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**Making College a Success by Assessing and Navigating Candidates'
Study Habits**

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Abstract

In an ideal world colleges would recruit and admit the “right” students and there would be no doubt about their success. But even in a less than ideal world, it is incumbent upon professors to ensure that students who do come to them experience success to the greatest extent possible. This capstone educational adventure offers immeasurable benefits to the individual student and to society. The individual is prepared for a chosen career that leads to a quality and productive life. Society is enhanced by any worthwhile contributions of the individual. However, college is expensive and requires untold demands of students. To be a success in college, students must make necessary financial arrangements and establish good study habits as they pursue a degree. This presentation provides a snapshot of the crucial elements for college success. It also provides data on a select group of college students about their study habits and how they may be navigated to help ensure success in college. A closer look at the candidates and the process informs the profession about avenues for enhanced success.

Keywords: college cost, college success, higher education, minorities, study habits

Introduction

College is more than simply a step beyond high school. It is the “higher level” of preparation that a country affords its citizenry for a professional career and a better way of life. It is expensive and demands tremendous effort on the part of students to be a success and should therefore be taken seriously by all stakeholders.

There are gloomy predictions that half of the students who enter college in the 21st century will fail to earn a degree with a contributing factor being their inability to find and use information (Owen, 2010). To lose such a large number of students to withdrawal or dropout is a travesty for the individual students, their families and to society.

What makes a college successful? It is successful when there is quality teaching and learning and a high proportion of students gaining the qualifications for which they enrolled (Successful further education, 2005). To ensure quality teaching and learning it should be understood that there are different and multiple pathways to learning. For example, students will find that the most effective way for them to learn may be visual-spatial, musical, Intrapersonal, and/or kinesthetic. It is likely that students' learning style will coincide with their personality type (College success skills, n.d.). Professors should take into consideration students' learning styles and personality types as they prepare for and conduct instruction.

There are also important external factors related to degree completion. They include

the quality of high school, parental income and wealth, and amount of schooling of the parent(s). Research reports that early intervention programs offer the best opportunity to increase the number of degree holders from lower income families (Beaver, 2010).

It requires comprehensive effort for colleges to recruit the “right” students and ensure their success. This presentation examines some crucial elements to get about the business. Attention is focused on the decision to attend college and the benefits, problems that students face in seeking a college education, particular skills to aid success, a report on selected students’ study habits, and how colleges may navigate students’ study habits to help ensure their success in college.

Decision to attend college and the benefits

Most present-day high school graduates realize that college is an excellent decision because it increases their opportunities for success. But they will find that the college learning environment is different from that of high school. College is less structured and requires more self-monitoring skills than is needed in high school because teachers and parents will not be making decisions for them. In the meantime, college students must be prepared to face an increased level of academic competition with less contact with professors. They will be responsible for their actions, learning, successes and failures as a college student (College survival skills, n.d.).

It is unfortunate that society does not afford equal opportunities for college. Middle and upper classes have far more access to the right information and to college than others (Dolan, 2008). Beaver (2010) pointed out that for middle-class Americans college attendance is expected and viewed as necessary because of the various advantages degree holders share. To be successful in college students will need a lot of knowledge and certain thinking capabilities. They need self-knowledge, such as a realistic appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses, how to study and manage their time, as well as make the right decisions. They must also know how to interact with students and professors from different backgrounds and how to navigate the bureaucratic process, especially in terms of financial aid (Dolan, 2008).

Most parents, including those of low socioeconomic status, want their children to attend college. But they often do not have the appropriate information about college. If parents and children are not made aware of opportunities early, they may see college as something that is not a reality for them (Dolan, 2008).

In addition to increasing opportunities for general success in society, a bottom-line benefit of a college degree is greater income. Degree recipients will have acquired skills that make them more employable and allow them to command higher incomes, especially those with majors like accounting, computers, and nursing. It was reported that on average, a high school graduate brings home \$630 a week while a person with a bachelor’s degree earns \$1140 a week (Beaver, 2010). Another study reported that in the mid-1970s college graduates earned about 40 percent more than people with high

school diplomas and today it stands near 100 percent. College graduates were the only category of workers whose real pay increased since 1979 (Carey, 2011). It was stated that college graduates earn more because they are smarter and societies reward smart people (Beaver, 2010). However, the ultimate benefit of a college education is for the nation. That's because the economy continues to reorganize itself in ways that favor people with the knowledge and skills that college degrees represent. The nation that invests the most in education is generally the nation with the highest level of per capita income (Carey, 2011).

One study reported that the number of college graduates is increasing but the distribution is unequal. Students from lower income families attend and complete four-year degrees at far lower rates than those from middle and higher income groups. As many as 90% of students from the highest income quartile enroll in college after high school, while only 40% from the lowest income quartile do so. It gets even worse for the latter group in terms of college success as only 11% of low-income first generation college students graduate after 6 years (Beaver, 2010).

Problems that students often encounter

To succeed in college students must first get to college. While there are opportunities to improve college preparation at all levels, high school is where college aspirations come to an end for far too many students. Too many students drop out of high school and relinquish the opportunity to enroll in college (Carey, 2011). Dropout rates in urban high schools are daunting. While 70 percent of the nation's 3.3 million high school graduates go directly to two- or four-year colleges every year, and still more enroll by their mid-twenties, less than half of all students are exposed to a legitimate college preparatory curriculum in high school (Carey, 2011). Matters get worse for certain groups in society. For example, it is stated that 50% of the high school dropouts come from just 12% of the high schools in the nation and that more than three-fourths of dropouts come from the bottom half of the socioeconomic ladder (Beaver, 2010).

Also, to succeed in college students must stay in college. Students drop out of college by the hundreds of thousands every year. Challenges faced by minority students upon entering college are insufficient academic preparation and feelings of isolation and alienation (Dolan, 2008). Among students who enroll as first-time full-time freshmen in four-year universities, less than two-thirds graduate within six years. Among all new college students, the on-time graduation rate is less than 50 percent. In 2009, more than 350 four-year colleges and universities reported a six-year graduation rate of 30 percent or less (Carey, 2011). Reasons associated with minority students being successful or staying in college include economic factors, institutional type, campus environment, institutional agents, and psychological factors. For examples, the ability to pay is essential in attending college; campuses classified as minority-serving tend to have a positive effect on success; chilly and hostile campus climates may be discouraging; faculty and peers shape students' perceptions of and experiences in college; and self-concept, commitment, and expectations are associated with college success (Factors that influence, 2011).

Problems exist for those college students who try to fight to the finish. Research shows that most students have not developed a systematic approach to study skills. In college instructors take for granted that students can read, write, listen, take notes and work on exams and assignments effectively. Unsuccessful students bumble through such activities whereas successful students employ a systematic approach (College survival skills, n.d.).

Some predictions are that half of the students who enter college in the 21st century will fail to earn a degree, with a contributing factor being their inability to find and use information. Librarians and professors frequently complained that freshmen students were unable to use university resources well. It was reported that 59% of college instructors were dissatisfied with the ability of high school graduates to do research. The skill weaknesses of entering college students were categorized into groups which included: lack of general knowledge, difficulty defining research questions and following the research process, problems searching for information, and trouble evaluating and using information (Owen, 2010).

Another basic skill that today's college undergraduates seem to lack is critical thinking. They do not seem to think for themselves and to take college seriously enough. Some think that if most students would simply apply themselves seriously to their studies, many of their deficiencies would quickly disappear (Prepping kids for college, 1996).

The general population faces major challenges in earning a degree but it can be even more challenging for persons with disabilities. For example, students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are at high-risk of academic achievement problems and school failure and are less likely to complete a postsecondary education. Things that hinder them include problems in self-regulation, task persistence, and attention. Students with ADHD do not necessarily lack the intellectual ability to learn. Their hyperactivity, impulsivity, and/or inattention make concentration difficult and negatively affect their performance. It was posited that school curricula necessitate linguistic and logical-mathematical types of intelligence whereas students with ADHD possess more natural and spatial types of intelligence (Reaser & et al., 2007).

Skills for success in college

Along the way in this manuscript, attention has been called to some things that play a role in college success. In this section more explicit focus is given to specific skills that are identified for success in the academic domain. It is important to realize that no one skill leads to academic excellence. Success in college requires a number of skills that when properly used become productive habits in all areas of life (Cusimano, 1998). Anderson and Anderson (1992) reported that two skills (study skills and communication skills) learned in high school contribute most to college success. The authors offered the following guidelines for developing good study habits and skills:

- Have a special time for study each day;

- Learn to use the library;
- Decide which subjects require the most time;
- Study to learn (make information meaningful; and
- Never pretend to understand, always ask for an explanation .

In the meantime, students are encouraged to continue to search for the most effective ways to achieve academic success (Anderson & Anderson, 1992).

Cusimano (1998) made the case that the first step to developing better study skills lies in organization, both physical and mental. Students are encouraged to keep their study center equipped with extra supplies such as pens, pencils, calculator, folders, paper and any other items they anticipate needing. Another “must” given was good time management; without which a student can easily fall behind in course requirements. The author advised that students should at the beginning of the semester set up a daily, weekly and monthly schedule for study and other activities (Cusimano, 1998).

Other essentials for success in college include (1) Note-taking skills – professors often teach by lecture and class notes are the record of what was said in class; (2) Good listening skills – which help in assimilating important information from lectures. This can be facilitated by making eye contact with the professor and rephrasing in mind what is being said; (3) Effective reading strategies – which empower ones academic abilities. Application of such may include reading a chapter by looking over the title, headings, illustrations, charts, and diagrams and then reading the chapter; (4) Putting information into long-term memory – this may involve storing information through daily review and understanding of the material; and (5) Test-taking strategies – this includes being prepared and getting proper rest and nutrition for the brain to work at optimum level during the test (College success skills, n.d.; Cusimano, 1998).

Some very practical skills and activities can aid students in college. Suggested ones that may be helpful in making the transition from high school to college, as provided by College survival skills (n.d.), are:

- Select an appropriate set of classes. Inquire about class format, class requirements such as amount of reading, papers assigned, type of tests given and instructor’s teaching style;
- Take a less demanding class along with more demanding classes each semester. This will help balance the workload;
- Complete classes required for graduation early in the program. This reduces scheduling conflicts;
- Develop organizational strategies, study skills and a network of support;
- Attend class. Arrive on time, pay attention and participate in class discussions and activities;
- Talk to the instructor, ask questions;
- Complete and check all work. Turn in neat and clear assignments;
- Monitor your progress. If you begin to fall behind, ask for help; and
- If with a disability, stay in contact with the office of disability support services and your professors.

In summary, to maximize success in college, it takes a high level of academic aptitude, efficient study skills, and positive attitudes for both students with disabilities and those without. Specific aspects important to learning are motivation, time management, information processing, self-regulated strategy use and general study skills (College survival skills, n.d.; Reaser & et al., 2007).

Students' perceptions of their study habits

No two people learn in exactly the same manner; each has unique ways of processing information. It is vital that students understand their own learning style and find their keys to success. A set of tools is needed that can be utilized to learn, adapt and create strategies tailored to your personal strengths and unique information processing skills. Students must understand their own style and accommodate it to be an effective learner and to compete at the postsecondary level (College survival skills, n.d.).

In large measure it appears that professionals do the talking about study habits for students. After challenging students to attend class regularly and to do all assignments on time, Deen (2005) gathered their suggestion as to what is needed for them to be successful. The suggestions were:

- Use good time management. Start with highest priorities, education, family, then swimming;
- Avoid procrastination. It can be the worst enemy;
- Take work seriously. Just do the work and do it right; and
- Have a good attitude. Go into class thinking you will learn something new and get a better understanding.

The students went on to make suggestions about the kind of teachers they need in order to become successful, which fell into two general classifications: (1) teachers who know and care about their students, and on who provide a good learning situation in the classroom and (2) teachers who provide a learning situation in the classroom. Teachers who know and care: Give encouragement to students (compliment good work, encourage one to try hard and help with problems); Love their job (walk through question until student understands); Know their students (gauge what students can really handle); Care about all students (make all students feel special); and Give detailed explanations of assignments (have patience). Teachers who provide a learning situation in the classroom: Give lot of writing practice (it is necessary); Insist on good behavior (be flexible but not to point students walk over them); Allow students to express their views (accept different views); and Give feedback (tell what one needs to work on) (Deen, 2005). The author advised that teachers can heed students' suggestions by getting to know them individually, caring about them and encouraging them to succeed. Besides getting to know them through their writing, teachers can have student conferences, use quick e-mails, do writing in the computer lab to see what is causing difficulty, have students critique each other's writing in peer groups and small support groups to encourage one another (Deen, 2005).

The current study went beyond gathering suggestions from students about making college a success; it actually ascertained students' perceptions of their study habits. The population consisted of 32 students enrolled in a teacher education program at an urban university in southern USA. They were administered a twenty-item likert-scale instrument which included study habits in the categories of in-class behaviors, study habits, completion of assignments, test-taking strategies and personal disposition. Construction of the scale was based on a number of resources cited in the reference and the website, <http://www.edu.pe.ca/southernkings/succeed.htm>. The drafted instrument was submitted to a class of graduate students to complete and make comments on the structure and content of the scale. Their comments were taken into in the final version of the instrument. With the instrument, the junior and senior teacher education majors were instructed to indicate, on the scale always, often, sometimes, rarely or never, how often they do the listed behaviors. The responses were tallied according to the areas on the scales and percents were calculated. A further calculation was made to determine the number and percent for the combination always and often for each item to indicate how many satisfactorily applied the study habits or behaviors. Table 1 illustrates the findings.

Table 1
Candidates' Report on Study Habits (N = 32)

Study habit	Report (No/%)					AO (No/%)
In-class behaviors:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	AO (No/%)
-Take notes in class	24/75%	7/22	1/ 3	0/ 0	0/ 0	31/ 97%
-Ask questions when unsure	17/53	8/25	6/19	1/ 3	0/ 0	25/ 78
-Pay attention in class, concentrate	20/63	10/31	2/ 6	0/ 0	0/ 0	30/ 94
-Prepare for class, bring materials	26/81	5/16	1/ 3	0/ 0	0/ 0	31/ 97
Study habits:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	AO (No/%)
-Manage study time and set goals	13/41%	11/34	7/22	1/ 3	0/ 0	24/ 75%
-Have space to study, few distractions	13/41	7/28	9/28	1/ 3	0/ 0	22/ 69
-Do difficult homework when at best	14/43	10/31	6/19	2/ 6	0/ 0	24/ 75
-Stick to schedule, homework/rev notes	4/13	10/31	13/41	3/ 9	2/ 6	14/ 44
Completion of assignments:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	AO (No/%)
-Read material assigned by instructor	15/47%	9/28	8/25	0/ 0	0/ 0	24/ 75
-Ask instructor for outside help	7/22	7/22	15/47	3/ 9	0/ 0	14/ 44
-Use library, computer for information	15/47	10/31	7/22	0/ 0	0/ 0	25/ 78
-Complete assignments to best of ability	23/72	7/22	2/ 6	0/ 0	0/ 0	30/ 94
-Submit assignments on time	24/75	8/25	0/ 0	0/ 0	0/ 0	32/100
Test-taking strategies:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	AO (No/%)
-Prepare/study well for quizzes/exams	14/44%	11/34	7/22	0/ 0	0/ 0	25/ 78
-Read whole test first, plan your time	7/22	3/ 9	8/25	9/28	5/16	10/ 31
-Outline essay answer, begin to write	9/28	4/13	7/22	8/25	4/13	13/ 41
-Answer questions you know first	16/50	11/34	5/16	0/ 0	0/ 0	27/ 84

-Go over returned tests, study mistakes 18/56 7/22 5/16 2/ 6 0/ 0 25/ 78

Personal disposition:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	AO (No/%)
-Believe in yourself and your abilities	29/91%	3/ 9	0/ 0	0/ 0	0/ 0	32/100
-Think positively, be confident, say "I can do it"	28/88	3/ 9	1/ 3	0/ 0	0/ 0	31/ 97

(Reference: <http://www.edu.pe.ca/southernkings/succeed.htm>)

In terms of category, the students' self-report in personal disposition was highest. All of the students (100%) indicated that they believed in themselves and 97% think positively, are confident and say "I can do it." The category with some of the lowest ratings was test-taking strategies. Things that they did least were "read whole test first and plan their time (31%) and "outline an essay answer then begin to write." The highest and lowest frequency behaviors in the principal scale components were: (1) In-class behaviors - the behaviors most often exhibited were "take notes in class" (97%) and "prepare for class, to include bringing materials" (97%) whereas the behavior least exhibited was "ask question when unsure" (78%); (2) Study habits – the behaviors most often exhibited were "manage study time and set goals" (75%) and "do difficult homework when at best" (75%) whereas the behavior least exhibited was "stick to schedule in doing homework and reviewing notes" (44%); (3) Completion of assignments – the behavior most often exhibited was "submit assignments on time" (100%) whereas the behavior least exhibited was "ask instructor for outside help"(44%); and (4) test-taking strategies – the behavior most often exhibited was "answer questions you know first" whereas the behavior least exhibited was "read whole test first then plan your time" (31%).

It was very interesting to discover that the students always believe in themselves and their abilities and always submit assignments on time. The literature had reported that procrastination was a short coming for many college students. The students further reported that they almost always take notes in class, prepare for class and complete assignments to the best of their ability. The literature rated note-taking as a very essential skill for college success. The students reported a number of weaknesses in test-taking strategies as well as in asking instructors of help and sticking to a schedule. These study habit were also viewed in the literature as important for success in college.

How colleges may help ensure success (Navigating students' study habits)

The current study showed that the sample population of teacher education major on the one hand frequently engaged in some essential study habits and on the other hand infrequently engaged in some essential study habits. How might a professor navigate or work with such students? Three distinct possibilities come to mind: (1) the professor could attempt to accommodate or instruct the students as they are, (2) the professor could facilitate development in the areas of infrequent engagement; or (3) the professor could do both as deemed necessary. In the absence of empirical evidence, it appears that combination of the two approaches holds promise.

There was evidence in the literature to suggest how colleges may help ensure college success. Colleges would do well to make their admissions standards clearer about the knowledge and skills students should master; realize that freshmen often don't know what courses to take, don't have the right study habits, and don't know how to negotiate the system; and provide mentors as necessary (Dolan, 2008).

While students should define their own success, colleges help them along the way. Colleges should compile resources to help students become well-rounded college, including information and assistance with time management, study techniques, stress relief and health awareness. Much of this material can be provided in a handbook to be used as a reference tool throughout the college experience (College success skills, n.d.). Librarians can also help students successfully transition from high school to college (Owen, 2010).

It was reported that over 70 percent of institutions offer first-year seminars. They serve primarily to assist students in making the transition from high school to college and to motivate them to take advantage of everything a university has to offer. Positive outcomes associated with first-year seminars included improvement in retention from first to second year and subsequent graduation rates. Other benefits included interacting informally with faculty, participating in class discussion, collaborating academically with other students, course attendance and formation of a network of friends on campus (Jessup-Anger, 2011).

It was suggested that two factors are essential requirements for a college to be highly effective. First, it should have strong sense of mission and an exemplary response to educational and social inclusion. They should understand the needs of their local community and be flexible in meeting them, have high aspirations of their own performance and the ability to achieve those ambitions and make staff training a high priority. Second, colleges should put learners' needs at the center of their work. They should make teaching of the highest quality, ensuring that it accommodates the particular needs of all their students whose strengths and weaknesses they know intimately. The outcomes for students at successful colleges were remarkable, retention and pass rates were very good (Successful further education, 2005). Further, even students with ADHD showed improved behavior or performance when tasks are made salient, novel, or interesting (Reaser & et al., 2007).

Colleges can get students fired up by showing them what they can achieve with a good college education. They should tell students up front exactly what is expected of them, find out what worries they may have about class and ease their minds on those issues and then get down to the business of teaching. These things usually foster a more positive environment for learning. A good strategy in teaching is to make examples of good students' work rather than singling out the underachievers for criticism (Prepping kids for college, 1996).

In higher education the goal is to enroll in college, perform in classes and to graduate (Braley & Ogden, 1997). Teachers must see students through the students'

eyes in order to understand and help them. After all, it's the students who are getting an education and they should be included in the thinking and planning process(Deen, 2005).

Summary and implications

Making college a success necessitates a quality high-school preparation and four more years of dedicated work in an institution of higher learning. This requires the employment of good study habits. The literature has gone to great length to enumerate these study habits and expound on how essential they are to college success.

The current study found that teacher education majors make frequent use of some essential study habits but infrequently use other essential study habits. Professors must work with what students currently do as they develop them into what they should be. After all, as Deen (2005) stated, educators should strive to be the kind of teachers that students need and always remember to see the students through their eyes; for they are the product we are working to perfect.

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