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An Examination of the Motivation of Business University Students

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ABSTRACT

Many educators complain that students today are less engaged in university classrooms than previous generations of U.S. students. In this paper, we employ motivation theory to explore business students' motivation regarding their coursework. Informants in this investigation reflect a major trend in the demographic make-up of university students in the U.S., with the percentage of non-traditional students increasing dramatically. Our data reveal that a large percentage of our informants work either full-time or part-time while also taking a full-time credit-hour course load. These individuals often feel stressed, juggling these dual roles and responsibilities. They also typically lack the time management and project management skills crucial in handling their multiple obligations. We offer a modified motivation theoretical framework based on our findings. In addition, recommendations are made, including the incorporation of time management and project management skills into larger course assignments.

There is an emerging consensus that the widespread disengagement of America's students "is a problem with enormous implications and profound potential consequences" (Trout, 1997, p. 48). Not only is it more pervasive than other problems afflicting education, it is "potentially more harmful to the future well-being of American Society" (Steinberg, 1996, p. 28).

American college students are said to work fewer hours on their school work than students in any other industrialized country (Owen, 1995; Trout, 1997). The amount of time American students spend studying or doing homework is reported to be at an all time low, according to UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute. Professors complain about college students who are disengaged, have poor study habits, and focus on getting by with a minimum of effort (Steinberg, 1996; Wiesenfeld, 1996; Skinner & Belmont,

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1993; Trout, 1997). Disengaged students are students who do not read the assigned material for class, do not try hard and give up easily in the face of challenges, avoid participating in classroom discussions, expect high grades for mediocre work, are passive, resent attendance requirements, complain about the workload in their classes, refuse to register for “tough” or demanding instructors, and come to class and to exams poorly prepared (Trout, 1997; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Research suggests that students who are more engaged in ongoing learning activities earn higher grades, score higher on standardized tests of achievement, and show better personal adjustment to school (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Undergraduates today are very different from undergraduates of a decade or two ago (Levine & Cureton, 1998). The contemporary student body is older and much more diverse, with the non-traditional student now the norm in undergraduate education. Less than 20% of contemporary undergraduate college students fit the stereotype of the traditional college student - that is, a student that is single, has just graduated from high school, and holds no or minimal employment while enrolled in college classes (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Some scholars argue that this situation is due to the rising cost of a university education, mandating that students split their time between part time or full time jobs and their college classes. Others suggest that U.S. citizens have been so fortunate for so long that they do not see the need to work hard in school to ensure a strong future. Instead, some warn that many of these individuals simply expect a high standard of living without exerting much effort (Zakaria, 2008; Friedman, 2005; Prestowitz, 2005).

In this investigation we are responding to the call for more research to increase our understanding of students’ motivation to work in their college classes (Kelley, Conant, & Smart, 1991; Trout, 1997; Obermiller, Fleenor, & Raven, 2005). We employ an interpretive research design using semi-structured interviews to better understand the many nuanced experiences and attitudes of undergraduate business students.

Motivation

The key issue we are exploring in this research is student motivation. That is, are students motivated to work hard to learn the material presented in their courses, and what factors are related to their motivation? Thus, our research has motivation theory as its foundation. Student motivation has been cited as one of the biggest problems teachers encounter in the classroom. It is important because it contributes to achievement, but it is also important as an

outcome to student education (Ames, 1990). Effective instructors are those who are able to impart knowledge as well as to help students develop goals, beliefs, and attitudes that will help them sustain a long-term commitment to education and learning (Ames, 1990). It is in this sense that motivation should be an input as well as an outcome of the educational process.

Motivation has been described as the intensity, direction, and duration of behavior (Ames, 1990). It is the internal forces that determine a person's goals (Breen & Lindsay, 1999). Motivation is a hypothetical construct inferred from and indirectly based on an individual's behavior. Most recent research examining students' motivation to learn employs an Expectancy X Value theory framework to conceptualize motivation, thus, we employ this framework as well (Breen & Lindsay, 1999; Eccles, 1983; Ryan, 2001).

Motivational theories try to understand what induces individuals to engage in learning (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Pintrich, 2003). Meaningful learning can only be attained if classroom training experience is coupled with the motivation to learn (Paas, Tuovinen, van Merriënboer, & Darabi, 2005). For learning to take place, students need to be motivated to actually invest the mental effort in processing the material covered in a course; thus, learning is usually indicative of a person's motivation to learn (Weiner, 1990). Critical to the expression of intelligence and learning success, the motivation to learn is imperative for education to take place (Paas, Tuovinen, van Merriënboer, & Darabi, 2005; Pearson & Carey, 1995). Motivational beliefs and self-regulated learning skills (e.g., goal setting, active engagement in learning, accurate analysis of task demands, selection of appropriate learning strategies) can predict the academic motivation of college students (Ray, Garavalia & Murdoch, 2003).

Motivation theories usually emphasize general cognition and suggest that students ask themselves two basic questions: First, do I have the ability to do well and to be successful in my schoolwork? And, second, do I want to do my schoolwork? (That is, do I find it interesting? Do I feel I will benefit from learning this information?) The Expectancy X Value theory of motivation addresses both of these questions (Breen & Lindsay, 1999; McMillian, Simonetta, & Singh, 1994). Expectancy for success, the first variable in this model, is a measure of an individual's belief about how well they think they can perform in a specific academic situation. Students' self-concept of their efficacy has significant consequences for student achievement. Efficacy is not self-concept of ability in a general sense; instead it is task specific and situation specific (Ames, 1990). A student's self-worth is challenged when the task is important and when the student's perception of their ability is threatened. In an academic setting, all tasks can be made important through the use of

external rewards and some evaluation procedures. As a result, self-efficacy is often a critical factor in predicting a student's task choices and their willingness to try and to persist on difficult tasks.

Effort can become a double-edged sword, however, because working hard at a task and failing can threaten a student's self-concept of their ability. Although teachers may value the effort and hard work they see their students put forth, students may prefer to minimize their effort expenditure. When students' self-concept of ability is threatened, they display failure-avoidance motivation. These failure avoiding tactics include such behaviors as not trying, procrastinating, false effort, and even denial of effort. Although seemingly illogical, these behaviors are perceived to reduce the negative implications of failure. Failure without effort is thus not perceived to negatively reflect on their ability (Ames, 1990).

Students' self-efficacy responds positively when they have learned to set realistic, short-term goals and when they are shown how to make progress toward these goals (Thorne McAlister, 2006). Helping to ensure student success is not a matter of convincing them they can do well, and certainly not guaranteeing it. It is instead helping students to learn to develop the skills and strategies to succeed. Students' use of learning strategies and other self-regulated thought processes are effort-driven processes that are motivational (Ames, 1990). Activities such as organizing and planning, goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-instruction are generic learning strategies that can be applied across situations and across domains, leading not only to success in business courses, but also contributing to positive life-long learning and business success as well (Thorne McAlister, 2006). Instructional practice should include giving students short-term goals and strategies for making progress toward achieving their larger academic goal. Once a student understands how to reach a goal, and how to focus on successful strategies, they are more likely to repeat the short-term strategies that led to their success in the past (Ames, 1990).

Value theory, the other major construct in this theoretical framework, is composed of both the intrinsic value and the utility value as perceived by the student. We investigate intrinsic value by examining informants' interest in and enjoyment of a specific course. Utility value is the importance and relevance of a construct, in this case students' coursework, investigated as the student-perceived usefulness or relevance of a course. Why students engage in learning and choose to devote the necessary effort in their courses is vitally important. Students generally fall into one of two main motivational categories: mastery-oriented strategies and performance-oriented strategies. Students with mastery-oriented learning strategies are interested in learning new things and

in developing their skills and abilities, with a greater willingness to expend the necessary energy to learn and to confront challenging tasks. This is the learning style that is more likely to produce independent learning and sustained academic involvement.

Students with a performance orientation want to be able to publicly demonstrate that they have the ability to successfully complete classroom tasks. These students engage in more short-term learning strategies such as memorizing and studying only the information they think will be on a test. The preponderance of public evaluation practices, extrinsic rewards, ability grouping, and normative comparisons in our society and our educational system all tend to encourage a performance orientation (Ames, 1990). When normative evaluation and public comparisons are employed, students' choices will probably reflect an avoidance of challenge and a preference for tasks that ensure success. With evaluations of one's final product, students make choices that are not based on interest; instead they are based on protecting an image of themselves and projecting that preferred image to themselves, their instructor, and their classmates. This may, at least in part, explain the common complaint of faculty that students are not as engaged in the learning process as instructors would like them to be.

We now turn to explaining the method used in this investigation. This will be followed by the results of our research illustrated with representative informant comments. We conclude this paper with some recommendations for instructors based on our findings and some resulting modifications to motivation theory as represented in the theoretical framework offered.

Methods

The semi-structured interviews conducted in this project can provide a deeper understanding of students' feelings than data collected via other data collection techniques. Informants can express their thoughts using their own words, with the ability to explain in great depth experiences and attitudes that are most salient (Faranda & Clarke, 2004). Thus, we extend current knowledge about business school students' motivations and experiences using a theoretical framework and methodology that have the potential to contribute highly relevant and actionable insights (Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Kelley, Conant, & Smart, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In addition, student interviewers further our goals because student informants will be far more candid with a friend-student-interviewer than they would be with a professor or a terminal degreed researcher. During the course of three class meetings, students who

were enrolled in an undergraduate marketing research course received training in conducting interviews and in probing informants for greater depth and understanding (Faranda & Clarke, 2004).

Our informants were undergraduate students enrolled in a large research-oriented university in the southeastern United States. Sixty-two student interviewers conducted one interview each after extensive training in the spring semesters of 2005 and 2006. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim resulting in approximately 450 double-spaced pages of data. The resulting transcribed interviews were downloaded by the authors into a qualitative software program for searching, coding, organizing, and indexing data. We, the authors, examined the transcripts, looking for emergent themes as well as for categories discussed in the literature. Our examination focused on individual informants and their experiences and feelings. In addition, we focused on informants across our sample to understand recurring categories and patterns in the data. We then discussed key categories and themes in our data and included only those in this manuscript that both authors agreed were clearly visible in multiple informants.

Results

Our findings are organized around Expectancy X Value theory and its components of motivation. We report informants' representative comments to illustrate our findings.

Expectancy for Success

Consistent with the expectancy variable of Expectancy X Value theory, we wanted to know if informants believed that they could successfully pass their courses (Small, 2000). When asked about the rigor of their classes, our sample did not discuss course difficulty as a serious hindrance. Most of our informants seemed to reflect the confidence that they could do well in their classes, as Josh illustrates:

I definitely have to study more now than I did in high school. You could pretty much get by without doing a lot of studying in high school. Uh, now, mostly reading, try to make, ya' know, in-depth notes, um, and then I go over my notes and just read them before an exam. ... Yeah, I'm confident in, in my own personal abilities. I definitely think that I'm intelligent enough to succeed and do well. ...Well my accounting tests are

really hard, and then, my electives are not that hard. I think everybody's really stressed out, because everybody wants to make good grades. (Josh, Management Major, Junior)

Josh reveals that he learned his performance-oriented habits in high school, and that he was able to "*pretty much get by without doing a lot of studying.*" He now applies that orientation to his college classes, telling us he reads his notes *only* before an exam, saying, "*I go over my notes and just read them before an exam.*" He also explains that his focus is not really on learning the material, a mastery orientation, but that he and his friends focus instead on getting good grades, a performance orientation to learning, saying, "*everybody wants to make good grades.*" Candice, too, explains that she feels she can do well in her classes:

Girl, these teachers are trippin.' (laughs) I have tons of projects and homework coming up. I hate group projects because I'm working and I don't have time to meet with my groups. My classes are hard, but I guess I'll do fine. (Candice, Marketing Major, Senior)

Candice also voiced the difficulty of balancing both her job responsibilities and her school responsibilities, a common theme echoed in our data. Although most student informants discussed feeling stressed often throughout the semester and talked about the difficulty of some of their classes, they also voiced confidence that overall they felt they have the ability to be successful in their classes.

Next, we examine our informants' feelings and experiences related to Value, the value placed on doing well in a course. The value a student places on their involvement in a course is based on its perceived value, both intrinsic and extrinsic.

Value

As a key factor in motivation theory, we wanted to better understand the value students perceived their classes to have. We wanted to better understand whether students enjoyed their classes - that is, whether students believed that their classes had intrinsic value. We also wanted to learn whether students felt their classes had utility or relevance, and whether the classes imparted information that would be important for student to know in the future.

Intrinsic Value

First we present our findings on intrinsic value, or students' enjoyment of their classes. We were curious whether students enjoyed their classes and whether they enjoyed learning the material presented in their classes. This factor is very relevant to the ongoing discussion of the lack of student engagement in today's college classroom. We wanted to examine whether students felt actively engaged in their education. Some students were very enthusiastic about their classes; however, these individuals were in the minority, as was the following young man:

I'm taking this one class, called Loan Structuring, and it's basically about how you go about acquiring loans and mortgages and trying to, you know, actually make your own cash flow statements, income statements to really see if you're financially stable enough to borrow money. It's all about really borrowing money, you know, in order to find different, you know, products you really need to know. Things in your life. So that's kind of interesting to see how you go about, trying to determine if you have enough money or equity to, you know, borrow funds for whatever you're trying to do. (Nathan, Finance Major, Senior)

Although the above student voiced enthusiasm, the majority of student informants were, at best, ambivalent when discussing their interest in their courses, as the following students illustrate:

Well, currently, all of my classes are really boring. Except for one of them, because the teacher is more upbeat and like funny and gets the class involved. Versus like my other classes are more like lecture based and completely, like really, really boring (laughing) and you don't pay attention and that's really bad. (Amanda, Marketing Major, Junior)

It depends on the professor. Some professors keep you interested and some don't so it just depends on how they relate things to real life. I've had some professors that are just boring (pauses) and monotone. (Aiden, Finance Major, Junior)

In our probing to better understand students' enjoyment of their classes, students repeatedly echoed the idea that their instructor is the key to whether or not they enjoy a course, consistent with a growing stream of literature. The following students illustrate this idea:

...And whether or not they [teachers] are designing the curriculum in a way that, like, the students can relate to. Versus like, here's the facts, okay, next fact, and here we go, you know. (Sheila, Marketing Major, Sophomore)

Well, the teacher is very down to earth. She is very talkative. She is not boring for sure. She captures your attention. (Susan, Finance Major, Junior)

Utility Value

This factor examines how important and useful students perceived their schoolwork to be. In our research, students independently initiated talk of this factor in their interviews. Repeatedly, the utility value of a course or its relevance was discussed in various contexts, and can be broadly categorized into two main areas: relevance for a future career, and relevance for life in general. Some students also mentioned that some courses were required for their degree, but this alone did not make a course relevant in the eyes of our student informants. First, we report a representative comment of a student who does not feel that one of his courses is relevant:

I think that new globalization class is kind'a bogus. There's nothing you really...nothing I could see getting out of it. It's more of an anthropology class. We're not learning any information for running a business. It's about international stuff. But it's hardly even about international trade. So far we've only briefly talked about like the World Trade Organization and stuff. I think I got a better idea of that kind of stuff in business ethics than I have, then I'm gonna get in this class. (Rob, Economics Major, Senior)

The above quote is especially surprising in a country such as ours that is being impacted so much by globalization. Many of our informants view their coursework as only relevant to get a diploma so that they can get a job. Two additional representative vignettes illustrate student attitudes about the relevance of their courses:

No! Well, I don't know, maybe (my classes are preparing me for life). Um, I feel like it's a lot of busy work and only sometimes am I learning stuff that will actually impact my life later. Uh, whatever you have to do in school if you wanna get a good job afterwards, right? (Sydney, Hospitality Major, Senior)

No they're just giving me a paper to say that I can now experience the world. I feel that it's the job that I'll receive after graduation that's going to teach me what I need to know to be successful in the marketing industry. In school I basically memorize rather than learn. (Candice, Marketing Major, Senior)

Probably an equal percentage of our informants did feel their classes were relevant and that they would be helpful or applicable in either their careers or in their future lives in general:

I would say to a certain extent yes, it is (preparing me for life). Because, I mean, you are going to use the stuff that you are learning in school in your life. You are going to use it. (Susan, Finance Major, Junior)

I believe the classes are preparing me for... a better chance of setting up a successful business the first time, instead of having a couple failures before I have a successful business. So I would say yes, they are helping me prepare... for my future. ...I would... enjoy the classes a whole lot more, if they were more like real life experience. (Michael, Business Management Major with a concentration in Entrepreneurship, Senior)

I think they need to do a little bit more hands on, but I feel like I'm learning quality information for my future adventures. (Alicia, Public Relations Major, Marketing Minor, Senior)

Relevance is a key factor in the motivation of our student informants. Students who believe the course material is relevant for their future careers and/or provides information that can be applied to their life after school were far more interested in learning the course material.

The majority of our informants are spending an amazingly small amount of time dedicated to learning the course material outside of the classroom, as many of our informants report, including the representative students quoted below:

I normally take about 12 hours (credit hours) per semester. ...I'm taking 10 this semester. ...Uh, I usually study about an hour per week. And, uh, I work about like 24 hours a week. (Adam, Computer Science Major, Senior)

(I study) about five hours a week. I try to balance it a little bit because Finance requires retaining a little bit of information. It's probably not enough time studying, but trying to balance work and school that's about all that I have to put into it. (Lindsay, Finance Major, Senior)

According to the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement, under 20% of "first-year students expect to spend more than 25 hours per week studying, the approximate amount of time experts say is needed to do well in college." Overall, the informants in our study spend far less time preparing for their classes than faculty experts claim is needed to do well in college. This finding supports previous academic research on this topic (Schroeder & Kuh, 2003). Rather than focusing only on time spent engaged in a specific academic activity, however, it is the quality of task engagement that is more important

than the time spent on a task. Students' time spent on a task alone reveals little about what students are attending to, how they are processing information, how they are reacting to their studies, or how they are interpreting feedback. Although difficult to measure, the quality of students' engagement is what is really critical, according to some educational researchers (Ames, 1990). Others argue that time spent on task studying for courses is a 'surrogate' measure of motivation.

Adam and Lindsay, both quoted above, like many others in our sample, illustrate a common, contemporary college student demographic characteristic. Many of our informants work at least part-time while completing their college education, making it difficult for these individuals to spend additional time on their coursework. Many of the students in our sample, surprisingly, were working full-time while also attending classes full-time at a research-oriented commuter university. The large percentage of our informants that work part-time or full-time may be a function of that commuter status; however, universities with commuting student populations are no longer uncommon. In 2003, 30% of full-time students worked 20 or more hours per week and another 9% were working 35 or more hours per week (*Youth Indicators 2005*). Seventy-nine percent of part-time students were employed as well. For many of our informants, studying was prioritized as less important than work, and sometimes also as less important than social activities:

My study habits aren't so great. I typically wait until right before a test to study, but I'm working on it. It's hard to say how often I study per week since I don't study on a weekly basis, but I would estimate that I probably spend about three hours studying for a test. I'm just so busy between attending class, working, and being in a sorority that when I have free time, I typically don't want to study. (Sally, Hospitality Major, Junior)

Sally explains her busy schedule and her priorities, and the fact that studying is at the bottom of her list. Others in our sample also elaborated on the same inability to effectively juggle their multiple time commitments:

I may have trouble with learning how to divide up the work and when this should get done, and that should get done, along with school and everything else in my life. I have problems sometimes managing my time wisely. ...For instance, I usually, a lot of times, I work on the weekends and that's a good time to study because you don't have to go to class. I may have a test coming up next week, but since I work, like I might get off late and I might not feel like studying that night. But then the test is coming up, so I got to hurry up and study, like one weekday before I have the test, and I may have three tests in one week so I've got to know

how to divide my time up to be able to study for each to be well prepared for each of them. It is trouble to try and divide up the time correctly. (Kelly, Computer Information Systems Major, Junior)

Kelly's learning strategy illustrates the common performance orientation that was discussed earlier, and that is commonly represented in our data. The focus is on short-term learning strategies such as memorizing and studying only the information that students believe will be on an exam. Kelly, as well as many others in our data set, lacks the skills to develop longer term learning strategies. Again, the time she is spending working at her job instead of on her school work forces her to try to juggle these varied time commitments.

Cramming as a technique to prepare for exams was very prevalent in our data; in fact, one of our informants even coined the term "temp learning" to explain it. "I learn what I need for the material that's going to be on my test, but, ...once the test is over with, everything is forgotten that same day, if not the next day..." The term "temp learning" is descriptive of the cramming so typically done by performance-oriented students in our sample. It recognizes that cramming rarely results in learning, but instead course material is memorized for the exam, and then quickly forgotten.

Discussion

In this paper we explore students' motivation in their undergraduate business classes. We examine the relationship between motivation, mediating variables, and the instructor's role in the classroom (Ames, 1990). Overall, our student informants seem motivated to do well in their coursework. Our informants suggest that their expectancy for success is good - that is, students are confident they can be successful in their business class coursework. They feel capable of doing well academically. However, many students voiced frustration over the little time they have available for their classes, often due to their jobs, and sometimes, their family obligations.

Relating to the Value component of the Expectancy X Value model, our informants' appraisal of whether they found their classes to be interesting was mixed, with many students who did not find their courses to be interesting. This suggests that students will be less motivated to spend time outside of the classroom dedicated to mastering course material (Castiglia, 2004). Further, many of our informants did not seem to feel the personal responsibility to learn course material. Students expected instructors to be interesting, if not exciting. According to our student informants, and supporting previous research, the instructor is the key to whether or not students enjoy a course and whether

they are motivated to spend time learning course material (Clayson & Sheffet, 2006; Curran & Rosen, 2006).

Students tell us that they are willing to spend time on their classes when they feel it is relevant to their lives and to their futures. Relevance, the second component of the Value construct, was a strong motivator among our informants and again, our findings were mixed, reflecting a great deal of naiveté. It was sometimes surprising to hear the subjects that our informants felt were not relevant, such as economics and globalization. Although students at this point in their college education may be too inexperienced to effectively evaluate this dimension, it does suggest that with additional clarification and focus from instructors, students may be able to visualize why course information could be helpful in the future (see Pintrich, 2003 and Brophy, 1999), hopefully leading to more motivation and a mastery orientation with a resulting higher level of learning and understanding.

Because a student's goals or reasons for working on course material are far more important than the duration of time spent in that activity, students who are motivated by extrinsic rewards, such as grades, are likely to engage in very different thought processes and behaviors compared with the student who wants to learn something new or to improve a skill. The students who are motivated by grades will probably display short-term learning and will probably have a performance orientation related to their learning. Research on student motivation suggests that an instructor's grading policy can have an impact on students' motivation. A homework policy that allows students to study or work only 30 minutes per night on homework, states that homework will be graded as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory, allows students to re-do and correct their homework, and states that homework will count for only 10% of the students' grades will be more successful in getting students to complete their homework assignments and to maintain interest in the course material than a stricter policy that includes a letter grade, does not allow students to redo the assignment, and counts for a higher percent of the final course grade (Ames, 1990).

Whether or not students are willing to apply the necessary effort that course activities entail often depends on whether or not students believe that the effort will lead to success. Consistent with motivation theory, three issues are important in examining student use of learning strategies: (1) whether students have and can apply the necessary skills and strategies; (2) whether or not they believe these strategies are linked to success; and (3) whether they feel the outcome is worth the effort (Ames, 1990). Many students lacked the skills and strategies necessary to juggle both their academic and job responsibilities.

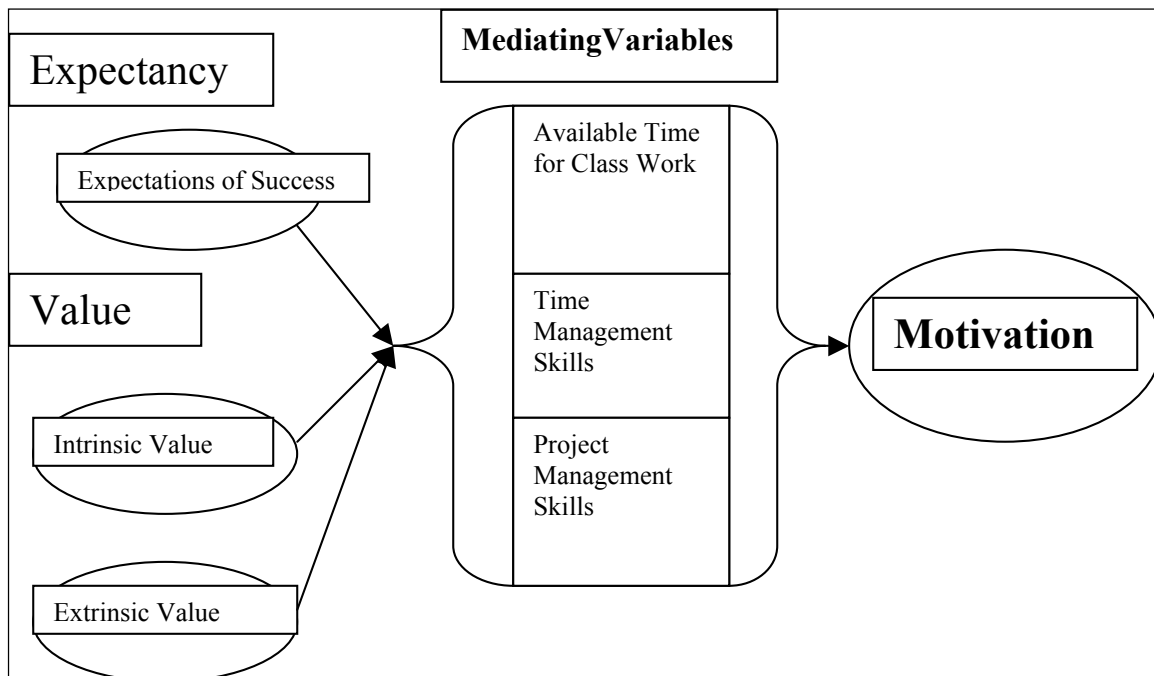
We found that a large number of our informants had part-time or full-time jobs. This trend in the demographic characteristic of students increases the significance of good time management and project management skills. Many of our informants discussed their jobs and talked, often with frustration, about the number of hours they worked. As found in previous research, work obligations were one of the most often cited reasons within our sample for not studying (Castiglia, 2004). Students can learn time management and project management skills through assignments that include breaking down larger semester projects into several smaller assignments, each with their own due dates. Several due dates for different parts of semester projects encourages ongoing effort on projects during the semester, instead of the more commonly observed activity of students only working on a semester project just before it is due. The development of these skills can also help to encourage a mastery-oriented learning strategy that could be very helpful to students in the future as well.

Thorne McAlister recommends that a project management plan be developed as a tool to strengthen student projects in MBA level courses to reduce student problems such as procrastination (2006). This work management tool can also provide undergraduate students with a template for organizing and implementing projects, while at the same time better preparing students for the often project-based workplace (Thorne McAlister, 2006). Project management skills are foundational to success because they require students to be able to set realistic goals, determine appropriate resources, meet deadlines, communicate effectively, assess outcomes and monitor and modify the projects for continuous improvement of the project; all are important skills to have in business.

Based upon the factors that emerged in our investigation, we suggest that the mediating variables of (1) available time, (2) time management skills, and (3) project management skills are also at play when evaluating undergraduate motivation and thus, based on our findings, we provide a modified theoretical framework that includes these mediating variables (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Motivation Theory and Its Mediators



Conclusion

Our results signal a very different demographic composition of contemporary students (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Many of today's students are employed, a situation that informants tell us is necessitated by the rising cost of tuition and books. Many of today's students often have families of their own too. Students' work and family responsibilities frequently trump their educational responsibilities (Levine & Cureton, 1998). This change in today's students means that higher education is not as central to the lives of these students as it has been in the lives of students in the past (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Nontraditional students want a very different relationship with their college or university than predecessors a generation or two ago. Typically, convenience, service, and the cost of their education are far more important now than they were for previous cohorts of college students (Levine & Cureton, 1998). The growth in the number of students working part-time and full-time is a trend in the U.S. that is expected to continue in the foreseeable future (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Instructors guided by goals that consign major importance to developing a lifelong motivation to learn will greatly benefit students in the long run. Helping students to develop or refine project management skills can go a long way in furthering a lifelong dedication to learning.

We also suggest that there should be additional funding made available to help students cover the expenses of tuition and textbooks. If we are to maintain our competitive edge in the hypercompetitive global economy, we

must have a well-educated work force, one that is not too distracted (due to job responsibilities) from making their education a primary focus while enrolled in university classes. Both Harvard and Yale recently acknowledged the hardship for middle-income families of financing a college education for their children. There is growing concern that we may soon have a “bow-tie” effect in student admissions, with only the children of the very wealthy and the poor (through generous financial assistance) able to have the means to finance a college education. In the fall of 2007, Yale and Harvard extended financial aid in much greater measure than ever before to middle-income families. Yale University’s president announced that its new financial aid package was developed to ensure that all of their students would be “able to make the most of Yale, academically and beyond, *without worrying about excessive work hours or debt*” (italics added) (Yale Office of Public Affairs, 2007).

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