

Nurturing a Growth Mindset; Developing Grit and Perseverance

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This research focuses on enhancing student success throughout the student life cycle by examining grit and perseverance, develop student's growth mindset through foundational services and co-curricular activities, and providing developmental opportunities, challenges, and engaging activities to support personal and academic growth; facilitates students morphing from struggling newbies to successful graduates.

This presentation will focus on techniques and methodologies to enhance student success through various stages of the academic life cycle anchored by Angela Duckworth's research on grit and the concept of a growth mindset. Duckworth is an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and her research focuses on a personality trait she calls "grit." She uses "a perseverance and passion for long-term goals" as the definition of grit. She and her colleagues identified two traits in individuals that predict achievement: grit and self-control. Duckworth and her colleagues found that grit—the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals—contributes significantly to successful outcomes. In short, grit is a better predictor of high school graduation and grade point average than IQ (Duckworth, 2013). Further, she found that "Gritty" individuals approach achievement as a marathon; their advantage is stamina.

Additionally, research on mindset, like the work of Carol Dweck from Stanford University, gives more insight into what it takes to persevere. She identified that individuals have two very different mindsets- fixed and growth mindsets. She has shown that people achieve what they believe about themselves (2012). Individuals with a fixed mindset believe that traits such as intelligence and talent are finite. Conversely, individuals with growth mindset see their talents as qualities to be developed through dedication and effort. These individuals see education, experience, and practice as opportunities to increase mastery. When those with a fixed mindset become discouraged, they quit. The fixed mindset is looking for the reward now rather than later. And when faced with failure, individuals with a fixed mindset reports that they would cheat on the next attempt rather than keep trying. On the other hand, when those with a growth mindset encountered obstacles, they were encouraged by the challenge.

Students in the university setting come with varied backgrounds. The amount of previous school work, workplace training or personal work experience may help identify which mindset they have been developing. The use of support for foundational learning, can have an impact on opening up a fixed mindset for development opportunities. An example is research by Camille Farrington and colleagues at the

University of Chicago looking at the role of developmental factors in school performance. They have found that students' mindsets and perseverance are directly associated with their grades. Students with growth mindset and perseverance earned high grades. Farrington has also found that these two developmental factors determined student engagement, class attendance, assignment completion, ability to learn from failure, and ability to stick to tasks until they are completed.

Included in the discussion will be primary research we interviewed a group of academic leaders and alumni from University of Phoenix; we surveyed them and discussed as well as the importance of grit and the linkage between grit, student success, and foundational services. Specifically alumni listed the following ideas as foundational services they would have deemed helpful during the education process:

- Goal Setting- Clarifying
- Balancing Life- work/school/job
- Building Relationships
- How to share successful moments
- Resources- faculty and administrators should impart knowledge-
"The Stuff You Can't Google!"
- Discuss employment opportunities
- Explain networking
- Workforce Prep
- Bridge learning with practical application
- Help with day to day work experiences
- Just in time resources. How to buy, use a graphing calculator
- Help with choosing a computer

To nurture both student grit and perseverance we also investigated the concept of flow as it relates to student success. Since the early 1990's, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has been studying positive psychology, especially happiness and flow. Csikszentmihalyi coined the term "flow" to describe the state when a person is completely emerged in a task, often referred to as "in the groove." Recently, Csikszentmihalyi has extended the concept to include student behaviors. He says that learning is the intrinsic reward of hard work. Challenging and engaging activities that lead to mastery can create an enjoyable experience called "flow". To achieve it, institutions must provide intentional learning environments and relevant learning activities that focus on a student's strengths, creating opportunities for long-term or higher-order goals.

A tri-pronged approach can be used to support student success. The combination of the psychological support elements associated with grit and flow, the inclusion of foundational support services to give students "just in time" academic and scholarly resources, and focus on co-curricular student activities can provide students a solid,

well rounded foundation. Some examples of co-curricular activities and services for intentional learning include “welcoming” the student to either the virtual classroom environment or the local campus facility. A welcome packet of information with basic information about online technical support services, lab facilities and parking are a few things that may be unfamiliar to new students. Just in time information that is relevant to their phase of enrollment is a key element. As students focus on basic needs the education environment may have insight as to where the student mindset is or where they are developmentally. Not all students need the same services. It’s not enough to provide the services, but it is also important to measure how important the service was to the user. Experiences beyond the classroom, interactions with faculty and staff, and engagement are factors in student success (Shinde, 2010). Academic Related skills and institutional commitment were most associated with retention. (Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson, & Le, 2006).

By aligning the flow of resources and information available to students, there is greater success in planning activities that suit the lifecycle of the student thus helping students morph from struggling newbies to successful graduates. Student success workshops and tutoring/coaching sessions can be that extra support mechanism when student’s progress from beginning courses to program specific or math related course work. Information about career development, networking and personal brand are important to those students nearing completion of a degree. “Support services and resources that provide academic assistance, prepare, promote student success and collaboration...Promote and provide opportunities for involvement and integration” (Roberts & Styron, 2010, p. 5).

Research reveals a disconnect between student expectations and understanding of their ability and how they perform when reviewing the life factor of hours worked weekly (part- or full-time) as well as personal attributes including locus of control, procrastination, academic attributes, and persistence.

This workshop will include interactive activities and material to guide administrators to the development of a multipronged student success plan through the integration of grit and perseverance with foundational services and co-curricular activities. We will poll participants regarding their current activities relating to offering both foundational services and co-curricular activities. If time permits we will include a small group exercise incorporating preset questions.

Methodology:

In addition to the literature review we conducted interviews and focus groups with academic leaders at the University of Phoenix. We began with the concept of grit and the following guiding questions:

- Define grit
- What are the behavioral attributes of individuals who have grit

- What is the difference between a time when you persevered vs. when you quit
- What foundational services could support grit
- What co-curricular activities could support grit
- Included in the discussion will be primary research obtained when we interviewed a group of academic leaders from University of Phoenix; we surveyed them in advance of a face to face meeting where everyone met to discuss their own perceptions of success as well as the importance of grit and the linkage between grit, student success, and foundational services. From this meeting several key trends were identified that will be shared at the conference.
- Additional research of current students and alumni, in a focus group, was designed to gain feedback about the experience of persistence. The primary objective was to capture student and alumni perspective of needs for graduating seniors as they are making the leap from university studies to career advancement. The makeup of this focus group included students at the end of their degree program who worked together in pairs, to identify what resources in a mentor relation would be most beneficial.
- The secondary objective was to obtain insight from current students and recent alumni on content and structure of a mentor program that would provide for a unique learning opportunity for University of Phoenix students. A group of eight students and alumni met to share insight from their university of experience. Specifically, the focus group listed the following ideas as foundational services they would have deemed helpful during the education process:
 - Goal Setting- Clarifying
 - Balancing Life- work/school/job
 - Building Relationships
 - How to share successful moments
 - Resources- faculty and administrators should impart knowledge-
 - “The Stuff You Can’t Google!”
 - Discuss employment opportunities

Between the academic literature and the primary research conducted, this panel discussion will provide opportunity for robust conversations relative to research and approaches to student persistence.

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