

## 2007-08 Faculty Development Grant

I received a Faculty Development grant in Fall 2007 to assist with data handling related to a research project I conducted into aspects of student socio-cognitive makeup, its potential impact on teaching methodology, and ways to improve teaching of college art and design based on qualitative and quantitative findings.

The grant funds helped me conduct IRB-approved survey research using student subjects by affording part-time clerical support to score and enter data at three stages during the 2007-08 academic year. The results of this study are incorporated into an academic journal article, titled *Teaching the Whole Student: Perceived Academic Control in College Art Instruction*. This article, chronicling the first study of perceived academic control and its impact on first-year art student success, is pending publication.

The following excerpt from the article's Abstract reveals the primary content:

*While college art instructors struggle to respond to a changing student population, educational psychologists stress the importance of focusing on students' cognitive-affective makeup in addition to teaching course content. With today's unique student peer characteristics drawing so much attention, perhaps now more than ever attribution theory, and more specifically, student perceptions of academic control, can serve to enhance teaching effectiveness and raise instructor empathy for students with diverse educational competencies. This study examines the impact of academic control-enhancing teaching methods on first-year college art student success and defines best practice recommendations based on quantitative and qualitative findings. Results suggest that understanding perceived academic control and incorporating that insight into classroom instruction can help college art faculty learn to more effectively support first-year students' adaptation to college, academic performance, mid-year retention, and matriculation to a second year.*

The following summary of findings demonstrates some of what the article contributes to the art education field, especially at the collegiate level:

- Students who attribute their academic successes and failures to things that they do, rather than to forces beyond their control, such as luck, fate, or powerful others, are oriented "internally." Internal control attributions are linked to academic success, and perceived academic control (PAC) has been identified as a singularly important academic marker in college settings. When controllable attributions improve, so do students' motivation, task-persistence, affect, and creativity.
- Early in the fall term, 38.9% of first-year students indicated externality. Since first-year college student externality is linked to failure-proneness and attrition, classroom interventions were tried and measured. By mid-year, transient externality had increased (predictably), but only by 3.7%, and faculty mitigation efforts successfully stabilized this rise, then reversed it (-5.0%) in the second term.
- Consequently, in spring term student attrition fell to a record low: less than *half* (48.1%) its prior five-year trend.
- As control attributions shifted toward internality, academic performance increased. In fact, the impact of Foundation instructors' classroom cognitive retraining efforts on students' control attributions compares favorably to shifts toward internality previously associated with *four* terms of college alone.
- By year-end, attrition to the second year also fell to a record low: 28.1% below its five-year trend.

- Remarkably, the sample indicated no significant differences in mean PAC scores by ethnic group, nor in any group by ethnicity. Similarly, no significant gender differences were found in student PAC scores, nor in the proportions of males to females in any category at any measurement point.
- Qualitative analysis of student focus group responses revealed that internal, external, and "turnaround" students all perceived positive impact on their academic success from control-enhancing teaching methodology. A review of literature, changes in mean PAC scores, and focus group findings led to seven recommendations for control-enhancing teaching methodology in college art settings.
- Results indicate that student internality can serve as a valuable *predictor* for college art student success. Thus this study has implications for art/design school admissions (some 4-year colleges have already begun to lace PAC measures into their applications). Unfortunately, young Americans' control attributions are *trending* toward externality. This is ominous for future college retention and graduation rates, and strongly suggests that the time for cognitive theory-based teaching is *now*. Follow-up research is currently underway at Otis into possible trending of first-year college art/design students' PAC (it is hoped that funding can be secured for this analysis).
- In conclusion, aspects of student cognitive makeup affect academic performance at all levels of higher education, and attention to PAC should become a core component of college art/design instruction for the 21st century.

Finally, a set of recommendations are offered, based on the research findings, for college art instruction:

Table 6

*Recommendations from the Faculty Idea-Building Session*

As Part of Course Content:

By means of:

Openly discuss LC/PAC in classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including in course syllabi</li> <li>• Presenting topic early in term</li> <li>• Soliciting student input</li> </ul>
Role-model internality for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing professional experiences</li> <li>• Thorough in-class demonstrations</li> <li>• Disclosing problem-solving processes</li> </ul>
Reinforce responsibility-taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching responsibility-taking behaviors</li> <li>• Reviewing responsibility-taking frequently</li> <li>• Rewarding successes with grades or credit</li> </ul>
Support student learning communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structuring curriculum accordingly</li> <li>• Enrolling students in common courses</li> <li>• Collaborating with shared faculty</li> </ul>
Relieve the effort dilemma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining the role of effort in success</li> <li>• Informing students of teacher's awareness</li> <li>• Crediting efforts that elevate outcomes</li> </ul>

Practice pre-critique

- Encouraging strengths prior to grading
- Identifying weaknesses prior to grading
- Reviewing criteria prior to grading

Foster students' problem-finding skills

- Prompting for novel responses
- Reinforcing students' individuality
- Rewarding inventiveness/originality

The Faculty Development grant helped me fulfill this complex educational research at Otis, and thereby contributed to my professional advancement and the furthering of this work, which has positively impacted hundreds of students.

-- Randall Lavender, Professor and Associate Chair, Foundation