
ANNOTATION

Mendoza Vargas, Miguel Gerardo. "Relationship between Grit and Academic Success among First Generation Students of Color." EdD dissertation, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, 2018. 163 pp.

In this dissertation, the author intends to determine whether the relationship between a) the Grit Scale and b) the end-of-first-year college GPA among first generation students of color "is relevant for enhancing a university's admissions process" (ix). He determined the relevancy of said relationship for possibly improving the admissions process, in large part, by conducting a study that "collected a convenience sample of 217 first year college students at a small private Midwestern university" (ix). In addition to possibly enhancing the admissions process, the author states that "his study may contribute to planning student success interventions, could help in designing pre-college candidates summer programs, and also contribute to designing programs for training college teachers" (15).

The dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter outlines various contours of the research problem, namely its antecedents, limits, assumptions, justification, and relevance. The second chapter reviews two types of literature: a) that which is related to the topic itself (first generation students of color, non-cognitive personality traits, and grit) & b) that which is related to the author's methodology (two types of correlation analysis – Pearson's and Spearman's rho). The third chapter gives the author's methodology and includes, among other elements, descriptions of the research design, the Grit Scale, and the author's statistical analysis. Chapter four describes "the demographic characteristics of the sample [the students who were studied] and presents the data relevant to each one of the questions and hypotheses of the research" (89). The concluding chapter ties together the threads of the study by discussing its meaning and significance, admitting its unresolved problems and weaknesses, and offering recommendations for present practice and future research.

In his presentation of the problem, Mendoza opines that the traditional admissions process used in most American universities in large measure is failing to adequately recruit sufficient numbers of students of color. He questions whether the use of the Grit Scale, which measures non-cognitive personality traits, would aid the admissions process to recruit a greater number of promising first-generation students of color. The author's overarching research question is "How strong is the relationship between the Grit Scale Score and academic success, compared to high school grade point average and American College Testing score for two groups of college students: first generation students of color and traditional students?" (17). Mendoza states that his research makes an important contribution to society in a variety of ways: economically, educationally, and socio-ethically and that it also contributes to the admissions process, to the study non-cognitive personality traits, and specifically to research on grit (18).

Chapter two includes two extensive literature reviews, the first being topical (about first-generation students of color, non-cognitive personality traits, and grit). Of all the topical literature that is

reviewed, Mendoza opines that the literature about grit is the most significant. This part includes a “presentation of positive psychology, the development of the Grit Scale, how grit functions, and the limitations of grit’s measurements” (67). The second literature review focuses on statistical analyses of grit research and points out that “the most typical statistical approach for validating admissions processes is by calculating Pearson product-correlation coefficients and stylizing regression analyses” (69).

The third chapter describes the methodology the author used for investigating the “relationship between the Grit Scale and the end-of-first-year college GPA among first-generation students of color, so as to determine if this relationship may enhance the university’s admissions process” (85). Mendoza’s study, a correlational analysis, used a sample composed of 217 volunteers who, at the time of the study, were first-year college students at a small private Midwestern university. The utilized instrument was the 17-item version of the Grit Scale, which includes the sub-scales of grit overall, persistence of effort, consistency of interest, and ambition.

In his fourth chapter Mendoza articulates several interesting results. He found that one’s high school GPA strongly correlated to end-of-first-year college GPA for both first-generation students of color and non-first-generation white students. Furthermore, the ACT score is strongly correlated to end-of-first-year college GPA for first-generation students of color and moderately correlated for non-first-generation white students (101). Some readers will be surprised to learn that practically none of the Grit Sub-Scale scores added relevant information that would help inform the traditional college admissions process. The only exception is that there was a moderate correlation between the “ambition score” of the Grit Scale and end-of-first-year college GPA for first-generation students of color (102).

In the final chapter, Mendoza articulates this important implication of his research: “The traditional [college] admissions process shows itself to be a valid measurement of academic success among first-generation students of color” (112). In conclusion, the author presents four recommendations for further research: a) investigating the connection between grit and self-efficacy; b) studying the difference in the strength of the correlation between high school GPA and academic success across different groups; c) utilizing the ambition sub-scale with a larger sample of non-traditional students; and d) probing connections between other non-cognitive skills that have shown relevance to education and the workplace (119).