

# Video Game Development Success through Emotional Intelligence

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**Abstract** – Effective leaders have high emotional intelligence. The video game producer is a leadership role that relies heavily on emotional intelligence. This study investigates the effect a video game producer’s emotional intelligence has on team performance for the purpose of better understanding the role. This study found contradictory results that warrant further research on the subject.

**Index terms** – Emotional intelligence, SPSS, team performance, game development, video game, producer, peer evaluation

**SPSS** – a software package used for social science statistical analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence is the understanding of our emotions and the emotions of others [1]. It has shown to have a greater impact on a person’s success than intellect and is critical for working with others [1]. In *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman introduces emotional intelligence and defines it as our ability to perceive, reason, understand, and manage one’s emotions and how their emotions affect their relationships [1]. It is associated with a person’s maturity.

The role of the video game producer is to ensure the game delivers on time, on budget, and is of high quality. They are the overseer of the project and often seen as the team leader by the nature of their duties. The role asks them to use soft skills frequently, and so, producers perform their roles best when they have high emotional intelligence.

In preparation for this study, investigators found research to validate the link of leader emotional intelligence to job performance. A study by Robert Kerr found that leaders with high emotional intelligence had higher subordinate ratings than those with low emotional intelligence [2]. A meta-analysis testing the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance found that self and peer report measures are useful for tracking emotional intelligence’s impact on performance [3]. Wong and Law developed an emotional intelligence survey that tracks five dimensions of emotional intelligence [4]. Another study found that peers are better for tracking team member performance than instructors or supervisors [5].

Understanding how emotional intelligence effects the development team and which dimensions of emotional intelligence are most valuable for a producer, benefits the industry’s development of producers. There has not been a study conducted concerning emotional intelligence of a leader in video game development. Knowing how the producer’s emotional intelligence impacts video game development gives the industry the possibility to train producers in emotional intelligence to improve game development team performance.

This study investigated the effect video game producer’s emotional intelligence has on video game development success through a series of surveys distributed to two teams of developers throughout their projects. Participants filled out the surveys after each development milestone. One survey asked questions that rated the producer’s emotional intelligence across five emotional intelligence dimensions and the other measured performance based on peer evaluations.

Understanding the effect of their emotional intelligence on development gives video game producers insight as to how their emotional intelligence could affect the success of a project. To reach this goal, the data from the survey tracks the change in effect throughout development. If the data from the measure of team performance align with the measurement of the producer’s emotional intelligence, their correlation indicates emotional intelligence affects team performance.

## II. RESEARCH REVIEW

This study showed the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) in video game development and the effect a project’s producer EQ has on the success of a project. Its purpose is to prove the importance of the game producer’s EQ so the industry may learn more about the producer role in order to train and hire producers. There have been no studies related to EQ in video games, but there are many studies covering the effects of EQ in leaders.

Investigators of this study found sources relating to the field of EQ and leadership using searches on SMU Libraries, ProQuest, and Google. The sources give note to the significance of EQ, how leader EQ improves team performance, and how to test for EQ.

A study conducted by Robert Kerr and other researchers in the **Leadership and Organization Development Journal** tested 38 supervisors of a large manufacturing organization with the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) [2]. The purpose of the test was to find a link between their emotional intelligence and their leadership effectiveness using subordinate rating surveys. The study results indicated that leaders with higher scores on the MSCEIT, or higher EQ, had higher subordinate ratings than leaders with low EQ scores [2].

In a meta-analysis of EQ studies testing the relationship between EQ and job performance, researchers found EQ is a predictor of job performance [3]. The analysis classified EQ studies into three streams; ability-based, self or peer report, and mixed models [3]. The study found the overall relationship between EQ and job performance is positive and significant [3]. The study also found that the self and peer report stream was a

better indicator for job performance than the other two streams [3].

Chi-Sum Wong and Kenneth S. Law conducted a study that tested the effect leader EQ and emotional labor had on leadership effectiveness and job outcomes [4]. While the study was unable to find significant evidence supporting leadership EQ improving performance, it did find that the EQ measure used in the study performed better for external criterion variables and testing the emotional labor of the leader than internal measures [4]. Researchers studying peer evaluations and team performance indicate peers are better at distinguishing team member performance than instructors or supervisors [5].

This study measured the effect of the producer’s emotional intelligence on a video game team’s performance. The study displayed the significance of emotional intelligence and validates the testing for EQ and using peer evaluations to measure team performance.

III. METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study were two producers on separate video game development projects. The sizes of the two teams are fourteen and fifteen developers. The teams of the producers filled out two surveys at the end of their projects’ first three milestones of a total of six.

The three milestones and their lengths:

MS1	Proof of Concept Technology	2 weeks
MS2	Proof of Concept Gameplay	2 weeks
MS3	Vertical Slice	4 weeks

The milestone definitions are in Appendix A.

The first survey measures the emotional intelligence of the producer on the project. It uses a 21 question EQ survey developed by C.S. Wong [3].

The five EQ dimensions are:

- Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)
- Other’s Emotion Appraisal (OEA)
- Use of Emotion (UOE)
- Regulation of Emotion (ROE)
- Emotional Labor Items (ELI)

A sample question from the EQ survey:  
(Name of Producer) has a good sense of why they have certain feelings most of the time.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The full survey is in Appendix B.

The second survey is a peer-evaluation that consists of six questions asking the team members to rate their peers on a five-point Likert scale. This study analyzed peer evaluation data

provided by SMU Guildhall curriculum from previous game projects with SPSS. Using a sample of 105 peer evaluations, researchers extracted a single factor (varimax rotation) that explains 74.1% of the variance. The component matrix from the analysis shows the attendance measure of performance did not cleanly load on any one factor and researchers subsequently dropped attendance from the overall performance measure. Below is the factor analysis using the six peer evaluation items before the removal of attendance.

Component Matrix 6 Items

	Component		
	1	2	3
Ease To Work With	.936	-.134	.136
Attitude	.815	-.263	.484
Attendance	.587	.796	.145
Ethics	.920	.000	-.260
Quality	.894	-.076	-.364
Team Work	.956	-.062	-.043

Eiganvalue = 4.5  
Explained Variance = 74.1%  
Coefficient Alpha = .92

The remaining five items increase the coefficient alpha of the performance measure by .03 to r = 0.95. Below is the factor analysis of the remaining five peer evaluations and items. All five items cleanly loaded on a single factor that this study uses as the measure for team performance.

Component Matrix 5 Items

	Component
	1
Ease To Work With	.942
Attitude	.830
Ethics	.920
Quality	.903
Team Work	.958

Eiganvalue = 4.2  
Explained Variance = 83.1%  
Coefficient Alpha = .95

A sample question from the peer evaluation survey:

	1	2
<b>Ease to work with</b>	Interrupts, distracts, or disrupts others; difficult to work with.	Seldom demonstrates cooperation and respect; unpleasant to work with.
3	4	5
Often demonstrates cooperation and respect; generally agreeable to work with	Frequently demonstrates cooperation and respect; easy to work with.	Always demonstrates cooperation and respect; enjoyable to work with.

The full survey is in Appendix C.

The participants taking the two surveys are the members of the two development teams. The consent form each participant of the study signed is in Appendix D. The co-investigator of this study administered and monitored the participants while they filled out the surveys. Participants filled out the producer EQ survey at their work stations using paper and pencil and kept their surveys private from other team members. Participants completed the peer evaluation survey online as part of SMU Guildhall’s curriculum.

The survey at each milestone tracks the two producer’s emotional intelligence and the team’s performance via peer evaluations. The data derived from the surveys compose evidence of the effect the producers’ emotional intelligence has on team performance.

IV. RESULTS

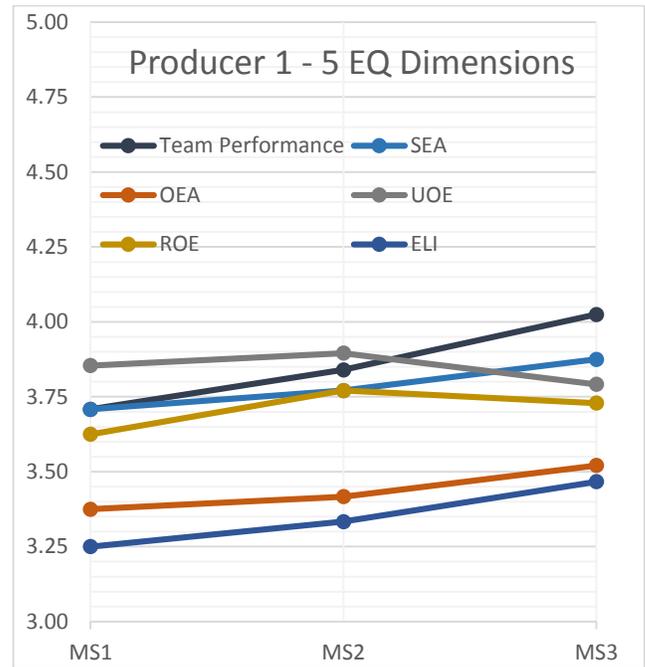
The data collected from the three milestones shows the two producers had contradictory results. The relationship between Producer 1’s EQ and team performance had a positive correlation of  $r = 0.90$  ( $p < .05$ ) while Producer 2’s correlation was  $r = -0.53$  (nonsignificant).

The table below shows the team performance and EQ measures of Producer 1 at each of the project’s three milestones:

Producer 1		
Milestone	Performance	EQ
MS1	3.71	3.64
MS2	3.84	3.71
MS3	4.02	3.73

Both measures increased each milestone. This data indicates there is a positive relationship between Producer 1’s EQ and team performance. Thus, the producer’s improvement in EQ each milestone improved team performance.

The table below plots the five EQ dimensions of Producer 1 and the performance measure over the three milestones.



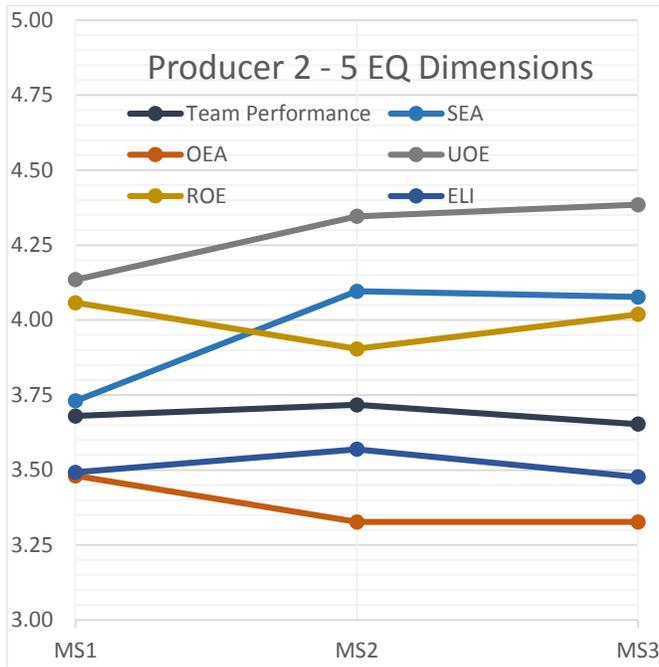
The relationship between Producer 1’s 5 EQ dimensions and team performance was positive ( $r = 0.85$ ). Along with team performance, three of the five dimensions increased each milestone including; self-emotion appraisal, other’s emotions appraisal, and emotional labor items. The two that did not increase each milestone were use of emotions and regulation of emotions.

The table below shows the performance and EQ measures of Producer 2 at each of the project’s three milestones:

Producer 2		
Milestone	Performance	EQ
MS1	3.68	3.85
MS2	3.72	3.92
MS3	3.65	3.95

While Producer 2’s EQ measure increased each milestone, the team performance measure rose the first two milestones and then fell in the last milestone. The relationship between Producer 2’s EQ and team performance had a non-significant correlation, ( $r = -0.5$ ). The negative relationship implies Producer 2’s EQ and team performance moved in opposite directions.

The table below plots the five EQ dimensions of Producer 2 and the performance measure over the three milestones.



The relationship between Producer 2's 5 EQ dimensions and team performance was non-significant. The measure did not relate to one another and no single dimension was the cause of the lack of relationship.

## V. CONCLUSION

Producer 1's EQ and team performance being positively correlated agrees with the study's hypothesis that video game producer's EQ affects team performance. Producer 2's EQ did not impact his team's performance. Therefore, further research is needed to discover why Producer 2's EQ did not affect team performance in the same manner as Producer 1's EQ. The co-investigator of the study observed the behaviors of the producers and their teams. He concluded that Producer 1 improved as a leader through each milestone and that Producer 2's EQ did not impact team performance due to leadership substitutes on the project.

Producer 1 improved his EQ each milestone, as shown by the surveys, which positively impacted team performance. Improving EQ coincides with improving as a leader. In a study, S. Paul and G. Whittam interviewed 19 Broadway producers and identified four themes for leadership learning; learn about context, learn about yourself, intuiting, and envision the future [6].

The co-investigator of this study observed Producer 1 improving as a leader in these four themes which in turn improved his EQ reliant interactions with team members. Producer 1 learned more about game development as the project progressed which taught him industry terminology that helped him better communicate and understand team members. One of Paul and Whittam's interviewees said, "To get the best out of people you have to know their strengths and weaknesses. How can you do this if you don't know your own strengths?" [6]. This holds true for Producer 1 as he identified his strength of tracking project task progression and was able to use that strength to bring out the most in his team members. Producer 1 also

identified risks, such as proving out voice over implementation, earlier as the project progressed. This improved intuition helped the team plan, resulting in the team's trust of Producer 1. Finally, Producer 1 became a better planner by envisioning the future for his team. His understanding of team members' strengths and risk identification helped him make action plans as to how the team would accomplish project goals.

The leadership learning Producer 1 experienced was a combination of improvements in empathy and social interactions which used his EQ. These improvements ultimately resulted in the gradual increase in EQ each milestone which the survey data reflects.

S. Kerr and J. Jermier developed substitute leadership theory, which suggests that leader success is dependent on the situation rather than the performance of the leadership role [7]. The researchers identified 13 leadership substitutes and then tested which had the greatest effect on subordinate satisfaction, morale, and performance [7]. To test the substitutes, the researchers surveyed 54 University police officers and 113 City police offices with the substitute leadership questionnaire they developed [7]. The study found that leadership substitutes affect some leader activities and the degree of which is dependent on the organization and its members [7].

For this study, leadership substitutes were observed to be the reason behind Producer 2's EQ not impacting team performance. The co-investigator observed the most impactful leadership substitutes were professional orientation, organizational formalization, and cohesive teams.

The first potential leadership substitute the observer noted was professional orientation. Professional orientation, in Kerr and Jermier's study, is when employees seek feedback horizontally, peer-to-peer, rather than vertically, peer-to-supervisor [7]. Both teams divided developers based on the disciplines of art, level design, and programming. Each discipline had a lead which interacted more with their developers of their specialization than with the producer. The developers of these disciplines sought feedback within their discipline rather than the producer reducing Producer 2's need to use his EQ when giving team members feedback. Professional orientation acted as a leadership substitute because it reduced the use of Producer 2's EQ and thus lessened the impact Producer 2's EQ had on team performance.

The second leadership substitute observed was organizational formalization. Organizational formalization is the consistency of an organizations rules and guidelines for roles, duties, and project goals [7]. Both teams' shared two executive producers and had a team make up of a senior producer, the subject producer, and four discipline leads. The co-investigator observed the saturation of leads led team members to rely less on Producer 2's EQ, reducing its impact on team performance. Each lead contributed to the formation and upkeep of the project schedules, goals, rules, and feedback, so the responsibilities did not solely rest on Producer 2. Also, the co-investigator observed discipline leads sought the senior producer instead of Producer 2 when seeking advice about critical conversations and troublesome team members. This behavior is desired in an organization and so organizational formalization as leadership substitute is not a product of Producer 2's lack of leadership.

The last potential substitute for leadership is cohesive work groups. Cohesive, independent work groups occur when subordinates' performance and job satisfaction rely more on their interactions with their team members than their superiors [7]. The developers on both teams had worked together on two different game development projects before this study. While those teams' make up and size were different from this study, the prior experiences could replace the need for the producer's leadership, and thus the impact of their EQ on team performance.

Producer 1's data implies his EQ impacted team performance, but Producer 2's data contradicts this conclusion. The study concludes Producer 2's EQ was less impactful due to leadership substitutes. These leadership substitutes were observed, but not tested for during the study. There are many other substitutes that could have reduced the impact of the producers' EQ. To prove which substitute, if any, had the greatest impact on the on the producers' EQ effectiveness, further research is needed.

## VI. FURTHER RESEARCH

This study did not prove that video game producer EQ has an effect on team performance, but the positive correlation of Producer 1's EQ and team performance suggests the subject deems further research. If this research were to be taken further, the co-investigator suggests the follow changes to find data that is more conclusive: adjust the surveys, increase sample size and length, and EQ survey all the project leads.

The survey used for the performance measure should change based on the circumstances of the future study. If future researchers took the study further in the same Guildhall environment, it is advised to use the same peer evaluation survey to track team performance. However, future researchers should monitor outlying team members that may provide invalid data. If future studies were to be taken to industry, the performance survey should reflect the game's development and studio culture. The co-investigator recommends a tailored version of the survey used in Paul Tonzour's *The Game Outcomes Project* [8]. Tonzour surveyed 771 game developers with 120 questions covering teamwork, culture, production, and project management to discover what factors determine game development success [8]. Testing for these factors would be a better measure for team performance and development success. This study did not use Tonzour's survey because it was too long to administer each milestone in this study. Future studies should pare down Tonzour's survey so the questions only reflect team performance measures that are relevant to the circumstances of their study.

Further research should also increase the participant sample size and length of the study. Increasing the sample size would reduce the inconsistencies created by team leaders. The three milestones in eight weeks was an acceptable length for this study, but to have data that is more reliable it is advised to increase the length of the study and number of milestone surveys. More time increases the chance the producer would need to use their EQ and thus increasing its impact on team performance.

Organizational hierarchy is different in almost every organization especially in the video game industry. Further

research on this subject should distribute EQ surveys to all leadership roles on the project. Surveying all the leads could possibly put additional strain on team members by completing too many surveys. Therefore, the co-investigator suggests the team complete three EQ surveys each milestone, one for the producer, game designer, and their discipline specific lead. Future studies should also remove the position of the senior producer to reduce the impact of the leadership substitute, organization formalization. If the future project does have a senior producer, another EQ survey should be administered for the senior producer.

While this study did not prove if video game producer's EQ affects team performance, further research using the suggested changes could lead to new ways we approach the video game producer role. Studies have proven leader EQ has positive effect on team performance. Proving that link to the video game producer role is a worthwhile venture to further understand the role and its impact on video game development success and improved team performance.

## VII. REFERENCES

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## VIII. APPENDIX A

### Development Schedule and Milestone Definitions

#### **Prototype 1: Proof of Concept Technology – 2 Weeks**

- Built as quickly as possible to verify design works within desired technology
- Assets can be pulled from any source and are considered throw-away to allow faster completion

#### **Prototype 2: Proof of Concept Gameplay – 2 Weeks**

- Built as quickly as possible to verify design and core game mechanics are “fun”
- Assets can be pulled from any source and are considered throw away to allow faster completion
- Technology of this prototype can be pulled from any source and is considered throw-away to allow faster completion

#### **Vertical Slice – 4 Weeks**

- One complete “level” or “section of level”
- All assets are of defined shippable quality
- No place-holders
- All features work
- Includes significant portion of game play

## IX. APPENDIX B

## Wong's Emotional Intelligence Survey

**Survey #**

Milestone:

Name:                      Student ID #:

Please circle a value on each question using the scale below

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Undecided      Agree      Strongly Agree

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

1. I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. I have good understanding of my own emotions.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. I really understand what I feel.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. I always know whether or not I am happy.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. I am a good observer of others' emotions.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. I always tell myself I am a competent person.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. I am a self-motivated person.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. I would always encourage myself to try my best.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

13. I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

14. I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

15. I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

16. I have good control of my own emotions.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

1. I spend most of my work time interacting with people (e.g., customers, colleagues, and other workers in this organization).

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

2. I spend a lot of time with every person whom I work with.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

3. I hide my actual feelings when acting and speaking with people.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

4. I am considerate and think from the point of view of others.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

5. I hide my negative feelings (e.g., anger and depression).

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

## X. APPENDIX C

## Peer Evaluation Survey

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Ease of Working</b>	Interrupts, distracts, or disrupts others; difficult to work with.	Seldom demonstrates cooperation and respect; unpleasant to work with.	Often demonstrates cooperation and respect; generally agreeable to work with	Frequently demonstrates cooperation and respect; easy to work with.	Always demonstrates cooperation and respect; enjoyable to work with.
<b>Attitude</b>	Often is publicly critical of projects and rude to guests and/or members of the class.	Occasionally is publicly critical of projects and rude to guests and/or members of the class.	Rarely is critical of the project and acceptable to guests and/or members of the class.	Very rarely is critical of the project and kind to guests and/or members of the class.	Never is critical of the project and acceptable to guests and/or members of the class.
<b>Attendance</b>	Does not arrive on time, attend the entire session, or notify the team regarding absences and unforeseen delays.	Seldom arrives on time, attends the entire session, or notifies the team regarding absences and unforeseen delays.	Often arrives on time, attends the entire session, and notifies the team regarding absences and unforeseen delays.	Almost always arrives on time, attends the entire session, and notifies the team regarding absences and unforeseen delays.	Always arrives on time, attends the entire session, and notifies the team regarding absences and unforeseen delays.
<b>Work Ethic</b>	Very rarely focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Others do their work.	Rarely focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Teachers and class members must remind this person to keep on-task.	Usually focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Teachers and class members can count on this person.	Almost always focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Teachers and class members can rely on this person.	Consistently stays focused on the task and what needs to be done. This person is very self-directed.
<b>Quality</b>	Work reflects very little effort on the part of this student.	Work reflects little effort from this student.	Work reflects expected effort from this student.	Work reflects a much effort from this student.	Work reflects a great deal of effort from this student.
<b>Team Work</b>	Never listens and speaks actively and shows understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas.	Seldom listens and speaks actively and shows understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas.	Often listens and speaks actively and shows understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas.	Usually listens and speaks actively and shows understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas.	Always listens and speaks actively and shows understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas.

## XI. APPENDIX D

## Consent Form

This consent form asks you take part in a thesis study about the impact a video game producer's emotional intelligence has on development.

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how college students with jobs manage their school, leisure and work time. We are asking you to take part because you signed up at the SUSAN web site for this study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this study is to learn how students who have paid jobs manage their class work. You must be working at least 10 hours a week for pay to take part in this study.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your job, the hours you work, how much you earn, the number of classes you take at Cornell, how much you study, social and leisure activities, your health and well-being, and how much you sleep. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

**Risks and benefits:**

There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your job conditions to be sensitive. [Note: For studies posing no specific risks, use the IRB standard minimal risk statement, "I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life."]

There are no benefits to you. Cornell is a very demanding place to be a student and we hope to learn more about students who work while earning degrees.

**Compensation:** You may earn extra credit if you are taking a class that offers credit for research studies. The class instructor will assign credit according to class policy. If you wish, you may earn \$3 instead of extra credit.

**Your answers will be confidential.** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Cornell University. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researchers conducting this study are Randy Jackson and Prof. Simon Cowell. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Randy Jackson at randy@blabmail.com or at 1-800-555-4365. You can reach Prof. Cowell at meanguy@abbey.uk or 1-800-555-4365, ext. 1000. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 607-255-5138 or access their website at <http://www.irb.cornell.edu>. You may also report your concerns or complaints anonymously through Ethicspoint ([www.hotline.cornell.edu](http://www.hotline.cornell.edu)) or by calling toll free at 1-866-293-3077. Ethicspoint is an independent organization that serves as a liaison between the University and the person bringing the complaint so that anonymity can be ensured.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.*

The title of the study should appear at the top of every page.