

Underachievement Among College Students

Megan Balduf

Fairfax County Public Schools

Statement of the Problem

The academic success of America's youth is a priority for the nation's citizens. One purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) is to ensure that all students learn basic skills and perform at or above mandated proficiency levels. The federal government expects all students to succeed academically; thus, underachievement may constitute a serious detriment to the full realization of the legislation. In addition to political ramifications, underachievement is a visible sign that education is not working for all students. These students need more assistance than they are receiving to reach their potential. Because their insight is essential to reversing the situation that has caused this lack of success, individual conversations with students are the most effective way to determine the specifics of underachievement.

Connection to the Literature

Underachievement, like so many other issues in the field of gifted education, is not consistently defined; Dowdall and

Many high-achieving students do not question their academic success. They do well and are content with the study skills they have developed to ensure that they achieve their goals. However, these students, whose high schools considered them achievers, experience difficulties and sometimes failure in situations where they had previously experienced success. Using a sample of college freshmen who had earned academic warnings or had been placed on academic probation, this research examined each individual and his or her causes of underachievement. Participants attributed their high school successes to minor efforts. Not needing to do much to earn the success they wanted, these students were never taught, nor ever taught themselves, how to work through challenging issues. When these participants encountered challenging coursework in college, they were unprepared to deal with it. Additionally, several other aspects of participants' experiences contributed to their college underachievement: inadequate study skills, poor time management, and internal versus external motivation. Participants felt that the intervention that would best reverse college underachievement was improving their own attitudes and behaviors. Through counseling and other means, gifted students need to learn how to motivate themselves to work when grades do not come easily. Colleges should be aware that even their high-achieving applicants may lack the skills necessary to succeed. In addition to offering study skills courses to underachieving students, colleges should include preemptive strategies for all incoming freshmen, including motivational and time management strategies.

Summary

Colangelo (1982) found more than a dozen definitions of underachievement in articles written from 1950 to 1980. The field's lack of agreement on what constitutes evidence of the construct shows inadequate insight about it (Schultz, 2002b). Variations of definitions keep the field from developing guidelines that differentiate underachievement from phenomena such as "boredom or emotional challenges" (Schultz, 2002a, p. 203). Most definitions of underachievement classify it as lower academic performance than would be expected based on measures of potential (Berube, 1995; McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Rimm, 1997; Schultz, 2002a; Whitmore, 1989). However, Reis and McCoach (2000) have derived a clear definition of underachievement, particularly gifted underachievement, that integrates definitions in the field:

Underachievers are students who exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations). . . . Gifted underachievers are underachievers who exhibit superior scores on measures of expected achievement (i.e., standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments). (p. 157)

Reis and McCoach further contend that underachievement cannot be the result of a diagnosed learning disability and must be a condition present over an extended period of time, although they were unclear as to how long that period of time should be.

Many studies and much of the literature (Berube, 1995; Garber, 2002; Greene, 1986; Harris & Coy, 2003; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Natale, 1995; Rimm, 1997; Schultz, 2002a; Whitmore, 1989) focus on the importance of internal and external causes specifically related to the student and the student's peers, culture, family, social environment, and school environment. According to Reis and McCoach (2000), gifted underachievers share characteristics that fall into the following categories: personality characteristics, internal motivators, dif-

ferential thinking skills/styles, maladaptive strategies, and positive attributes. The number of characteristics present, and the magnitude of each, varies from student to student. No student possesses every characteristic; there may be underachieving students who do not possess any of these characteristics and achieving students who possess some of them. Researchers attribute gifted underachievement to several factors including family, school, and peers (Rimm, 1995). Fehrenbach (1993) contended that a student's personality characteristics such as self-esteem, perfectionism/procrastination, and an ability or willingness to take risks also contributes to his or her underachievement.

Peers can influence a student's academic achievement in positive or negative ways. According to Brown and Steinberg (1990), in a sample of 8,000, less than 10% were willing to admit their association with the "brain" crowd, with most preferring to align themselves with the "popular" or "normal" crowds. Tannenbaum (1962) found that nonathletic, academically successful high school boys ranked lower on the social ladder than nonathletic, academically unsuccessful boys. In his work as a child psychologist, Anderegg (2007) found many students shunned association with the term "nerd."

At the college level, underachievement stems from either underprepared students or students who do not perform to expected standards (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2003; Nelson, 1998). Haycock and Huang (2001) found that nearly 50% of college students are not academically prepared. According to a study compiled by Coleman and Freedman (1996), a considerable number of students who either voluntarily or involuntarily leave a 4-year college before graduating have, at some point, been on academic probation. In addition, Grayson (1996) found that underachieving freshmen who spent their time outside of class in academically related extracurricular activities (e.g., attending nonrequired lectures, speaking with the professor outside of class) were more likely to see an increase in their grade point averages than those students who pursued socially related activities (e.g., clubs, sports, cultural events).

McCoach and Siegle (2003) found that gifted underachievers differed from gifted achievers in their levels of motivation; they were less motivated to be successful in school. By using students' interests as a motivator, students can be "trapped" into learning important skills (Ford, Alber, & Heward, 1998). To find what motivates a student, Patrick, Gentry, and Owens (2006) suggested looking for the following five indicators: activity choices, activity level, engagement behaviors, persistence, and continuing motivation. Activity choices would include what the student chooses to do and how much challenge is involved. Activity level is the amount of energy the student expends on an activity. Engagement behaviors refer to the type and quality of behaviors a student displays when working on a task. Persistence is the extent to which a student stays with a task. Continuing motivation is the extent to which students show interest and a desire to go above and beyond what is expected of them.

In previous studies of collegiate underachievers, both motivation and goal valuation were key factors in determining why students were not succeeding. In a recent study, Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra (2007) found students whose GPAs put them on academic probation (below a 2.0) had goals that were counterproductive to academic success. These poorer performing students were less likely to search out assistance in reversing their underachievement (Hsieh et al., 2007). Shim and Ryan (2005) found that students who valued mastery—mastering the content regardless of the academic gain—had higher motivation, while performance-avoidance—shying away from challenge and situations that could result in failure—related to lower motivation. Underachievers tended to have lower motivation and difficulties dealing with stressful situations and challenges (Preckel, Holling, & Vock, 2006). A study of Turkish collegiate underachievers found that the majority of participants (67%) had low motivation and a slightly higher percentage (69%) had issues with preparing for their coursework (Baslanti, 2008). Overall, Baslanti's study found that students who had previously experienced academic success encountered situations in college wherein low motivation contributed heavily to underachievement.

Importance of the Topic

Underachievement is a substantial problem in education, from defining it and its causes to creating purposeful interventions to reverse it. The underachievement of gifted students has been studied for decades (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Reis and McCoach (2000) considered determining the causes of underachievement one of the necessary avenues of research in the field. Neumeister and Hébert (2003) asserted that “educators and researchers need to deconstruct this all-encompassing label of underachievement by looking beyond the underachieving *behaviors* and, instead, critically examine the *attitudes* that drive those behaviors” (p. 222). To that end, this study examined gifted underachievers and the reasons their performance did not match their potential. Specifically, this study focused on a group frequently overlooked in gifted underachievement research: college students (Peterson, 2000). These students have been studied, but not to a significant extent.

Essential Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions. To what factors did first-year college students at an elite university attribute their underachievement, and what interventions or remediation did they feel might reverse that underachievement? The subjects of this study were undergraduates at Queen Mary College¹, specifically those freshmen who, within their first semester, were on academic probation or who had earned an academic warning. Freshmen at Queen Mary College are required to be full-time students, taking an average of 12–18 credits per semester and successfully completing at least 9 of those credits. An academic warning is given to those students whose semester grade point average is less than 2.0. Academic probation is a situation wherein a student’s semester grade point average is less than 2.0 and where fewer than 9 credit hours are earned. Academic warnings and probation are given on a semester basis.

Queen Mary College is among the nation's top 50 small public schools; entering freshmen show high previous achievement. As of 2007, the freshman class had an average high school GPA of 4.0, combined SAT scores between 1240–1440, and ACT composite scores between 28–32 (McGrath, 2007). This essentially means that students earning academic warnings go from straight *As* in high school to earning *Ds* and *Fs* in college.

Methodology

The researcher intended to view the phenomenon of underachievement through the lens of those experiencing it using qualitative research techniques. Both convenience and purposive sampling were used to select students at Queen Mary College. Communication was essential in ensuring the completion of this study. First, the researcher contacted university administrators who were in a position to assist in contacting the sample pool. The researcher met with the Associate Dean of Academic Interventions and Academic Support Services to provide the administration with a description of the study, together with the researcher's rationale. The Associate Dean was persuaded, by the nature of the study, to assist in obtaining a sample pool. The Associate Dean cleared the study with the Dean of Students and, with the assistance of the information technology department, filtered the list of students on academic probation and with academic warnings to produce a purposive sample pool of 83 freshmen. These students came from a larger group of approximately 1,500 freshmen. A consent form, including a description of the study and pertinent definitions, was created for distribution to all 83 students. The Dean of Students Office distributed the consent form via electronic mail, campus mail, and an electronic post to the academic warning/probation Blackboard site. Three weeks following initial contact, the Dean of Students Office re-sent the consent form to all identified subjects with the statement that each study participant would receive a gift certificate to a local restaurant upon completion of his or her interview. Participants

who completed interviews before this second letter was mailed had already received gift certificates.

As participation in the study was self-selected, each time letters were sent, subjects were instructed to contact the researcher if they wished to participate. After both rounds of contact, only 7 freshmen from the initial pool chose to participate in the study. The participants included 4 females and 3 males; they made up 8.6% of the initial pool.

As interviews would be conducted online, once communication between the subject and the researcher was established, screen names for AOL's Instant Messenger program were exchanged, and interview times were scheduled at the participant's convenience. Online interviews were conducted for several reasons. First, the Internet is a natural setting for the participants, one which, according to the Associate Dean of Academic Interventions and Academic Support Services, might actually encourage more participation than face-to-face interviews. Second, using the Internet allowed participants to schedule interviews at times convenient for them, whether that was early morning, late night, or midday: Participants could conduct the interview from their dorm rooms, a classroom, the library, or any other location in which they felt comfortable. Third, the researcher felt participants would provide truer responses if they had a feeling of anonymity.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and consisted of a set of standard questions (see Appendix A for interview protocol) with the flexibility for follow-up questions. Participants consented to the interview at its outset, with the provision that they could end the interview at any time without recourse. Participants were reminded at the close of the interview that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Transcripts from all interviews were saved throughout the course of the questioning in a Microsoft Word document and at the close of the interview in HTML format.

Once all interviews were completed, transcripts were analyzed for themes (situational categories present in conversation). These themes—previous achievement, causes of underachievement—

ment, and interventions—were utilized in analyzing all interviews. In the days following each interview, the participant was given a transcript of his or her interview for verification (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Once all participants were interviewed, all transcripts were used to identify shared statements (e.g., many participants had done well in high school with what they now felt was very little effort, and this easy success had not prepared them for the rigors of Queen Mary College.).

Additionally, when the research was completed, all participants received a full copy of the analysis to again review for verification. Information and results garnered from these interviews were shared with all participants and the university administration at the close of the study.

Ethical Considerations

For the purposes of this study, underachievement was defined as a “severe discrepancy between expected achievement . . . and actual achievement” (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 157). Because participants were interviewed regarding their grades, they were informed at the start and end of each interview of their ability to opt out of the study at any time. When data were analyzed, no participant names were used. Upon completion of the data analysis, each participant received a copy of the results for verification. The researcher used open-ended questions with each participant. To develop unbiased questions, the researcher enlisted the assistance of other researchers—a cohort of graduate students in a gifted education master’s program and that cohort’s doctoral professor—to review the wording of interview questions. Follow-up questions were used to clarify participant responses. Potential threats to the study included participant honesty and students’ metacognitive awareness, the latter affecting the students’ abilities to determine true causes of their underachievement. In addition, participant responses about causes of underachievement were not triangulated; there was little evidence that a student’s stated reasoning did or did not directly

cause his or her underachievement. The corroborating data were the grades the participant earned that caused him or her to be placed on academic probation or given an academic warning. The researcher served as a nonparticipant observer in this study. The researcher had two major biases about the study: (a) prior experience with Queen Mary College led to an assumption that attending students were previously high achievers who possessed high ability; and (b) the researcher possessed presumptions, based upon personal experience, as to what caused participant underachievement. The researcher experienced an ease in earning high marks in secondary education and poorly developed study skills that made college more difficult than anticipated.

Data Analysis

Qualitative procedures were used to address the study's research questions. Transcripts were coded for themes using "definition of the situation" codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) in three general categories: previous achievement, cause of underachievement, and interventions. Definition of the situation codes covered a set or sets of narration that described a set of events or a single situation. These particular codes were based upon the essential questions of the study and related to specific questions posed during the interviews. Narratives from each transcript were coded to identify sections in which participants spoke of their previous achievement, what they considered to be the causes of their underachievement, and what interventions they believed might reverse their underachievement. These broad sections of conversation were further analyzed to identify specifics. Previous achievement statements related primarily to previous levels of challenge experienced and prior motivational factors. Causes of underachievement consisted of comments about current study skills, motivation, time management, level of course challenge, and environmental factors. Observations as to interventions consisted of altering one's attitude, learning adequate study skills, and possessing more background on courses.

Narratives were examined across transcripts to determine possible common causes of underachievement among participants.

Results

In response to the factors that contributed to their underachievement, three major themes emerged: lack of preparation for Queen Mary College, problems with time management, and issues with self-discipline and motivation. These themes recurred throughout participant responses in the interviews.

Most participants stated they were not ready for the challenges they encountered at Queen Mary College. Nearly all participants believed high school did not require them to work hard enough and felt they had earned high grades without expending much effort. Connor² felt he “was effectively able to get an *A* for showing up” (personal interview, March 29, 2006). Kristen said, “I got high grades [with] very little effort. I could study the night before a test and pull off an [*A*] or [*B*] depending on the subject with no problem” (personal interview, March 28, 2006). Daniel admitted to “[slacking] off but [still getting] about a 3.4 or so” (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Jonathan stated that, “if I’m there to hear the material first hand (*sic*) [I pick] it up pretty well” (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Elizabeth and Stacia both considered their high school experiences too easy. Elizabeth said her “high [school] probably wasn’t challenging enough” (personal interview, April 11, 2006) and Stacia didn’t think she “was pushed hard enough” (personal interview, April 13, 2006).

All participants admitted to taking challenging courses, such as honors and AP classes, and earning primarily *As* and *Bs*. Julie’s high school GPA was “around 3.9 or so” and she “always chose the more difficult courses—AP courses, or continuing to higher levels of language” (personal interview, March 21, 2006). Jonathan’s high school achievement was exceptional. He had a “3.98 GPA, 1380 SAT, *A-B* honor roll every semester, over 4.0 GPA both Junior and Senior year” (personal interview, March

31, 2006). He earned those grades while taking “AP Calc AB, AP Calc BC, AP Stats, AP Chem, AP Physics, AP U.S. History, AP Govt, plus the basic courses in [E]nglish and history and math, 3 [years] of [S]panish as well as accounting and marketing electives” (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Even though he “slacked off,” Daniel earned his 3.4 by taking “mostly honors and AP history and AP calc” (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Stacia “graduated with a 3.6,” and she “always took a science and math each year even in senior year when we had the option of not taking them. [She] also took English, Spanish, Latin, Health, [and] Computer classes . . . [she took two] AP English classes and AP Spanish, AP English, and AP Bio” (personal interview, April 13, 2006). Elizabeth “maintained over about a 3.4 [GPA] mostly all *As* and *Bs*” taking “honors and [AP] when available . . . honors bio then [AP] senior, honors chemistry, [AP] government (senior year), [AP] history, [and AP E]nglish” (personal interview, April 11, 2006). Participants attributed these successes to minor efforts. Not needing to do much to earn the success they wanted, these students were never taught, nor ever taught themselves, how to work through challenging issues. When these participants encountered challenging coursework in college, they were unprepared to deal with it. Had the AP and IB courses these students encountered in high school provided real academic challenge, instead of allowing students to “do” school, they might have been able to deal with the challenges they faced in college.

Additionally, several other aspects of participants’ experiences contributed to their underachievement: inadequate study skills, poor time management, and internal versus external motivation. Because grades always came so easily, participants did not learn adequate study and note-taking skills. Stacia admitted that, with the college courses in which she did poorly, she felt that she “didn’t know how to study” for those classes (personal interview, April 13, 2006). Kristen also said she did not “know how to study” and even more so, she did not “have the discipline to make [herself] study” (personal interview, March 28, 2006). Elizabeth admitted that her “study habits were definitely not great” (per-

sonal interview, April 11, 2006). This hampered their collegiate success as they were unprepared to do the work required to succeed in college courses.

Many participants professed to studying, but most studied shortly before exams. They did not know how to pace their studies, spending time in advance to prepare for assessments. This lack of early study also contributed to collegiate time management issues. Julie's school performance was "lackluster [because she was] still procrastinating"; she found it "challenging . . . to manage [her] time and keep up with the syllabus" (personal interview, March 21, 2006). Jonathan, who believed his academic success in high school was based upon his ability to hear and remember material, was "not often [present in class to hear the lectures]" (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Because of an inability to manage her time, Elizabeth would "put off reading in one class because [she] would have something due in another" (personal interview, April 11, 2006). Additionally, she felt the amount of freedom was a big shock. She exclaimed, "Wow, [I] can stay up until 4 if [I] wanted to," but "just the fact that you don't have classes [all] day as you do in high school through (*sic*) me off balance in that I had extra time . . . it was just difficult balancing academics and the social aspects of college" (personal interview, April 11, 2006). Stacia said, "time management was poor for me. I slept during the day instead of studying in the day" (personal interview, April 13, 2006). Kristen believed "the work that [she had to] do outside of the classroom is a challenge because there are many more distractions here than at home," and instead of studying she slept or socialized (personal interview, March 28, 2006). A lack of structure in college gave some participants the false feeling of free time, and many, unaccustomed to having to set their own reading and study regimen, did not use their time wisely.

Earning high grades without having to work hard never provided students with a sense of internal motivation. They did not see grades as something to work toward for themselves. The grades participants earned in college were not what they expected of themselves, as they had all experienced success in high school. In

conversation, many participants admitted disappointment with their schooling. This disappointment is the first sign of intrinsic motivation—participants wanted good grades not because they were someone else's view of success, but because that was how they viewed their own success. Daniel knew he “wasn't putting in enough effort” and that he “need[ed] to just step up and be more responsible . . . [because] all of [his] teachers and parents and whoever [tried] to instill morals and ethics. At this point [it] is up to [him] to pay them back” (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Julie was motivated in high school to do well to maintain her position on the track team. As for her underachievement in college, she felt her “particular situation can mostly be improved only by personal discipline and motivation” (personal interview, March 21, 2006). Jonathan's motivation in high school was his parents. In college, his underachievement could be reversed if he could “just . . . find personal motivations” (personal interview, March 31, 2006). Kristen attributed some of her lack of success to the fact that she “[didn't] have [her] parents over [her] shoulder making sure that [she did her] work as well as [her] teachers hounding [her]” and that to turn her grades around she “just need[ed] to learn discipline and resist the urge to socialize or sleep and study when [she] need[ed] to” (personal interview, March 28, 2006).

Conclusions

The high-achieving participants in this study entered a postsecondary educational setting without the skills needed to succeed. From a failure to manage time well to an inability to adjust to independent life, these high-ability students no longer succeeded at their expected level. These participants' experiences mirror what Haycock and Huang (2001) found: Not all students entering college are adequately prepared for the challenges ahead. Because these students possessed high ability, they were previously able to earn high grades without putting forth effort proportionate to their potential (Grobman, 2006) and thus

never needed to learn the skills that would have assisted their successes at Queen Mary College. Many participants attributed their underachievement to various issues related to time management. Reis et al. (1995) found that poor time management led to underachievement: Students who did not know how to handle unstructured time tended to be less academically successful. Many participants mentioned a lack of self-discipline or motivation as a reason for their underachievement. In their research, Coleman and Freedman (1996) found that postsecondary success is based partially on goal directedness and interpersonal problem solving. They found that students who were able to set realistic and attainable goals, successfully managed stress, consciously used strategies, and were flexible in social settings had more academic success in college (Coleman & Freedman, 1996). McCoach and Siegle (2003) found that gifted underachievers differed from their achieving counterparts in motivation and goal valuation. Participants mentioned some difficulty related to these two concepts.

Participants felt that the intervention that would best reverse underachievement was improving their own attitudes and behaviors. Emerick (1992) spoke to gifted students and found several factors that underachievers felt would reverse their underachievement. One factor was the student understanding his or her underachievement behaviors, developing self-confidence, and changing his or her perception to see school as a matter of personal responsibility and a source of satisfaction. Coleman and Freedman (1996), in their effort to find working interventions for college undergraduates, found that interventions should focus on time management and study skills, relaxation and meditation techniques, and career and goal identification. Other researchers (Borkowski & Thorpe, 1994; Glaser & Brunstein, 2004, as cited in Preckel et al., 2006) have also concluded that study skills, metacognitive strategies, and ways to enhance motivation should all be included in college programs designed to reverse underachievement.

Implications

Through counseling and other means, gifted students need to learn how to motivate themselves to work when grades do not come easily. Colleges should be aware that even their high-achieving applicants may lack the skills necessary to succeed. In addition to offering study skills courses to underachieving students, colleges should include preemptive strategies for incoming freshmen. Motivational strategies (Albaili, 2003) and time management strategies should be part of freshman orientation. To succeed in postsecondary education, students need to “regularly engage in rigorous, intellectually challenging work” (Haycock & Huang, 2001, p. 11). High schools should also reevaluate how challenging their upper level courses are.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides the field with research that confirms previous findings on causes of underachievement. However, most studies about secondary underachievement have focused on high school students, not collegians. Participants in high school studies have not experienced some of the factors that impacted the collegians studied here. Although the results of the study are not generalizable beyond the participants at Queen Mary College, they do raise questions about public schools and their ability to adequately prepare their high-ability students for postsecondary education. When schools fail to identify gifted underachievers, these students progress to postsecondary education where the challenges they face can severely impact their potential future success if they are not equipped with the necessary skills to be successful.

To determine the breadth of the problems uncovered in this study, similar studies should be conducted with underachieving freshmen at other academically challenging colleges and universities across the country. These studies can examine the factors to which underachieving college students attribute their academic

performance. Quantitative research should be conducted with colleges to determine the services they offer to underachieving students. Surveys could be mailed to the Dean of Students offices at colleges and universities across the country with questions about the schools' prerequisite for an academic warning or academic probation; whether or not interventions are provided to those students; the kinds of interventions provided; the frequency with which such interventions are provided; and longitudinal results of the interventions. Gifted underachievement may be a far more widespread occurrence than was previously considered. To that end, qualitative research should be conducted with identified high school gifted students regardless of their current academic performance. A phenomenological study might be used to examine gifted high school students' perceptions of their academic success. Students can be questioned about their study habits and the rigor they believe they experience in their high school courses. Studies can be conducted at high schools to discover: (a) the extent of postsecondary preparation provided to students, (b) the study skills they have learned, (c) any strategies that would help students deal with having to set their own schedule when they find themselves with excessive amounts of unstructured time, and (d) strategies to regulate one's level of commitment to the task at hand.

References

- Albaili, M. A. (2003). Motivational goal orientations of intellectually gifted achieving and underachieving students in the United Arab Emirates. *Social Behavior and Personality, 31*, 107-120.
- Anderegg, A. (2007). *Nerds: Who they are and why we need more of them*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
- Bailey, T. R., Hughes, K. L., & Karp, M. M. (2003). *Dual enrollment programs: Easing transitions from high school to college* (CCRC Brief). New York: Community College Research Center. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED475805)

- Baslanti, U. (2008). Investigating the underachievement of university students in Turkey: Exploring subscales [Electronic version]. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 4, 40–56.
- Berube, B. N. (Ed.). (1995). *What educators need to know about underachievement and gifted students* (Practitioners' Guide A9712). Storrs: University of Connecticut, National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED429413)
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brown, B. B., & Steinberg, L. (1990). Academic achievement and social acceptance: Skirting the “brain-nerd” connection. *The Education Digest*, 55, 57–60.
- Coleman, H. L. K., & Freedman, A. M. (1996). Effects of a structured group intervention on the achievement of academically at-risk undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37, 631–636.
- Dowdall, C. B., & Colangelo, N. (1982). Underachieving gifted students: Review and implications. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 26, 179–184.
- Emerick, L. J. (1992). Academic underachievement among the gifted: Students' perceptions of factors that reverse the pattern. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36, 140–146.
- Fehrenbach, C. R. (1993). Underachieving gifted students: Intervention programs that work. *Roeper Review*, 16, 88–90.
- Ford, D. Y., Alber, S. R., & Heward, W. L. (1998). Setting “motivation traps” for underachieving gifted students. *Gifted Child Today*, 21, 28–33.
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (6th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Garber, S. H. (2002, April). “Hearing their voices”: Perceptions of high-school students who evidence resistance to schooling. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Grayson, J. P. (1996). *Under- and over-achievement in first year*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Institute for Social Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED404904)
- Greene, L. J. (1986). *Kids who underachieve*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

- Grobman, J. (2006). Underachievement in exceptionally gifted adolescents and young adults: A psychiatrist's view. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 17*, 199–210.
- Harris, H. L., & Coy, D. R. (2003). *Helping students cope with test anxiety*. Greensboro, NC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED479355)
- Haycock, K., & Huang, S. (2001). Are today's high school graduates ready? *Thinking K-16, 5*, 3–17.
- Hsieh, P., Sullivan, J. R., & Guerra, N. S. (2007). A closer look at college students: Self-efficacy and goal orientation. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 18*, 454–476.
- Kanevsky, L., & Keighley, T. (2003). To produce or not to produce? Understanding boredom and the honor in underachievement. *Roeper Review, 26*, 20–28.
- McCoach, D. B., & Siegle, D. (2003). Factors that differentiate underachieving gifted students from high-achieving gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 47*, 144–154.
- McGrath, A. (Ed.). (2007). *U.S. News & World Report: Ultimate college guide*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.
- Natale, J. A. (1995). Making smart cool. *The Executive Educator, 17*, 20–24.
- Nelson, R. R. (1998). Achievement difficulties for the academically gifted. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 28*, 117–123.
- Neumeister, K. L. S., & Hébert, T. P. (2003). Underachievement versus selective achievement: Delving deeper and discovering the difference. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 26*, 221–238.
- No Child Left Behind Act, 20 U.S.C. §6301 (2001).
- Patrick, H., Gentry, M., & Owen, S. (2006). Motivation and gifted adolescents. In F. A. Dixon & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *The handbook of secondary gifted education* (pp. 165–195). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Peterson, J. S. (2000). A follow-up study of one group of achievers and underachievers four years after high school graduation [Electronic version]. *Roeper Review, 22*, 217–224.
- Preckel, F., Holling, H., & Vock, M. (2006). Academic underachievement: Relationship with cognitive motivation, achievement motivation, and conscientiousness. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*, 401–411.
- Reis, S. M., Hébert, T. P., Díaz, E. I., Maxfield, L. R., & Ratley, M. E. (1995). *Case studies of talented students who achieve and underachieve in an urban high school* (Research Monograph 95120).

- Storrs: University of Connecticut, National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED414687)
- Reis, S. M., & McCoach, D. B. (2000). The underachievement of gifted students: What do we know and where do we go? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 44, 152–170.
- Rimm, S. B. (1995). Underachievement syndrome in gifted students. In J. L. Genshaft, M. Bireley, & C. L. Hollinger (Eds.), *Serving gifted and talented students: A resource for school personnel* (pp. 173–199). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Rimm, S. (1997). An underachievement epidemic. *Educational Leadership*, 54, 18–22.
- Sawin, S. (2004). *Sampling and bias notes*. Retrieved July 15, 2008, from <http://cs.fairfield.edu/~sawin/Stats/Notes/sampling.html>
- Schultz, R. A. (2002a). Illuminating realities: A phenomenological view from two underachieving gifted learners. *Roeper Review*, 24, 203–212.
- Schultz, R. A. (2002b). Understanding giftedness and underachievement: At the edge of possibility. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 46, 193–208.
- Shim, S., & Ryan, A. (2005). Changes in self-efficacy, challenge avoidance, and intrinsic value in response to grades: The role of achievement goals. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 73, 333–349.
- Tannenbaum, A. (1962). *Adolescent attitudes toward academic brilliance*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Whitmore, J. R. (1989). Re-examining the concept of underachievement. *Understanding Our Gifted*, 2, 1, 7–9

End Notes

- 1 University name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the school, its staff, and its students.
- 2 Participants' names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Appendix A

This interview is for a study of freshman underachievers, defined as those students with an academic warning or on academic probation, at Queen Mary College. You may discontinue this interview at any time. Do you consent to this interview?

- Describe your previous academic performance in high school.
- To what did you attribute your academic performance while in high school?
- Describe your current academic performance.
- To what do you attribute your current academic performance?
- What level of challenge did you experience in high school? How does that compare to the level of challenge you experience in classes at Queen Mary College?
- What courses did you select to take while in high school?
- How do those courses differ from what you have selected thus far at Queen Mary College?
- Describe your current study habits.
- How are they different from those you used while in high school?
- To what extent were you involved in activities outside of high school?
- To what extent are you currently involved in activities outside of classes?
- Do you feel you are achieving at your fullest potential? Why or why not?
- What interventions or remediation do you feel would help raise your academic performance?

If you decide later to opt out of this study, simply e-mail me and this information will not be used. When my study is complete, I will e-mail you a copy so that you can verify I portrayed you accurately.