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Academic Difficulties of On- track and Off- track College Students of San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc Incorporated

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ABSTRACT

The study titled primarily sought to describe the profile of respondents taking BS Nursing, BSMLS, and BS Pharmacy whether they were On-Track or Off-Track; determine the academic difficulties encountered by On-Track and Off-Track first year college students in the four areas of Understanding Content, Basic Skills Requirements, Motivation, and Study Time; determine the level of academic difficulties encountered by the respondents; and determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic difficulties encountered by On-Track and Off-Track students in their first year of study at SLRC. The proposed action plan targets both On-Track and Off-Track first year college students of SLRC Ormoc and primarily aims at improving students' mastery in basic science concepts in chemistry, physics, and biology. The study sought to examine the academic difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track college students of San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc. Overall t-test results (1.072) revealed no significant difference on the level of difficulties encountered by the On-Track and Off-Track first year college students among the different areas of academic difficulty. Based on the results and findings of the study, it is concluded that regardless if students are On-Track or Off-Track, they experienced academic difficulty in their College life. These difficulties however are minimized when students have strong motivation to study. The school environment can help students cope with their academic difficulties by designing different mechanisms to address these difficulties.

Keywords: *On-Track Students, Off-Track Students, Academic Difficulties*

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INTRODUCTION

The tertiary education landscape in the Philippines drastically changed in 2018 when the first batch of Senior High School (SHS) graduates entered college. These students were expected to enroll on programs aligned with their tracks. However, the reality was that there were students who were on-track and off-track. Students who are On-Track are believed to cope better with the academic demands of their chosen field of study that is aligned with their SHS track and strand. This is because foundational concepts of the discipline they have chosen are already taught in the relevant SHS track and strand taken prior to college (Cordero, et at., 2022).

There is expectation for this new set of first year college students to be better prepared than counterparts in the old curriculum. RA 10533 otherwise known as the Enhancing the Basic Education Act of 2012 mandated the addition of two more years of high school in the hope of producing graduates that are globally competitive and college ready (CMO 20 s. 2013). There are four tracks offered in senior high school namely; Academic, Technical-Vocational Livelihood, Arts and Designs, and Sports. The Academic Track also offers four strands, depending on the preference of students: Accountancy Business and Management (ABM), Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), Science and Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and General Academic Strand (GAS). Students are supposed to take the SHS track and strand that are aligned with the college programs and life choices they have in mind, such as those who may already want to work after SHS, may opt for the Tech-Voc strands. A student who aims to be a nurse, a pharmacist, or a medical technologist is encouraged to take the STEM strand of the Academic Track to be better prepared for the academic difficulties of paramedical college courses (Jacolba, et al., 2018). The alignment of college degree program taken and SHS track and strand is required in the revised PSGs of various courses issued by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in 2017.

However, in December 29, 2017, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued a clarification on the admission of SHS graduates to HEIs effective AY 2018-2019 and had reversed its earlier position on mandatory bridging program for Off-Track SHS graduates emphasizing that "All grade 12 graduates beginning AY 2017-2018 are eligible to enter college regardless of the track or strand taken in SHS" (CMO 105 s. 2017). Old curriculum graduates (CMO 10 series 2017) and Alternative Learning System completers and passers of the Accreditation and Equivalency tests (CMO 10 series 2018) can likewise be admitted to college without the benefit of SHS training subject to the admission policies of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which may or may not include a bridging program.

The mismatch of SHS strand and college program taken of Off-Track students add to the many challenges college students have to cope with. One of these challenges as Kokemuller (2020) notes includes difficulties in understanding course content, basic skills requirement, maintaining a high degree of motivation, and finding time to study. Students also had to balance academic demands with work, personal, and social responsibilities; furthermore, he posits that college is

more difficult than high school requiring more hard work and focus on the part of the students to understand course content, as the students move higher in the educational ladder, the difficulty increases.

Hence, Friedman (2018) declares that no matter how rigorous one's training in secondary education is, many students are still not fully prepared for all the challenges first year college students face in higher education. These challenges are even harder for students who are Off-Track as they need more time to adjust to the academic demands of their discipline, and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of academic work expected of them especially in reading and library research work.

San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc (SLRC) offers three medical preparatory programs namely; Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Science (BSMLS), and Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy (BS Pharm). Students taking these programs must have graduated from the STEM strand of the Academic Track in SHS. However, based on the Personal Data Sheets of students available at the Office of Student Placement and Development of SLRC, some of the SHS pioneer graduates enrolled last AY 2018-2019 were Off-Track and graduated from Non-STEM SHS strand. The same alignment profile remains true in the succeeding batches of first year students of SLRC.

Many of these Off-Track students reported having some difficulty transitioning from high school to college. They find some courses in college hard particularly in Science and Mathematics even those taken as part of the bridging program of their course. In addition, ALS (Alternative Learning System) completers who have taken these preparatory medical courses offered by San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc also have difficulty coping with their course especially English, Math, and Science. Some of them did not finish the semester and opted to transfer to another school with a different program, which is a waste of time on the part of the students and a waste of resources on the part of the parents or the ones who supported them in their studies.

Given that San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc admits both On-track and Off-track first year college applicants, it is incumbent to study the difficulties encountered by these first-year college students as basis for the design of an action plan for the enhancement of the guidance program of SLRC.

Findings of the study shall be significant to academic curriculum planners, especially at SLRC to consider the importance of the SHS track in the admission of students. The academic community of SLRC especially the professors can make use of the study as basis for the preparation of their syllabi when students are Off-track. Guidance Counselors can utilize the findings of the study in the refinement of their career guidance programs for the SHS students. Lastly, the students themselves will find enlightenment on the importance of planning one's career as early as high school.

Research Questions

The study sought to examine the academic difficulties of On-Track and Off- Track college students of San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc. It endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc First Year College Students in terms of the following:
   1.1 Senior High School Track and Strand
   1.2 Program enrolled in college?
2. What are the academic difficulties encountered by the On-track and Off-track first year college students in school in terms of:
   1. Understanding Content
   2. Basic Skills Requirement
   3. Motivation
   4. Study Time?
3. What is the level of academic difficulties encountered by the On-track and Off-track first year college students?
4. Is there a significant difference on the level of difficulties encountered by the On-track and Off-track first year college students among the different areas?
5. What action plan can be proposed based from the results of the study?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used the descriptive correlational survey utilizing checklist and rating scale as tools for data gathering. A descriptive-correlational research design sought to describe the relationship of certain variables. It assumed the collective similarities of groups except the identified variable, which in this case was the SHS track and strand taken by first year college students of SLRC. This was appropriate to the study which sought to determine the academic difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track college students. Profile of respondents was confirmed using data available at the registrar's office, students' SHS Track and Strand Taken.

The Sample and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at San Lorenzo Ruiz College of Ormoc located at Barangay San Pablo, Ormoc City. SLRC has three colleges namely, the College of Nursing, College of Medical Technology (Medical Laboratory Science), and the College of Pharmacy. All three colleges of have already produced board top-notchers and consistent above-the-national-average passing

percentage rate. In 2016, SLRC accepted its first batch of grade 11 students with the opening of the SLRC Senior High School Department offering the Academic Track and the following strands: STEM, ABM, HUMSS, and General Academics.

All 194 first year college students of SLRC enrolled in 2nd semester of AY 2023-2024 were considered part of the sample clustered according to degree program: BSN- 105, BSMLS-57, BS Pharma-32. Students who did not successfully answer the online questionnaire were excluded from the sample. Table 1 below presents the distribution of respondents.

Table 1. Program taken by first year college students of SLRC Ormoc

Program Taken	Population	%
BSN	105	54.12
BSMLS	57	29.38
BS PHARMA	32	16.5
TOTAL	**194**	**100**

Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made questionnaire to determine the level of academic difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track first year college students of SLRC. Part I of the survey questionnaire was a checklist that described the alignment of students' SHS strand and degree program taken at SLRC, whether On-Track or Off-Track. Part II of the survey questionnaire measured the academic difficulties encountered by the On-Track and Off-Track first year college students in terms of understanding content, basic skills requirement, motivation, and study time. The alignment of SHS tracks and college program taken by first year college students of SLRC, and the level of academic difficulties of both On-Track and Off-Track students were then determined. The researcher-made questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts and was subjected to pilot testing for validity and reliability.

Gathering of Data

Approval to conduct the study was first sought from the Dean of the Graduate School of the Franciscan College of the Immaculate Conception. When approval to conduct the study was granted, a letter asking permission to administer the questionnaire was sent to the school administrator of SRLC, then consent from respondents to be part of the study was sought before the gathering of data.

The respondents of the study were all SLRC first year college students enrolled in the 2nd semester of AY 2023-2024 who successfully answered the online questionnaire using Google Forms during the gathering of data on the first two weeks of April 2024. However, first year

college students who failed to successfully answer the online questionnaire during the data gathering were excluded.

Upon retrieval of the questionnaires, the responses were tallied, tabulated, and statistically analyzed using the appropriate statistical means.

To determine the level of difficulty encountered by the On-Track and Off-Track first year college students in terms of understanding content, basic skills requirement, motivation, and study time, weighted mean was also used. Result was categorized into the following:

Weighted Mean	Description	Interpretation
1.00-1.74	Very Difficult	Indicators were all found to be difficult by the respondents
1.75-2.49	Difficult	Indicators were found to be quite difficult by the respondents
2.50-3.24	Slightly Difficult	Indicators were found to be a little difficult by respondents
3.25-4.00	Not Difficult	Indicators were not found to be difficult by respondents

To determine if there is a significant difference on the level of difficulty experienced by On-Track and Off-Track first year college students of SRLC, t-test using MS Excel Data Analysis application was utilized. The results of the study were presented in tables with discussions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the results of the survey on academic difficulties encountered by On-track and Off-track first year college students in the four areas of understanding content, basic skills requirements, motivation, and study time. Results are presented through tables and interpreted using suitable statistics which aid the discussion.

Profile of the Respondents

The alignment of respondents' program in college to their SHS track and strand plays a vital role in their ability to cope with the academic demands of tertiary education. When program taken in college aligns with respondents' SHS strand, the adjustment challenges maybe less. Table 2 presents the respondents profile according to SHS strand and program taken:

Table 2. Respondents' Profile According to SHS Strand and Program Taken

SHS STRAND		f	%	PROGRAM		f	%
GAS	13	7.3		BSN	99	55.9	
ABM	8	4.5		BSMLS	47	26.6	
HUMSS	8	4.5		BS PHARMA	31	17.5	
STEM	140	79.1					
TVL	7	4					
SPORTS	1	.6					
TOTAL	**177**	**100**		**TOTAL**	**177**	**100**	

Out of the 194 officially enrolled First Year College Students for 2nd Semester of AY 2023-2024, only 177 successfully completed answering the online questionnaire and were considered part of the sample of the study. Table 2 shows that the most common SHS Strand taken by first year college students of SLRC is STEM (140), followed by GAS with 13 students, then ABM and HUMSS with 8 students respectively, then TVL with 7, and Sports with 1 student. It must be noted that 140 respondents were On-Track, while 37 out of the 177 respondents took paramedical programs even if they graduated from a non-aligned SHS strand which in this case are courses in Allied Health Sciences that should have a STEM strand in senior high school. Same findings were reported by Santos, et al. (2019) and Caballes, et al. (2022) who also noted the high rates of mismatch between SHS Strand and college program taken by first year college students. As of the Off-Track students, they revealed during online interview with the counselor that they took a paramedical degree program at SLRC because of the insistence of their benefactors who are health care professionals themselves working abroad.

The dominance of the STEM strand among the SHS tracks taken by first year college students of SLRC is expected since SLRC is a para-medical school classified as a Professional Institute under the horizontal typology of the CHED (CMO 46, s. 2012). Para-Medical degree programs require a strong background in Science and Mathematics. As to college program taken, majority of the respondents are taking BSN (99), followed by BSMLS (47) and BS Pharmacy (31). Nursing was listed as one of the top 10 courses of the country for the year 2024 (What are the most In-Demand college courses of the Philippines, 2024).

BSN had always been a flagship program of SLRC, the first course offering of SLRC in 2004 when SLRC was founded. The BMLS program was offered two years after in 2006, and the BS Pharmacy course in 2009. SLRC graduates in all three programs are doing well in their board exams with passing rates that are above the national performance, even with a 100% passing rate

for the Nursing department in the years 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020, and 2021. All three programs had also produced board topnotchers: 3rd, 7th, and 8th placers for Nursing (2014 NLE); 7th and 5th placers for BMLS (MTLE 2015 and 2017 respectively); and 5th placer for BS Pharmacy (PLE 2020). The top enrolment at SLRC often oscillates between the Nursing and MedTech departments, depending on the national trends, with BS Pharmacy enrolment following the two flagship programs.

Academic Difficulties Encountered by On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students

Academic difficulties encountered by On-Track and Off-Track first year college students of SLRC were measured using the four variables namely: Understanding Content (UC), Basic Skill Requirements (BSR), Motivation (M), and Study Time (ST). To determine the difficulties encountered in the four areas, data from each program were considered to support the overall result for each indicator. Results for each variable is presented next.

Understanding Content

Understanding content is defined as the ability to comprehend easily concepts in Science and Math such as those taken in allied health sciences courses. Since these concepts are already taught in SHS under the STEM strand, there is expectation for On-Track students to have no difficulty in these courses as they have already mastered them in their Senior High School. At the same time, Off-Track students maybe expected to have some difficulty navigating through these courses in Science and Math as they had a different background in their Senior High School years.

Table 3.1 presents that both On-Track and Off-Track students had Slight Difficulty in Understanding Content with a mean score of 2.97 and 2.94 respectively. Both On-Track and Off-Track students reported slight difficulty in all 10 indicators including explaining scientific and mathematic concepts and performing laboratory experiments which are the usual complaints of students to be difficult. The alignment of SHS Strand and degree program taken in college does not seem to matter in determining students' academic difficulties, although, On-Track students had a slightly higher mean than Off-Track students.

T**able 3.1** Table Distribution on the Academic Difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students on Understanding Content

INDICATORS	ON-TRACK STUDENTS		OFF-TRACK STUDENTS	
	MEAN	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. I can understand advanced science and math concepts.	2.94	Slightly Difficult	2.78	Slightly Difficult

2. I can apply concepts in science and math in performing academic tasks and processes.	3.03	Slightly Difficult	2.92	Slightly Difficult
3. I can comprehend the discussions presented in class.	3.18	Slightly Difficult	3.08	Slightly Difficult
4. I can synthesize lengthy information found in textbooks.	2.96	Slightly Difficult	3.0	Slightly Difficult
5. I can clearly articulate my thoughts and opinions on various issues based on my understanding.	3.16	Slightly Difficult	3.14	Slightly Difficult
6. I can explain clearly scientific and mathematic concepts to others.	2.69	Slightly Difficult	2.76	Slightly Difficult
7. I can illustrate concepts in science and math using concrete examples.	2.87	Slightly Difficult	2.86	Slightly Difficult
8. I can cope with the Math and Science courses offered in college.	3.01	Slightly Difficult	3.0	Slightly Difficult
9. I can work on the academic tasks easily.	2.88	Slightly Difficult	3.0	Slightly Difficult
10. I can perform laboratory experiments well.	2.97	Slightly Difficult	2.86	Slightly Difficult
TOTAL	**2.97**	**Slightly Difficult**	**2.94**	**Slightly Difficult**

Both On-Track and Off-Track students reported highest means in clearly articulating thoughts and opinions on various issues based on their understanding and in comprehending the discussions presented in class, and likewise had the lowest mean score in explaining clearly scientific and mathematic concepts to others (2.69 and 2.76 respectively). That both On-Track and Off-Track rated this indicator as their lowest score would suggest that first year college students experience the same difficulties in understanding content regardless of their SHS Track and Strand. This result is supported by Lima, et al. (2019) who claims that the difficulty of college students who have a hard time explaining concepts in math is a result of poor background knowledge in basic education.

Basic Skills Requirements

Basic skills requirements refer to the background knowledge in science and math a student learns in SHS. This prior knowledge acts as a scaffold for students to build upon in their college education. The advantage of aligned SHS Strand and degree program taken in college can best be demonstrated in the absence of difficulty in Basic Skill Requirements (BSR) among On-Track Students. This is because On-Track students have the necessary background knowledge in their STEM SHS strand needed in navigating similar courses in college (Caballes, 2022), which in this case are the math and science courses in the allied health sciences offered at SLRC. It is interesting

to find out if indeed On-Track students exhibit this clear advantage over their Off-Track counterparts. Table 3.2 presents the results for Basic Skills Requirement:

Table 3.2 Table Distribution on the Academic Difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students on Basic Skills Requirements

INDICATORS	ON-TRACK STUDENTS MEAN	DESCRIPTION	OFF-TRACK STUDENTS MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. I have a good background in science and Math during SHS	3.01	Slightly Difficult	2.70	Slightly Difficult
2. I have mastered the basic mathematical operations.	2.88	Slightly Difficult	2.95	Slightly Difficult
3. I have mastered the basic science concepts in chemistry, physics and biology.	2.76	Slightly Difficult	2.38	Difficult
4. I can use my background knowledge in SHS in accomplishing academic tasks in college.	3.17	Slightly Difficult	2.92	Slightly Difficult
5. I have good grades in SHS academic subjects especially in science and math.	2.96	Slightly Difficult	3.0	Slightly Difficult
6. I have good communication skills both in speaking and writing.	2.89	Slightly Difficult	2.95	Slightly Difficult
7. I can read academic articles on science and math with ease.	2.70	Slightly Difficult	2.76	Slightly Difficult
8. I can organize my thoughts and ideas comprehensively.	3.06	Slightly Difficult	3.14	Slightly Difficult
9. I can identify laboratory apparatus and equipment and know its use.	3.4	Not Difficult	3.05	Slightly Difficult
10. I can understand medical and scientific terminologies and concepts.	3.01	Slightly Difficult	2.84	Slightly Difficult
TOTAL	**2.99**	**Slightly Difficult**	**2.87**	**Slightly Difficult**

On-Track and Off-Track first year college students were reported to have "Slight Difficulty" in almost all indicators for Basic Skills Requirements with 2.99 and 2.87 overall mean scores. They both reported highest means in organizing their thoughts and ideas comprehensively and in identifying laboratory apparatus and equipment and knowing its uses, with On-Track students reporting the 2nd highest mean in using background knowledge in accomplishing academic tasks in college, while Off-Track Students reported 3rd highest mean in having good grades in SHS academic subjects especially in science and math. This shows that On-Track first year college students of SLRC have Slight difficulty in Basic Skills Requirements despite their background in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics strand in Senior High School. This finding is supported by Friedman (2018) who claims that no matter how

rigorous the training is in secondary education, many first-year college students are still unprepared for college.

As to laboratory apparatus, result shows that On-Track students found no difficulty in identifying laboratory apparatus and equipment and knowing its use with a 3.40 mean score. This result is an evidence of the advantage of aligned SHS Strand and course taken in college, while Off-Track students reported Difficulty (2.38) in the mastery of basic science concepts in Chemistry, Physics, and Biology, a very important BSR item for para-medical courses. This result implies that Off-Track students struggle in comprehending the content of the lessons where skills on Science and Math are necessary as these skills were not fully assimilated and developed during their non-STEM senior high school strand, thus the difficulty in mastery of basic science concepts in Chemistry, Physics, and Biology.

This result is consistent with the findings of Kokemuller (2020) who insists on the importance of good pre-college background for students to succeed in college and a good background in Science and Math would really prepare first year college students for the academic rigors of college life. Furthermore, Culatta (2020) also reiterated on the reliance of old cognitive structures (schema) in navigating new information. As it is, if one has a good background in Science and Math, it would be easier for the student to breakthrough barriers in Science and Math courses in the tertiary level.

Motivation

Students' interest on learning new concepts in their chosen field of endeavor can make difference in their success as a learner (Abdulrahmar, 2023). Motivation is a very important factor of success that even with limitations, a highly motivated individual can still make it in the world. The same can be said about learning in the classroom. Even if some students have limited background knowledge in Science and Math, having taken a degree in college not aligned with their SHS strand, they can still compete with On-Track students who had good background knowledge in Science and Math, as long as they maintain a high degree of motivation in their studies (Oclinaria, 2018).

Table 3.3 presents that both On-Track and Off-Track students had slight difficulty maintaining their motivation with mean scores of 3.11 and 3.18 respectively, with both reporting No Difficulty in having clear goals for their studies and enjoying exchanging ideas with classmates. This is evidently a result of the K-12 curriculum that encourages collaboration among the students, making it easy for them to collaborate with peers. In today's highly diverse and multi-cultural world, students must be collaborative to succeed.

Table 3.3 further shows that On-Track and Off-Track students also had distinct strengths: No Difficulty on their willingness to go an extra mile for their studies for On-Track students and on enjoying time spent in school for Off-Track students. STEM graduates are used to the rigors of the hard sciences and mathematics, making them ready to go an extra mile. On the other hand, the humanistic background of the Non-STEM strands, may have developed among Off-Track students

a happier attitude towards studies in particular, and towards life in general. Abdulrahman et al. (2023) and Morales & Loor (2024) believe in the power of motivation to develop positive attitudes towards learning and learning engagement that can impact academic achievement.

On-Track students are expected to have a high motivation in learning, yet the data shows otherwise. Both On-Track and Off-Track students overall exhibited the same degree in maintaining their motivation for their studies.

Table 3.3 Table Distribution on the Academic Difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students on Motivation

INDICATORS	ON-TRACK STUDENTS		OFF-TRACK STUDENTS	
	MEAN	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. I have clear goals for my studies.	3.51	Not Difficult	3.68	Not Difficult
2. I am excited to go to school to attend my classes	3.04	Slightly Difficult	3.11	Slightly Difficult
3. I find school tasks interesting and exciting.	3.02	Slightly Difficult	3.19	Slightly Difficult
4. I am willing to go an extra mile for my studies.	3.27	Not Difficult	3.22	Slightly Difficult
5. I am always ready for school tasks.	3.03	Slightly Difficult	3.0	Slightly Difficult
6. I feel a rush when doing academic tasks.	3.02	Slightly Difficult	2.92	Slightly Difficult
7. I enjoy time spent in school.	3.09	Slightly Difficult	3.27	Not Difficult
8. I enjoy exchanging ideas with classmates.	3.32	Not Difficult	3.49	Not Difficult
9. I have fun reading assigned articles and books.	2.96	Slightly Difficult	2.95	Slightly Difficult
10. I enjoy doing my assignments.	2.86	Slightly Difficult	2.95	Slightly Difficult
TOTAL	**3.11**	**Slightly Difficult**	**3.18**	**Slightly Difficult**

Study Time

Study time refers to the frequency and duration a learner allots for studies in a day or week. It is said that a student needs three hours study time for every hour of class time. This would be very challenging among young people nowadays considering the many extracurricular and social activities they have to attend to. Managing one's time would really be challenging to a modern day college student. It would therefore be interesting to find the academic difficulties encountered by On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students on Study Time.

Table 3.4 Table Distribution on the Academic Difficulties of On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students on Study Time

INDICATORS	ON TRACK		OFF TRACK	
	MEAN	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
1. I have a good study habit.	2.74	Slightly Difficult	2.84	Slightly Difficult
2. I spend at least an hour a day for reviewing my lessons.	2.88	Slight Difficult	2.86	Slightly Difficult
3. I spend at least an hour a day to study in advance my lessons.	2.74	Slightly Difficult	2.57	Slightly Difficult
4. I can balance my academic and co-curricular activities.	2.98	Slightly Difficult	3.03	Slightly Difficult
5. I have set clear priorities in my schedules.	3.04	Slightly Difficult	3.30	Not Difficult
6. I have a daily study time schedule.	2.59	Slightly Difficult	2.65	Slightly Difficult
7. I have a weekly study time schedule.	2.79	Slightly Difficult	2.84	Slightly Difficult
8. I can prioritize my studies over social engagements.	3.12	Slightly Difficult	3.08	Slightly Difficult
9. I can pass assignments on time.	3.11	Slightly Difficult	2.92	Slightly Difficult
10. I have a well-balanced life.	2.99	Slightly Difficult	2.92	Slightly Difficult
TOTAL	**2.90**	**Slightly Difficult**	**2.90**	**Slightly Difficult**

One of the key skills among successful learners is finding balance among the many demands in life. Table 3.4 shows that both On-Track and Off-Track first year college students claimed the same level of difficulty in managing their time with the same mean score of 2.90 (Slightly Difficult). In relation to this findings, Friedman (2018) states that first year college students are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of academic work expected of them especially in reading and library research work, thus poor time management skill can be disastrous to the academic studies of first year college students, whether On-Track or Off-Track.

Furthermore, result presents highest means in setting clear priorities in their schedules and in prioritizing studies over social engagements. This result implies that the first year college students has life and studies balance, a mindset that is so important among young people. Achieving this balance is crucial to success (Szeged, et al., 2024). Both respondents also had lowest means in spending at least an hour a day to study in advance their lessons and in having a daily study time schedule. These indicators speak of self-discipline, and for both On-Track and Off-Track students to rate these as their lowest mean scores would suggest that they still need to

develop a daily study routine. As observed, developing a daily study schedule would really be hard for students who are bombarded with so many distractions. As pointed by Kokemuller (2020), spending additional hours for studies would not be easy for most college students to take especially that there are many social activities to attend to.

Among all the indicators, the respondents differed significantly only in setting clear priorities in their schedules where the Off-Track students had No Difficulty with a mean score of 3.30 (Not Difficult), while On-Track students had Slight Difficulty. This is rather unexpected among the On-Track students, who are believed to have been more trained in setting priorities in their studies. This may imply that the behavioral psychology and philosophy courses of the ABM and HUMSS strands were able to help Off-Track students manage better their priorities.

Level of Academic Difficulties Encountered by On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students

The alignment of SHS Strand and degree program taken in college can affect the academic difficulties encountered by first year college of students of SLRC. Table 4 below shows the levels of academic difficulties in the four areas of Understanding Content, Basic Skills Requirements, Motivation, and Study Time among On-Track and Off-Track first year college students of SLRC.

Table 4. Summary Distribution on the Level of Academic Difficulty of On-Track and Off-Tract First Year College Students

INDICATORS	ON-TRACK STUDENTS		OFF-TRACK STUDENTS	
	MEAN	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
Understanding Content	2.97	Slightly Difficult	2.94	Slightly Difficult
Basic Skills Requirement	2.99	Slightly Difficult	2.87	Slightly Difficult
Motivation	3.11	Slightly Difficult	3.18	Slightly Difficult
Study Time	2.90	Slightly Difficult	2.90	Slightly Difficult
TOTAL	**2.99**	**Slightly Difficult**	**2.97**	**Slightly Difficult**

Both On-Track and Off-Track first year college students were reported to have Slight Difficulty in the four areas of academic difficulties, reporting no difference in their level of difficulty. On-Track students have reported an overall average score of 2.99 (Slightly Difficult) with Off-Track students coming close at 2.97 (Slightly Difficult). Both groups' highest mean score is on motivation (On-Track 3.11, Off-Track 3.18), suggesting that first year college students have great motivation in chosen program and they already attained a certain degree of maturity to be

self-motivated in their studies. Motivation, as Pishghadam, et al. (2022) claim is an important factor to academic success.

As to indicators with lowest means, study time (2.90) for On-Track students and basic skills requirements (2.87) for Off-Track students were reported. Although both mean scores are categorized as Slightly Difficult, this result implies the advantage of having aligned SHS Strand and degree program taken. Basic Skills Requirements are cemented in the SHS level of aligned students, and for Off-Track students to report this as their lowest mean score in the four areas of academic difficulties supports the notion of Kukemuller (2020) who believed in the importance of having basic skills before learning more complex concepts.

Difference on the Level of Academic Difficulties Encountered by On-Track and Off-Track First Year College Students

Table 5 shows the t-test results of respondents' academic difficulties in the four areas of Understanding Content, Basic Skills Requirements, Motivation, and Study Time. The t-test of difference was computed using MS Excel Data Analysis application. The results of the t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the scores of On-Track and Off-Track first year college students in all four areas of academic difficulty. This means that overall, both On-Track and Off-Track students experienced the same degree of academic difficulty (Slightly Difficult) in the first year of their college studies in San Lorenzo Ruiz College regardless of the track and strand taken in Senior High School. In other words, alignment of SHS Strand and degree program taken in college did not significantly affect the difficulties encountered by first year college students of SLRC in all areas of academic difficulty.

Table 5. T-Test Results of Respondents' Academic Difficulties Among the Different Areas

DIFFICULTIES	STUDENTS	N	MEAN	SD	MEAN DIFFERENCE	t-value	DESCRIPTPTION
UNDERSTANDING CONTENT	On-Track	140	2.97	0.239	0.03	1.107	***NO DIFFERENCE***
	Off-Track	37	2.94				
BASIC SKILLS REQUIREMENT	On-Track	140	2.99	0.334	0.12	1.769	***NO DIFFERENCE***
	Off-Track	37	2.87				
MOTIVATION	On-Track	140	3.11	0.335	-0.07	0.396	***NO DIFFERENCE***
	Off-Track	37	3.18				
STUDY TIME	On-Track	140	2.90	0.3	0.0	0.819	***NO DIFFERENCE***
	Off-Track	37	2.90				
OVERALL	On-Track	140	2.99	0.241	0.02	1.072	***NO DIFFERENCE***
	Off-Track	37	2.97				

Note: computed at 0.05 level of significance

This result of "No Difference" as shown in TABLE 5 suggests that regardless of the SHS Strand taken by first year college students of SLRC, they exhibited the same level of academic difficulties. The notion then of aligned SHS Strand and program taken in college as advantage may not always be true and the CHED after all was right in the issuing CMO 105, s. 2017 that required colleges and universities to admit to any degree program a holder of a SHS diploma regardless of track and strand.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on the results of the study.

Summary of Findings

This study sought to determine if alignment of Senior High School Strand and Degree Program taken in college had an effect on the academic difficulties encountered by the On-Track and Off-Track first year college students of San Lorenzo Ruiz College in the four areas of Understanding Content, Basic Skills Requirements, Motivation, and Study Time. Results of the study revealed the following findings:

Out of 194 first year students enrolled in SLRC for AY 2023-2024 taking BSN, BSMLS, and BS Pharmacy, only 177 participated in the survey where majority (140) of the respondents were On-Track with STEM as SHS strand; the remaining 37 students were Off-Track with ABM, HUMSS, GAS, Tech-Voc, and Sports as SHS track and strand;

Results of the study revealed that On-Track and Off-Track first year college students encountered the following difficulties in the four areas of academic difficulty: Slight Difficulty in all items of the Understanding Content for both On-Track (2.97) and Off-Track (2.94); Slight Difficulty in Basic Skills Requirements except in the mastery of basic science concepts in chemistry, physics, and biology in which Off-Track students found it Difficult with a 2.38 mean score, and in identifying laboratory apparatus and equipment and knowing its use in which On-Track students found it Not Difficult with a mean score of 3.4; Slight Difficulty for Motivation except in having clear goals for their studies and enjoying exchanging ideas with classmates where both On-Track and Off-Track students did not find them difficult; likewise in willingness to go the extra mile where On-Track students did not find difficult (3.27) and in enjoying time spent in school where Off-Track reported Not Difficult (3.27); Sligh Difficulty was also reported for Study Time except in setting clear priorities in schedules where Off-Track students found it Not Difficult (3.30).

Overall, both On-Track and Off-Track first year college students reported Slight Difficulty in all four areas of academic difficulties, and reported highest mean scores in Motivation (both

On-Track and Off-Track), but reported lowest mean scores in Basic Skills Requirements (Off-Track) and in Study Time (On-Track).

Overall t-test results (1.072) revealed no significant difference on the level of difficulties encountered by the On-Track and Off-Track first year college students among the different areas of academic difficulty.

Conclusion

Based on the results and findings of the study, it is concluded that regardless if students are On-Track or Off-Track, they experienced academic difficulty in their college life. These difficulties however are minimized when students have strong motivation to study. The school environment can help students cope with their academic difficulties by designing different mechanisms to address these difficulties.

Recommendations

With the conclusions, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Adopt the proposed Action Plan for the Enhancement of Guidance Program of SLRC (Appendix 3) as mechanism for first year college students to cope with academic difficulties;
2. Continue the bridging program for Off-Track students targeting basic skills in Science and Math starting first semester of AY 2024-2025;
3. Conduct further study involving a larger sample size maybe combining the student populations of clustered schools especially in AY 2024-2025 when the first batch of full cycle K-12 graduates enter college.

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