

One class increases odds of college graduation for struggling students

April 16 2009

A researcher at Ohio State University has developed a course on learning and motivation strategies that actually increases the odds that struggling first-year students will graduate.

Students in academic difficulty who took the "Learning and Motivation Strategies" course in their first quarter at Ohio State were about 45 percent more likely to graduate within six years than similar [students](#) who didn't take the class.

Average-ability students who took the course were also six times more likely to stay in college for a second year and had higher grade point averages than those who didn't take the class.

"We are taking the students who are least likely to succeed in college and teaching them the skills they need to stay in school and graduate," said Bruce Tuckman, a professor of education at Ohio State, and creator of the course.

"Just taking this one class has made a big difference in how well below-average students do at Ohio State."

Tuckman and Gary Kennedy, a graduate student in education, recently completed a study looking at how students have fared after taking the class. They presented their results April 16 in San Diego at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

The researchers compared 351 students who took the class their first quarter at Ohio State with 351 matched controls who didn't take the class. The students were matched on quarter of enrollment, gender, age, ethnicity, high school class rank and ACT scores to make sure those who took the class were compared to students of similar ability and background.

Students were followed for seven years to determine if they stayed in school, and if so, what grades they earned and whether they graduated.

Along with the higher retention and graduation rates, students who took the class averaged significantly higher grade point averages for each of the first four quarters. Over those four quarters, course takers had an average GPA of 2.85, compared to 2.74 for their matched controls who didn't take the class, a difference of about three percent

While any student can enroll in the course, Tuckman said it is aimed at those at the bottom of the academic ladder - those with the lowest test scores and those with the lowest class ranks in high school.

Results of the study showed that these were the students who benefitted the most from the class.

"Students who did not do well their first quarter at Ohio State, which was the quarter they took the class, were the ones who had a higher likelihood of graduating compared to similar students who didn't take the class," Kennedy said. "They were able to turn themselves around."

While many colleges and universities provide students some assistance in learning study skills, few offer credit courses as does Ohio State. Offering a credit course gives more time to teach the skills and attracts students who might otherwise not participate, according to Tuckman.

The course now enrolls more than 1,000 students each year.

Tuckman said the below-average students in the class often don't have the advantages of higher-ranked students when they arrive at college.

"If you lived in a strong education environment your whole life, had parents who were college graduates, you probably have the skills to learn and do well in college," Tuckman said.

"But students who grew up in different environments, where no one has gone to college, need to be taught how to succeed in college."

Tuckman said he designed the class around accepted principles about how people learn and how they are motivated. He identified four strategies which he teaches in the class: Take reasonable risk; take responsibility for outcomes; search the environment for information; and use feedback.

But the unique part of the [class](#) is how it is taught, Tuckman said. Students have to complete 216 short, online assignments during the 10-week quarter. Every one of these assignments is graded, and students receive constant feedback.

"We want to change students behavior, and to do that we have to get them to behave in ways that will help them succeed. They have 216 opportunities to behave in the ways we want them to, and they always know where they stand."

The course is very structured, he said, which helps the students learn how they should approach all their classes.

"We create a cocoon in this course, and they live in that cocoon for 10 weeks," Tuckman said.

"When those 10 weeks are over, they can create the cocoon for themselves, because they know what it is. They must be doing it, because they are coming back to school and graduating at higher rates."

Source: The Ohio State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: One class increases odds of college graduation for struggling students (2009, April 16)
retrieved 23 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2009-04-class-odds-college-struggling-students.html>

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