

Students' Motivation to Access Academic Advising Services

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The interrelationships between motivation for choosing a program of study, intention to access academic advisors, academic difficulty, and actual appointments with academic advisors were based on student self-reports of motivation and intentions. In addition, academic achievement measures and data on student access to academic advisors were obtained. Motivation level at the beginning of enrollment and academic difficulty at the end of the semester were not significantly related to intended or actual appointments with academic advisors. However, subtle trends indicate that students with higher levels of motivation, including those in academic difficulty, saw academic advisors more than did their less motivated peers. Notions of expectancy value, self-worth, goal orientation, and self-concept were the theoretical frameworks used in the analysis.

KEY WORDS: expectancy-value theory, learning readiness, self-concept theory, self-worth theory, student learning strategies

Relative Emphasis: research, theory, practice

Introduction

Frost (2000) suggested that the academic advisor's role has become synonymous with the academic adjustment of students, particularly those who experience academic and other adjustment difficulties. Moreover, the current view of academic advisors relates to faculty members and experts who develop academic advising systems that increase the likelihood of student retention (Lowe & Toney, 2000-2001). Academic advisors can also be instrumental in cultivating students' expectation for success by providing clear and prudent educational advice, developing systems of cognitive and affective assistance, promoting students as important members of the university, and encouraging their interest in and drive for scholarship (Tinto, 2006). Therefore, the dynamic interaction among motivation for choosing a course of study, access of academic advising services, and academic achievement is of clear interest to advising stakeholders.

Several theoretical frames of reference can be used to consider students' motivation for learning

and accessing educational services. First, expectancy-value theory demonstrates the value students place on learning and education and the expectancies that they have in terms of educational outcome and the services being offered by universities (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Presumably, students will incorporate cognitive and affective mechanisms that drive their decision-making behaviors and processes (Leonard, Beauvais, & Scholl, 1999; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Pintrich, 2003). Consequently, students' expectancies and values will likely influence their beliefs about the utility of education and the services being offered in universities (Leonard et al., 1999; White, 2000).

The process of interaction involved in the expectancy value formula also has relevance to developing a sense of self, which culminates in an internalized and integrated view of oneself (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The difficulties in developing a clear understanding of self emerges due to the conflicting sources of information about the self and the complexity of the changing social roles that students act out in a university environment. This dynamic interaction can adversely impact the development of students' self-representations: their perceptions of who they think they are and what they would like and ought to be. This interplay within and between person processes becomes difficult for young adults as they often have multiple interchanging views of self (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Self-concept theory about the willingness of students to accept realistic information with regard to levels of ability and skill is a useful frame of reference. Through it, one can explore the perceptions of being an effective student (Collier & Callero, 2005; Greve & Wentura, 2003; Ommundsen, Haugen, & Lund, 2005; Wentura & Greve, 2005). Furthermore, this concept relates to students' views about the value of academic advising services and the congruity level of these perceptions with self-representations (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

This notion of self has definite relevance to self-worth theory, which suggests that students make decisions based on their self-evaluations of competency (Covington, 2000; Rhodewalt & Vohs, 2005). Therefore, decisions to heighten their level of motivation for study and access of educational services may lower students' sense of self-worth;

that is, by seeking help they may feel as if they are admitting to having low competency. This perceived loss of face may deter some students from developing their educational expertise and may lead to academic underachievement.

Moreover, the ideas posited about goal orientations and student learning strategies will determine the likelihood of accessing academic advising services; that is, student approach or avoidant strategies to learn will affect their service-seeking inclinations (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Covington, 2000; Covington & Müeller, 2001; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Elliot & Covington, 2001). A person employing the approach strategy will focus on positive possibilities while those engaging avoidant behaviors are likely to concentrate on negative outcomes (Elliot & Covington, 2001).

Measuring motivation is also of interest to academic advisors. The most common forms of measurement involve the utilization of self-report systems such as the *Learning and Study Strategies Inventory* and the *Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire* (Braten & Olaussen, 1998; Duncan & McKeachie, 2005; Gable, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993). Even though several authors have shown self-report questionnaires to be highly effective in identifying patterns of learning (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005; Yip & Chung, 2005), these measurement systems have also been criticized with respect to their psychometric robustness (Edwards, 2005; Flowers, 2003).

An additional system for measuring motivation and readiness for study involves the classification of motivation (De La Fuente Arias, 2004; Hirsch, 2001; Petri & Govern, 2004; Zimmerman, 1994). For example, Zimmerman stated that students are often categorized according to self-regulatory characteristics that include self-starters (who are persistent and achieving students), confident problem solvers, and those who are reactive to their own performance outcomes. Furthermore, Hirsch's (2001) proposed multiple-intervention model provides a holistic approach for diagnosing academic problems and developing intervention systems. In Hirsch's model, three levels of motivation (or readiness for study) are suggested, thus promoting the idea of a three-stage theory of educational motivation. According to Hirsch, students who are categorized as Motivation Level 1 are undermotivated or coerced into their study, Level 2 students are more ambivalent and consider their proposed study as a second choice option, and Level 3 students are highly motivated to succeed in their quest for academic

proficiency and are likely to have clear reasons for choosing their academic program.

Considerable literature suggests a perceived connection between use of academic services and adaptation, which is linked with persistence and academic achievement (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Quinn, Muldoon, & Hollingworth, 2002; Zepke & Leach, 2005). Consequently, Hirsch's (2001) motivation levels imply that students who are poorly prepared or exhibit less readiness for study may be less inclined to seek assistance from auxiliary academic services. Moreover, Hirsch's levels provide a framework for extending and modifying research on the association between motivation level and intended and actual use of academic advising services.

The cultivation of self-regulatory strategies for learning via an academic advising process has also been investigated. Robbins, Lauer, Davis, Langley, and Carlstrom (2004) found that many academic and psychosocial factors are significantly correlated with retention, and the strongest of these are academic goals, academic self-efficacy, and academically related skills. Consistent with other researchers (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; Tinto, 2006), Robbins et al. suggested that motivational and social factors are likely to be involved in generating positive academic attainment. Moreover, other studies have shown that academic advising can be transformative in students developing and reflecting on academic goals and volitional planning (Pizzolato, 2006) as well as on cultivating a sense of academic self-efficacy (Gore, 2006).

My study has two aims. First, I investigated the associations between motivation level and intended and actual use of academic advising services. Second, I focused on the interplay between students experiencing academic difficulty, motivation level, and actual use of academic advising services. I had two main propositions in mind when evaluating these areas of research. I expected that students with higher levels of motivation will intend to and actually access academic advising services more frequently than students with lower levels. I also anticipated that self-defined levels of motivation and academic difficulty would be associated with actual access to academic advising services.

Methodology

Participants and Sampling

Three hundred and seventeen (241 female, 76 male) volunteers participated in the study, which was conducted at AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand. The average age of the participants was 24.76 years ($SD = 9.244$). Two hundred and two par-

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ticipants (63.7%) were in their first year of study in the departments of Applied Humanities, Business, Design and Creative Technologies, and Health and Environmental Sciences. The students in this sample came from four levels of study: pre-degree certificate, pre-degree diploma, degree, and postgraduate courses.

The sample was compared with the university student population and the subsequent analysis showed that the sample group and the university student population were equivalent. Even though my goal was not to create an ideal sample in terms of representativeness (as per Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2001), a nonbizarre group is desirable so that interpretations about underlying relations can be generalized to the larger student body of the university.

Procedure

The data were collected over a 1.5 year period at three different times: fall semester of 2005, spring semester of 2005, and fall semester of 2006. At the beginning of each semester students were asked to fill in a demographic survey sheet and at the end of each semester academic and access data were collected via student records.

Four variables were incorporated into the analysis: motivation level, intended use of academic advising services, level of academic difficulty, and access of academic advising services. The first two data sets were obtained from students' responses to questions used in the demographic survey sheet. The last two data sets were obtained (with students' permission), in line with the ethical collection and use of data, from students directly or through ARION Support Services (AUT University's student information service).

First, the motivation variable was determined after students were classified into the three levels. On the survey, students were asked to check one preferred option only. Motivation Level 1 students responded to the survey with "coerced into it by significant others (e.g., parents, friends)" and "did not know what else to do, or had nothing better to do." Motivation Level 2 students were grouped with respect to their responses of "needed a qualification for work," "was not given entry into the degree programme [*sic*]," and "considered the present course as a second choice option." Motivation Level 3 students indicated "was interested in the course of study, and considered it as a first choice option." Second, students' responses regarding their intentions to use academic advising services (use; non-use) were also obtained.

The third variable involved collapsing the retention variable into a simple categorical measure of academic difficulty (passed all papers; failed at least one paper). Students who voluntarily withdrew from their course of study were omitted from the analysis. Thus, academic difficulty was defined by successful completion of papers at the end of each semester; student failure to turn in one or more papers was evidence of academic difficulty; however, students who turned in all their papers were considered to have no academic difficulty. The fourth acquired variable characterized the use of academic advising services (use; non-use).

Data Analysis

I investigated the levels of interaction between three nominal variables with respect to two analyses. I selected a log-linear approach because the contingency tables suggested that a set of response variables and the areas of interest were related to the associations between the nominal variables. Through an additive design feature, this approach created a convenient method for analyzing the different levels of interaction. Finally, by revealing levels of non-significance, I could eliminate higher order interactions and thus simplify the analysis (see Agresti & Finlay, 1997; Howell, 2006).

Two categorical analyses were consequently performed. First, I evaluated the association between motivation level and access to academic advising services (intended; actual). I initiated a log-linear approach using a 2 (actual access to academic services) \times 3 (motivation level) \times 2 (intended use of academic services). Second, I assessed the association between motivation level, academic difficulty, and actual access to academic advising services. I employed a log-linear approach using a 2 (actual access to academic services) \times 3 (motivation level) \times 2 (academic difficulty) model.

Findings

Motivation and Service Usage

I investigated levels of association between motivation level and actual and intended usage of student academic advising services. Log-linear modeling was initiated using a 2 (actual access to academic services) \times 3 (motivation level) \times 2 (intended use of academic services) model. The subsequent analyses are shown in Table 1.

The likelihood ratio and Pearson's chi square analyses showed no significant three-way effect. However, I found a significant likelihood-ratio two-way effect, $\chi^2(7, N = 305) = 14.664, p = .041$, and a nonsignificant ($p < .05$) Pearson two-way

Table 1 Hierarchical log-linear model analyses on motivation and service usage

Levels of Interaction and Main Effects	Likelihood ratio χ^2	<i>p</i>	Pearson χ^2	<i>p</i>
Interaction Effects and Main Effects				
Three-way	2.717	.257	2.395	.302
Two-way	14.664	.041	11.884	.104
One-way	351.151	.000	350.830	.000
Two-Way Analyses				
Motivation Level \times Actual Access			3.446	.179
Motivation Level \times Intended Use			.704	.703
Actual Access \times Intended Use			8.340	.004
Main Effects Analyses				
Motivation level			116.792	.000
Actual access			30.088	.000
Intended use			189.607	.000

Table 2 Intention to access student academic-advising services by actual access of student academic-advising services

Actual Access To Student Academic Advising Services	Motivation Level	Intention to Access Student Academic Advising Services		
		No	Yes	Total
No	1	2	16	18
	2	17	74	91
	3	14	77	91
	Subtotal	33	167	200
Yes	1	0	5	5
	2	1	42	43
	3	5	52	57
	Subtotal	6	99	105
Total		39	266	305

effect, $\chi^2(7, N = 305) = 14.664, p = .104$. Upon further investigation, a significant two-way interaction was shown for actual access to academic services and intended use of academic services, $\chi^2(1, N = 305) = 8.340, p = .004$. No other significant interaction effects were found.

In the most interesting finding, motivation level was independent of the other two variables. As expected, access to academic services and intended use of academic services were dependent. An inspection of Table 2 shows that among those who did not intend to seek advising services, 15% accessed it, while 37% of those who intended to contact advisors received service. While the result was not significant, the access ratios are higher for those with higher levels of motivation. That is, those at higher motivation levels were more likely to carry through on their intentions to access services than were those at lower motivation levels. For

example, approximately 40% of those at Motivation Level 3 who intended to access academic services received services, while 24% of those at Motivation Level 1 did.

Analysis of Service Access, Motivation, and Academic Difficulty

Log-linear modeling was initiated using a 2 (actual access to academic services) \times 3 (motivation level) \times 2 (academic difficulty) model. The subsequent analyses are shown in Table 3.

The likelihood ratio (and Pearson) higher order analyses indicated a lack of significant three-way and two-way effects. I used frequency data to investigate levels of association between use of student academic-advising services, motivation level, and measured academic difficulty. The tabulated data in Table 4 show that of those students who appeared to have academic difficulty 2 out of 8 (25%) Level

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Table 3 Hierarchical log-linear model analysis of service access, motivation, and academic difficulty

Levels of Interaction and Main Effects	Likelihood ratio χ^2	<i>p</i>	Pearson χ^2	<i>p</i>
Interaction and Main Effects				
Three-way	.409	.815	.428	.807
Two-way	8.759	.270	8.871	.262
One-way	195.180	.000	186.934	.000
Effects of Two-Way Analyses				
Motivation Level \times Actual Access			2.470	.291
Motivation Level \times Academic Difficulty			3.437	.179
Actual Access \times Academic Difficulty			1.776	.183
Main Effects Analyses				
Motivation Level			114.003	.000
Actual Access			30.502	.000
Academic Difficulty			41.916	.000

Table 4 Motivation level by actual access to student academic-advising services by academic difficulty

Actual Access to Academic Advising Services	Motivation Level	Academic Difficulty		
		No	Yes	Total
No	1	12	6	18
	2	54	36	90
	3	64	26	90
	Total	130	68	198
Yes	1	3	2	5
	2	30	13	43
	3	43	12	55
	Total	76	27	103
Total row		206	95	301

1 student accessed student academic advising services compared to 13 out of 49 (27%) Level 2 students and 12 of the 38 (32%) Level 3 students.

Discussion

In this study, I examined the associations between motivation level to choose an area of study, academic difficulty, and intended and actual use of academic advising services. The findings of the investigation were twofold. In the first level of analysis, associations between motivation level and intended and actual use of academic services were analyzed. After this investigation, I examined the associations between motivation level, use of academic advising services, and academic difficulty.

The results of the first level of investigation suggest that students' motivation levels had no significant bearing on their choice to access academic advising services. However, students enrolled and interested in their first choice of study options

were more likely to carry through on their intentions to access services than were those who were coerced into a study program or did not know what other option to pursue. However, the lack of significance in these findings is contrary to expectations. Expectancy-value theory may provide some clues about why some students, especially those who are relatively less ready or unmotivated for study, are not following through on their intentions to seek advising services.

Expectancy-value theory relates to student motivation as determined by a combination of student beliefs about the value of academic advising, and these perceptions may be moderated by expectancies of these services (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The factors involved in choosing to access academic advising services may be related to several factors that include students' perceived intrinsic value of academic advising services, sense of usefulness of the services, and notion of time and convenience (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

At one level, students are likely to employ a cognitive strategy when appraising the value of academic advising services as a student learning and development center (Leonard et al., 1999). Nonetheless, expectancy constructs have a wide reach and can be linked to “self-efficacy, perceptions of competence, and expectancy for success from self-efficacy, self-worth, [and] self-determination” (Pintrich, 2003, p. 671). Therefore, strong emotional and social influences may be related to the choice to access academic advising services. The decision likely involves both cognitive and affective processes, and incongruence caused by nonintegrated emotional and cognitive states may create a motivational barrier to accessing services.

In the second level of investigation, I considered associations between motivation level, academic difficulty, and use of academic advising services. The variables were adjudged to be independent. This was an unanticipated result. I expected students with higher self-defined levels of motivation and academic difficulty to access academic advising services more frequently than their peers. While the data do not contradict the premise (32% of Motivation Level 3 students in academic difficulty accessed academic advising services compared to 27% of Motivation Level 2 and 25% of Motivation Level 1 respondents categorized with academic difficulties), the trend is unconvincing.

Many students, irrespective of their initial reason for studying, appear to be unable to regulate their study-related behavior effectively due to a set of faulty academic self-representations (Markus & Wurf, 1987). An explanation for this distorted academic self-representation may lie in further examination of the concept of self. Markus and Wurf suggested that self-concept can be represented as actual, ideal, and desired selves being shaped through interaction with one’s culture, social environment, individual needs, and perceptions of reality. This shaping process of multiple selves involves a cocktail of feelings, cognitions, and beliefs that drive behavior. Therefore, students’ academic achievement is determined by the orientation of each of these forces, and the self-regulatory process required to be effective students may thus be either positively or negatively influenced by the level of balance in these forces.

The evaluation of student experiences and academic performance is integrally linked to their sense of self-worth. The maintenance of a positive self-image relates to self-worth theory. Covington (2000) explained that students judge themselves by their own level of achievement and this assess-

ment is the basis of their self-perceived worth in society, specifically the academic community. Such judgments are often defined by their earned grades and actual and perceived capabilities in terms of adaptation and utilization of university resources (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Quinn et al., 2002; Zepke & Leach, 2005).

The cognitive and affective processes students utilize when considering engagement with academic advising services are often manifested in two behaviors: avoidance and approach. In reference to the present findings, the use of these approaches for problem solving appears to be equally distributed across all groups, suggesting that even those students interested in their studies may cling to misleading concepts about study-related solutions to learning. Many students in this university are, therefore, avoiding academic assistance, which is contributing to their likelihood of attrition. They may be avoiding assistance due to an acquired set of expectancies, beliefs, and values related to the academic advising programs available at this university. They may be employing self-protection mechanisms linked to self-worth protection, self-handicapping, and defensive pessimism (Covington, 2000). Students thus set goals accordingly.

For self-regulation to be enacted effectively, several components need to be considered (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The first relates to goal setting, followed by cognitive preparation for action and a cybernetic cycle involving behavior, monitoring, judgment, and self-evaluation. If students are unable to develop accurate and authentic self-representations then their self-regulatory processes are unlikely to be effectively and efficiently initiated. Students who experience academic difficulty likely have insight into their study-related problems. Hence, the problem is not one of recognition but in the utilization of academic advising services; students are thus not passing their courses partly because of disengagement or avoidance from known auxiliary resources (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). Students who experience academic difficulty may acknowledge problems (internal attributions), but they may have difficulties in developing solutions due to self-misrepresentation of competencies and values (Leonard et al., 1999).

Inferences for Academic Advising

In New Zealand, academic advising services are employed to “teach academic survival skills to at-risk (of not succeeding) or targeted first year students” (Simpson, 1991, p. 8). Their development was initiated in response to a need for greater assis-

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tance for at-risk students in their transition into higher education. Thus, the aim of academic advising is to promote effective academic learning and develop performance skills in students, especially for those who encounter academic difficulties.

The findings presented in this study show that students' judgments about service utilization are likely to be both intrapersonal and interpersonal, and they may be related to the students' initial perceptions about their own motivation in their courses. More convincing evidence suggests that at-risk students are avoiding services despite their knowledge about them. That is, students may be employing failure-avoidance tactics by purposefully setting up failure justifications (Covington, 2000). Therefore, the effective strategy to alleviate academic difficulties does not lie in the awareness of problems, but in the methods students choose to solve them.

Several issues need to be addressed: specifically the students' self-image as learners, realistic appraisal of their academic competency, motivation to seek assistance for enhanced learning, the culture of learning, and the perceived value of academic advising services. It is difficult to discern which of these factors should top the list of priorities for academic advisors. One key element involves engendering academic advising services as agencies receptive to solving academic issues such that they benefit students at all levels of learning. Such a strategy would promote the sense that university stakeholders expect and value success and that they care about students' academic and nonacademic needs (Robbins et al., 2004; Tinto, 2006).

The desire for seeking academic advising services may be evident before and after enrollment. Although more research is needed before firm conclusions can be made, one can argue that students who are unready or unmotivated for study may be less likely to seek assistance from academic agencies. Nonetheless, to increase persistence, students need to be thoughtfully guided into appropriate courses and counseled in making prudent choices at the pre-enrollment phase (Tinto, 2006).

In addition, academic advising services probably will benefit from faculty buy-in and effective marketing practices from student service organizations that espouse the benefits of such services. Research into combining both a pre-enrollment strategy and a faculty-based marketing policy would likely be fruitful.

The findings of this study provide a basis for some useful understanding of student motivation and problems as well as the possibilities for action

and change. However, these matters are neither simple nor easily resolved. While the understanding may help, changing behavior is a substantially layered process that involves multifaceted, complex issues and requires both academic and nonacademic interventions.

The limitations of the research need to be acknowledged. The use of a simplified classification system based on Hirsch's (2001) work needs to be expanded and explored in future research. A criterion-based validity process utilizing self-report questionnaires and interview data is recommended to develop a more comprehensive set of questions. Other areas that may require refinement include a larger sample size, different methods of determining academic difficulty, and use of interview-based and other qualitative methodologies. In addition, because of the high risk of attrition in the first year of study (Tinto, 2006), more comprehensive research should be implemented to investigate the experiences of students who feel that they are coerced into study or who appear to be unmotivated for learning.

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Author's Note

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