

Early Identification & Intervention:  
Is There “Hope” for At-Risk Law Students?

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ABSTRACT (citations omitted)

Psychologists have defined hope as a cognitive style involving how people think about pursuing goals. Research by Snyder and colleagues has shown that hope predicts academic performance and psychological well-being among undergraduate students. Consistent with these findings, our prospective study of hope, optimism, academic performance, and psychological well-being in law students showed that hope predicted academic performance in the first semester of law school above and beyond previous academic achievement. Moreover, hope predicted life satisfaction during the last week of the semester. Thus, assessing for low hope in those entering law school may help to identify students at risk for academic underperformance and psychological maladjustment.

Once low-hope students have been identified, legal educators can intervene by employing five strategies for engendering hope: (A) optimizing student goals; (B) increasing student autonomy; (C) modeling the learning process; (D) helping students understand evaluation as feedback; and (E) modeling agency. These strategies, derived from Snyder’s hope theory, are grounded in contemporary teaching and learning theories and are consistent with principles discussed in *Best Practices for Legal Education*. By identifying low-hope students early and intervening to improve their hope, legal educators may be able to improve their academic performance, enhance their life satisfaction, increase their bar passage rates, and, eventually, build a happier and more competent generation of lawyers.