Studying tips got her an A+ gratuity

Who are the best tippers in restaurants? Men. Specifically, nonsmoking, older men who have a cocktail or two or three, and who pay the bill with a credit card.

At least, that's the conclusion of a student research project by Rebekah Bill, an economics major at the University of Virginia.

Bill did the research during her junior year. She said her project was about understanding the relationship between customer behavior and tipping patterns. The project involved analyzing data from several restaurants in the area, focusing on the tipping habits of different customer groups.

Her findings were as follows:
- Customers who drank alcoholic beverages left bigger tips (by 15 percent) than those who didn't.
- And the best tippers of all were nonsmoking, older men who paid with credit cards.

Bill's research was presented to a class of college-age women.

“Not having a male waiter was one of the main limitations of my study,” she said. “I interviewed several guys who work as waiters. They all said women are better tippers. I put that in my paper.”

No matter. Gill was pleased with her study.

“First, it was a fun project,” she said. “Also, the R-squared value was 34 percent, which is good.”

Come again?

“That’s a technical term meaning 34 percent of the variability in the tips can be explained by the 10 variables, or regressors, used.”

Hey, if you say so.

The best part of the project?

“I got an A plus on my paper,” Bill said. And that’s the best gratuity a college student who waits tables can receive.”