Overcoming Barriers to Persistence: Developing Grit, Growth Mindset, and Resilience in Students and Advisors

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Why focus on Persistence?

- College retention, persistence, and graduation rates influence public perceptions of quality.
- State legislatures, governing boards, and other funding sources are increasingly concerned about graduate rates.
- Students’ and Parents’ choices of institutions today include graduation and completion rates of students.
- Improved student persistence towards graduation can increase institutional financial stability.
- Improved student persistence towards graduation demonstrates an institutional focus on student learning and growth.

Campbell & Nutt, 2010
Defining Retention & Persistence

• Retention Rate – percentage of first-time, full-time students who return for their second fall

• If student retention is the primary goal, then there is never a motivation to graduate them. (Strayhorn, 2015)
Defining Retention & Persistence

Retention is not the goal but is a byproduct of a good educational experience that affects the commitment of students.

Vincent Tinto
Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, 1993
Defining Retention & Persistence

- Student Retention – the ability of an institution to keep a student from admission through graduation (Seidman, 2012)

- Student Persistence – the desire and actions of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion (Seidman, 2012)
Barriers to Student Persistence

Student
• Academic Preparation
• Academic Performance
• Finances
• Health Issues
• Family Situations
• Clarity of purpose for attending college

Institution
• Course Availability
• Success Resources
• Institutional Financial Stability
• Institutional policies, processes, and procedures
• Clarity of path toward degree
Advisor Persistence?

- Advisor Retention
  - Advisors remain in their positions at their institutions
- Advisor Persistence
  - What is the equivalent of “the desire and actions of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion”
  - Profession v Career v Job
  - Professional Development and Involvement
Barriers to Advisor Persistence

Institutional
• Institutional Leadership
• Institutional Finances
• Job description
• University mission
• Unit mission
• Support for professional development

Personal
• Finances
• Health Issues
• Family Situations
• Job v Career
Lessons from National Research

In *Increasing Persistence* (2012) Habley, Bloom, & Robbins outlined three key areas that contribute to student persistence:

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Grit

- **Passion and Perseverance for long-term goals** (Duckworth, 2013 & 2016)
  - Research on high achievers
    - West Point grads
    - National Spelling Bee finalist
    - Olympic & professional athletes
  - Can predict success
  - Malleable – can change over time
  - Impacted by both nature and nurture
  - Search for changeable, specific causes of adversity
Overcoming Barriers to Persistence

- What students bring to college is far less important than what they do in college.
  – (Strayhorn, 2015)

- But what students bring affects their commitment to academic goals, what they do, and the effort they expend

- Can developing Grit increase the ability to overcome barriers?
Grit – Passion

- Passion – top level goal – end in itself
  - Hierarchy of goals or steps along the way to ultimate goal
  - Gives meaning to the goals below it
- Stamina in interest - how steadily do you hang on to goals over time?
- How important/valuable our goals are to us
- How much we value achievement relative to other ends
- Working hard vs doing the bare minimum
- Passion has to be actively constructed
- Passion as a *compass* rather than passion as *fireworks*
Grit – Perseverance

• Stamina of effort
• Bounce back after failure
• Staying the course when progress is not obvious
• Identify obstacles and make plans to overcome them
• Translate intentions into actions
• Cost-benefit rational choice framework
• Must be sustained over time
• Using the Grit Scale, Duckworth found that grittier people often have a higher Perseverance score than Passion score, because Passion is clarified and solidified over time
• Without effort, talent is nothing more than unmet potential

• Without effort, skill is nothing more than what you could have done but didn’t

• With effort, talent becomes skill and skill becomes productive

Talent x Effort = Skill

Skill x Effort = Achievement

Duckworth, 2016, pgs.42 & 51
How Grit Develops

- Interest
- Practice
- Purpose
- Hope
Interest

• Discovery
  – Discovered through activity/interactions not introspection

• Developing
  – Initial interest has to be retriggered by subsequent encounters
  – Need to be encouraged and supported by others

• Deepening
  – Early interests are fragile, vaguely defined, and in need of energetic, years-long cultivation and refinement (Duckworth, 2016, p. 106)
Practice

• Trying to do things better than the day before
• Identify weaknesses and focus on development
• Make it a habit
• Deliberate Practice
  – Clearly defined stretch goal (focus on your weakness)
  – Full concentration and effort
  – Immediate and informative feedback (emotion free mistake making)
  – Repetition with reflection and refinement
• Growth Mindset
Mindset

- Mindset (Dweck, 2006)
  - Beliefs about your intelligence, your talents, and your personality

- **Fixed** mindset
  - Believe that traits are set
  - Urgency to prove traits
  - Risk Adverse

- **Growth** mindset
  - Believe that qualities can be developed through dedication and effort
  - Focus on opportunity to stretch and practice
Purpose

• Conviction that your work matters
  – Job – Career – Calling

• Purpose sustains interest over time

• Intention to contribute to the well-being of others

• Cultivating a Sense of Purpose
  – Reflect on how the work you are already doing can make a positive contribution to society
  – Think about how you can change your current work to enhance its connection to your core values
  – Find inspiration in a purposeful role model
Hope

• Present in all three of the previous steps
• Expectation that our efforts can improve our future
• Undergirds Perseverance
• Requires Resilience
• Growth Mindset
Resilience

• The process of adapting well in the face of adversity and “bouncing back” from difficult experiences

• Factors associated with Resilience
  – The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out
  – Confidence in strengths and abilities
  – Skills in communication and problem solving
  – The ability to regulate emotions
  – View failure as a form of useful feedback

https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/resilience
Developing Resilience

- Cultivate “realistic optimism”
- Fail forward – “Failure is a process, not an obstacle” Scott Adams
- Realize that becoming resilient is a process
  - Shock and Guilt
  - Anger and Depression
  - Exploration, Action, and Change
- Recognize how you contribute to your own need for resilience
- Look around

(Staley, 2014)
Resilience is a Process

- Shock
- Guilt

- Anger
- Depression

- Exploration
- Action
- Change

Support

Guidance

Encouragement

Adapted from Staley (2014)
Growth Mindset and Hope

Fixed Mindset → Pessimistic Explanation of Adversity → Give up on Challenges or Avoid

Growth Mindset → Optimistic Self-Talk → Perseverance over Adversity

Change beliefs about Intelligence → Practice Optimistic Self-Talk → Ask for Help

Duckworth, 2016
Growth Mindset Language

**Undermines**
- You’re a natural
- At least you tried
- This is hard. Don’t feel bad that you can’t do it.
- Maybe this just isn’t your strength. I am sure you’re good at other things.

**Promotes**
- You’re a learner
- Let’s talk about how you approached the situation and what might work better in the future.
- This is hard. Don’t feel bad that you can’t do it yet.
- I am holding you to high standards because I know we can reach them together.
Increasing Grit

• Keep students/advisors focused on the task in front of them
• Promote Growth Mindset
• Facilitate Deliberate Practice
• Change beliefs about studying and practice
• Reframe problems
• Foster safe circumstances that encourage grit
• Acknowledge the sacrifice grit requires
• Engage students/advisors in experiences that deepen interests and cultivate a sense of purpose
Student Persistence

- The **desire** and **actions** of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion (Seidman, 2012)

- **Grit** = **Passion** and **Perseverance** for long-term goals
Developing Student Persistence through Advising

• Discovering & Developing Interests
  – Help students envision their future possibilities
  – Top level goals

• Growth Mindset
  – Shape how students interpret events happening to them by teaching them to reframe the situation and create strategies for success next time around

• Strengths-based advising (optimistic self-talk)
  – Ask students about past successes, what energizes them, what they love to do, what others have noticed about them
Advisor Persistence

- The **desire** and **actions** of an advisor to thrive within the profession of Academic Advising.

- Reflect, Recharge, Restart today!
  - Persist, Refocus, Adapt

- Beyond today – Continuing the momentum when you get back to your work environment
  - What are the supports/structures we need to be able to persist?
    - Professional community
    - Institutional leadership
    - Supervisors
    - Students
    - Ourselves
Resources

- Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance (Duckworth, 2016)
- Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (Dweck, 2006)
- College Student Retention, 2nd ed. (Seidman, 2012)
- Increasing Persistence (Habley, Bloom, & Robins, 2012)
Examples

• The Thriving Project (http://www.thrivingincollege.org/)

• Stanford Resilience Project (https://undergrad.stanford.edu/resilience)
  – Stanford, I Screwed Up
  – The Worst Grade
  – Raise Your Hand
  – Making Major Decisions: How Failure Can Help you Choose a Major

• Student Curriculum on Resilience Education (SCoRE) (https://www.scoreforcollege.org/)

• Penn Positive Psychology Center (http://www.positivepsychology.org/)
Thank you

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References

References


Continuing the Conversation

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How should we spend this time?

• Unpacking Advisor Persistence

• Facilitating student development of Grit, Growth Mindset, and Resilience

• Thinking about how working with exploratory students connects to purpose
Unpacking Advisor Persistence

• Advisor Persistence = The desire and actions of an advisor to thrive within the profession of Academic Advising.
  – Anything to add or modify?
  – What does is mean to thrive in Academic Advising?

• Grit = Passion and Perseverance for long-term goals

• What does “Passion” look like for an Academic Advisor?

• Passion as Compass – it’s a decision making tool that keeps you pointed in the right direction
What is your Passion?

• Goal Hierarchy (picture from page 62)
  – Ultimate Goal (aka Passion) – highest level goal, every other goal is a means to this end
  – Mid-level Goals
  – Lower-level Goals

• Write down a list of Career Goals
• Circle the Five highest-priority goals
• Of those you didn’t circle, how many are distractions that take time and energy away from keeping your eye on the prize?
• To what extent do these goals serve a common purpose?
• Sometimes you have to abandon the things you are working very hard on because they don’t support your ultimate goal.
Conflicting Passions

• Personal goals v Professional goals
  – Sometimes they align, other times they conflict
  – Prioritizing one of the other does not make you less gritty

• Work setting goal v Professional goal v Personal goal

• You’ll know which one is your ultimate goal because it will be the hardest one to give up
Deliberate Practice in Advising

• Deliberate Practice
  – Set a specific stretch goal
  – Fully concentrate on a single task
  – Receive immediate and informative feedback
  – Practice repetitively until fluent

• What opportunities exist in your current work setting?

• What opportunities exist in your professional setting?
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Facilitating student development of Grit
• Grit
  – Perseverance and Passion for long-term goals

• Growth Mindset
  – Belief that qualities can be developed through dedication and effort

• Resilience
  – The process of adapting well in the face of adversity and “bouncing back” from difficult experiences

• Achievement = Talent x Effort
Were we resilient?

- Think back to your own undergraduate years and take a minute to jot down a situation when you did not feel successful in your academic endeavors
  - What emotions did you experience?
  - What strategies did you employ to deal with (or not deal with) the situation?
  - What supports did you rely on?
  - What resources did you tap into?
Resilience is a Process

- Shock
- Guilt

- Anger
- Depression

- Exploration
- Action
- Change

Support

Guidance

Encouragement

Adapted from Staley (2014)
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Developing Persistence in the Classroom

• First day of class
  – Be explicit about what it take to be successful
  – Stress quality effort, not just effort

• At some point
  – Myth bust fixed mindset
  – Provide a brief lesson on how the brain learns and attributional style

• Throughout the course
  – Use growth mindset language
  – Create opportunities for safe risk taking
  – Require deliberate practice
Developing Persistence through Support Services

• Peer Leaders – Model Growth Mindset
  – Can explain how they worked through past mistakes to current successes
  – Share how their views of learning and what was possible have changed over time

• Career Center
  – Passion as a framework for Career Development

• Tutoring and Other Academic Support
  – Students can only benefit from these supports when they learn optimistic self-talk (perseverance/resilience) and believe that change is possible (growth mindset)
Policies and Procedures

- Academic Remediation
- Prerequisites
- Late Admission and Late Enrollment
- Academic Probation
- Orientation
- Advising
- Registration
## Keys to Persistence

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Habley, Bloom, & Robbins (2012)
Early Alert Student Interaction

• Think back to the last time you worked with a student who had received an Early Alert Flag or who was struggling in some other capacity.

• How did the student describe the situation?

• Growth Mindset or Fixed Mindset?
Early Alert Student Interaction

• Optimistic Explanatory Style
  – Proactive and problem-focused coping strategies
  – Take initiative
  – See the lessons in failure
  – Attributes failure to controllable causes

• Guiding Questions
  – Where am I going? (possible selves)
  – Where am I now? (mindset and attributional style)
  – How can I close the gap? (strategies)
Working with Exploratory Students
Reflections on Exploring

• When you entered college:
  – What was your major?
  – Why did you choose that major?
  – What did you expect to do with that major (in other words, what were your career goals)?

• Points to ponder
  – By what process did you develop these expectations and goals? Who and what influenced your expectations and goals? How have these changed over time?
Who are exploratory students?

- Those who marked Undeclared
- Those who don’t successfully progress
- All students, first-year students in particular
What are students exploring?

• Themselves – interests, skills, values, personality, talents
• Academic, Personal, and Career Goals
• Curricular Opportunities
• Co-Curricular Opportunities
• Extra-Curricular Opportunities
# A little theory

– Marcia’s (1980) Identity Theory

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<th>No Crisis</th>
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<td>Foreclosed</td>
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Case Studies

• Jane is coming to the end of her first year in the nursing program. She earned a 2.5 in her first semester. When you ask her what grades she is expecting in her second semester, she replies that she’s doing ok in all of her classes and will definitely get an A in Sociology. Jane’s only A from last semester was in her Fine Arts course. When you ask her how she was able to be so successful in her Fine Arts and Sociology courses, she tells you that she had a lot of fun in those classes and loved the teachers. She also comments that she wishes she could take more of those types of courses. When you ask Jane why she decided to major in nursing, she responds that several people in her family are nurses. She also mentions that her parents are very excited that she has decided to major in nursing.
You have met with Doug on several occasions. Doug is a nursing major finishing his sophomore year. He has a 3.5 GPA. Doug is always very prepared for each advising appointment. He is well versed in the nursing curriculum and has a list of courses for which he plans to enroll next semester. Each semester he includes a Dance or Marketing course on his list of potential courses, but he never enrolls in them. When you ask him about this, he shrugs off the question and says that those courses are just wishful thinking.
Key questions to facilitate exploration

• What made you decide to attend college this semester?
• What do you hope to learn or accomplish during college?
• How do you think you’ll be different when you graduate?
• What is your favorite class this semester?
• What out-of-class activities have you taken advantage of this semester?
Key questions to facilitate exploration

• What do you value in a potential career?
• What are your major or career interests?
• How did you decide on your major or career interests?
• What are your academic, personal, and career goals?
• What will be your biggest challenge to accomplishing your academic, personal, and career goals?
Tips for Exploring

• Embrace the process
• Do your research
• Keep an open mind
• Utilize the curriculum
  – General Education
  – Introductory Courses
  – Course Descriptions
• Get involved on campus
  – Student Organizations
  – Major-related activities/events
• Utilize resources
“Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience.”

Richard Light
Making the Most of College (2001)