

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

Students

[Home](#) [News](#) [Administration](#) [Students](#)

September 7, 2007

Your Parents Were Right, Scholars Say: More Studying Leads to Better Grades

By *DAVID GLENN*

As parents deposited their offspring at college this fall, many of them may have anxiously appraised their children's roommates. Does this one seem hungover? Does that one have a few too many piercings?

Here is another question parents might ask: Did the roommate bring a video-game system? According to a paper released last week by the National Bureau of Economic Research, first-year college students who are assigned roommates with video-game consoles study 40 minutes less per day, on average, than first-year students whose roommates did not bring consoles.

And that reduction in study time has a sizable effect on grades: First-year students whose roommates brought video-game consoles earned grades that were 0.241 lower, on a 4-point scale, than did equivalent students whose roommates did not have consoles.

The point of the paper is not to prove anything about video games. Instead, the researchers wanted to examine the relationship between the amount of time students spend studying and the grades they earn.

That seemingly simple question has bedeviled scholars of education for many years. It is treacherous to draw conclusions about causation from simple correlations between grades and time spent studying, because there are so many hidden variables that might shape the relationship. (To cite just one of many possibilities, students who study more might be smarter, on average, than students who study less.)

The ideal way to solve the puzzle would be to randomly assign students to two different groups, forcing one group to study more and the other to study less. But an experiment like that would be hugely cumbersome, not to mention unethical. So the authors of the new paper — Todd R. Stinebrickner, an associate professor of economics at the University of Western Ontario, and his father, Ralph Stinebrickner, a professor of mathematics and computer