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# Report: First two years of college show small gains

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By Reed Saxon, AP

Students walk around the University of California's Riverside campus last June.

## TIME USE

How college students spend their time, based on a 168-hour week (seven days):

Source: *Academically Adrift*

By **Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY**

Nearly half of the nation's undergraduates show almost no gains in learning in their first two years of college, in large part because colleges don't make academics a priority, a new report shows.

Instructors tend to be more focused on their own faculty research than teaching younger students, who in turn are more tuned in to their social lives, according to the report, based on a book titled *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Findings are based on transcripts and surveys of more than 3,000 full-time traditional-age students on 29 campuses nationwide, along with their results on the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a standardized test that gauges students' critical thinking, analytic reasoning and writing skills.

After two years in college, 45% of students showed no significant gains in learning; after four years, 36% showed little change.

Students also spent 50% less time studying compared with students a few decades ago, the research shows.

"These are really kind of shocking, disturbing numbers," says [New York University](#) professor Richard Arum, lead author of the book, published by the [University of Chicago](#) Press.

He noted that students in the study, on average, earned a 3.2 grade-point average. "Students are able to navigate through the system quite well with little effort," Arum said.

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The Department of Education and Congress in recent years have looked for ways to hold colleges and universities accountable for student learning, but researchers say that federal intervention would be counterproductive.

"We can hope that the (new research) encourages rather than discourages college faculty to learn more about what works in terms of fostering higher levels of student learning," said George Kuh of the Center for Postsecondary Research at [Indiana University](#).

Charles Blaich, director of the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, used by 130 private colleges to improve education quality, said he thinks colleges are aware of the shortcomings but are trying to improve.

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"I wouldn't want to create the impression that schools are blind to this," he said.

Other details in the research:

•35% of students report spending five or fewer hours per week studying alone. Yet, despite an "ever-growing emphasis" on study groups and collaborative projects, students who study in groups tend to have lower gains in learning.

•50% said they never took a class in a typical semester where they wrote more than 20 pages; 32% never took a course in a typical semester where they read more than 40 pages per week.

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