulated learning outside of class.

**Student Characteristics**

Mattern (2005) noted many college educators may often wonder what motivates some students to put forth greater effort in their academic studies than other less dedicated students. Houser and Frymier (2009) found empowered students were more motivated to perform classroom tasks and perceived themselves to have an impact on their learning processes. Moreover, Myers et al. (2009) stated student characteristics (e.g., confidence) are directly linked to in-class involvement. Thus, student characteristics have a major impact on level of involvement. Given previous instructional research asserts learning should be an active process, not a passive one (Petress, 2006), instructors should consider such active student characteristics as proactivity and ALOC as they move students toward involvement.

**Proactivity**

Proactive personality refers to one’s tendency to take active initiative in life (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006) and is a relatively stable characteristic that moves individuals toward positive change (Batemen & Crant, 1993). Proactive individuals are not passively constrained by situational forces but instead exert influence over and adaptively respond to their environments and previous research indicates proactive personality is a significant predictor of career success (Bowers, 1973; Brown et al., 2006). Organizational research indicated the construct has positive relationships with extroversion, conscientiousness, need for achievement, and need for dominance (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

Research primarily has focused on proactivity in the workplace (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000); however, it can also apply to the educational setting. For example, Mooney and Cole (2000) stated college students should create their own paths toward self-directed educational goals. Students who enjoy their teacher and class topic and believe they are treated fairly are more likely to work harder, to achieve more, and ultimately to be more proactive (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005). Thus, proactivity offers students an opportunity to become successful in the educational setting.
Academic locus of control

There is more to academic success than cognitive abilities (Licht & Kistner, 1986). Previous research found that various affective and nonintellective variables can influence students’ academic achievement (Chapman, 1988). ALOC centers on a generalized expectancy reflecting the degree to which individuals perceive outcomes as contingent on their own behaviors and abilities rather than on some external force such as luck, chance, or powerful others (Janssen & Carton, 1999). Students with an internal ALOC take responsibility for academic achievements and failures (e.g., “I earned an ‘A’ on my test because I studied really hard”) while students with an external ALOC attribute academic achievements and failures to others (e.g., “I failed the test because the teacher is really mean”). Students are more likely to take ownership of their learning if they perceive that they helped to decide the activities in which they take part in. Students who perceive that they managed their own learning environment are more likely to have an internal locus of control while an external locus of control stems from a reliance of others in the academic environment to manage student learning (Arlin & Whitley, 1978).

Perceived Instructor Communication Behaviors

Students may come to the classroom with varying goals and levels of motivation; however, the primary job of a teacher is to foster learning and to motivate students for lifelong learning. Davis (1999) suggested whatever level of motivation students come into the classroom with, it will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens in the classroom. Frymier and Houser (2000) suggested the instructor-student relationship is, in part, an interpersonal one. So it is not only important to consider an instructor’s teaching methods but it is also useful to examine their use of immediacy-gaining communication behaviors.

Ultimately, communication theory and research indicates that verbal and nonverbal messages function differently in the communication process (Burgoon, 1994). Burgoon et al. (2002) include verbal and nonverbal messages to describe the structural communication properties of interactivity. Overall, verbal messages convey the content of a message whereas nonverbal messages help to establish the overall relationship between interactants (Burgoon, 1994; Mehrabian, 1971). Kendrick and Darling (1990) stated communication is a vital component of the classroom experience. Furthermore, Gardner (2003) indicated the delivery of a message is as important as the message itself. This study included teacher clarity and nonverbal immediacy, which McCroskey, V. P. Richmond, and Bennett (2006) noted make up an instructor’s prosocial classroom behaviors.

Teacher clarity

Teacher clarity focuses on explicitness of instructional communication (Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997). Oral clarity includes content examples and teacher feedback from student questions. Written clarity includes the course syllabus and outlines of class
projects or course objectives. Overall, oral and written communication in the classroom impact students’ perceptions of teacher clarity.

Rosenshine and Furst (1971) claimed teacher clarity as the most essential teacher behavior in terms of instructional research and teacher training. Prior research examined the clarity of instructors’ verbal messages, as well as instructors’ vagueness, disfluencies, and verbal mazes, which produce a lack of clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998a). Positive relationships exist between teacher clarity and student cognitive learning, student-perceived teacher effectiveness, and student academic success (Anderson, 1984; Hines, Cruickshank, & Kennedy, 1985; Smith & Land, 1980). Teacher clarity enhances students’ perception of teacher instructional competence and is a key component in facilitating student learning. For example, when instructors are clear, students are more effective in their note taking during a class session (Titsworth, 2004). Moreover, an increase in student understanding of course content can lead to an increase in students’ perceived cognitive learning (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001), can increase affect for the course and the teacher (Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997) and can reduce students’ classroom state communication apprehension (Chesebro, 2003). The combination of high clarity and high nonverbal immediacy proves to be even more effective in reducing student receiver apprehension in the classroom than would be predicted by the two main effects alone (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998a).

**Teacher nonverbal immediacy**

Nonverbal immediacy behaviors help to reduce distance by reducing real and/or perceived distance (Mehrabian, 1971) and include smiling, relaxed body posture, and vocal variety (Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004). Andersen (1979) conceptualized immediacy as communication behaviors that predict teaching effectiveness. Students’ perceptions of instructors’ nonverbal immediacy influence other student perceptions of the instructor and classroom (Titsworth, 2004). For example, Witt et al. (2004) stated, in their meta-analysis of immediacy in the classroom, that there is “a low to moderate association between teacher nonverbal immediacy and greater liking for the teacher and course, greater likelihood of engaging in behaviors learned, and greater likelihood of enrolling in another course of the same type” (p. 185). When students perceive their teachers as being immediate, they also perceive them to be more caring, competent, and trustworthy (Teven & Hanson, 2004; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998). Rocca (2004) found that college students are more likely to attend classes when they perceive their instructors to be immediate. Overall, prior research has shown teacher nonverbal immediacy and teacher clarity are essential to effective classroom instruction.

**Rationale**

Effective teacher-student interactions are often a precursor to successful learning experiences (Kuh et al., 2005). When students perceive their teachers as immediate in the classroom they are more likely to have greater affect for the teacher and
learning. However, Titsworth (2004) found that teacher immediacy can actually distract students during the learning process and can serve as a barrier to effective note taking. Student achievement is also linked to instructional clarity (Goods & Grouws, 1977). However, if instructors are clear and explicit in the classroom, will students be less involved? Students may ask less questions in class when teacher clarity is high. In contrast, teacher clarity may increase students’ out-of-class involvement. When course guidelines and expectations are clear and explicit, students may be more prepared for their class.

The role of the teacher is just one part in the process for creating well-educated individuals, as Erikson and Shultz (as cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004) suggested instructor behavior is only one of the fundamental components in classrooms that influences students’ educational experiences. As an extension of current instructional communication research, this study considers students’ role in the learning process. Hence, the following hypotheses and research question are offered:

H1a: Student proactivity and internal ALOC will be positively associated with student in-class involvement as well as out-of-class involvement.

H1b: Perceived instructor clarity and nonverbal immediacy will be positively associated with student in-class involvement as well as out-of-class involvement.

RQ: Will student characteristics (proactivity and ALOC) or perceived instructor behaviors (clarity and immediacy) account for more variance in student in-class and out-of-class involvement?

Lastly, students should constructively contribute in class discussion. Student in-class involvement offers students an opportunity for participation and it can come in many forms (e.g., asking questions, offering suggestions). In order for student in-class involvement to be of value, students need to be well prepared for class. It should be expected that students who prepare for class would also be more willing to talk in class, and, thus, the following hypothesis is predicted:

H2: There will be a positive relationship between students’ in-class involvement and out-of-class involvement.

**Method**

**Participants and Procedures**

Participants consisted of 346 (n = 158 males, n = 188 females) undergraduates (n = 60 freshmen, n = 87 sophomores, n = 110 juniors, n = 89 seniors), enrolled in communication courses at a midsize, public university. The students voluntarily participated in a two-part study during normal class time and received minimal credit for participation. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Data collection took place at two points to ensure the assessed course or instructor did not influence student characteristics. Following the methodology developed by Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and V. P. Richmond (1986), participants completed the instruments in reference to the instructor of the course they attended immediately
prior to the research sessions to ensure students reported on a variety of courses and instructors. The first wave of data collection ($T_1$) took place at the beginning of the second week of the semester. It focused on Proactive Personality and ALOC and demographic information such as student sex, academic rank, and age. The students’ mean age was 20.40 ($SD = 1.92$). The sample had a variety of different majors ($n = 54$) and reported on a range of course subjects ($n = 43$).

During the eighth week of the semester, the participants completed the second wave ($T_2$) of instruments. This allowed time for students to develop their perceptions of the class and instructor. Surveys included instructor (i.e., teacher clarity, nonverbal immediacy) and involvement variables (i.e., Metacognitive Self-Regulation Questionnaire, Willingness to Talk in Class).

Measures

**Proactive personality**
Bateman and Crant’s (1993) 17-item Proactive Personality Scale assessed participants’ level of proactivity. On a 7-point scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7) participants indicated their agreement on 17 items (e.g., “If I see something I don’t like, I fix it”) at $T_1$. For this study $\alpha = .91$ ($M = 85.45$, $SD = 13.28$), with a range of 36 to 119.

**Academic locus of control**
The 28-item Academic Locus of Control (ALOC) measure assessed students’ beliefs in their personal control over academic achievement outcomes (e.g., “College grades most often reflect the effort you put into classes”) at $T_1$ (Wang & Newlin, 2000). On a 7-point scale (strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 7), the measure predicts a wide range of relevant behaviors of college students. Items were re-coded in order for a high score to indicate internal locus of control and a low score external locus of control. For this study $\alpha = .93$ ($M = 129.43$, $SD = 27.53$), with a range of 65 to 196.

**Teacher clarity**
The 10-item Teacher Clarity Short Inventory was included at $T_2$. Items (e.g., “My teacher is straightforward in his or her lecture”) relate to content and process clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998b). The 5-point (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5), Likert-type scale yielded a reliability of .91 ($M = 39.51$, $SD = 8.07$), with a range of 12 to 50.

**Nonverbal immediacy**
The 10-item, Likert-type Nonverbal Immediacy Behaviors (NIB) instrument reflects specific, low-inference immediacy behaviors (V. P. Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987). NIB refers to actual nonverbal behaviors (e.g., “Smiles at the class while talking”) teachers might use in the classroom, and participants were instructed to respond to the items based on a 5-point scale (0 = never to 4 = very often) at $T_2$. For this study $\alpha = .86$ ($M = 28.03$, $SD = 7.64$), with a range of 2 to 40.
In-class involvement
The Willingness to Talk in Class measure operationalized in-class involvement at T2 (Menzel & Carrell, 1999). The 19-item, Likert-type instrument gauges how often (0 = never to 4 = very often) students would be willing to participate in class. The statements (e.g., “I am willing to participate when the class is engaged in an open discussion”) reflect variables such as interest in the class or topic, motivation, similarity to classmates, similarity to the instructor, and classroom variables (e.g., seating). For this study $\alpha = .93$ ($M = 45.04$, $SD = 13.36$), with a range of 6 to 76.

Out-of-class involvement
The 12-item, Likert-type Metacognitive Self-Regulation Questionnaire (MSRQ) assessed students’ out-of-class involvement on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all true of me to 7 = very true of me) at T2 (Pintrich et al., 1991). The MSRQ (e.g., “Before I study new course material thoroughly, I often skim it to see how it is organized”) is a subscale of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ).

The comprehensive 81-item MSLQ instrument investigates the nature of student motivation and learning strategies use (Pintrich et al., 1991). The MSLQ consists of 15 subscales, six within the motivation section and nine within the learning strategies section. The MSLQ manual indicates the instrument is completely modular, and the scales can be used together or individually. Pintrich (2003) noted students’ motivation is directly linked to their ability to self-regulate their learning activities, and he defined self-regulated learning as being metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active in one’s own learning processes and in achieving one’s own goals. For the sake of brevity and relevance, the MSRQ subscale, which explores students’ learning strategies outside of class, was used in this study.

The MSRQ subscale was modified in order to only focus on students’ out-of-class involvement. One statement, “During class time I often miss important points because I’m thinking of other things” was altered to “During study/reading time I often miss important points because I’m thinking of other things.” For this study $\alpha = .79$ ($M = 50.27$, $SD = 10.48$), with a range of 20 to 79.

Results
The correlations among variables are reported in Table 1. Although the perceived instructor behaviors were highly correlated with each other, multicollinearity does not appear an issue as variable inflation factors (VIFs) ranged from 1.18 to 1.79, and tolerance ranged from 0.55 to 0.84.

Hypothesis and Research Questions
The first set of hypotheses offered predictions between student and perceived instructor characteristics and student involvement. For H1a and H1b, results found positive relationships between student and perceived instructor characteristics and willingness to talk in class and self-regulated learning (Table 1).
The first portion of the research question explored which student characteristics and perceived instructor behaviors served as greater predictors of student in-class involvement. A multiple regression, in which all variables were entered simultaneously, revealed that the strongest significant predictor of perceptions of students’ willingness to talk in class was teacher nonverbal immediacy, $\beta = .230$, $p < .001$, followed by ALOC, $\beta = .188$, $p < .001$, and proactivity, $\beta = .156$, $p < .05$. The regression indicated that the model including teacher nonverbal immediacy, ALOC, and proactivity, $F(4, 307) = 11.85$, $p < .0001$, accounted for 13% ($R^2 = .13$) of the variance in perceptions of students’ willingness to talk in class. In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and students’ willingness to talk in class, teacher nonverbal immediacy ($t = 3.24$), ALOC ($t = 3.23$), and proactivity ($t = 2.69$) significantly ($p < .001$) predicted willingness to talk in class, while teacher clarity ($p = .62$) did not. Thus, perceptions of instructors’ nonverbal immediacy, and “who” the students are, influence student in-class involvement.

The second portion of the research question queried which student characteristics and perceived instructor behaviors served as greater predictors of student out-of-class involvement. A multiple regression, in which all variables were entered simultaneously, revealed that the stronger significant predictor of students’ self-regulated learning was proactivity, $\beta = .266$, $p < .0001$, followed by ALOC, $\beta = .164$, $p < .005$, and teacher clarity, $\beta = .157$, $p < .05$. The regression indicated that the model including proactivity, ALOC, and teacher clarity, $F(4, 304) = 18.61$, $p < .0001$, accounted for 20% ($R^2 = .20$) of the variance in out-of-class involvement. In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and self-regulated learning, proactivity ($t = 4.78$), ALOC ($t = 2.94$), and teacher clarity ($t = 2.26$) significantly ($p < .001$) predicted self-regulated learning, while teacher nonverbal immediacy ($p = .27$) did not. Students are more likely to prepare for class when they perceive a sense of ownership and control over their learning environments and have a teacher who is clear in instruction.

The study’s second hypothesis stated there should be a positive relationship between students’ preparedness for class and their willingness to talk in class. Results
Discussion

Both student characteristics and perceived instructor communication behaviors are essential to student involvement. Student characteristics were stronger predictors of both types of involvement than were perceived instructor characteristics even though student characteristics were measured at T1 (2 weeks into the semester) whereas perceived instructor characteristics and the outcome variables were measured together at T2, at the eighth week of the semester. One might expect that measuring instructor and involvement variables at the same time would inflate correlations between these variables, and yet the student predispositions (measured 6 weeks earlier) were still stronger predictors of student involvement. Overall, proactivity and ALOC served as predictors for both in- and out-of-class involvement, while, teacher nonverbal immediacy predicted in-class involvement and teacher clarity predicted out-of-class involvement.

Even though prior research indicates teacher clarity is an effective instructional method, results revealed it did not predict students’ willingness to talk in class. One explanation for this outcome may be found in Howard and Henney’s (1998) student participation research. From interviews and surveys, the researchers asked students why they participate or do not participate in the classroom. The top reasons for participation in descending order were: seeking information or clarification; have something to contribute to class; learning by participating; and overall enjoyment in participation. Hence, if instructors are clear, well organized, and explicit in the instructional messages students may not need to seek information or to ask questions for clarification in class. Therefore, teacher clarity may not offer students opportunities for in-class involvement.

However, instructor clarity predicted out-of-class involvement. Students who prepare for class (e.g., completed course readings) may be better able to follow their instructors’ comments and hence to perceive their instructors to be clearer. Moreover, students may also be likely to prepare for class when their instructors offer clear and explicit instructional messages. In order to prepare for class, students may try to change the way they study in order to fit the course requirements and the instructor’s teaching style. Thus, course requirements must first be clear before students can effectively prepare for class. Results indicate when instructors are clear and explicit in how students can succeed student may be more likely to prepare for their courses.

Teacher nonverbal immediacy was associated with involvement differently than teacher clarity. Positive perceptions of instructors’ nonverbal immediacy promoted student communication in class. These results may also suggest that students who talk in class elicit immediacy from their instructors in return. Overall, this outcome follows previous immediacy research, for example, V. P. Richmond, Lane, and McCroskey (2006) stated immediate instructors effectively stimulate and motivate their students toward positive learning outcomes. Results found students who
perceived their instructors as being immediate also reported being more willing to talk in class. However, nonverbal immediacy had no relationship with out-of-class involvement. The two instructor variables offered differing outcomes for this study. Taken together, the findings attest to the need to incorporate a variety of teaching methods in the classroom. This outcome follows communication theory and research in that verbal (e.g., clarity) and nonverbal messages (e.g., nonverbal immediacy) function differently in the communication process (Burgoon, 1994). Instruction in the classroom is a rhetorical and relational process (Mottet & Beebe, 2006), and this study found different instructional communication behaviors may lead to different student-learning outcomes. As researchers explore student involvement they should examine other instructor communication behaviors (e.g., humor) to determine how they predict involvement. As researchers continue to examine student involvement they also need to determine the direction of causation between instructor and student variables.

Results also indicated a positive relationship between in- and out-of-class student involvement. Students who prepare for class report they are also likely to talk in class. This outcome also follows Howard and Henney (1998) participation research. Their study found the top reasons for nonparticipation were: ideas not well formulated; lack of knowledge about the subject matter; likelihood of appearing unintelligent in the eyes of other students; and not doing the assigned reading. If students do not prepare for class, they may be more uncomfortable communicating in class because they feel they have nothing worthwhile to contribute. To ensure students prepare for class, instructors need to offer clear expectations for their classes and also to create an immediate learning environment that nurtures student communication. Moreover, based on the results of this study, instructors also need to consider student characteristics.

Student characteristics were consistent predictors of involvement than perceived instructor communication behaviors. Results found students who perceived themselves to have an internal ALOC were more likely to be involved. Likewise, proactive personality proved to predict students’ involvement inside and outside of the classroom. Students are more likely to become involved when they perceive a sense of control over their learning environments. Prior research suggests when students feel a sense of importance in class they are more likely to become more proactive (Kickul & Kickul, 2006). When students play an important role in the classroom and are assigned more responsibility in class (e.g., group leader) they develop a sense of proactivity over time in the classroom (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2000). Hence, whenever possible, instructors need to help students develop a sense of proactivity and an internal ALOC. Given this study examined student characteristics early on in the semester, future research should consider if instructor communication behaviors influence students’ proactivity and ALOC over the course of a semester. Students’ level of proactivity and ALOC may change for the better or the worse depending on their experiences in the classroom. For example, Myers, Edwards, Wahl, and Martin (2007) found when students perceive their instructors to be verbally aggressive they also report a lack of in-class participation. It is likely instructor
communication behaviors will affect student characteristics over time and in turn their overall level of involvement. Future research should assess these student characteristics periodically over the course of a semester to determine if instructors’ communication attributes mediate the relationship between students’ perceptions of themselves and their level of involvement.

In light of the study’s outcomes, limitations should be considered. First, Hess, Smythe, and Communication 451 (2001) noted students may offer positive evaluations of instructors based on factors outside of the variables examined, including grading too easily. This study found a strong correlation between perceived teacher clarity and nonverbal immediacy. Given these two variables are distinctly different constructs, this outcome could be based on students liking their instructors and offering them positive evaluations. Second, this study did not assess actual teacher behaviors, which Smythe and Hess (2005) concluded is problematic due to differences between student reports and trained observer reports of teacher classroom behaviors. For this study, results are based on students’ perceptions of what happens in the classroom, not necessarily what actually happens in the classroom. Lastly, the methodology prohibits any casual statement to be made for this study. However, the study’s strengths, a large sample of students reporting on a variety of instructors and course topics, data gathered at two points in time, and the inclusion of both perceived instructor and student characteristics as predictors, extend our knowledge of the college classroom experience.

Conclusion

Student performance should be considered the most important outcome of the classroom experience (Hirschy & Wilson, 2002; Page & Mukherjee, 2000), and student involvement serves as one indicator that learning is occurring in the classroom (V. P. Richmond & Gorham, 1992). Similarly, Weaver and Qi (2005) asserted that students are more academically successful when they are actively engaged in the learning process. Thus, it is important for educators to find a way to connect students with course content, especially if students are not as excited as they are about it (J. Richmond, 1986). The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE, 2007) argued that in order to get students involved they must be engaged in high impact activities, which will encourage students to work extensively on purposeful tasks. Essentially, these high-impact activities demand that students frequently interact with faculty and peers in a substantive way. Ultimately, it is important and possible to move students toward increased involvement. When this happens students are more likely to succeed in college.

Overall, proactivity and ALOC consistently predicted student involvement in and out of the college classroom. As instructors implement their own instructional communication methods in the classroom, they should also tap into student characteristics and use them as an additional resource for fostering student academic success. Instructors may be able to strategically implement learning opportunities that serve to develop students’ sense of proactivity and internal ALOC. For example,
if instructors adopt student microteaching (Bell, 2007) into their course planning and assign student leaders in the classroom it will encourage students to take ownership over their own learning (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2000). If instructors encourage students to become self-regulated learners the students will perceive themselves as involved participants who effectively control their own learning experiences in a variety of ways (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). Self-regulated learners are likely to organize and rehearse information to be learned, to have positive perceptions about their learning capabilities, and to value learning in general.

As instructors incorporate meaningful student-directed activities in the classroom, they should also continuously assess students’ proactivity and ALOC. Using these instruments periodically over the course of a semester will allow instructors to assess whether or not students are developing a sense of control over their learning environments. Allowing students the opportunity to take ownership over their own learning will also encourage them to become more academically involved.

Notes

[1] To further test the first research question, the student characteristics and perceived instructor characteristics were entered into the regression model separately to compare the size of betas and to determine which variables accounted for more variance in students’ willingness to talk in class. The betas for the student variables increased when they were entered alone as opposed to along with the two instructor variables: ALOC, $\beta = .201, p < .001$, and proactivity, $\beta = .159, p < .01$. The regression model including the student variables, $F(2, 309) = 15.39, p < .0001$, accounted for 8.5% ($R^2 = .085$) of the variance in perceptions of students’ willingness to talk in class. The betas for the instructor characteristics decreased when they were entered alone: nonverbal immediacy, $\beta = .229, p < .005$, and teacher clarity, $\beta = .001, p = .986$. The regression model including the instructor variables, $F(2, 309) = 8.59, p < .0001$, accounted for 4.7% ($R^2 = .047$) of the variance in perceptions of students’ willingness to talk in class. The two student characteristics share almost twice as much variance with willingness to talk in class as the two instructor characteristics.

[2] To further test the second research question, the student characteristics and perceived instructor characteristics were entered into the regression model separately to compare the size of betas and to determine which variables accounted for more variance in students’ self-regulated learning. The betas for the student variables increased when they were entered alone: ALOC, $\beta = .187, p < .001$, and proactivity, $\beta = .278, p < .0001$. The regression model including the student variables, $F(2, 306) = 27.22, p < .0001$, accounted for 14.5% ($R^2 = .145$) of the variance in perceptions of students’ self-regulated learning. The betas for the instructor characteristics also increased when they were entered alone: nonverbal immediacy, $\beta = .207, p < .01$, and teacher clarity, $\beta = .074, p = .318$. The regression model including the instructor variables, $F(2, 306) = 11.27, p < .0001$, accounted for 6.3% ($R^2 = .063$) of the variance in perceptions of students’ self-regulated learning. The two student characteristics share over twice as much variance with self-regulated learning as the two instructor characteristics.

References


