High attrition rates at colleges and universities are costly to students and to institutions, in terms of money, time, effort, etc. The prediction of academic success or failure is related to the problem of accountability. In order to plan and account for certain program expenditures, it becomes imperative to predict the needs and behaviors of students. Such procedures attempt to program the students and institutions for success. Programming for success involves many administrative aspects and decisions. Initially, in terms of this paper, one could ask, does reading ability contribute significantly to the academic success of college students? Are college reading programs necessary and/or helpful? (Author)
READING ABILITY AND GRADES:

A BRIEF REVIEW

Bonnie C. Pedrini and D. T. Pedrini

University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska 68101

Abstract

High attrition rates at colleges and universities are costly to students and to institutions, in terms of money, time, effort, etc. The prediction of academic success or failure is related to the problem of accountability. In order to plan and account for certain program expenditures, it becomes imperative to predict the needs and behaviors of students. Such procedures attempt to program the students and institutions for success. Programming for success involves many administrative aspects and decisions. Initially, in terms of this paper, one could ask, does reading ability contribute significantly to the academic success of college students? Are college reading programs necessary and/or helpful?
Educational administrators have always found it beneficial in the decision making process to be able to predict behaviors. As early as the 1920's, it was recognized that there were many variables which could be used to predict a student's success in college—intelligence,\(^1\) past performance in high school,\(^2\) ability to read,\(^3\) scores on achievement tests in English,\(^4\) Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, etc.,\(^5\) ability to study,\(^6\) mental health,\(^7\) and motivation.\(^8\)

It soon became apparent that many factors had variable success in being able to predict overall scholarship and scholarship in a particular field. Using Cooperative Test Service scores, CEEB verbal scores, CEEB mean scores, and the mean of secondary school, grade 12, final grades, Landry found considerable variation existed in the predictive ability of the different measures for the different subject

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\(^3\)Kornhauser, loc. cit.; see also Stalnaker, loc. cit.

\(^4\)Kornhauser, ibid.

\(^5\)Stalnaker, loc. cit.

\(^6\)W. F. Book, "How Well Can College Students Read?" *School and Society*, 26:242-248, Aug., 1927; see also Stalnaker, ibid.

\(^7\)Stalnaker, loc. cit.

\(^8\)Ibid.
matter fields and for the different colleges studied. Nelson concluded that when all students were considered, the Denny Reading Test seemed superior to English tests and to high school content exams for the prediction of scholarship, while Schmitz found that the criteria in a battery of tests which included the Iowa Reading Test, were approximately of equal value in predicting college success. Flora found that the academic success of college men could be predicted from high school averages, but in order to predict the success of college women, verbal test scores (which included reading) were necessary. Pepper researched the relationship between study skills (which included reading ability) and academic achievement for marginal admission students. Although the marginal students did not do as well as the regularly admitted students, he found the relationship between the skills measured and academic achievement to be unclear. Conflicting reports were and continue to


13 R. Pepper, "The Study Skills and Academic Achievement of Marginal Admission Students," (paper read at the National Reading Conference, December, 1969, Atlanta, Georgia), (ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, Dec., 1969).
be published concerning the predictive value of reading skills for college achievement.

Considering that reading is a valuable skill necessary for further learning, can it be assumed that one who reads poorly will also do poorly in college courses? In other words, while reading ability may
or may not predict academic success, can reading ability predict failures or dropouts? Lanigan correlated scores on three different tests with grades in six subject matter fields for 163 Boston University freshmen. She found that the Minnesota Speed of Reading Test did not differentiate well between high and low achieving students.15 Breen was concerned about the relation of reading ability to college mortality of freshmen at the University of Washington. Using three reading scores (as measured by the Cooperative English Test) and grades in 26 subject areas, he found that students with test scores below the means on the three reading subtests had a 50-50 chance of achieving an all-school average of 2.00; other students had about a 3-1 chance. The total mortality for the subjects was about one-third and Breen concluded that reading may have contributed considerably to this figure.16 Wellington found that the most academically successful men were more likely to make higher scores on the Ohio State Psychological Exam and on the vocabulary and reading comprehension sections of the Nelson Denny Reading Test than were the most academically unsuccessful men.17 Ikenberry studied 580 Michigan State University students who had entered the university at the same time; he compared the 250 students that remained at the end of the first


17 J. A. Wellington, "Factors Related to the Academic Success of Resident Freshmen Men at a Midwestern Liberal Arts College During the Academic Year 1952-53," Dissertation Abstracts, 16:69, no. 1, 1956.
year with 330 students who dropped out during the year. He found three functions (one being achievement) differed significantly between the groups and he noted that scores on a reading test were positively related to all three functions. In his study of comparisons of good and poor readers, Neville found that "prediction of success or failure among poor readers could be made with limited accuracy." And in a study using a group of dean's list students and a group on academic probation, no significant differences were found between the groups on reading rate or vocabulary. However, the former group was found to be significantly superior in verbal comprehension. Jellison studied two groups of dropouts, those with good academic potential and those with poor academic potential. When questioned about what influenced them to drop out, the latter group mentioned "not learning how to study in high school, and poor reading ability" significantly more often than the other group.

College students have typically been expected to be good readers, thus, at one time college reading programs were considered unnecessary.

However, Pressey and Pressey offered evidence in 1930 that college reading programs could result in academic work gains.\(^{22}\) Thompson showed that while reading ability might not be enhanced by a reading course, students taking such a course would be less likely than their counterparts who received no guidance, to fail courses.\(^{23}\) Kilby's 1945 study revealed that the amount of benefit from college remedial reading programs showed no relationship to a student's reading ability at the start of the program, scholastic aptitude, high school achievement, or predicted grade and that the remedial reading training resulted in greater improvement in verbal courses than in quantitative courses.\(^{24}\) O'Bear studied the changes in the academic achievement of matched groups of remedial reading and non-remedial reading students at Indiana University. His investigation revealed that the remedial course students achieved poorer grades than the non-remedial course students in all areas and that the highest grades earned by the remedial course students were during the semester they were enrolled in the reading course.\(^{25}\) Studies completed by McDonald and Schoenbeck indicated that college reading programs increased enrolled


\(^{23}\) W. Thompson, "Experiment in Remedial Reading," School and Society, 34:156-158, Feb., 1931.


students' grades and reduced the number of dropouts. However, Scheller's investigation indicated that while reading programs may improve reading skills, it does not necessarily follow that grades will be improved. Thus, diversified results and conclusions drawn from studies concerned with college reading programs suggest that many variables must be taken into account in order to determine the effectiveness of the programs, e.g., effectiveness of methods used, effectiveness of mechanical devices, permanence of gains, and materials used in the program.


