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Effects of Group Versus Individual Instruction on At-Risk Students Grade Point Averages

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EFFECTS OF GROUP VERSUS INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION ON AT-RISK
STUDENTS GRADE POINT AVERAGES

A Research Paper

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Occupational and
Technical Studies at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Science

By


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SIGNATURE PAGE

This research paper was prepared by Christine S. Ricks under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Master of Science degree.

Approved:



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Date

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In our society, many people feel that obtaining a college degree is just the beginning to becoming successful. Many believe that the next step after high school without debate is college. After a student begins college the hard part of their journey to succeed is being able to stay in school and obtain a college degree. Retaining those students that have been accepted into their institution is what many colleges across the country find is their biggest obstacle in defining their success. Retention has been and continues to be a hot subject in many college administration office meetings.

Old Dominion University is just one college that takes student retention seriously. During a student's first year is where the university puts much effort into retaining their students. It is generally during a student's first year at the university where the retention rate is at its lowest. "The first-year retention rate, that is the percentage of first-time, full-time students that start in the fall and enroll the following fall, indicates how well institutions retain students from the fall of their first year to the fall of their second year, thus allowing them to progress toward their goal of earning a baccalaureate degree."

(<http://roie.schev.edu/>)

Old Dominion University has over the years implemented several programs to help in the retention of their students. Retaining students is one of the measurements of success many colleges strive to achieve. Millions of dollars

Limitations

This research paper was limited to the Fall 2002 freshman class at Old Dominion University who were assigned to the Advising Services Office. For the purpose of consistency, no students were studied outside of the university's undecided and at-risk advising office. These students are a special population of students admitted to the university who had a high school grade point average between a 2.5 and 2.69.

Assumptions

During this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The students on probation signed an Academic Success Contract.
2. The students followed the directions of the facilitators.
3. The students in the Academic Success Groups and individual sessions had a grade point average of less than a 2.0.
4. The students were not aware of this study.
5. By understanding what helps students improve their grade point average, students can be retained longer than their freshman year.
6. Students knew what were the reasons why they were on academic probation.

Procedures

The subjects of this study were selected from the Fall 2002 admitted freshman in the Advising Services Office at Old Dominion University. To satisfy the hypothesis of this study, students attended an Academic Success Group or

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature that was related to the objectives. In this chapter are sections on making the transition from high school to college, enhancing study skills, academic probation, and the Freshman Success Program at Old Dominion University.

Making the Transition

When a student enters college after high school, he or she believes that the transition to college will be an easy one. Students believe that whatever grades they received in high school will continue in college. Many are not taught that having good study skills are essential in achieving good grades. "Many institutions are admitting students who not only are academically ill-prepared but also may lack the self-regulatory skills necessary for successful adjustment to campus life." (Bliss & Mueller, 1987; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Talbot, 1990) The decline of grades may be only one result of not being prepared. Problems like alcohol abuse, depression or dropping out of school can also arise. High schools today do not paint the realistic pictures that students should have about college life. Many students who attend college do so to be free of their parents and their rules. Others truly possess the desire to further their education, but find it hard to master what is needed to succeed. This is especially true for those students who are first generation college students. Many institution today have set up programs to assist these at-risk students. "The literature on

interventions for academically at-risk undergraduates reveals a number of approaches and strategies, including programs emphasizing time management and study skills, career- and goal-identification activities, a combination of academic and personal issues, and alternative approaches, including relaxation techniques and meditation". (Coleman & Freedman, 1996) Using such interventions can help the transition to college to be a smoother one for some students, thus enabling them to get off of or avoid academic probation.

Study Skills

Once a student is placed on academic probation, many interventions are used in order to retain the student and to approve his or her grades. The enhancement of a student's study skills is one of those interventions. "Academic competence is associated with the knowledge and application of effective study skills. Capable students at all grade levels may experience difficulty in school, not because they lack ability, but because they lack good study skills". (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002) Being academically competent is just one characteristic of someone who has mastered studying. There is not a class geared towards mastering the art of studying, but there are ways that many educators use in helping students enhance their study skills. For students to become masters at studying, they first have to become active learners. "They understand task demands and are able to implement flexible, effective strategies to succeed academically." (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002)

The motivation level of the student is also a contributing factor to a student mastering study skills. They should not lack in motivation and initiative, or lack home support to study. They should be willing and motivated to receive good grades. A student in college is said in order for them to be successful in their classes; he or she should study at least two hours per credit hour a week. This is a formula used in the Advising Office at Old Dominion University. A daily schedule is recommended to all students in order for them to see where they are with their studying on a weekly basis. The daily schedule is a time management tool. It has been proven that a student who has poor time management skills tends to do well academically.

There are many interventions that can be used to improve study skills. These skills are fundamental to academic competence. A student who has good study skills has a better chance of succeeding. They have to successfully learn the skills needed to perform well in school. Enhancing a student's study skills is just one, but a major component to success. A student has to be motivated foremost to improve and then they have to be active participants in the learning process.

Academic Probation

Academic probation is defined as obtaining a grade point average below a 2.0 on a four point scale. "Findings published by the Montreal Regional Metropolitan Admission Services reveal that in 1980, 18% of the students enrolled in college education programs failed 50% of their courses in the first

semester. This figure increased to 25% in 1986, and current trends seem to indicate that within the next 10 years, it could be as high as 33% if nothing is done to change the situation.” (Conseil des Colleges, 1988) A student at Old Dominion University can stay on academic probation for a minimum of one semester. If they continue below a 2.0 grade point average, they can be placed on suspension from the university from anywhere from one year to indefinitely. If a student is seen in the Advising Services Office at Old Dominion University, they are required by that office to go through several interventions to help either get the student a 2.0 GPA or better or improve their current grade point average (GPA) to help in the process of getting them at or above a 2.0 GPA. Once a student is placed on academic probation, a letter is sent urging the student to come into the Advising Services Office to meet with their academic advisor.

When the student comes to the office, he or she completes what is called a probation checklist. This checklist asks the student questions like, “How much time did they spend studying per week for their courses?” or if the student held a job then, “How many hours did they work per week?” This checklist helps the advisor to determine how a student was placed on academic probation. In addition to the checklist, the student has to sign an “Academic Success Contract”. This contract is an agreement between the student and their advisor to enter that student into at least two mandatory interventions. Interventions could be, but not limited to, meeting with their advisor at least three times before pre-registration to discuss the student’s progress in their current courses,

signing up to a six-week long Academic Success Group facilitated by one of the Advising Services staff, or scheduling six meetings with a staff member individually to discuss the enhancement of study skills to help improve his or her grades. At the end of the semester, students' grades are assessed. If they remain on academic probation and are suspended for a year from the university, they are advised that they can enter an appeal. A letter is sent to the Appeals Committee for those students who have done all the interventions agreed upon on the Academic Success Contract. Usually those students' suspension would be lifted, but they still remain on academic probation. Many students who are placed on academic probation and have the desire to achieve will do so. "As many as one fourth of undergraduate students are placed on academic probation one or more times during their college years. (Garnett, 1990)

Freshman Success Program

When a freshman enters Old Dominion University, a percentage of those students are categorized as at-risk, depending upon their high school grade point average. These students are placed in what is called the Freshman Success Program. The program is designed to assist students through the following:

- the first year of college classes,
- completion of English 110C, composition, and
- completion of 26 credit hours

There is only one class a student in the Freshman Success Program is required to take, which is optional for other students. The course is University Orientation

(ELS 101). It is a one credit course designed specifically to facilitated a student's adjustment to college and to sharpen their study skills. The Freshman Success Program allows for the following:

- frequent contact with an academic advisor to monitor progress
- on-going personal attention
- an orientation class designed to create a smooth transition to Old Dominion University and to enhance academic success
- academic success groups based on analysis of study skills
- assistance in avoiding academic probation (29.5 % of the Fall 2001 admits at Old Dominion University were put on probation).

The Freshman Success Program continues to help those students designated as at-risk. Following are highlights of past programs:

- 35% of Advising Services entering freshman earned a GPA of 3.0 or above (2001).
- 70% of Advising Services entering freshman earned a GPA of 2.0 or above.
- 17% of Advising Services entering freshman earned the Dean's List, (3.4 GPA or above).
- 61% of Advising Services entering freshman came to see their advisor within the first four weeks of the semester.
- Advising Services Students met with their advisor for an average of 4.4 sessions during the Fall 2001 semester.

Evaluation of the program, by students and parents, remains to be favorable and high. Parents especially like the constant contact their child has with their advisor.

Summary

The review of literature presents a broad spectrum of information related to the academic success and retention of students. Several issues have and must be explored and studied further. The issues and terms discovered in the review of literature offered insightful information that should be taken into consideration when students enter college. Educational programs needed to be strengthened and perceptions changed in order to give entering freshman the tools needed to remain in school and to become successful graduates.

CHAPTER III

Methods and Procedures

The problem of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between students admitted during the Fall 2002 semester who have a grade point average of less than a 2.0 received better grades after completing a six week Academic Success Group than those student who met with their advisor individually during six advising sessions. In order to gain pertinent data it was necessary to obtain the grade point averages for probation students who attended Academic Success Groups and students who attended individual study sessions. In this chapter, the methods and procedures for conducting the research will be discussed. These include the population, research variables, field procedures, methods of data collection, statistical analysis and summary.

Population

Subjects of this study were enrolled at Old Dominion University in the Fall 2002 term as new incoming freshman assigned to the Advising Services Office. This study included students, who after their first semester of taking classes, received below a 2.0 grade point average as full-time students. The number of freshman included in the study were 34 students who attended an Academic Success Group and 42 students who attended individual sessions with their advisor. The total population was 76 students.

Research Variables

The research variables to be outlined in the study include freshman who were admitted during the Fall 2002 semester in the Advising Services Office and the grade point averages they obtained during the Spring 2003 semester. The focus were on the independent variables, those students who attended the Academic Success Groups and those students who attended individual advising sessions. The dependent variable were the students who had a grade point average above a 2.0. The focus is on whether those student who attended Academic Success Groups compared to those who attended individual advising instruction and which intervention was a better predictor of a student to be successfully taken off academic probation.

Field Procedures for Data Collection

The procedure used in answering the researcher hypothesis will be data collected after the end of the Spring 2003 semester. The cumulative grade point average will be used in proving the researcher's hypothesis. This data will be from students who successfully completed all required sessions prescribed in their Academic Success Contract. Data will be collected, by each facilitator of the academic success intervention, in the method of obtaining information from the Advising Services database. Data will be drawn from the University Banner System. Each student's grade point average will be assessed, obtaining the pre-grade point average and the post grade point average. Those students who are to be studied are only those students who took advantage of the individual

or group study sessions used to help raise their GPA. Each student is identified by a number. If a student received group help they will be identified by G1, G2.... If a student received individual help they will be referred at I1, I2.... This is done to protect the identity of each student studied. These data are obtained routinely each semester by the Advising Services Office to keep abreast of the grade of their students. The data collected to determine the research hypothesis was the tabulation of grades for students who attended a six session Academic Success Group and students who attended six individual sessions for six weeks. An advisor in the Advising Services Office at Old Dominion University facilitated the group and individual sessions. Grades reflected in the research were from courses taken during the Fall 2002 and Spring 2003 semesters.

Statistical Analysis

The research will be analyzed by using the chi-square method for comparing data. Chi-square is a means of answering questions about data existing in the form of "frequencies", rather than as scores or measurements along some scale. The labels in this procedure are the Academic Success Groups versus the individual advising groups compared to those student who remained on probation to those student who received a 2.0 grade point average or better and were taken off of probation. The question the researcher will answer is whether the frequencies observed in our sample deviate significantly from some theoretical or expected population frequencies.

Summary

Chapter III discussed the methods and procedures used to determine if there was a relationship between students admitted during the Fall 2002 semester who have a grade point average less than a 2.0 received better grades after completing six Academic Success Group sessions than those students who met with their advisor individually during six individual advising sessions. In this chapter, population, research variables, field procedures for data collection, and statistical analysis were reviewed. In the following chapter, findings that resulted from the collection of data were found.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings compiled from data using the Advising Services database; a database whose information is University Banner System driven. The data collected was to be used to prove the hypothesis:

H₀: There is no correlation between the grades of probation students who attended a six week Academic Success Group and those who met with their advisor for six individual advising sessions and their rates of retention after the freshman year.

First, the researcher compared the grade point averages for those students who participated in an Academic Success Group. However, of the 34 students studied only five received a cumulative grade point average above a 2.0. Fifteen students raised their semester GPA above a 2.0 during the Spring 2003 semester. See Table 1.

TABLE 1

Academic Success Group	Fall 2002 GPA	Spring 2003 GPA	Cum GPA
G1	.97	1.2	1.1
G2	.4	0	.17
G3	1.52	3.02	2.32
G4	1.98	.23	1.11
G5	1.53	1.8	1.65
G6	0	0	0
G7	1.85	0	.92
G8	1.71	2.06	1.9
G9	.51	2.65	1.31
G10	1.81	.92	1.3
G11	1.54	3	1.88
G12	1.29	1.67	1.5
G13	1.74	1.13	1.41
G14	1.4	1.94	1.69
G15	1.61	3.3	2.39
G16	1	.85	.93
G17	1.89	1.77	1.82
G18	.42	0	.15
G19	1.33	2.38	1.9
G20	1.66	2.51	2.05
G21	1.98	1.73	1.84
G22	1.65	2.1	1.84
G23	1.06	2.2	1.61
G24	1	1.3	1.21
G25	1.47	2.09	1.78
G26	0	.62	.47
G27	1.6	2.46	2.03
G28	1.13	1.35	1.23
G29	1.03	2	1.42
G30	.33	0	.19
G31	1.76	.74	1.25
G32	1.72	2	1.86
G33	1.97	2.42	2.19
G34	1.01	2.2	1.6

Second, the researcher compared of the grade point averages for those students who participated in individual sessions. Of the 42 students, studied only eleven received a cumulative grade point average above a 2.0. Nineteen students received above a 2.0 during the Spring semester. See Table 2.

TABLE 2

Individual sessions	Fall 2002 GPA	Spring 2003 GPA	Cum GPA
I1	1.57	1.53	1.55
I2	1.8	2.2	2.03
I3	1.62	3	2.24
I4	.77	.4	.61
I5	1.56	2.93	2.22
I6	1.58	1.72	1.67
I7	1.67	1.35	1.51
I8	.4	0	0.18
I9	1.06	1.08	1.07
I10	.25	0	.14
I11	1	1.82	1.47
I12	1.54	1.3	1.41
I13	1.8	2.42	2.19
I14	.17	0	0.08
I15	1.45	2.2	1.68
I16	1.92	2.42	2.16
I17	1.48	.69	1.1
I18	1.75	1	1.36
I19	.85	0	.85
I20	1.79	0.92	1.3
I21	1.14	2.11	1.68
I22	1.75	2.07	1.93
I23	1.5	2.42	1.71
I24	1.14	0	.61
I25	1.25	2.17	1.68
I26	1.64	1.8	1.7
I27	1.4	3.56	2.38
I28	.85	2.8	1.7
I29	.7	.67	.68
I30	1.92	2.75	2.37
I31	1.84	3.3	2.13
I32	1.98	2.87	2.47
I33	1.93	2.67	2.28
I34	1.57	2.54	2

I35	1.98	1.21	1.6
I36	1.91	1.15	1.47
I37	1.73	2.13	1.92
I38	.28	0	.2
I39	.3	2.1	1.15
I40	1.88	1.62	1.75
I41	.7	0	.35
I42	0	0	0

TABLE 3

Table 3 presents the number of students who remained on probation and those who received above a 2.0 grade point average. Using the chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference in the students who received group versus individual help. The chi-square value is 7.45.

Intervention	Students on probation	Students off probation
Academic Success Group	29	5
Individual Advising	12	11

Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the data collected from the Academic Success Groups and individual sessions were reported. The chi-square presentation of data was outlined from the data collected from the Advising Services Office Banner driven data.

In the following chapter, the data obtained was summarized, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations on how this data can be further used were discussed and outlined.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter reported the summary of this study, its conclusions, and the recommendations as a result of the research data obtained from the Advising Services Office, on the retention of at-risk students at Old Dominion University. The results were used to assist Advising Services staff to more effectively serve their students and increase the retention rate of the freshman population.

Summary

This study indicated a variety of reasons why first year students tended to be on academic probation, stemming from the difficult transition from high school to college, poor time management and other study skills, the pressure to succeed, or the lack of enthusiasm a student may have about college in general. Whatever the problem, any college student who is demeaned as "at-risk" should be placed in some sort of program to help prevent retention problems too familiar on college campuses. The problem of the study was to determine if there was a relationship between students admitted during the Fall 2002 semesters who have a grade point average less than 2.0 received grades good enough to be placed off of probation after completing a six week Academic Success Group compared to those students who met with their advisor individually during six advising sessions.

In order to guide this study, the hypothesis was considered:

H₀: There is no correlation between probation students who received a 2.0 grade point average after the Spring 2003 semester to students who attended a six-session Academic Success Group than those students who met with their advisor for six individual advising sessions.

Data was collected, by each facilitator of the academic success intervention, in the method of obtaining information from the Advising Services database. Data was drawn from the University Banner System. Each student's grade point average was assessed, obtaining the pre-grade point average and the post grade point average. The findings, presented in table form, showed that individual sessions proved to be more effective.

A review of literature associated with this topic revealed that students who enter college after high school had a hard time transiting into college life. One of the major variables that factor into a student not performing well in college is poor study skills. Whether a student receives help in a group or a one-on-one setting, student must be an active learner in order to succeed. The research shows that individual sessions were a better predictor of a student's raised grade point average.

Conclusion

The problem of the study was to determine if there was a relationship between students admitted during the Fall 2002 semesters who have a grade point average less than 2.0 received grades good enough to be placed off of probation after completing a six week Academic Success Group compared to

those students who met with their advisor individually during six advising sessions.

The following hypothesis was developed to guide this study:

H₀: There is no correlation between probation students who received a 2.0 grade point average after the Spring 2003 semester to students who attended a six-session Academic Success Group than those students who met with their advisor for six individual advising sessions.

Data were obtained by the Advising Services Banner System generated database. These findings indicate that since the value of chi-square was 7.45 and is greater than 6.64 at the .01 level required for significance, we may reject the hypothesis. In other words, we may conclude that there was a significant difference between grade point averages of those students who participated in group counseling sessions opposed to those who attended individual counseling sessions.

Recommendations

Based on the reported data and the findings of the study, the researcher recommended the following:

1. A release of information document signed by parents to keep abreast of their child's performance. The release of information document gives parents permission to discuss their child's academic performance with an academic advisor and other college personnel.

2. Create study skill programs geared to the first year student to help student perform well in their courses.
3. Monitor the academic progress of the incoming freshman to identify potential problems and to avoid academic probation.
4. Professors should provide more feedback to students on how they are doing in their classes; it is hard to improve on something when feedback is not given.
5. Before entering college, students should be told the importance of studying and they should be taught how to study. This can alleviate the test-anxiety of students.
6. During high school provide study skills programs to students who plan to enter college. If a student knows what to expect they tend to do better prepared to perform.
7. To eliminate the group counseling session, since individual counseling sessions are a better predictor of a student's success.

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