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False stereotypes: Future teacher's expectations for their students

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Previous research has shown that teachers have preconceived expectations for their students. This mixed-methodological study examined how pre-service teachers expected students to perform academically based on demographic characteristics and the academic year of enrollment between sophomore and senior students. Participants ($n = 354$) included undergraduates enrolled in a teacher education program at a large mid-western university. Data were collected in a survey format in which participants ranked one out of twelve possible student scenarios defined by the following characteristics: gender, race, and SES. All twelve student scenarios presented a child with a stable family and involved in extracurricular activities. The participants used a scale from 1 to 5 (3 being "average" and 5 being "above average") to rank what their expectations for that particular student would be in their classroom. In addition, the participants explained their rating with a rationale. We examined the rationales for the numerical ratings provided on one question in particular within the survey, "How do you expect this student to perform academically in your classroom?" Above average ratings were further explored because the majority of both seniors and sophomores rated their scenario accordingly. (Seniors: 72.5%; Sophomores: 76.8%) Qualitative responses into the following categories: race, SES, family stability, and extracurricular involvement were tallied and analyzed. Overall, extracurricular involvement and/or family stability were viewed as indicators for above average academic performance. No significant differences were found between the sophomore and senior responses. Across scenarios the most stated reasons for above average academic performance were family stability and/or extracurricular involvement. No differences were found between race, gender, or SES. These findings suggest that many pre-service teachers, regardless of class rank, hold assumptions that a "stable" family and extracurricular involvement plays a significant role in their student's academic performance. Further implications for teacher preparation programs are discussed.