Campus Safety and Student Success: York College of Pennsylvania Case Study

Jasmin A. Santos
New York University

Kenya V. Farley
New York University

Abstract

According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety is the second most basic need, before love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, that humans require in order to be motivated. When this theory is placed within the context of higher education, one could argue that in order to reach their full potential, students must first feel safe in their environment. If students feel unsafe, they will not feel motivated to achieve personal or academic success. It should be noted that the concept and measurement of student success is an integral aspect of higher education and student affairs. In this context, student success will not only refer to retention rates and grade point averages, but also other factors such as campus involvement, activeness, and overall happiness/satisfaction. This study examined the relationship between campus safety and student success at York College of Pennsylvania. In order to assess how physically safe the campus was, we gathered crime rate data from various national and institutional resources. Student success was determined by the institution's retention rates and overall grade point average over a time frame of 16 years. There was a strong negative correlation between crime rates and overall grade point average, meaning as crime rates decrease on campus, the overall grade point average of students increases. These findings suggest that there is a relationship between campus safety and student success. However, all data in the present study is correlational and therefore, further research needs to be conducted in order to determine causation.

Introduction

The concept of student success is a topic of growing interest within higher education and student affairs. Student success can be defined as having a high-grade point average, being involved on campus, being satisfied with life, and staying healthy both mentally and physically. However, as the world of higher education continues to evolve, student success factors are being studied through a different lens. For example, grades are no longer regarded as the most important determinant of college student success because there are other factors that affect a person's ability to alter and shape their own life (Aydin, 2017). There are many psychological theories that can be used to describe this idea of student success and in turn, have become the framework that researchers base their work on. For the purposes of our research, we utilized Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a framework to further understand the correlation between campus safety and student success at a small to midsize college campus.

Literature Review

Factors pertaining to student success are now being thought of differently because of the overall belief that each individual person has autonomy over their own life. The perceptions, actions, attitudes, and values that one has towards their academic success are factors that differ as a result of one's personal experiences (Aydin, 2017). One of these internal factors of student success may be described as self-efficacy, which can be defined as one's ability to succeed. However, academic self-efficacy refers to the competency level of students in achieving academic responsibilities (Aydin, 2017). Students' belief in their own skills is highly correlated with higher grades in college, academic adjustment, longer

persistence, satisfaction, and retention (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013; Farruggia, Han, Watson, Moss, & Bottoms, 2016; Aydin, 2017). This relationship can be due to the fact that when people believe they are able to achieve something, they tend to put in more work to succeed. This concept is similar to the expectancy theory of student success where academic motivation is a driving force in how a student may actually achieve all goals (Farruggia et al., 2016).

Although studying and attending to academic responsibilities is an important part of the college experience, research also shows that making time for extracurricular activities enhances student success as well (Aydin, 2017). Extracurricular activities are another way that one can describe involvement, which can be defined as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student puts into their experiences within a campus community (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). This includes devoting time to clubs/organizations (i.e., Greek life, Student Senate, Sports teams), spending time and participating in events on campus (i.e., bingo/trivia nights, concerts), and interacting with faculty members and other students (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). Research shows that college students who are involved within a campus community and are engaged in social activities experience specific advantages around campus (Aydin, 2017), which are directly related to success. Based on the Student Involvement theory, learning is increased when there are more academic and social involvement aspects within the student's collegiate life (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). Engagement in social activities on campus is related to both a higher retention rate and higher-grade point average (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). This reinforces the concept of social involvement theory; if students are more involved socially, they will also perform better academically.

Additionally, studies show that engagement in extracurriculars also increases student satisfaction which is related to success (Aydin, 2017). Student satisfaction is explained by using various parts of campus life and academic life (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013; Aydin, 2017). Students' feelings about faculty, programming, activities, and campus environment as well as the students' personal degree of interest in their education and emotional health are all related to how satisfied they feel about life (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013; Aydin, 2017). Evidence has shown that students who are emotionally satisfied with themselves and with the college they attend achieve more academic success (Aydin, 2017). This can be due to the fact that they are most likely attending classes and events and therefore, are learning more and receiving higher grades.

Another aspect of satisfaction and success is campus resources. Overall, the most important campus resources are the location of the university and the type of community or town the campus resides in (Zhang & Aasheim, 2011). This is all related to one important factor that is not readily discussed in the literature but is still a determinant of student success: campus safety.

While the practice of looking at student success on a more individualized basis as opposed to a collective is very progressive, many universities and colleges are neglecting to consider campus safety as a main factor. Throughout the years, many traumatizing events have occurred on college campuses, impacting students all over the country. School shootings, hate crimes, and sexual assault are plaguing universities and instilling fear in many students. This is concerning because in order to truly succeed in and outside of the classroom, students must feel safe in their environment. Additionally, it is important to reiterate that the concept of safety being one of the most important needs for humans is not a new notion; Maslow introduced this idea in the 1940s within his theory of motivation (Aanstoos, 2018). However, it may be difficult for students to feel motivated to achieve academic and personal success if they do not feel secure on campus.

Research shows that crime and acts of violence can have many effects on student success. These effects can be divided into two sections: direct and indirect. Direct effects may be caused by incidents such as sexual assault or robberies and can lead to serious psychological trauma or physical injuries. Indirect effects can be caused by the overall fear of crime; when students fear crime, they may also experience other issues such as anxiety or alienation, which have a negative impact on their level of

engagement (Schuck, 2016).

Although crimes and acts of violence, regardless of how egregious they are, have negative impacts, research suggests that utilizing a student code of conduct to address the smaller offenses is beneficial to student achievement (Schuck, 2016). Many of the student conduct systems that are implemented within higher education focus on helping students learn and understand appropriate behavior, as opposed to ensuring that the individual is punished for their wrongdoings. As a result, students can learn how to take responsibility for their actions and more importantly, understand how their actions affected others (Schuck, 2016). A study done by Karp and Sacks revealed that a student conduct system based on determining and solving the issue at hand was linked to student responsibility and a stronger connection to the university (Schuck, 2016).

Ensuring campus safety is a shared responsibility, and student affairs professionals and faculty are not the only members of an institution that are accountable for achieving this goal. In fact, 95% of college campuses have their own law enforcement, and 68% of these schools have at least one officer that has full arrest powers (Schuck, 2016). Although campus police officers are supposed to support student success by ensuring overall safety, this is not always the case. The issue lies in the fact that many of these officers maintain zero-tolerance policies, which are enacted through arrests (Schuck, 2016). These arrests are done in lieu of referring the student to a conduct office on campus. The negative effects of this include embarrassment, missed classes, and the financial burden of trying to be released from jail (Schuck, 2016). All of these effects significantly impact the student's engagement on campus, which in return, affects student success. Therefore, it should be noted that student conduct systems may be more effective in ensuring the safety and success of students in some, but not all, cases.

One way that colleges and universities can ensure that they are creating safe environments is by assessing the overall perception of campus safety through surveys. In 2011, a study was conducted at a liberal arts women's college in Pennsylvania to determine how faculty members, staff, and students felt about the campus's safety. The survey consisted of four sections that asked questions pertaining to their beliefs and attitudes about campus safety, instances of victimization, and utilization of their own safety precautions (Baker & Boland, 2011). While most students and faculty members reported that they generally felt safe on campus and considered the school's safety features to be satisfactory, many respondents identified as victims of violent acts, such as racial slurs, inappropriate gestures, emotional abuse, stalking and other offenses (Baker & Boland, 2011). In some cases, the percentage of faculty members experiencing certain offenses (such as stalking and break-ins) was higher compared to students (Baker & Boland, 2011). If faculty members do not feel safe or are experiencing harmful events, then they will not be able to effectively perform their job, and as a result, the quality of a student's education may decrease.

Additionally, participants in the survey were asked what action they took after an incident occurred. 51.8% of students reported that they tried to ignore the violation (Baker & Boland, 2011). This is an alarming statistic, and student affairs professionals must be aware that it is possible that many of the students they encounter or work with may have experienced (or are currently experiencing) some sort of issue that they have decided to keep to themselves. Students may decide to keep these offenses to themselves for fear of being victimized in the future, which also has negative impacts on student success. The survey also revealed that more faculty members than students filed informal and formal complaints with the university (32.8% vs 17%) (Baker & Boland, 2011). Therefore, campus officials must be able to recognize warning signs in order to ensure that students feel safe on campus because they are less likely to report these instances.

The majority of the literature that discusses student success fails to consider the effects that campus safety may have on students. The present study aims to explore the importance and necessity of campus safety by analyzing how crime rates have affected the success of students attending various universities across the United States. Based on previous literature, one can assume that campus safety

(or the lack thereof) may have an effect on student success because crime affects many aspects of a student's life, which can in turn, affect their success.

Methods

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between crime and student success by analyzing total crime rates at York College of Pennsylvania to the overall campus grade point average and retention rates from the years of 2001 to 2016. York College of Pennsylvania is a small to midsize campus with a population of about 4,000 undergraduate students. The gated campus is located in the middle of the City of York and is open to the community during the day but has security after 6pm. The study focuses on the crime rates within the boundaries of the campus itself and does not take into consideration the surrounding area. The researcher then examined which specific crimes were most impactful to student success. This was done by analyzing the rates of sex crimes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, and car thefts and their impact on retention rates and overall grade point average. The data for this study came from various sources. The information on campus crime that was collected for the years 2014 to 2016 came from the York College of Pennsylvania 2017 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report. The data for years 2001 to 2013 came from the Campus Safety and Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool, maintained by the US Department of Education. This study defined crime as the number of sex crimes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, and car thefts that occurred over the reported years. The information on York College's retention rates was gathered from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is the National Center of Education Statistic's main data collection program that maintains annual information on a variety of data, which includes retention and graduation rates, enrollment, and financial aid (Shuck, 2016). All information about overall campus grade point average was retrieved from York College of Pennsylvania's institutional records.

Results

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between York College of Pennsylvania retention rates and rate of total crime on campus. A weak positive correlation that was not significant was found (r (14) = .414, p = .110). Therefore, there is no relationship between retention and crime at York College of Pennsylvania.

A significant Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between York College of Pennsylvania's overall campus grade point average and the rate of total crime on campus. A strong negative correlation was found (r (12) = -.771, p = .001), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables, meaning as crime rates decrease over time, students' grade point averages tend to increase.

In order to examine the relationship between grade point average and specific York College crimes, including sex crimes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, and car thefts, a Pearson correlation was calculated. As shown in Table 1, there were no significant correlations between these crimes and grade point average, except for the strong positive correlation for sex crimes (r (12) = .664, p = .010), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. This means that as sex crimes on campus increase, so do campus grade point averages. The strong negative correlation between burglaries and grade point average (r (12) = -.849, p < .001) indicates a significant relationship between the two variables, meaning that as the number of burglaries decreased, the campus grade point average increased.

Discussion

The intent of this study was to explore the relationship between campus safety and student success. Previous research suggests that student success may be related to campus safety due to the fact that safety, as a whole, may influence a student's satisfaction with life, anxiety levels, and involvement, which are all factors of student success. The results of this study indicate that there may

be a relationship between campus safety and student success.

Although there was no relationship between crime rates and retention rates, there was a negative relationship between crime rates and overall grade point average, meaning that as the rate of crime went down, the overall grade point average went up. The relationship between overall crime rates and grade point average encouraged the researchers to look further into this relationship by analyzing how specific crimes are related to grade point average. The crimes examined were sex crimes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, and car thefts. There was a relationship between burglaries and grade point average; as the number of burglaries decreased, the student's grade point average increased.

Essentially, as a campus became safer, students were able to perform better academically. Although this study was correlational and no causation can be determined, one can speculate that this is due to students feeling more secure within their campus community, thus becoming more involved, which is related to success. Another explanation can be that students are focusing more on their studies and perform better in class because they are not concerned about the safety of their environment.

Interestingly, there was also a relationship between sex crimes and grade point average. Unlike the relationship between burglary and grade point average, there was a positive relationship for sex crimes and grade point average, suggesting that as sex crimes increased on campus, so did students' grade point averages. This relationship was not one that was expected; however, it can be due to the growing education surrounding sex crimes and the resources available to students. In 2014, York College of Pennsylvania started a campaign to encourage women to be empowered and report incidents of sexual misconduct. Over the years, it has been more acceptable to report crimes of this nature. Therefore, there may not be necessarily more sex crimes taking place, rather the number of people reporting these crimes is increasing.

Although the results of this study mirrored previous research, there were many limitations that could have had an effect on this study. Data was only collected from York College of Pennsylvania and data from the surrounding area of the campus was not taken into consideration. The area that is directly next to campus may also have an effect on students and their success, especially because students also have to walk through the residential areas between York College Campuses. Another factor that was not taken into consideration that may be an area for future research is how crimes are handled at York and how students feel about safety. Students' opinions on safety can play a huge role in student success. While this study was limited to examining the actual numbers, student perceptions of campus safety may not reflect the number of crimes that occur on campus.

This study was conducted to help students, faculty and staff understand the importance of campus safety and how it may be related to student success. It can be concluded that there is a strong negative relationship between the two variables. However, more research needs to be conducted to consider causation of the relationship. This study can help campus administration focus on what resources students need that would help support their academics and achieve success. Campus safety is essential to college students' mental and physical health. If students feel safe and secure on campus, then they can focus more on their personal/academic goals and less on outside factors that may hinder their overall success.

References

Aanstoos, C. M. (2018). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*. Retrieved from http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.nyu.edu

Aydin, G. (2017). Personal Factors Predicting College Student Success. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*,17(69), 93-112. doi:10.14689/ejer.2017.69.6

Baker, K. & Boland, K. (2011). Assessing safety: a campus-wide initiative. *College Student Journal*, 45(4), 683-699.

Farruggia, S. P., Han, C., Watson, L., Moss, T. P., & Bottoms, B. L. (2016). Noncognitive Factors and

College Student Success. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. doi:10.1177/1521025116666539

Krumrei-Mancuso, E. J., Newton, F. B., Kim, E., & Wilcox, D. (2013). Psychosocial Factors Predicting First-Year College Student Success. *Journal of College Student Development,54*(3), 247-266. doi:10.1353/csd.2013.0034

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). IPEDS data center. Retrieved https://www.niaaa.nig.gov/.

Nwaokoro, A. N. (2010). An Investigation Of Institutional Enhancement Factors On Student College Success. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER),3*(8), 1. doi:10.19030/cier.v3i8.221

Schuck, A. M. (2016). Evaluating the Impact of Crime and Discipline on Student Success in Postsecondary Education. *Research in Higher Education,58*(1), 77-97. doi:10.1007/s11162-016-9419-x

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *The campus safety and security data analysis cutting tool.* Retrieved http://ope.ed.gov/security/.

York College Department of Campus Safety. (2017). *Annual security and fire safety report.*

Zhang, A., & Aasheim, C. L. (2011). Academic Success Factors: An IT Student Perspective. *Journal of Information Technology Education,10*.

Appendix

Table 1: Correlation Between York College of Pennsylvania Crime Rates and Grade Point Average

Table 1

Correlation Between York College of Pennsylvania Crime Rates and Grade Point Average

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Overall GPA	--	.664**	-.487	.306	-.849***	-.461
2. Sex Crimes	.664**	--	.680	.736**	-.495	-.301
3. Robbery	-.487	.680	--	.359	.381	.291
4. Assault	.306	.746**	.359	--	-.227	.032
5. Burglary	-.849***	-.495	.381	-.227	--	.527*
6. Car Theft	-.461	-.301	.291	.032	.527*	--

$* p < .05$
$** p < .01$
$*** p < .001$