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ABSTRACT

High attrition rates at colleges and universities are costly to students and to institutions, in terms of money, time, effort, etc. The prediction of academic success or failure is related to the problem of accountability. In order to plan and account for certain program expenditures, it becomes imperative to predict the needs and behaviors of students. Such procedures attempt to program the students and institutions for success. Programming for success involves many administrative aspects and decisions. Initially, in terms of this paper, one could ask, does reading ability contribute significantly to the academic success of college students? Are college reading programs necessary and/or helpful? (Author)

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READING ABILITY AND GRADES:

A BRIEF REVIEW

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Abstract

High attrition rates at colleges and universities are costly to students and to institutions, in terms of money, time, effort, etc. The prediction of academic success or failure is related to the problem of accountability. In order to plan and account for certain program expenditures, it becomes imperative to predict the needs and behaviors of students. Such procedures attempt to program the students and institutions for success. Programming for success involves many administrative aspects and decisions. Initially, in terms of this paper, one could ask, does reading ability contribute significantly to the academic success of college students? Are college reading programs necessary and/or helpful?

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Educational administrators have always found it beneficial in the decision making process to be able to predict behaviors. As early as the 1920's, it was recognized that there were many variables which could be used to predict a student's success in college--intelligence,¹ past performance in high school,² ability to read,³ scores on achievement tests in English,⁴ Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, etc.,⁵ ability to study,⁶ mental health,⁷ and motivation.⁸

It soon became apparent that many factors had variable success in being able to predict overall scholarship and scholarship in a particular field. Using Cooperative Test Service scores, CEEB verbal scores, CEEB mean scores, and the mean of secondary school, grade 12, final grades, Landry found considerable variation existed in the predictive ability of the different measures for the different subject

¹A. W. Kornhauser, "Test and High School Records as Indicators of Success in an Undergraduate School of Business," Journal of Educational Research, 16:342-356, Dec., 1927; see also M. J. Nelson and E. C. Denny, "The Terman and Thurstone Group Tests as Criteria for Predicting College Success," School and Society, 26:501-502, Oct., 1927.

²J. M. Stalnaker, "American Council Psychological Examination for 1926 at Purdue University," School and Society, 27:86-88, Jan., 1928.

³Kornhauser, loc. cit.; see also Stalnaker, loc. cit.

⁴Kornhauser, *ibid.*

⁵Stalnaker, loc. cit.

⁶W. F. Book, "How Well Can College Students Read?" School and Society, 26:242-248, Aug., 1927; see also Stalnaker, *ibid.*

⁷Stalnaker, loc. cit.

⁸*Ibid.*

matter fields and for the different colleges studied.⁹ Nelson concluded that when all students were considered, the Denny Reading Test seemed superior to English tests and to high school content exams for the prediction of scholarship,¹⁰ while Schmitz found that the criteria in a battery of tests which included the Iowa Reading Test, were approximately of equal value in predicting college success.¹¹ Flora found that the academic success of college men could be predicted from high school averages, but in order to predict the success of college women, verbal test scores (which included reading) were necessary.¹² Pepper researched the relationship between study skills (which included reading ability) and academic achievement for marginal admission students. Although the marginal students did not do as well as the regularly admitted students, he found the relationship between the skills measured and academic achievement to be unclear.¹³ Conflicting reports were and continue to

⁹H. A. Landry, "The Relative Predictive Value of Certain College Entrance Criteria," Journal of Experimental Education, 5:256-260, March, 1937.

¹⁰M. J. Nelson, "Some Data from Freshman Tests," School and Society, 31:772-774, June, 1930.

¹¹S. B. Schmitz, "Predicting Success in College: A Study of Various Criteria," Journal of Educational Psychology, 28:465-473, Sept., 1937.

¹²L. Flora, "Predicting Academic Success at Lynchburg College from Multiple Correlation Analyses of Four Selected Predictor Variables," Dissertation Abstracts, 27:2276, 8-A, 1967.

¹³R. Pepper, "The Study Skills and Academic Achievement of Marginal Admission Students," (paper read at the National Reading Conference, December, 1969, Atlanta, Georgia), (ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, Dec., 1969).

be published concerning the predictive value of reading skills for college achievement.¹⁴

Considering that reading is a valuable skill necessary for further learning, can it be assumed that one who reads poorly will also do poorly in college courses? In other words, while reading ability may

¹⁴W. D. Templeman, "Vocabulary and Success in College," School and Society, 14:221-224, Feb., 1940; see also W. D. Templeman, "Vocabulary and Success in College," Journal of Higher Education, 13:213-215, April, 1942; see also I. H. Anderson and W. F. Dearborn, "Reading Ability as Related to College Achievement," Journal of Psychology, 11:387-396, April, 1941; see also W. J. Humber, "The Relationship Between Reading Efficiency and Academic Success in Selected University Curricula," Journal of Educational Psychology, 35:17-26, Jan., 1944; see also H. E. Peixotto, "The Relationship of College Board Examination Scores and Reading Scores for College Freshmen," Journal of Applied Psychology, 30:406-411, Aug., 1946; see also M. Anderson and E. J. Stegmar, "Predictors of Freshman Achievement at Fort Hays Kansas State College," Educational and Psychological Measurement, 14:722-723, April, 1954; see also W. J. Bruce, "The Contribution of Eleven Variables to the Prognosis of Academic Success in Eight Areas at the University of Washington," Dissertation Abstracts, 13:505, no. 4, 1955; see also D. W. Kern, "The Prediction of Academic Success of Freshmen in a Community College," Dissertation Abstracts, 15:85, no. 1, 1955; R. McQueen, "Diagnostic Reading Scores and College Achievement," Psychological Report, 3:627-629, Dec., 1957; N. S. Endler and D. Steinberg, "Prediction of Academic Achievement at the University Level," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 41:694-699, April, 1963; see also J. W. Campbell, "Factors Related to Scholastic Achievement (Louisiana State University's 1963-1964 Freshman Class)," Dissertation Abstracts, 26:4360-4361, Feb., 1966; see also T. F. Gallant, "Academic Achievement of College Freshmen and its Relationship to Selected Aspects of the Student's Background," Dissertation Abstracts, 26:6468-6469, May, 1966; see also M. K. Distefano, Jr., and M. Rice, "Predicting Academic Performance in a Small Southern College," Educational and Psychological Measurement, 26:487-489, Feb., 1966; see also D. J. Ernest, "The Prediction of Academic Success of College Music Majors," Journal of Research in Music Education, 18:273-276, March 1970; see also S. Feuers, "The Relationship Between General Reading Skills and Junior College Academic Achievement," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:3186A, Feb., 1970; see also R. Graff and J. Hansen, "Relationship of OASIS Scores to College Achievement and Adjustment," Journal of College Student Personnel, 11:129-134, March, 1970; see also H. Janzen and E. Johnston, "The Use of Reading Tests for Entrance and Placement Testing in a Community College," cited in Research in Education, 5:110, Dec., 1970.

or may not predict academic success, can reading ability predict failures or dropouts? Lanigan correlated scores on three different tests with grades in six subject matter fields for 163 Boston University freshmen. She found that the Minnesota Speed of Reading Test did not differentiate well between high and low achieving students.¹⁵ Breen was concerned about the relation of reading ability to college mortality of freshmen at the University of Washington. Using three reading scores (as measured by the Cooperative English Test) and grades in 26 subject areas, he found that students with test scores below the means on the three reading subtests had a 50-50 chance of achieving an all-school average of 2.00; other students had about a 3-1 chance. The total mortality for the subjects was about one-third and Breen concluded that reading may have contributed considerably to this figure.¹⁶ Wellington found that the most academically successful men were more likely to make higher scores on the Ohio State Psychological Exam and on the vocabulary and reading comprehension sections of the Nelson Denny Reading Test than were the most academically unsuccessful men.¹⁷ Ikenberry studied 580 Michigan State University students who had entered the university at the same time; he compared the 250 students that remained at the end of the first

¹⁵M. A. Lanigan, "The Effectiveness of the Otis, the A.C.E., and the Minnesota Speed of Reading Test for Predicting Success in College," Journal of Educational Research, 41:289-296, Dec., 1947.

¹⁶L. C. Breen, "The Relation of Reading Ability to College Mortality of Certain Entering Freshmen at the University of Washington in the Year 1950-1951," Dissertation Abstracts, 14:482, March, 1954.

¹⁷J. A. Wellington, "Factors Related to the Academic Success of Resident Freshmen Men at a Midwestern Liberal Arts College During the Academic Year 1952-53," Dissertation Abstracts, 16:69, no. 1, 1956.

year with 330 students who dropped out during the year. He found three functions (one being achievement) differed significantly between the groups and he noted that scores on a reading test were positively related to all three functions.¹⁸ In his study of comparisons of good and poor readers, Neville found that "prediction of success or failure among poor readers could be made with limited accuracy."¹⁹ And in a study using a group of dean's list students and a group on academic probation, no significant differences were found between the groups on reading rate or vocabulary. However, the former group was found to be significantly superior in verbal comprehension.²⁰ Jellison studied two groups of drop-outs, those with good academic potential and those with poor academic potential. When questioned about what influenced them to drop out, the latter group mentioned "not learning how to study in high school, and poor reading ability"²¹ significantly more often than the other group.

College students have typically been expected to be good readers, thus, at one time college reading programs were considered unnecessary.

¹⁸S. Ikenberry, "Factors in College Persistence," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 8:322-329, Winter, 1961.

¹⁹D. Neville, "An Exploratory Study Comparing Successful and Unsuccessful University of Florida Students Classified as Average or Poor Reader," Dissertation Abstracts, 22:3525-3526, April, 1962.

²⁰J. Seegers and H. Rose, "Verbal Comprehension and Academic Success in College," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 42:295-296, Nov., 1962.

²¹B. Jellison, "Certain Differences in Two Groups of Dropouts at Fort Hays State College with Recommendations for Reducing Attrition Among Students with Good Academic Potential," Dissertation Abstracts, 26:5867-5868, April 1966.

However, Pressey and Pressey offered evidence in 1930 that college reading programs could result in academic work gains.²² Thompson showed that while reading ability might not be enhanced by a reading course, students taking such a course would be less likely than their counterparts who received no guidance, to fail courses.²³ Kilby's 1945 study revealed that the amount of benefit from college remedial reading programs showed no relationship to a student's reading ability at the start of the program, scholastic aptitude, high school achievement, or predicted grade and that the remedial reading training resulted in greater improvement in verbal courses than in quantitative courses.²⁴ O'Bear studied the changes in the academic achievement of matched groups of remedial reading and non-remedial reading students at Indiana University. His investigation revealed that the remedial course students achieved poorer grades than the non-remedial course students in all areas and that the highest grades earned by the remedial course students were during the semester they were enrolled in the reading course.²⁵ Studies completed by McDonald and Schoenbeck indicated that college reading programs increased enrolled

²²L. Pressey and S. Pressey, "Training College Freshmen to Read," Journal of Educational Research, 21:203-211, March, 1930.

²³W. Thompson, "Experiment in Remedial Reading," School and Society, 34:156-158, Feb., 1931.

²⁴R. Kilby, "Relation of a Remedial Reading Program to Scholastic Success in College," Journal of Educational Psychology, 36:513-534, Dec., 1945.

²⁵H. H. O'Bear, "Changes in the Academic Achievement of Matched Groups of Remedial Reading and Non-remedial Reading Students at Indiana University," Dissertation Abstracts, 15:357, no. 3, 1955.

students' grades and reduced the number of dropouts.²⁶ However, Scheller's investigation indicated that while reading programs may improve reading skills, it does not necessarily follow that grades will be improved.²⁷ Thus, diversified results and conclusions drawn from studies concerned with college reading programs suggest that many variables must be taken into account in order to determine the effectiveness of the programs, e.g., effectiveness of methods used,²⁸ effectiveness of mechanical devices,²⁹ permanence of gains,³⁰ and materials used in the program.³¹

²⁶A. S. McDonald, "Influence of a College Reading Improvement Program on Academic Performance," Journal of Educational Psychology, 48:171-181, March, 1957; see also P. Schoenbeck, "Counseling and Reading Skills for the Terminal Student," (Paper presented at the National Reading Conference, Dec. 4, and 5, 1966, St. Petersburg, Florida), (Washington, D. C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, Aug., 1967).

²⁷T. G. Scheller, "The Effects on Academic Grades of Enrollment in a Reading Course," General College Studies, v. 3, no. 3, 1966-67, cited in Research in Education, 3:99, Spet., 1968.

²⁸F. S. Foreman, "Study of Self-Reinforcement and Study Skills Program with Bright College Underachievers," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:1430A, Oct., 1969; see also M. R. Thompson and R. P. Whitehill, "Relationships between Reading Flexibility and Speed Gains," Journal of Educational Research, 63:211-215, Feb., 1970.

²⁹R. L. Dubois, "Improvement of Textbook Comprehension in College Reading Classes," Journal of Reading, 13:113-118, 165-166, Nov., 1969.

³⁰L. J. Yuthas, "A Study of Two Approaches to the Teaching of Remedial Reading to Low-Achievers at an Urban College," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:2272A, Dec., 1969; see also B. H. Roberts, "Differing Practice Schedules for College Developmental Reading Classes," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:3333A, Feb., 1970.

³¹W. C. Hampton, "Multi-Level and Mono-Level Approaches to Study Skills with College Freshmen," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:1361, Oct., 1969; see also J. R. Dornish, "A Study of the Effectiveness of ITV as a Supplement to Face-to-Face Teaching of Functional Illiterates," Dissertation Abstracts, 30:5221A, June, 1970.