

## Measures Of Success: Exploring Fashion Students' Perceptions of Academic Success

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**Introduction:** Academic achievement is a crucial component of a student's educational journey (Madani, 2019). Achieving success in academics not only lays the foundation for future career prospects but also builds confidence and self-esteem (McIntyre, 2020; Moyano, 2020). Fashion education is more than creating aesthetically pleasing designs for the runway. It is a highly competitive field that requires a combination of technical skills, creativity, and industry knowledge to succeed (Yang, 2010). Academic success in fashion education is measured not just by grades but also by the ability to network, communicate effectively, and demonstrate industry readiness (Choi, 2021). The literature on academic success suggests that students who can think outside the box and develop original concepts while showcasing their technical expertise are likely to succeed in fashion education. However, this journey is not without its challenges. Effective time management, awareness of resources, and study habits are crucial to managing the intense workload and tight deadlines that come with the field of fashion. To stay motivated, fashion students need to set clear and specific goals, imagine themselves succeeding, and break down their larger objectives into smaller, more manageable tasks. With the right mindset, skills, and support, students can achieve academic success and pave the way to a successful career in fashion.

As educators, we are aware that conventional metrics of academic achievement, such as scores on standardized college entry exams, college grades, and credit hours earned in consecutive terms, are utilized by university administrators to evaluate student success in college. Other measures of success include post-graduation accomplishments such as graduate school admission test scores, enrolment, completion rates in graduate and professional schools, and performance on field-specific examinations (Kuh et al., 2006). Employment and income after college are also considered measurable indicators of success. Educators and administrators need to comprehend the factors that affect student success from the students' standpoint to provide tailored programming and institutional investments. Given the evolving nature of society and the demands of a knowledge-based economy (Carnevale and Desrochers 2002), there is a growing understanding that a high school education that was once sufficient is no longer adequate for success in college and the workforce in the 21st century (American Diploma Project 2004). Therefore, it can be inferred that the present generation of college students has experienced diverse social and learning environments (Orosz et al., 2019), resulting in a disparity between their interpretation of student success and that of current educators/ college administrators. This research aims to explore the definition of student success in college from the perspective of Gen Z college students. This study is part of an extensive investigation that delves into college students' reported Sense of Fit in the Fashion Design and Fashion Merchandising department.

**Theory:** Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of attitude-behavior is an all-encompassing theory that posits beliefs as the driving force behind attitudes, which in turn lead to intentions, and ultimately shape behaviors. Beliefs are formed based on an individual's perception of both social norms and expected outcomes, which in turn shape attitudes towards these norms and outcomes. These attitudes have a direct influence on intentions, which are a reliable predictor of subsequent

behavior (Bean, 1990). Bean and Eaton (2001-02) went on further to identify key psychological processes that affect student attitudes and ultimately their success in college: (1) self-efficacy, (2) locus of control, and (3) coping skills.

**Method:** In the Fall semester of 2022, the Fashion Department faculty at a large Northeastern university collaborated with their Career Services team to develop a one-credit course (The Fashion Networking Tour class) to facilitate experiential learning and fashion networking opportunities for fashion students. The course involved a two-day trip to a fashion week event in a major city in the Northeast. While participation in the trip was voluntary, students were required to pay a fee of \$30, which covered the cost of transportation, lodging, meals, and entry to various fashion-related events. Recruitment for the trip prioritized freshman and transfer students, followed by students in the major's sophomore, junior, and senior levels. Students pursuing a minor in Fashion were also eligible to enroll in the course. The itinerary for the trip included training on dinner etiquette, attending a fashion show, and visiting the headquarters of one of the largest active sportswear companies in the nation. Upon completing the trip, each student was interviewed using a semi-structured format to assess their Sense of Fit in the Fashion Design and Fashion Merchandising department.

**Results:** The Fashion Networking Tour attracted sixteen undergraduate students, comprising twelve females, three males, and one transgender female, consistent with the predominantly female population of the Fashion Department. Most participants self-identified as White/Caucasian, while the remaining identified as Black/African American and Asian/Pacific Islander. Regarding academic standing, most participants were first-year and transferred students, with some upperclassmen in attendance who majored in Fashion with minors in disciplines such as marketing, business, and journalism.

During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to provide their perspectives on what constitutes a successful college student. The responses reflected the three vital psychological processes Bean and Eaton (2001-02) outlined: self-efficacy, locus of control, and coping behavior. Examples of these included statements such as "Success requires a passion for what you do; if you are not interested in your field, success will be difficult to attain", "A successful student is someone who is committed to their studies and devotes adequate time to them", "Effective study habits and use of resources are important", "A successful student achieves a balance between academic and social commitments", and "Time management skills are critical for success in both academic and personal spheres."

**Conclusion:** According to the attitude-behavior theory, self-efficacy is crucial in helping students overcome academic and social challenges. Those with a strong self-concept and coping skills tend to be more confident in their abilities and are less likely to give up in the face of difficulties. When asked to describe a successful college student during semi-structured interviews, many participants identified themselves or closely aligned with their own descriptions. Interestingly, the importance of balance between academic work and social life emerged as a recurring theme among the participants. This perspective on success differs from conventional metrics used by university educators and administrators. By understanding students' perceptions of academic success, valuable insights can be gained to help educators, administrators, parents, and students address challenges and barriers to achieving it.

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