

The Effects of Academic, Financial and Social Support on Preservice Teachers' Academic Performance

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There is an increasing concern about the impending teacher shortage. Fewer college students are choosing teaching as a career and a significant portion of the current teaching force is expected to retire over the next decade. The shortage is most acute in urban school districts, where the number of students are increasing at a rate faster than the number of teachers being produced (Case, Shive, Ingrebetson, & Spiegel, 1988; Haberman, 1987).

To address this problem schools, colleges and departments of education (SCDEs) must examine their retention strategies. This study examines the impact of three retention strategies on the academic success of students in a College of Education.

Literature Review

Academic Support. Many SCDEs have developed special programs for students who need additional academic support. These programs assign students a faculty and/or peer mentor who will monitor their progress in their college courses (Cooper & McCabe, 1988). The mentor will provide help when needed. In addition to the individual support, group support is offered through workshops on time management, writing skills, and test-taking skills (Justiz & Kameen, 1988). Another major barrier for students is passing teacher certification tests. Group study sessions, often sponsored by SCDEs to prepare for the test have proven to be helpful.

Research has shown that it is not enough to only provide help to students, the institution must also change and reflect a supportive culture. Students are more likely to perform at higher levels when they have caring professors who make their courses relevant to the real world. Some universities have addressed this by revising their teacher education programs to become more field-based (Watkins, 1989). Many have also provided diversity training for faculty (Mwangaza, 1993). This training helps faculty understand how to meet the learning needs of all of their students.

Financial Support. For many students being academically prepared for college is not their biggest obstacle to attending college. The biggest barrier to attending college is economics, as their families cannot afford to pay for college. Despite the scholarships, grants and work-study offered by the government and the university, some students still do not have the resources to attend college. Many SCDEs realize this and offer additional support to students who are interested in becoming teachers (Donnelly, 1988).

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The tuition waivers and paid internships offered by SCDEs have enabled many students to attend college who may have not been able to do so. Another financial issue is the ability to earn a living wage once a student has graduated. Many students are concerned about starting salaries for teachers (Stephens, 1999). Financial support must also be provided by school districts in the form of forgivable loans and low-cost housing programs (Wise & Shaver, 1992).

Social Support. When students enter the university, having a social support system is critical to students' success. Many SCDEs have developed student organizations for education students (Cooper & McCabe, 1988). The student organizations provide professional development through social activities and seminars. This form of peer support helps students to feel less isolated in large institutions. Once students feel comfortable in the university environment they are encouraged to make contacts in the community (Tewel & Trubowitz, 1987). Mentors in the community can be instrumental in helping them find a teaching position upon graduation. When they have accepted a teaching position, school districts will also need to provide social support systems for beginning teachers. The support can be a mentor and/or a series of workshops for novice teachers (Haberman, 1989). This support is crucial to the retention of new teachers. Many new teachers become overwhelmed by the demands of the working conditions in schools. They lack the experience and the tools to handle some of the problems they face. Thus, a support system is needed to help them learn how to face these challenges.

In sum, a program that can provide comprehensive support to students may be able to retain more students (Morris, 1990). The study will examine the following research questions.

1. How does academic support impact the performance of students from upper, middle and lower income backgrounds?
2. How does financial support impact the performance of students from upper, middle and lower income backgrounds?
3. How does social support impact the performance of students from upper, middle and lower income backgrounds?

Method

Sample. The sample for the current study included 188 students in their final semester of a teacher education program at a public university in the Midwest. All graduating students were given the opportunity to complete the survey in class during winter semester 2001.

Instrument. The *College of Education: Student Information Survey* has 24 close- and open-ended questions. There are sections on personal background, career aspirations, financial support, academic support, social support and feelings about the social climate at the university. All surveys were completed anonymously in approximately 20 minutes.

Analysis. A trained graduate student coded and entered the survey responses into a

database. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the impact of academic, social and financial support on grade point average due to variations in economic background. Income levels were based on annual family income. Less than \$40,000 per year was considered lower income, middle income was considered \$40,000 to \$80,000 and upper-income was determined as greater than \$80,000.

Results

A three (upper, middle and lower income levels) by two (support vs. no support) between subjects factorial ANOVA was calculated comparing grade point averages (GPA) for each type of support (academic, financial and social). The ANOVA results for the effects of academic support have been presented in Table 1. There was a significant main effect for income level ($F(1,2) = 3.397, p=.036$). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the difference for income level. Students from middle-income backgrounds had higher GPAs ($m=3.46$) than upper income students ($m=3.29$). Receiving academic support did not have a significant effect on GPA.

Table 2 contains the results of the ANOVA for financial support. There was a significant main effect for income level ($F(1,2) = 3.355, p=.038$). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the difference for income level. Students from middle-income backgrounds had higher GPAs ($m=3.45$) than students from upper-income backgrounds ($m=3.28$). There was a significant main effect for financial support ($F(1,2) = 4.608, p=.034$). Students who received financial support had higher GPAs ($m=3.42$) than students who did not have financial support ($m=3.27$).

The results for the social support ANOVA are in Table 3. There was a significant main effect for income ($F(1,2) = 3.132, p=.046$). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the difference for income level. Students from middle-income backgrounds have higher GPAs ($m=3.49$) than students from upper-income backgrounds ($m=3.33$). There was a significant main effect for social support ($F(1,2) = 10.862, p=.001$). Students who received social support had higher GPAs ($m=3.51$) than students who do not receive social support ($m=3.3$).

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that there was a significant main effect of income on students GPAs. In this case more money did not equate to higher levels of achievement. Actually, upper class students had the lowest GPAs of all students. This may point to the type of upper class students and middle-income students that attend this university. The university offers numerous full-ride scholarships to academically talented students. Thus attracting many bright students from lower- and middle-class backgrounds. These students may be accepted to top-tier colleges but may not be able to afford to attend them. Therefore, they choose a university where their tuition is covered by a scholarship. Conversely, while wealthy students have the financial means to attend prestigious universities they may not have the grades to earn admission. Thus, the students from

upper class backgrounds on this campus may be more likely to be average students.

In the study, receiving academic support through tutoring, workshops and campus-based services had no effect on students' GPA. The average GPA for students in this study was above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. This was above average, and therefore, students may not feel that they need academic support or they receive it in informal ways from their instructors and peers.

Financial support had a significant main effect on students' GPAs. Students who received grants and scholarships had higher GPAs than students who did not. Grants and scholarships may allow students to cover their educational expenses without taking on a part-time job during the school year. Part-time employment decreases the number of hours students can devote to their studies which has an impact on how well they do in their classes. Therefore, students who do not have to work will probably have better grades than students who have to work.

Students who participated in social clubs or had faculty and/or peer mentors had higher GPAs than students who did not have any social support. This was consistent with previous research that showed students' performance was affected by how well they were integrated into the university (Tinto, 1987). The social support provided by professors and peers provides an important connection to the university. Students who have a support network know that there is someone available to help them when they have a problem. Thus when they face financial, academic or personal obstacles that would ordinarily pose a risk to completing their education, they can get help rather than fail a class or drop out.

Based on the positive effects of financial aid and social support I have two recommendations for SCDEs. The first recommendation is to provide more information for parents and students on scholarships and grants in the field of education through workshops, brochures and websites. There are numerous talented students who are willing to pursue teaching if they know that there are scholarships available.

Second, formalizing the social support network is essential. All students should be connected with a student organization, faculty member, or a peer mentor. These support people will help the student adjust to a new environment and feel comfortable on campus.

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TABLE 1

ANOVA for income level and academic support

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Income (I)	.955	2	.478	3.397	.036
Academic (A)	4.788E-02	1	4.788E-02	.340	.560
I X A	.118	2	5.892E-02	.419	.658
Error	25.315	180	.141		

R squared = .040

TABLE 2

ANOVA for income level and financial support

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Income (I)	.918	2	.459	3.355	.038
Financial (F)	.631	1	.631	4.608	.034
I X F	4.957E-02	2	2.479E-02	.181	.835
Error	18.479	135	.137		

R squared = .098

TABLE 3

ANOVA for income level and social support

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Income (I)	.819	2	.410	3.132	.046
Social (S)	1.420	1	1.420	10.862	.001
I X S	2.426E-02	2	1.213E-02	.093	.911
Error	23.794	182	.131		

R squared = .104