

Launching College Students on Academic Probation into the First Phase of Self-Efficacy: A Descriptive Case Survey

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The purpose of this case survey was to examine the reasons that students provide regarding why they are on academic probation and the efficacy of discussing the family life cycle among this group. Initially, a pilot population of 93 students on academic probation, who are a part of a multi-cultural community college in New York City, were surveyed during the spring 2005 semester. The pilot survey found that most of the students reported to be on academic probation because of having social problems. The pilot survey satisfied reliability and validity. During the fall 2005 semester, a revised survey was administered to 16 students on academic probation. Six were African American, two were Asian, six were Hispanic, one was West Indian, and one was Hispanic and African-American. These students attended an academic success workshop that was geared to assist them with meeting retention standards. Category variables such as: parental status, caregiver status, personal illness, family illness, employment, poor academic preparation, and mental health status, were used to probe responses. The survey was administered before the workshop, so their responses would not be influenced by the workshop materials. During the workshop, the researcher discussed ways of getting off probation, presented concepts of the family life cycle, and explored how to manage multi-tasking responsibilities for family-life, school, work, and personal needs. After the workshop, students were given a likert scale to evaluate the workshop. The results of the survey reported that students were on academic probation because of ambiguity with managing multi-tasking role responsibilities in the areas of family life and social life. Fifteen students reported mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and attention deficit disorder as impeding factors. The students found the workshop and the discussion of the family life cycle to be very beneficial. College students on academic probation should be educated on the family life cycle, healthy relationships, and how to manage multi-tasked responsibilities. This will help them venture into the first phase of self-efficacy. General systems theory argues that the sum of parts equals a whole. Thus, family life, employment responsibilities, job satisfaction, healthy partner relationships, and educational attainment will be the sum of parts that equals the individual, and in the realm of academia understanding these variables are vital for servicing the contemporary college student. Further research is needed for discussing the family life cycle among college students on academic probation (Contains 25 references). This article has been submitted to Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) for inclusion.

Launching College Students on Academic Probation into the First Phase of Self-Efficacy:
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By

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Contemporary service trends in college counseling centers report that counselors are faced with a growing population of student enrollment. Currently, there are 1200 community colleges in America and these institutions have been experiencing a rapid growth of student enrollment. For the year 1980, there were 4.5 million students enrolled; for 1990, 5.5 million students were enrolled, and there has been a projected growth of six million students to be enrolled in community colleges by the year 2006 (Bolden, Durodoye, & Harris, 2000). This increase has socially changed institutions of higher education. From a micro-level of organizational analysis, college counseling centers are faced with a reduction of resources coupled with an expansion of delivery services (Hodges, 2001). Today's students report more stressors that impede academic performance than college students in prior generations (Hodges, 2001; Gilbert, 1992; Gilgun, 1994). However, there is some uncertainty if such stressors were prevalent among prior generations of college students or perhaps society is more attentive to social issues that impede individual success rates (Gilbert, 1992).

Although college counseling centers are struggling for needed resources, counselors continue to develop intervention strategies for retention, based on trends of college students (Brotherton, 2001). Historically, the retention of college students who were on academic probation has been a concern for many institutions of higher education.

Smith and Winterbottom (1969) found that among probation students who attended Princeton University, were “lacking positive motivation for academic work, had unrealistic optimistic expectations concerning grades, and attributed their difficulties to academic factors rather than personal concerns” (p. 391). Helkowski, Jongsma, & Stout (2004) reported that, 90 % of 274 college and university counseling centers had to contact emergency services to hospitalize students for mental health crises and 30% reported at least one suicide. Additionally, Helkowski, Jongsma, & Stout (2004) contend that students are faced with tough choices about relationships, emotional and physical intimacy, sexual orientation, use of alcohol and other drugs, appropriate management of emotions, and a host of other issues” (pp. 2-3). Therefore, when exploring retention, mental wellness in the lives of students is a vital concern for colleges and universities in contemporary society.

International concepts of intervention by educators report that, college students in Turkey are in need of assistance from college counselors with understanding family life and appropriate relationship behaviors to academically progress (Biyik, Kiziltas, Turkim, & Yemenicil, 2005). “Students who perceive their family functioning as unhealthy were also found to have academic problems” (Biyik, Kiziltas, Turkim, & Yemenicil, 2005, p. 257). Among the students who reported better family relationships, also had better coping and problem-solving skills, and did not report mental distress. The researchers indicated that students with better family cohesiveness reported more shopping behaviors, which could be a method of dealing with stress within the family; however, the researchers did not indicate if the students with better family relationships had better academic performance.

Background

Conceptual Framework

General systems theory posits that the sum of parts equals a whole (Hanson, 1995). This concept can be applied to numerous situations in life. From a human behavior perspective, general systems theory would explore an individual and his/her environment, which encompass the realities of their life experiences. Thus, family life, employment responsibilities, job satisfaction, healthy partner relationships, and educational attainment will be the sum of parts that equals the whole individual, and in the realm of academia understanding these variables are vital for servicing the contemporary college student. Colleges should develop institutional intervention strategies by conducting internal researching; this will indirectly allow counselors to devise a plan, which can cause a positive effect for course achievement and student autonomy within the college or university setting (Hodges, 2001). “Community college counselors most frequently encounter students experiencing problems relating to issues of family, alcohol, and self-esteem” (Bolden, Durodoye, & Harris, 2000, p. 456). Thus, an issue of self-efficacy among college students on academic probation is a topic for further exploration and research.

Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy is better known as personal effectiveness, and there are three areas of social cognitive theory that influences individual self-efficacy. Bandura (2002) terms these three areas of influence as: (a) Personal agency, when the individual believes that he/she can achieve self-delineated goals, (b) Proxy agency, when the individual seeks assistance via resources, so personal goals can be achieved, and (c) Collective agency, when the person extracts and synthesizes concepts and behaviors from acquired life experiences, and as a group member, individuals use their aspirations and positive learned behaviors to collectively accomplish group goals. By cohesively interacting in the three areas of human agency, the individual arrives to Bandura's full mode of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is dependent upon experiences that can be extrapolated from personal realities, family systems, educational attainment, employment, and role modeling from others, the benefits of these experiences enables an individual to achieve projected goals. Thus, the student must be able to blend all of these elements together to be progressive. Of course there are more intricate components to a student that will be important factors of having self-efficacy, such as health issues, income, belief systems, perceptions, and other life style attitudes and behaviors that can be explored on a micro-level via individual counseling (Bandura, 2003; Hodges, 2001). Self-efficacy is highly dependent upon: (a) Self-development and/or perhaps self-actualization among humans, (b) The way in which humans adapt to their environment, and (c) The way humans evoke change (Bandura, 2003).

Self-Discipline, Behaviorism, & Self-Concept: The Personal Agency

Since the personal agency mode indicates that the individual believes that he/she can achieve personal goals; how does one reach self-efficacy if they have self-conflicting variables that impede the process of being in the personal agency mode? The most common sense application would be the necessity of an individual desiring self-discipline, which is a derivative of behaviorism and having control over self (Mowrer, 2001). Self-discipline is acquired via life experiences and must be role modeled to others (Rogus, 2001). Thus, self-discipline is a result of the determinants of actions that are triggered by positive self-concepts and perceptions of rewarded or valued behaviors (Combs, 2001). For example, if a student is having personal crises and is enrolled in school, he/she is less likely to have a positive self-concept because of the stressors in his/her personal life. Thus, it is more probable that he/she may not perform well academically, which will in-turn cause him/her to become a probation student by the end of the same semester, if the crisis is that severe. So, in this situation there are doubts with having control over-self and the inability to effectively problem solve, which results in poor academic performance and self-concept (Olszewski, Scott, & Joy, 1992).

Interestingly, some researchers believe that failure is a turning point that leads many people to change (Combs, 2001; Kane, 1997). However, change is determined by an individual's coping skills, so the change may be progressive or detrimental. With all of this in mind, a more specific question evolves when exploring college students on academic probation, which is: How can professors in college counseling centers assist students on academic probation reach the personal agency mode of self-efficacy? Combs (2001) suggest that can be done by teaching self-discipline and reinforcing positive self-

concepts. He further suggests that educators who wish to teach positive self-concepts would demonstrate the following behaviors to students: caring, apathy, dignity, integrity, and allow the students to experience success in the learning environment.

Teaching self-discipline and positive self-concepts becomes a buffer for new beginnings among students on academic probation. By implementing Comb's strategy, the professor leads or perhaps launches the student to venture into the personal agency realm of the human agency, which will then address some aspects of mental wellness in the college environment. Educating students on having positive concepts is one avenue to lead students into self-efficacy; however, there must be a dialogue among college counselors and students on academic probation about family life (Hodges, 2001; Biyik, Kiziltas, Turkim, & Yemenicil, 2005). For many years, social scientists have argued the family unit is the premise of society (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). So, family behavior patterns, belief systems, and coping skills have a cohesive correlation to the life style of progressive and unprogressive individuals in society (Erikson, 1980).

Statement of Purpose

This descriptive survey examines the reasons that students who are a part of a community college in New York City provide regarding why they are on academic probation, as well as the effectiveness of an approach that college counselors can use to assist students on academic probation with reaching the personal agency mode of self-efficacy. Students on academic probation do not meet the college's minimum standards of retention; this is based on grade point averages (GPA) earned by course-work. Many colleges require students to maintain a 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 grading scale. Prior research

reports that contemporary college students who have impediments to meeting academic requirements have problems with family, employment, and intimate relationships, which causes poor concentration. These problematic issues have a correlation with an individual having role ambiguity, poor self-concepts for academic success, and poor academic performance. The survey was guided by the following two research questions, which were geared to review: (a) What are some reasons students' state for being on academic probation? and (b) How effective is discussing the family life cycle among some students on academic probation? This survey provides a snapshot approach to researching current barriers to academic performance and gives some rationalization from community college students regarding their academic probation status (Calder, 1998).

Methods

Researcher

Choudrin, Glauser, and Peregoy (2004) and Calder (1998) recommend that qualitative researchers provide a description of themselves, so peers could become aware of the influences that may come from the researchers themselves. The researcher of this study is an African American female assistant professor in the counseling department at a community college in New York City. I conduct Saturday academic success workshops during the fall and spring semesters at the college the research study was implemented.

Pilot Survey

To ensure reliability of the survey form, for the spring 2005, a pilot survey was administered to 93 students who participated in the Saturday and Wednesday academic success workshops that were conducted at the college. These workshops are geared to assist with students meeting retention standards by educating them on academic strategies

that will help them get off of academic probation. An institutional review board (IRB) application was approved by the college for human subject research (for the pilot and research surveys). Informed consent was discussed with the students and all consented to voluntarily participate in the pilot and research surveys.

For data validity, the survey was constructed to probe responses that explored personal influences that can cause barriers to academic progress (Calder, 1998). The pilot survey indicated that most of the students reported to be on academic probation because of having family problems, poor academic preparation, care-giving responsibilities, financial hardships, and mental health concerns. Many of the students gave multiple responses, such as parenting combined with being a care-giver for relatives and being employed while attending school caused poor academic preparation, which led them to probation status.

Survey Procedures

For the fall 2005, a revised survey was administered to probe more responses regarding mental health services received. The only constraints of this survey was the control of how many students attended the initial Saturday success workshop, so the survey was based on a convenience sample of students on probation. All students voluntarily consented to the study. The survey form contained open and closed-ended questions that focused on demographic information, and reasons why students believed they were on academic probation, and their self-reported mental health status. The survey gave options to choose for reasons that caused probation such as: parental status, care-giver, personal illness, family illness, employment, poor academic preparation, as well as an option of other, which allowed each student to document other reasons why

they believe they were on academic probation. The mental health questions probed if they ever participated in therapy.

The survey was given to them before the workshop, so their survey responses would not be influenced by the workshop materials, regarding the family life cycle. After they completed the survey, the students were given a likert scale to evaluate the workshop. The following six statements were provided on the likert scale: (a) My knowledge of the subject increased, (b) The workshop inspired me to learn more, (c) I am confident that I can apply what I learned from this workshop in the future, (d) The workshop materials were clear to me, (e) I developed skills that will improve my academic standing and adjustment to college, (f) As a result of this workshop, I am more confident of my ability to succeed. The categories of choice are as follows: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) not sure, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree. The scale was used to research the efficacy of discussing the family life cycle.

During the workshop, the researcher discussed ways of getting off of probation, presented concepts of the family life cycle via a PowerPoint presentation, and explored how family life responsibilities can impact daily routines for family, school, work, and personal needs. The learning environment was interactive and students openly discussed their concerns of managing their daily responsibilities. They were directed to devise a plan of action, which incorporated all of their responsibilities and how they would manage them on a daily basis. Students were informed and encouraged to follow-through with delineated goals. The researcher emphasized that no change can happen if there is no effort to implement new delineated goals. When presenting the family life cycle concepts, a family crises hotline referral was provided to students during the presentation,

as a safety net for crisis counseling and perhaps future intervention, as they re-manage their life-styles. Also, they were informed that they could individually meet with their counselor for assistance.

Findings

Demographic Information

A total of 16 students from diverse backgrounds attended the initial Saturday academic success workshop for the fall 2005 semester. Thirteen (81%) were female and three (19%) were male. Six of the students reported to be African American (37%), two were Asian (13%), six (37%) were Hispanic, one (6%) reported to be West Indian, and one (6%) reported to be Hispanic and African-American. Thirteen (81%) of the students were single/never married, two (13%) were divorced, and one (6%) was separated. Ten (63%) students reported to be employed; six (38%) were full-time employees and four (25%) were part-time employees. Four (25%) students reported to be parents and nine (56%) students were care-givers to relatives. Two themes were created from the data, which are the following: (a) Academic impediments leading to probation, which discusses student's reasons to why they became probation students, and (b) Benefits of participating in a workshop that discusses the family life cycle.

Academic Impediments Leading to Probation

Fifteen (94%) students were on academic probation and one (6%) student reported that he/she attended the workshop for personal betterment. Out of the fifteen (94%) that were probation students: eight (53%) reported that they attended the workshop for personal betterment as well as on the basis of being on academic probation and seven students out of the 15 (47%) reported that they were on academic probation because of

poor preparation for course-work. Five students (33%) reported that their participation in employment was a factor to becoming a probation student. Four (27%) students reported that personal illness was a factor regarding being on probation; three students (20%) believed that their roles as care-givers caused them to be on academic probation; two students (13%) stated that parenting became a barrier to attending college and they became probation students. Only one student (7%) reported that: (a) Parenting, (b) Care-giving, (c) Personal illness, (d) Family illness, (e) Employment, (d) Finances, and (f) Poor academic preparation for course-work were barriers to meeting the minimum standards for academic retention.

Eight (50%) of the students circled multiple responses regarding their reasons for being on academic probation; out of those eight students, four (50%) of those students provided the following additional reasons to why they became probation students: (a) Emotional issues, breaking up with my boyfriend, (b) Bad Choices, scheduling, taking too many difficult classes at one time, (c) Problems with the teachers, and (d) Problems managing social life and school work. Thirteen (81%) students reported having mental health issues; out of the 13, five (38%) students reported to have encountered depression; five (38%) reported stress was an issue for them; one (8%) reported having anxiety disorders; and two (16%) reported to have an attention deficit disorder. Out of the 13 students, five (38%) of the students reported multiple mental health issues. Most importantly, students were asked if they ever participated in individual counseling services regarding their mental health crises; only three of the 13 (23%) reported to have participated in therapeutic intervention; one (8%) of the three students' reported to have services for a few days, another student (8%) reported to attend counseling for three to

five months, and one (8%) reported to have attended counseling for six months or more. Unfortunately, ten (63%) of the 13 students reported that they never attended any therapeutic intervention although they had encountered some forms of mental health distress.

Benefits of Participating in a Workshop that Discusses Family Life

The results from the likert scale showed that all 16 students (100%) agreed that their knowledge increased, and 15 students (94%) were inspired to learn more about the family life cycle. Fifteen students (94%) believed that what was learned could be applied to the future, and 16 students (100%) reported they would share the information with others. When asked if the materials were clear to the students, fifteen students (94%) perceived clarity of the presentation. Fifteen students (94%) believed that they developed skills that will improve their academic standing and adjustment to college. Last, 15 students (94%) reported that their participation in the workshop empowered them, so they felt confident of their ability to succeed.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The sample survey group of this case is not generalizable of students in college, nor of the population of students on academic probation at the community college it was conducted. However, their reported impediments mirrored the findings of larger research studies in the field (Hodges, 2001; Gilbert, 1992; Gilgun, 1994; Bolden, Durodoye; Harris, 2000; Maples & Luzzo, 2005). The findings from this survey indicate that students have many role responsibilities that impede their academic performance, much of which lies within the family household, so discussing the family life cycle was beneficial for college students on academic probation. Unlike prior generations,

contemporary college students seem to be more aware of how their social behaviors and life experiences impact their academic performance. Thus, if students are reporting uncohesiveness family relationships as a factor that impedes academic performance, then, intervention strategies for coping skills should be devised to address issues of problematic behaviors, as well as positive guidance for communication and coping with expectant role responsibility among family members. Intervention strategies for family-life, will help college students who may need assistance with being progressive because of dysfunctional family life styles (Erikson, 1980). This concept is not new to society, but on the basis of increased educational attainment, it has trickled into the system of higher education and has become a concern for mental wellness in the lives of students, as well as barrier for progressive academic performance and retention, among the population being served.

In the realm of individual counseling, intervention is a necessary strategy when servicing students who are at-risk of not completing their educational attainment. Hodges (2001) suggests four fundamental strategies college counselors should implement for students in crises, which can be used as a coping strategy. First, when providing individual counseling, the student's emotions should be assessed; second, counselors should reflect upon the student's crises from the student's perspective; third, the counselor should have apathy and deliver services in a non-judgmental way; last, there should be a student appeal process regarding temporary withdrawals from the institution of higher education. This will allow students to deal with their crises as well as be able to re-enter the college at a more appropriate time. By implementing this procedure colleges and universities will be in compliance with the 1990 Americans Disability Act.

In contemporary society, college counselors can help students on academic probation venture into the first phase of self-efficacy by integrating concepts of the family life cycle into the intervention strategies they develop. By educating students on the family life cycle, they can personalize the concepts and make educated choices for themselves and their families as well as have the ability to practice better communication skills. “Factors such as family construction, parent attitudes, and social support influence the mental health and well-being of young people” (Biyik, Kiziltas, Turkim, & Yemenicil, 2005, p. 254). The college setting can be an arena where counselors can help students become aware of some important factors of success by blending academic responsibilities, educating students on expectant multi-tasking responsibilities, exploring the family life cycle, promoting positive self-concepts, and educating students on having control over-self. Additionally, when devising intervention strategies, college counselors should take a general systems approach for assisting students; on the basis of many of them having multi-task responsibilities, of “working, childrearing, juggling household chores, caring for extended family members, and struggling with limited incomes that have been stretched to pay for college tuition” (Bolden, Durodoye, and Harris, 2000, p. 460). Research has shown that the lack of mental wellness impedes student success rates (Brothern, 2001; Overstreet, 2004, Arrendondo, Kurpris, & Rayle, 2005; and Rosales & Person, 2003).

Self efficacy is not only determined by the personal agency mode, but also incorporates the proxy and collective agencies. By participating in intervention services, college students automatically ventures into the proxy agency, on the basis of their willingness to seek services. Thus, the collective agency allows an individual to arrive to

overall self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000). “A group’s attainment is the product not only of shared knowledge and skills of its different members, but also of the interactive, coordinative, and synergistic dynamics of their transactions” (Bandura, 2000, p. 76). The collective agency can be assessed when students voluntarily participate in student organizations and/or clubs. Providing guidance to students about the family life cycle will lead to overall academic retention and educational attainment, and perhaps a better state of mental health.

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