

PDF - WHAT FACTORS PREDICT THE SUCCESS OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN AN INTRODUCTORY BIOLOGY COURSE - researchcub.info **ABSTRACT**

Academic success correlates strongly with high rates of class attendance in an introductory biology course for first-year developmental education students. To better understand this correlation, the author studied how students' grades in the course are predicted by students' ethnicity, gender, grade-point average, ACT Aptitude Rating, and class attendance. Students' grade-point averages and class attendance were the strongest predictors of students' academic success, followed by their ACT Aptitude Rating. Attendance was strongly associated with students' grade-point averages, and only weakly with their ACT Aptitude Rating. Ethnicity had no predictive value for academic success. First-year college students encounter learning environments and academic expectations that often differ dramatically from those of high school (Tinto, 1993). For example, college is accompanied by more personal freedoms, new social situations and settings, less supervision, and lax attendance policies in most classes. These changes often result in social and academic problems that contribute to large numbers of dropouts (Tinto, 1993; Razali & Yager, 1994; Seymour & Hewitt, 1994, 1997). This is especially true for science majors. Indeed, only about half of the high school seniors who declare science as their major remain science majors after their first year of college. This helps to explain why the sciences have higher attrition rates than any undergraduate major (Seymour & Hewitt, 1994, 1997; National Research Council, 1996; Daempfle, 2002). Numerous studies have investigated what factors are associated with the academic success of developmental education students. These studies have focused on a variety of factors, including test-anxiety, self-esteem, the ability to use higher levels of thinking, and problem-solving (Bassarear, 1991; Berenson, Best, Stiff, & Waskik, 1990; Chisko, 1985; Dwinell & Higbee, 1991; Goolsby, Dwinell, Higbee, & Bretscher, 1988). However, several of these studies have been based on self-reported data, which are often highly unreliable (Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002). In this study, I examined factors associated with the academic success of developmental education students in an introductory biology course. To avoid the problems associated with self-reported data (Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002), I studied pre-admission and post-admission criteria such as students' gender, ethnicity, class attendance, college grade-point-average, and ACT Aptitude Rating, each of which could be measured easily, accurately, and objectively.

**Methods** The course and its students. This study was done during 2002-03 in a large introductory biology course at the Twin Cities campus of the University of Minnesota. All sections of the four-credit course (Principles of Biological Science) were taught by the same instructor, in a similar way (e.g., the same syllabus, textbook sequence of topics, pedagogical techniques), and in the same classroom. The study included 847 students having an average age of 20 years, an average ACT composite score of 20, an average high-school rank of 51%, and an average course-load of 15 semester-hours. The classes were 52% male and 48% female, and were ethnically diverse: 17% African-American, 2% American Indian, 16% Asian and Pacific Islander, 4% Chicano/Latina, and 61% Caucasian/other. Attendance, exams, and grading. Class attendance was recorded in at least 80% of the course's classes. All exams covered material presented both in class and in assigned readings from the required course textbook. Missing classes did not preclude any student from earning an A; that is, students could have earned an A on each exam if they had read and understood the readings assigned in the textbook. No grades were "curved," students were not allowed to retake any exams, and there were no extra-credit projects. Course grades were based entirely on students' abilities to demonstrate their mastery of the course's academic content and skills.

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