# PREPARATORY YEAR FRESHMEN'S EXPECTATIONS IN NAJRAN UNIVERSITY

**Arwa Rafeeq Arna'out**

Assistant Professor, Preparatory Year, Najran University,
KSA.

arwaarnaout@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed at determining Preparatory Year freshmen's (perceived and achieved) expectations in Najran University. A scale was developed and distributed to (100) male and (50) female freshmen at the beginning and at the end of the academic semester 2014-2015. It consisted of (28) items distributed on three expectations domains about: Student-teaching staff interaction, study techniques and social experience. Data were processed using means, standard deviations, and T-test. Results showed that the freshmen's perceived and achieved expectations level was high. The results also showed that there were statistical significant differences between perceived and achieved expectations in favour of the perceived expectations in two domains: study techniques and social experience expectations. Moreover, findings showed statistical significant differences in perceived social experience domain according to gender in favour of female freshmen. No statistical significant differences in freshmen's achieved expectations were shown according to freshmen's gender.*

**Keywords**: expectations, freshmen, interaction, study techniques, social experience

## INTRODUCTION

Preparatory Year Program (PYP) in Najran University is an obligatory and a basic requirement for admission to specializations like Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Medical Laboratories, Nursing, Engineering, and Administrative Sciences. PYP comprises of two levels. The duration of each level is one semester. Students study courses like English skills, Math, Computer Skills, in addition to Learning, Thinking and Research skills. These courses aim to qualify students for university study (B.A. degree) and bridge the gap between general education and university education. Passing PYP is a prerequisite for joining majors that require PYP such as Colleges of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Engineering, and Administrative Sciences (Admission at Preparatory Year, 2014). As freshmen in other universities, PYP freshmen have different expectations regarding university experience and interaction with teaching staff, study techniques, and social experience.

Psychologists have recognized the importance of expectations in understanding human behavior. Expectations are personal beliefs about occurrences that may take place in the future. They develop from a combination of individuals' experiences and knowledge. Expectations serve as a basic function to prepare humans for action, and they range in certainty from a small possibility of occurrence to an almost certain occurrence. The consequences of expectations affect how people think, feel and behave. (Casad, 2007) Going to college represents a significant developmental milestone requiring students to adjust to the academic challenges, increased levels of independence, separation from friends and family, and new role expectations. (Kreig, 2013)

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As students transition into their first-year experience in institutions of higher education, they bring with them a range of expectations (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Moreover, those set of expectations shape their responses to their new environment (Gibney et al., 2011). Students have expectations regarding their interactions with faculty members. Though it does not correspond with faculty member perceptions of their practices, first-year students have been found to hold expectations that faculty members will provide quick feedback to students about their work and that faculty members will be readily accessible to students (Brinkworth et al., 2009). Clearly, there are differences between students' expectations of university and the reality of their experience. (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2003)

Malaney & Shively (1991) noted that higher Education should care about students' expectations for many reasons.  The level of integration is dependent upon the expectations and perceptions a student has about the college as well as college experiences. While students' expectations, perceptions, and experiences change throughout their collegiate tenure, the first year is a crucial time. Moreover, several researchers have offered evidence that student persistence, engagement, retention, completion and achievement are greatly determined by their first-year college experiences (Longden, 2006). On the other hand, first year students’ expectations of what it will be like to be a university student play a determining role in their attitudes towards study and in the quality of their experience. (Krause et al., 2005)

Factors that seem to have influenced the students' expectations and perceptions are students′ background knowledge, previous experience, informal communication, and individual needs. (Moru et al., 2009)

Institutions role is clear when students' expectations are low. Gibney et al. (2011) indicated that if students are coming to university with unrealistically low expectations, institutions need to more clearly communicate their expectations about the time demands and commitment expected. On the other hand, if an individual’s perception exceeds his/her expectations, this positive sum is assumed to affect the state of satisfaction positively. However, respondents may rate service quality lower, despite being quite satisfied. (Theodorakis et al., 2001)

It is desirable if students have realistic and well-informed expectations of higher education. (Arquero, Burne et al., 2009). Jackson et al. (2000) contended that understanding freshman expectations is essential in predicting the adjustment capacities of these students. The alignment of university services and programs with first-year student learning anticipations and influences requires an understanding of the first-year student experience.

There are significant differences between the students’ expectations and the experience that institutions are prepared to offer. This may arise because students have unrealistic expectations of what will transpire during their time at university; it may also arise because of misunderstandings associated with the information provided by the institution about its culture or because the institution is simply unaware of the students’ expectations. University teachers and service providers may make erroneous assumptions about students’ needs, as universities tend to provide information to students based on the institutions’ expectations, not those of the student (Pithers & Holland, 2006)

Well-prepared students have realistic expectations about course content, required study skills, teaching methods and aspects of non-academic life, such as social contacts and finance. In particular, an appreciation of the need for independent learning skills and good personal time management seem to be important. Where students are badly prepared, it is possible to overcome this through induction activities and study support. However, these efforts require individual contact and a willingness on the part of the student to engage with the process. Both of them require institutional resources and a basic level of student motivation. (Round, 2005)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Graces-Ozanne & Sullivan (2014) examined how students' expectations in the first year Principles of Economics I were related to the grades they actually receive. They found that students' expectations were indeed overoptimistic, but there appeared to be a gap between their optimism and actual performance. They also found that students' grade expectations remained statistically different from actual grades received. Therefore, despite being faced with reality, what students want is still not what they get.

Expectations and experiences of academics, social life, family involvement, and satisfaction with the chosen college were compared in a study conducted by Kreig (2013). Findings showed that students' experiences generally did not differ from their expectations, except regarding increased involvement with family. Violated expectations of academic demands predicted stress during the first and senior years. Violated expectations regarding social experiences predicted stress in the vulnerable first year.

In a study entitled "Why Did they Come Here? The Influences and Expectations of First-Year Students' College Experience", Nadelson et al. (2013) used a survey to investigate the relationships between first-year students' college expectations and experiences, their awareness of the university's programming and projected image, the influence of the programming and image on their decision to attend the institution, and the students' personal characteristics. Findings revealed positive perceptions of their university expectations and experiences and relationships between expectations, experience, and perceptions of influences with the personal characteristics of the students.

To address students' expectations of classroom pedagogy, Jackson et al. (2009) conducted a research using a survey administered to a sample of first-year college students. Findings indicated that 25% or more of the students had a significant gap between their expected and actual classroom pedagogies.

There may be significant differences between student expectations and the experience that institutions are prepared to offer. Crisp et al. (2009) hypothesized that students' who have unrealistic expectations of their first-year experience, will experience misunderstandings between the information provided by the institution about its culture and will lack awareness of institutional expectations for first-year students', which are all indicators that can lead to misalignment of student expectations and their experience.

Arquero et al. (2009) examined motives, expectations, preparedness and academic performance of students of accounting at a Spanish University. Findings revealed that students are motivated by a combination of intrinsic and vocationally-oriented factors and feel well prepared for high education.

Brinkworth et al. (2009) investigated transitioning from high school to university by surveying Humanities and Science students at the University of Adelaide. Findings indicated that even though student expectations, student experience, and teacher views differed, remarkable similarities emerged across the two degree programs (Science and Humanities). They highlighted a call for non-specialized transition programs to meet first-year students' needs and facilitate the transition from secondary to tertiary education.

Smith & Wertlieb (2005) used a survey to compare first-year pre business majors' students' expectations for their university experience with their actual first-year experiences. Paired t tests revealed that student expectations didn't align with their first-year experiences. To assist students with the transition to college, they recommended high school and college collaboration. Findings revealed that students' academic and social expectations did not align with their first-year experiences. Academic and social expectations / experiences were not statistically significant predictors of first-year academic achievement. However, students with unrealistic high social or academic expectations had lower first-year grade point averages (GPAs) than students with average or below-average expectations.

Lowe & Cook (2003) identified a gap between expectation and reality. In most cases students adapt to the unexpected but some students find it difficult to bridge the gap between expectations and reality.

Krallman & Holcomb (1997) conducted a study sought to identify the academic, personal, and social expectations of incoming college freshmen. They also examined the effects of orientation programming on modifying unrealistic expectations held by some students. By using a questionnaire mailed to freshmen at Miami University in Oxford after completing freshman orientation program, the study found that many pre-orientation respondents had unrealistic academic, personal, and social expectations concerning their future college experience. Students surveyed after the orientation program tended to have more realistic expectations in many, but not all, areas.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Every year freshmen enter institutions of higher education with a set of preconceived ideas and expectations. And due to the lack of empirical research on freshmen expectations in Najran University and the need to support freshmen's expectations by providing opportunities to articulate them, there is a justification for continuing to research the phenomenon.  The purpose of this study was to investigate PY freshmen's expectations in Najran University and determine the level of perceived and achieved expectations. Therefore, the following questions were set:

1. What is the level of PY freshmen's perceived expectations when joining the university?
2. To what extent did freshmen perceived expectations have been achieved?
3. Are there any statistical significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between freshmen's perceived expectations when joining the university and the achieved ones?
4. Are there any statistical significant differences at the significant level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in freshmen's perceived expectations when joining the university according to gender?
5. Are there statistical differences at the significant level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in freshmen's achieved expectations according to gender?

## STUDY LIMITATION

This study was limited to PY freshmen at Najran University during the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015.

## METHODOLOGY

The study followed the descriptive analytical method using a three-point Likert scale. The scale aimed to explore PY freshmen's perceived expectations when joining the university (at the beginning of the first semester) and estimated to what extent these expectations were achieved regarding three domains: Student-teaching staff interaction, study techniques and social experience expectations. The responses were analyzed quantitatively using means, standard deviations, and t-test to detect the significant statistical differences between the means. Results were explained according to means and have been classified into three levels: Low (1-1.66), average (1.67–2.33) and high freshmen's expectations (2.34-3).

### Population and Sample

Study population consisted of all PY freshmen of the first level at Najran University, enrolled in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015, which numbered according to statistics of PY (230) freshmen (160 male and 70 female). However, the sample of the study consisted of (150) male and female freshmen (100 male and 50 female).

### Instrument

The three-point Likert scale was directed to the first level PY freshmen in the second week of the second semester 2014-2015 (7th Sep – 11th Sep 2015), and again to the same sample in the 13th week of the first semester (15-19 Nov 2015). It consisted of (38) items covering three domains:

1. Student-Teaching Staff Interaction Expectations (Items 1-13)
2. Study Techniques Expectations (Items 14-26)
3. Social Experience Expectations (Items 27-38)

To verify content validity, the scale was distributed on twelve specialists in Najran University to express their opinion about the scale items and domains. Eight copies were returned and it was standardized according to their suggestions for deleting and adding some items. On the other hand, scale reliability was calculated through Split-Half Reliability “Spearman Brown Formula”. The scale was applied on a random sample of (50) freshmen in Najran University in different Colleges (male and female). It revealed (r=0.872).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It should be pointed here that the study findings were limited to its (spatial and temporal) limitations, sample size and the way the sample was chosen. This study was also limited to PY freshmen's perceptions about their perceived and achieved expectations and other stakeholders were not sought by the study. Means, standard deviations, perceived expectations level and rank were computed to answer the first question. Table 1 shows the results**.**

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Perceived Expectations Level and Rank**

| *Freshmen's Expectations Domains* | *N* | *Mean* | *Std. Deviation* | *Level* | *Rank* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | 150 | 2.63 | .305 | High | 3 |
| Study Techniques | 150 | 2.73 | .223 | High | 1 |
| Social Experience | 150 | 2.68 | .267 | High | 2 |
| *Total* | 150 | 2.68 | .189 | High | |

According to table 1, PY freshmen's perceived expectations level when joining the university were high. The domains means are between (2.36 – 2.73). The perceived freshmen's expectations about study techniques expectations rank first (M=2.73) then social experience expectations (M=2.68) and finally study techniques expectations which rank third (M=2.63). Findings revealed that PY freshmen's perceived expectations were high or in other words they were overoptimistic when joining the university and in the three expectations domains: Study techniques, social experience, and student-teaching staff interaction. This result was consistent with Darlaston-Jones et al. (2003) who found that there are differences between student expectations of university and the reality of their experience. According to this finding, freshmen's perceived expectations were overoptimistic as Graces-Ozanne, and Sullivan (2014)**.**

Means, standard deviations of achieved expectations level and rank were computed as shown in table 2 to answer the second question.

**Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Achieved Expectations Level and Rank**

| *Freshmen's Expectations Domains* | *N* | *Mean* | *Std. Deviation* | *Level* | *Rank* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | 150 | 2.58 | .322 | High | 2 |
| Study Techniques | 150 | 2.62 | .275 | High | 1 |
| Social Experience | 150 | 2.57 | .290 | High | 3 |
| *Total* | 150 | 2.59 | .202 | High | |

According to table 2, the achieved expectations are high in the three domains. Means of achieved expectations are between (2.58-2.62). Freshmen's achieved expectations about study techniques expectations domain rank first (M=2.62) then student-teaching staff interaction expectations domain (2.58) and finally social experience expectations domain which rank third (M=2.57). These findings showed that freshmen's perceived expectations have been achieved to a high extent.

Means and standard deviations and t-test of perceived and achieved expectations were computed as illustrated in table 3 and 4 to answer the third question.

**Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations of Freshmen's Perceived and Achieved Expectations**

| *Expectations Domains* | *Expectations* | *N* | *Mean* | *Std. Deviation* | *Std. Error Mean* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | Perceived | 150 | 2.64 | .305 | .025 |
| | Achieved | 150 | 2.59 | .323 | .026 |
| Study Techniques | Perceived | 150 | 2.73 | .224 | .018 |
| | Achieved | 150 | 2.62 | .275 | .022 |
| Social Experience | Perceived | 150 | 2.68 | .267 | .022 |
| | Achieved | 150 | 2.58 | .290 | .024 |
| *Total* | Perceived | 150 | 2.68 | .189 | .015 |
| | Achieved | 150 | 2.60 | .203 | .017 |

According to table 3, there are statistical significant differences between mean scores of freshmen's perceived expectations when joining the university and the achieved expectations. To determine the significant differences between mean scores, T- test formula was computed. Table 4 demonstrates the results.

**Table 4. T-test Results**

| *Expectations Domains* | *t* | *df* | *Sig. (2-tailed)* | *Mean Difference* | *Std. Error Difference* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | 1.343 | 298 | .180 | .049 | .036 |
| Study Techniques | 3.910 | 298 | .000* | .113 | .029 |
| Social Experience | 3.344 | 298 | .001* | .108 | .032 |
| *Total* | 3.956 | 298 | .000* | .089 | .023 |

*** p ≤ (0.05)**

Table 4 illustrates that there are significant differences at (α ≤ 0.05) between freshmen’s perceived and achieved expectations in the second and the third domain (study techniques expectations) and (social experience expectations) in favour of freshmen's perceived expectations. The calculated value of T is statistically significant at p≤ (0.05). Statistical significant differences were shown in freshmen's perceived expectations when joining the university, and in the achieved ones in two domains which were study techniques and social experience expectations and in favour of perceived expectations. This can be interpreted as (Waugh, 2001) stated: "Expectations are easier than experiences".

Accordingly, Darlaston-Jones et al. (2003) stated that universities need to understand the expectations of their students in terms of their university experience. Any gap between student expectations and their reality could potentially lead to students withdrawing from the institution and therefore impact significantly on available funding. In PY freshmen case, their expectations were high and also the achieved ones. On the other hand, this result should be taken into consideration. Malaney & Shively (1991) revealed that students' expectations may change throughout their university tenure, but the first year is a crucial time. This finding is not consistent with Lowe & Cook (2003) and Darlaston-Jones et, al. (2003) who revealed a gap between expectation and reality and in this study it was in favour of the perceived expectations.

To answer the fourth question, Means, standard deviations, and t-test formula are computed. Table 5 and 6 illustrate the results.

**Table 5(part-I). Means, Standard Deviations of Freshmen's Perceived Expectations according to Gender Variable**

| *Expectations Domains* | *Gender* | *N* | *Mean* | *Std. Deviation* | *Std. Error Mean* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | Male | 100 | 2.63 | .280 | .028 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.64 | .352 | .049 |
| Study Techniques | Male | 100 | 2.71 | .202 | .020 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.76 | .261 | .037 |

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**Table 5(part-II). Means, Standard Deviations of Freshmen's Perceived Expectations according to Gender Variable**

| *Expectations Domains* | *Gender* | *N* | *Mean* | *Std. Deviation* | *Std. Error Mean* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Experience | Male | 100 | 2.65 | .252 | .025 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.75 | .286 | .040 |
| *Total* | Male | 100 | 2.66 | .163 | .016 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.72 | .229 | .032 |

According to table 5, there are differences between mean scores of male and female freshmen. To determine the significant differences, T- test formula was computed as demonstrated in Table 6.

**Table 6. T-test Results of Freshmen's Perceived Expectations according to Gender Variable**

| *Expectations Domains* | *t* | *df* | *Sig. (2-tailed)* | *Mean Difference* | *Std. Error Difference* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | -.275- | 148 | .783 | -.01462- | .05305 |
| Study Techniques | -1.211- | 148 | .228 | -.04692- | .03873 |
| Social Experience | -2.204- | 148 | .029* | -.10083- | .04574 |
| *Total* | -1.624- | 148 | .106 | -.05289- | .03256 |

*** p ≤ (0.05)**

Table 6 illustrates that there are not statistically significant differences at the significance level (α ≤ 0.05) in freshmen’s perceived expectations when joining the university according to their gender except the third domain (social experience expectations). By comparing mean scores in table 6, the statistical differences are in favour of female freshmen (M=2.75) and T value is (-2.204-). Which means that freshmen’s perceived expectations vary depending on gender variable in social experience expectations in favour of female freshmen. Researchers have identified that gender found to play a significant role in the determination of educational expectations and outcomes (attainment). Andres et al. (2007) In this study, only freshmen's perceived social experience expectations showed statistical significant differences according to gender and in favour of female freshmen. This could be interpreted that Saudi female freshmen's tend to have more social relations in university especially after transition from school (a small closed community) to university (a larger community). It could be also interpreted due to the social and cultural environment in KSA. Female freshmen usually look forward to experiencing more social interaction opportunities in the university by making friends, socializing with peers, involving in campus culture, joining clubs and societies available in campus.

To answer the fifth question, Means, standard deviations, and t-test formula are computed. Table 7 and 8 illustrate the results.

**Table 7. Means, Standard Deviations of Freshmen's Achieved Expectations according to Gender Variable**

| *Expectations Domains* | *gender* | *N* | *Mean* | *Std. Deviation* | *Std. Error Mean* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | Male | 100 | 2.61 | .276 | .027 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.52 | .396 | .056 |
| Study Techniques | Male | 100 | 2.64 | .254 | .025 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.57 | .310 | .043 |
| Social Experience | Male | 100 | 2.60 | .233 | .023 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.52 | .376 | .053 |
| *Total* | Male | 100 | 2.62 | .157 | .015 |
| | Female | 50 | 2.54 | .264 | .037 |

According to table 7, there are differences between mean scores of male and female freshmen. To determine the significant differences between mean scores, T- test formula was computed. Table 8 demonstrates the results.

**Table 8. T-test Results of Freshmen's Achieved Expectations according to Gender Variable**

| *Expectations Domains* | *t* | *df* | *Sig. (2-tailed)* | *Mean Difference* | *Std. Error Difference* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student-Teaching Staff Interaction | 1.619 | 148 | .108 | .09000 | .05560 |
| Study Techniques | 1.358 | 148 | .176 | .06462 | .04757 |
| Social Experience | 1.650 | 148 | .101 | .08250 | .05001 |
| *Total* | 2.282 | 148 | .024 | .07895 | .03459 |

Table 8 illustrates that there are not any statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in freshmen’s achieved expectations according to freshmen's gender. This leads to (Buchmann & Dalton, 2002; Looker, 1997) who indicated that expectations for higher education may have become gender neutral.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the study findings, the researcher recommends PY in Najran University to do the following:

1. Administering freshmen's expectations through appropriate mechanisms.
2. Strengthening student-teaching staff relations and interactions.
3. Activating orientation programs for PY freshmen.
4. Enriching freshmen's experience to keep up with their expectations.

5. Conducting future researches about factors that influence and lead to freshmen's high expectations.
6. Being transparent with freshmen and understand the importance of rapid response to their expectations.

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