

Bruce Sacerdote and a former student designed a system that tracked email transmissions among students at Dartmouth College, to determine the effect of location on relationships: in this case, he was specifically interested in finding out how a student's freshman year dormitory assignment impacted their friendship during their years at Dartmouth.

His research informs other research that looks at the importance of peer groups and behavior, which argues that location is very important. He said that email transmissions are a highly effective way to study friendships, because his data indicates that students email one another more often when they are frequently seeing each other. When there is less face-to-face interaction, there are fewer emails.

Sacerdote analyzed the data along racial lines and gender lines and found that there is a 0.7% chance of two random white students to interact and a 0.4% chance for a random black student to interact with a random white student, confirming Sacerdote's hypothesis that, despite the university's efforts to deepen its diversity, student relationships are impacted by race.

His research indicated that women tend to email each other far more often than men emailed their male friends. Men were far more likely to email women, and vice versa. He joked that athletic males had to email girls far less frequently than their non-athlete male counterparts, but he surmised that the demands of student athletics also meant they had less time for electronic communications.

By studying data that followed students for their entire Dartmouth career, Sacerdote found that geography has a long-lasting impact on relationships.