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ABSTRACT

The research reported here is part of a larger study investigating differences between successful and unsuccessful (withdrawing) undergraduates at the University of Texas. It focuses on a 36-item list of problems which were rated by 647 withdrawing students during Fall 1969. Responses were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis and rotated by varimax procedure to yield 10 factors tentatively named: low academic stimulation, institutional academic dependency, social isolation, masculinity conflicts, career uncertainty, marital-engagement problems, employment-financial problems, social gregariousness, low academic skills, and demographic adjustment. Three groups of withdrawing students were compared on factor scores developed from the 10 factors and were found to differ significantly on 6 of the variables. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed. (Author/JS)

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THREE GROUPS OF WITHDRAWAL STUDENTS ON TEN FACTOR VARIABLES DERIVED FROM A 36-PROBLEM SELF-REPORT INVENTORY

by

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INTRODUCTION

The research reported here is part of a comprehensive survey of successful and unsuccessful undergraduate students in the College of Arts and Sciences of The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas. The overall study is designed to allow for longitudinal and cross-group comparisons of groups of students who complete baccalaureate degrees and those who terminate or interrupt their educations by voluntary withdrawal from the College.** The study is cast broadly to allow for comparisons between groups of graduating seniors and groups of withdrawing students in terms of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and attitudinal and social adjustment indices including patterns of use and valuing of university services, agencies, facilities, programs, and activities, and patterns of adjustment to the climate of life in the Austin community.

The phase of the project reported here specifically concerns withdrawing students and the problems instrumental to the decision to withdraw. Our goal is to review what we believe to be certain major dimensions of problems that concern withdrawing students, and to examine the ways in which these problems are experienced by groups of withdrawals differentiated on the basis of past academic performance. Our work begins with the assumption that the significant dimensions of the withdrawal decision are located in the interplay between self-factors (personality dispositions) and situational factors, and are most meaningfully interpreted in the context of the socially normal problems of youth, as opposed to the more clinical context of personality pathology. Our work is in response to what appears to be a definite need in the research literature (cf. Marsh, 1966), and in the simple enormity of the withdrawal problem.

**The overall Exit Interview Project consists of the component Withdrawal Studies and the Graduating Senior Surveys. The Senior Projects were coordinated by Mildred W. Douglas, with the consulting, supervisory, and supportive assistance noted (See note, preceeding page). Results of the Senior project will be reported separately, as will later comparative analyses.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument and Data Collection Technique

When a student enters the Arts and Sciences Student Office to initiate the withdrawal action, he meets with a student advisor who discusses the reasons for the proposed withdrawal with him and encourages alternative solutions to the action when possible. The student advisor attempts to find out whether the assistance of agencies such as the Counseling Center, the Financial Aids Office, and the Dean of Students Office, have been previously sought and, if appropriate, makes the proper referral to various sources of specialized assistance on the campus. If, however, after initial interviewing, the student remains insistent on withdrawal, he is given the Withdrawal Questionnaire, which is required as a part of the regular administrative procedure of the withdrawal, and which is completed in the Student Office under the supervision of the student advisor.

The questionnaire itself is an eight-page self-report inventory consisting of five parts: biographical and background information; an inventory of problems contributing to the withdrawal decision; an inventory of evaluation and use of university facilities, programs, and agencies; a series of attitudinal items probing a wide range of campus and community facets of student life; and an open-ended comments section for statements that the student may wish to make concerning himself, his decision, the campus, the community, or the project. The questionnaire forms the background and tool for subsequent interviewing by the student advisor, and becomes pooled in our collected data only when, after subsequent interviewing, it becomes quite clear that the student is not going to be deterred.

Part II of the questionnaire lists 36 problem areas which are to be rated by each withdrawing student on a five-point scale, in which "1" indicates "not a problem" and "5" indicates "a very important contributing problem." The 36 items and raw mean ratings by groups differentiated on the basis of academic performance are listed in Table 1, and underlie the analysis presented here.

The Survey Group

The survey group consists of 647 male and female Liberal Arts undergraduate students who withdrew from the College of Arts and Sciences during the Fall Semester of the Academic Year 1969-70. This group represents all voluntary withdrawals handled by the Student Office of the largest of the University's Colleges.

The Withdrawal Group is composed of 70% males and 30% females, with a mean age of 21.6 years. Nineteen percent are freshmen by academic classification; 21% are sophomores; 28% are juniors; and 26% seniors, with the remaining 6% being classified as special students. Marital status data indicates that 79% of the students are single, with 18% being married and 3% being widowed or divorced. All were regularly enrolled students in the college, carrying an average academic load of approximately 15 credit hours.

Of the 647 withdrawals, 613 were classifiable into one of three groups characterized by previous academic performance, namely: Group I -- those performing satisfactorily with no record of prior academic probation or enforced withdrawal for scholastic reasons; Group II -- those on scholastic probation, but with no prior record of enforced withdrawal; and Group III -- those whose records indicate both scholastic probation and a previous history of enforced withdrawal. Of the 613, 56% were in Group I, 30% in Group II, and 14% in Group III. Thus, more than half the students were performing satisfactorily scholastically at the time of the withdrawal action.

TABLE I

Contributing Problems and Mean Ratings by Group

(Ratings were made on a five-point basis where "1" = "not a problem"...to "5" = "a very important contributing problem.")

No.	Item	Group I	Group II	Group III	Total Survey
1.	Inadequate housing	1.38	1.42	1.26	1.36
2.	Difficulty -- Roommates	1.35	1.37	1.29	1.33
3.	Lack of Motivation to Study	3.24	3.07	2.60	3.05
4.	Poor Advising	1.91	1.71	1.80	1.84
5.	Insufficient Finances	2.14	2.60	3.06	2.39
6.	Own Physical Condition	1.72	2.15	1.52	1.84
7.	Boring Subject Matter-Courses	2.68	2.28	2.30	2.47
8.	Unable to Sleep Nights	1.69	1.74	1.55	1.69
9.	Poor Grades	1.99	2.42	2.43	2.18
10.	Poor Class Teaching	2.02	1.86	1.85	1.92
11.	Restlessness	2.90	2.75	2.44	2.75
12.	Inability to Concentrate	2.78	2.91	2.61	2.78
13.	Uncertainty -- the Future	3.06	2.94	2.62	2.95
14.	Felt Lonesome, Isolated	1.86	1.75	1.46	1.76
15.	Unsatisfactory Social Life	1.52	1.56	1.30	1.50
16.	Employment -- Too Much Time	1.81	2.28	2.50	2.05
17.	Social Activities -- Too Much Time	1.57	1.40	1.46	1.49
18.	Other Interests -- Too Much Time	2.02	1.83	1.92	1.93
19.	Difficulties with Parents	1.70	1.99	1.68	1.77
20.	Marital Problems	1.16	1.32	1.31	1.23
21.	Uncertainty -- Career	2.52	2.55	2.12	2.47
22.	Uncertainty -- What to Study	2.30	2.18	1.87	2.19
23.	Inadequate Faculty Contact	1.66	1.66	1.40	1.61
24.	Relationships -- Other Students	1.55	1.59	1.30	1.51
25.	Relationships -- Faculty	1.70	1.72	1.53	1.66
26.	Uncertainty -- Abilities for College	1.45	1.62	1.51	1.51
27.	Military Service	1.25	1.42	1.42	1.32
28.	Getting Married -- Engaged	1.37	1.25	1.62	1.36
29.	Not Enough Stimulation -- Courses	2.58	2.22	2.19	2.39
30.	"Freezing up" -- Examinations	1.51	1.78	1.61	1.60
31.	Living in Austin	1.30	1.25	1.29	1.28
32.	The Size of the Austin Campus	1.44	1.40	1.43	1.38
33.	Impersonal Treatment -- Staff & Admin.	1.59	1.58	1.52	1.58
34.	Inadequate Assistance -- UT personnel	1.37	1.37	1.32	1.38
35.	Unable to Locate Personal Aid -- Campus	1.38	1.33	1.26	1.33
36.	Confusion -- Personal Values & Goals	2.90	2.67	2.08	2.70
		N=343	N=184	N= 86	N=647

Analysis Program

In an unpublished study, Krebs and Liberty factored the 36 problem areas and reported 10 problem factors which were named: (1) Low Academic Stimulation -- boring subject matter, dull classes, etc.; (2) Institutional Dependency --

inadequate assistance and impersonal treatment from university agents; (3) Social Isolation -- unsatisfactory social life, loneliness, etc.; (4) Masculinity Conflicts -- the inability to get along with other males in the close association often necessitated by student life; (5) Career Uncertainty; (6) Marital-Engagement Problems; (7) Employment-Financial Problems; (8) Social Gregariousness -- that is social activities and other interests taking too much time; (9) Low Academic Skills -- poor grades, concentration, "freezing up" on examinations, etc.; and (10) Demographic Adjustment -- or difficulty in adjusting to the size of The University of Texas and life in the Austin community.

These factors were derived using a program FACTOR from the EDSTAT library of computer programs at The University of Texas' Computation Center. The program performs a principal axes, unit diagonals, factor analysis, with subsequent rotation to the varimax criterion. In the present study, a multiple regression weighting procedure was used to develop factor scores from the 10 varimax factors. Then, using analysis of variance, the three groups were compared on each of the ten factor variables.

RESULTS

The mean scores for the three groups on the 10 factor variables are displayed in Table II, where factor scores are expressed as T-scores. Groups were considered to differ significantly if P was .10 or less. Significant differences are found on 6 of the 10 variables and the groups are distinguishable on the problem dimensions.

TABLE II

Factor Scores and Significance* by Performance Group

Factor Variables		Group I	Group II	Group III	P
I.	Low Academic Stimulation	50.92	48.88	48.70	.03*
II.	Institutional Dependency	50.26	49.79	49.48	.78
III.	Social Isolation	50.30	50.94	46.64	.004*
IV.	Masculinity Conflicts	49.53	50.67	50.23	.57
V.	Career Uncertainty	50.53	49.64	48.56	.24
VI.	Marital-Engagement Problems	49.34	50.24	53.69	.07*
VII.	Employment-Financial Problems	48.10	51.84	53.69	.0001*
VIII.	Social Gregariousness	50.82	48.95	49.14	.07*
IX.	Low Academic Skills	48.87	51.94	50.43	.005*
X.	Demographic Adjustment	50.48	49.26	49.85	.60
		N=343	N=184	N=86	

Significant results from Table II may be summarized as follows:

(1) On Factor I, Group I reports significantly greater problems with not being stimulated by courses and professors than the other two groups.

(2) On Factor III, Groups I and II report significantly greater conflicts with social life and feelings of loneliness and isolation than does Group III.

(3) On Factor VI, Group III reports significantly greater marital and engagement problems than the other groups. Group II reports greater problems than Group I.

(4) On Factor VII, Group III reports significantly greater employment and financial problems than do the other groups. Group II reports greater problems than Group I.

(5) On Factor VIII, Group I reports greater problems with social activities and outside interests taking too much time.

(6) On Factor IX, Group II was significantly different from other groups, indicating the greater problems with academic skills. Group III reports greater problems than Group I.

(7) The three groups did not differ significantly on problems dealing with Institutional Dependency (Factor II), Masculinity Conflicts (Factor IV), Confusion about Career (Factor V), and Demographic Adjustment (Factor X).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The self-structure is increasingly being recognized as a social phenomenon, which cannot properly be interpreted without reference to the social environment. Similarly, educational problems and difficulties in academic performance which were formerly interpreted almost exclusively as properties of the person such as "I.Q." or "learning ability," or as evidence of some type of personality pathology, are now increasingly being understood as having strong situational components as well. The data presented are strong evidence

of the interpenetration of processes of self-enhancement and the loss of self-esteem, self actualization and frustration, and self-image or self-concept, with situation and environment.

The intitial factor variables derived from the problem inventory describe self-problems and performance outcomes which are not simply functions of the person. As far as personality characteristics or self-traits which emerge, the most striking general theme involves a strong element of dependency among students in the Withdrawal Group -- by which we mean an overt reliance of the individual on the environment for immediate motivational and other types of supports. This characteristic appears most clearly among students in Group I, and may be seen in the high mean scores on Factor I, involving academic stimulation, Factor II involving perhaps an overreliance on administrators, advisors, and other personnel for guidance and direction, and in Factor VIII, involving social gregariousness and the compelling need for immediate social-emotional gratifications as opposed to the more detached self-rewards of academic performance. Introducing the factor of ability as evidenced by previous performance, it is interesting to note that Group I which appears to be composed of the most able students, is also composed of the least mature, and the most underdeveloped from the personality standpoint. It is also interesting to note that this group is the most privileged in terms of concrete situational problems, showing fewer problems with employment, finance, marital status, and skill. It is almost as if the group which has the personality problem is the group which can concretely afford it. The immaturity and personality problem is one which as such appears to be an affordable luxury to these students, though certainly not one which is cognizant of full costs of the interrupted education to the person, the institution, and the society.

On the other hand, the group which has the greatest performance problem based on records which indicate both scholastic probation and prior enforced

withdrawals are not the least in terms of academic skills. It appears rather that this Group (III) is most significantly in a "bread and butter" trap. Group III's most significant problems have to do with employment and finances, and these appear to figure significantly in the performance problem. For this group, the demands of supporting an education are in conflict with the demands of getting one, and we speculate that this situational fact has implications for the associated disturbances of marital relationships, for example. In brief, multiple environmental demands are dominant in the picture, and while these may most certainly have implications for the self-concept of the student and for his social-emotional, as well as educational, well-being, the problem does not appear to have its primary locus in personality dynamics, but rather in the material instrumentalities of providing for an education. Marginal academic abilities also appear to play a role, but one which is secondary and which certainly cannot be fairly evaluated without consideration of the additional pressures which face the Group III students.

Group II, which is marginal on our criterion of performance, with scholastic probation indicated, but no prior enforced withdrawal, appears to be the marginal group in terms of associated problems as well. Group II is in some ways the most difficult group to characterize. It appears that poor academic skills figure most significantly for this group. Mean scores are highest on the Low Skill Factor for Group II. However, there are also strong elements of Group III problems involving finances and relationships with spouses and fiancées. There are also some notable components of the group I personality problems, although again these figure less significantly for this group than do skills and "bread and butter" issues.

In summary, in voluntary withdrawals, it appears that we are in fact dealing with a complex self and social problem, which is distinguishable on a number of attributes, which may be further differentiated in the light of factors such as past performance, and which has implications not only for our understanding

of the withdrawal phenomenon, but for the provision of student services as well. In the light of the data reviewed, Group I gives us the picture of a relatively able and materially secure group of students whose chief problem appears to be one of immaturity. These students are most notably characterized as dependent and stimulus seeking in their behavior in the classroom, in their relationships with other students, with faculty, and with the various components of the institution. These are students who would most probably benefit from a good hard look at themselves from the point of view of some self-growth and development concerns. However, their large numbers would appear to make individual counseling impractical, and if we are correct in interpreting the problem as a "socially normal" immaturity, the attention of a clinician or counseling specialist is probably not required except in a limited number of cases. What might be of extreme value for these students is a series of courses on student life, incorporating some of the perspectives of developmental, social, and educational psychology and sociology, applied specifically to the context of student needs and university demands. In addition, small group sections should be incorporated into the courses for exchange and dialogue to take place. Such courses might well provide the kind of insights which would alleviate the necessity for large numbers of these students to withdraw and also offer a vent for some of the frustrations which are a natural part of experiencing the process of self-change, environmental adaptation and personal growth. In addition, this type of approach offers the additional feature of freeing a number of counselors to handle the more severe problems which do require individual attention.

Group III students' greatest need is for a very practical, material type of assistance, and indications are that every effort should be made to make this assistance available. This holds for Group II students as well, who have the most serious deficits of skills and thereby are certainly in a lesser

position to meet the strain of job pressures and financial concerns in addition to their studies.

Groups II and III also dramatically point to an additional need in the provision of student services: namely, the need for integration, exchange, and interaction, on the part of those who provide student services. For the better than 40% of the withdrawals represented by the combined groups, financial assistance, placement services, and personal or relational counseling may all be required. The counseling psychologist can no more deal with the pressing financial need of a given student directly, than the financial aids officer can directly deal with the psychological scars of the students' repeated frustrations. Yet, if the needs of this given student are to be effectively met, the psychologist and the financial aids officer, to name just two, must be aware of and sensitive to each other. In addition, each can be invaluable to the other in the performance of their separate responsibilites. By close cooperation, each can provide valuable direct or indirect services for the other in terms of assessment, referral, and the actual provision of services to those who evidence the greatest need.

Finally, it is our belief that the type of survey, exit-interview, approach which is incorporated into our data represents a student service in and of itself. By providing insights and understandings of the students of a particular institution and engendering some speculations about students in general, we believe that our ability to provide effective atmospheres, services, and supports for educational problems is increased.

The study as we have presented it is incomplete. At a later date, we will want to reexamine the findings presented in the light of additional attributes of each of the groups -- including background data such as age, sex, marital status composition of each of the three groups, and attitudinal and other

variable attributes, such as political involvements and orientations, participation in and evaluation of various university programs and facilities. Such data is included in our survey and is currently being tabulated to amplify our findings and hopefully better our understanding. In the meanwhile, however, we feel our findings to be sufficiently encouraging to warrant our continued attention, and to continue our studies, refining both instrument and procedures and replicating our results. In addition, we believe the partial results presented here to be sufficiently encouraging to warrant the speculations we have entertained, and hopefully to warrant similar efforts and attentions on the part of others interested in a better understanding of the multi-faceted problem of student withdrawals.

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