Thrivers and Divers: Using Non-Academic Measures to Predict College Success and Failure
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OVERVIEW

Higher Education Institutions largely rely on past grades or standardized tests for admission decisions. This overreliance on past performance metrics to identify students likely to succeed or struggle in college oversimplifies the issue of academic (under)achievement. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that there is significant variance in how much past performance predicts subsequent performance.

The article reviewed in this volume, "Thrivers and Divers: Using Non-Academic Measures to Predict College Success and Failure", Beattie, Jean-William, Laliberte and Oreopoulus (2018), challenges the practice of using past performance as primary predictor of college achievement by highlighting non-cognitive measures with strong links to academic success, independent of entry-level GPA and test scores. In this research, "students completed survey questions about procrastination, study habits, social identity, academic expectations, and agreed to link their responses to the university's administrative database of background characteristics and future academic performance" (Beattie, et al. 2018; p.171).

RESULTS

Academic Thrivers

- **Definition:** Students whose first-year college GPA is **above** expectations as predicted by high school GPA & SAT
  - **Finding 1:** Express more philanthropic goals and are purpose-driven (e.g., I want to cure cancer)
  - **Finding 2:** Willing to study more hours per week (3 hours more, on average) to obtain the higher GPA they expect; even though they were no less likely to cram than Divers
  - **Finding 3:** Write longer answers to free response questions, use better spelling, and are also are more likely to identify self-discipline as a trait they admire in themselves

Academic Divers

- **Definition:** Students whose first-year college GPA is **below** expectations as predicted by high school GPA & SAT
  - **Finding 1:** Express less philanthropic goals and are driven by personal gain (e.g., I want to be rich)
  - **Finding 2**: Have a high propensity for procrastination and self-report cramming for exams and the study for fewer hours but also work more hours at their paid jobs
  - **Finding 3:** more likely to drop out after first year than other students, and even those who remain in school continue lagging behind their peers.

DISCUSSION:

Findings suggest that adding non-cognitive measures like personality (e.g., contentiousness), goals, motivations, and study habits to current quantitative and standardized assessment metrics may provide a more comprehensive understanding of students likely to under or overachieve. According to the authors, findings also give some insight into policies at the college level that might mitigate some of the behaviors shared by most Divers, such as increasing the frequency of deadlines to mitigate procrastination or further investment in high-school-to-college transition programs, like the First Year Experience Program offered at San Bernardino Valley College, that teach many of the skills found to be lacking in Divers.