Increasing our students’ success: What can faculty members do?
Meera Komarraju, Associate Professor, Dept. of Psychology

How do we measure our students’ success?

- Learnt new knowledge, skills
- Attend regularly
- Persisted: during semester and year
- Good grades and a high GPA
- Graduated on time
- Got a job or admission to graduate school
Variables that influence students’ “success” behaviors

- **Person**
  - Ability, aptitude, interest, motivation, implicit assumptions, expectations, personality, learning style, academic self-efficacy

- **Environment**
  - Prior school experience, teachers, friends, home life (parents, siblings), socioeconomic status, culture, current university environment, faculty members

Maslow’s Need Hierarchy for students

- **Physiological**: Financial aid, books, housing, health,
- **Safety**: Stability, Order, Structure
- **Social**: Friends, community
- **Esteem**: Confidence, mastery
- **Self-Actualization**: Fulfilling potential

How might faculty address these needs?
Other Theoretical Approaches

- Carol Dweck (1980s) [Stanford U.] Implicit Intelligence
  - Fixed intelligence: Performance, ability, give up easily
  - Malleable intelligence: Learning, effort, persist

  - Students are motivated when three needs are met:
    - Competence: “I can do this!”
    - Autonomy: “I did this because I wanted to”
    - Relatedness: “I enjoy learning along with others”

Outside Academe: Real Life Experiments: Making it work!

- Harlem Children’s Zone: Geoffrey Canada
  - One block at a time
  - Holistic approach: start early, kindergarten to college

- The Washington DC experiment: Harvard U., Roland Fryer
  - Cash = $2-per-point system, 1 point daily = each goal
  - Average two-week = ~$40
My Research
Study 1: Predicting second year GPA (191 students)

- **ACT**: predicted 5% of the variance in GPA
- **Academic discipline** predicted 10% more
- Lowest on
  - goal-setting,
  - Study skills, and
  - Determination to succeed

Study 2: Career Self-Efficacy

- More confident about searching for career information, planning, and problem solving about career issues are more likely to be motivated to learn and to succeed in college
Study 3 (308 students)
Personality, Motivation, Achievement

Personality traits: explained 14% of variance in GPA,
Learning styles: explained additional 5%

Conscientiousness predicts GPA & Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish is a mediator

Study 4
Personality, Learning Styles, Achievement

Personality traits: explained 14% of variance in GPA,
Learning styles: explained an additional 3%

Openness predicts GPA; elaborative processing and synthesis analysis are mediators
Study 5: Building students’ self-efficacy: Do Student-Faculty Interactions Matter? (242 students)

- **Higher Self-efficacy**
  - Higher Intrinsic motivation,
  - Higher GPA,
  - Faculty are approachable and caring

- **Lower Self-efficacy**
  - Higher apathy,
  - Lower GPA
  - Faculty are distant and uninterested

Study 6: Developing Teaching Self-efficacy (80 Teaching Assistants)

- Teaching Confidence = associated with greater Enjoyment of Teaching

- Confident, enjoy teaching, extraverted = associated with more positive student evaluations
Implications for faculty

- **Design Syllabus & Curriculum to foster:**
  - **Conscientiousness:**
    - structure, goal setting: submit assignments in small bits
  - **Openness to experience:**
    - relate concepts beyond classroom, provoke intellectual curiosity
  - **Deep processing learning style:**
    - connect material to other topics/courses, concept maps
  - **Emotional stability:**
    - reduce worry, frustration, anxiety [respond to questions, clarify doubts, have clear rules]

- **Building students’ self-efficacy**
  - Opportunities for **successful** experiences
  - Relevant **role models**: examples, cases
  - **Encouragement**: reward small gains
  - How to **overcome setbacks**, failures
**Implications for faculty**

- **In the classroom:**
  - Generating *positive emotions* during class: capturing students’ interest and sense of wonder enhances learning [boredom is a negative emotion]

- **Social needs:** Knowledgeable about your students and how to relate to them

- **Remaining positive** and enthused despite negative experiences with students

- Making a difference: one student at a time