Factors Influencing the Academic Success of College Students:

A Research Proposal

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Proposal Abstract

First-generation college students may have less preparation and guidance when navigating the college experience and the bureaucratic procedures that accompany that experience, whereas second and third generation college students may receive preparation and guidance from parents and grandparents who are familiar with the system and its numerous processes. If factors influencing the academic success or failure of first-generation college students can be identified, first-generation college students who currently struggle could potentially build coping skills and seek out resources to bolster areas in which they have disadvantages. The proposed research seeks to learn the extent to which academic success, as measured by GPA, is influenced by the following variables: self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional support networks. The authors hypothesize that academic success will be positively correlated with resilience, self-efficacy, and emotional support networks.

*Keywords:* First-Generation College Students, Academic Success, Self-Efficacy, Resilience, Emotional Support Systems, Coping Skills
Rationale

Literature on first-generation college students indicates first-generation students are at a disadvantage to classmates who receive preparation and guidance from parents and grandparents who attended college (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). This study seeks to identify correlations between the academic success of first-generation college students and the traits of self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional support networks, to learn the extent to which these variables influence academic success, and to find any patterns that might emerge among certain demographics.

Although previous research links academic success with factors such as social support and personal motivation (Dennis et al., 2005), the extent of the influence of the factors of self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional support networks upon academic success requires further research. There is also need for more focus on how these factors impact specific demographics, so that particularly vulnerable college students might potentially be identified in the future.

Relevant Background Literature

In a society where much emphasis is placed on academic performance, it is imperative that the constructs said to influence pedagogical success be assessed. This research is geared towards the assessment of the relationship between the social constructs of self-efficacy, resilience and emotional support upon the academic success of first generation college students. Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s perception of their ability to be successful at a particular task (Au, 2015). A higher level of self-efficacy is often attributed to students who maintain good academic standing. Taken together, the belief in one’s ability to succeed significantly contributes to performance and motivation (Ozer, O’Callaghan, Bokszczanin, Ederer, & Essau, 2014).
Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” from life’s difficulties. Research has found certain commonalities among resilient individuals (Eshel, Kimhi, Lahad, & Leykin, 2017). Resilient individuals consistently display prosocial behaviors and emotional regulation, which is linked with their sense of health and well-being, and negatively correlated to depression (Eshel et al., 2017). Prosocial behaviors and the skill of emotional regulation allow resilient individuals to maintain steady and logical moods and behaviors under difficult and unpredictable circumstances (Eshel et al., 2017).

Finally, emotional support systems are crucial to one’s well-being. Close familial relationships have been known to boost the academic functioning of college students. Undergraduate students who have strong emotional support systems often exhibit higher academic efficacy and reduced levels of emotional distress (Budescu & Silverman, 2016).

Although these constructs have been found consistently predictive of academic success, past research has yet to analyze the unique contributions of the said constructs on the academic achievement of first generation college students. Based upon previous research, it is the authors’ belief that college students who display resilience, self-efficacy, and who have emotional support systems are more likely to achieve academic success.

**Research Procedures to be Employed**

For the proposed research, quantitative data will be collected on the correlation between academic success as measured by GPA and the social constructs of resilience, self-efficacy and emotional support systems. Using snowball sampling methodology (Cohen & Arieli, 2011), links to an online survey will be sent out over social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. A sample population of 500 college students from New Jersey would be ideal. To analyze data, a Pearson correlation test and a stepwise linear regression analysis will be used. To measure the
variables of resilience, self-efficacy and emotional support networks, the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), the Self-Efficacy Scale (SES), and the Multidimensional Support Scale (MDSS) are to be utilized.

**Specific Means of Evaluation of Findings**

The researchers will use a survey to categorize the undergraduate student participants of the study. The individuals will be categorized by their college level (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). To evaluate findings, the researchers will review responses to the questions provided in the survey to get to better know the individual. For the analysis of data, the researchers will use the Pearson correlation test and the Stepwise linear regression analysis test. The Pearson correlation test allows us to look at the linear correlation between two variables x and y. These tests will aid in learning the extent to which each participant’s academic success is influenced by their resilience, self-efficacy, and networks of support. The stepwise linear regression analysis test is a method of reverting different variables while simultaneously removing those that are not needed. In the end, by looking at responses, the researchers will be able to determine if the hypothesis was correct, and will be able to compare and contrast all findings.

**Significance of the Potential Findings**

Though it may seem obvious that having a strong emotional support network, high resilience and high self-efficacy is likely to have a positive correlation with the academic success of first-generation students, hard data must first be acquired before we can act on this hypothesis. The proposed research hopes to ascertain the extent to which the aforementioned variables contribute to the academic success of first-generation college students. In this way, data collected on the effectiveness of emotional support networks, resilience and self-efficacy upon GPA will
provide valuable knowledge to college students (first generation and otherwise) regarding the importance of each of the said variables on their academic success.

This study therefore aims to find the areas that help and hinder first generation college students. Once this information is gained, positive change may be created by providing objective data. By conducting this study, the researchers will be able to see if the results correspond with the initial hypothesis. This information has the potential to better the academic performance and the social and emotional experiences of college students.
References


