



Thinking about Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Student Success in Post-Secondary Studies

¹Janet Miller, ²Brandon Smith, ¹Don Best
¹Mount Royal University, ²McMaster University (Canada)
jbmill@mtroyal.ca

Abstract

Student retention has been identified as an important issue in colleges and universities. In North America, it has been reported that one quarter of the students who enter post-secondary after high school do not return for their second year of study [1] [2]. In Canada, it has been found that almost a quarter of post-secondary students withdraw prior to graduation [3], and the majority of those who leave, do so within the first two years of study [4]. This becomes expensive for institutions and, at times, devastating for individuals. Identifying which students will be “at risk” of dropping out is complicated, and academic and cognitive factors only provide marginal predictive information [5] [6] [7]. Success in a post-secondary setting is the product of more than one’s intelligence and academic skill. Transition into university can be stressful and is often complicated by financial, interpersonal and intrapersonal issues. Emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses a range of emotional processing skills which likely support students to work through these challenges [8]. Studies which investigate the impact EI has on student success have just begun [9], and this study is designed to contribute to this growing field of study. In the Fall of 2010, first year, full time students entering into their studies at a Canadian university took part in a survey where they were asked to provide demographic information and respond to questions reflecting emotional intelligence, career uncertainty and general belongingness within the post-secondary context. A total of 898 students completed the questionnaire and consented to having their progress tracked through to the time of graduation. Results from the first three years of this longitudinal retention study will be presented, focusing on challenges faced by “first time, full time” students and “first generation” learners. Conclusions highlight the importance of emotional intelligence skills and career planning within the undergraduate experience approaches to further support student success in university studies.

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