

2. STUDENT MOTIVATION AND SELF-REGULATED LEARNING IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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College student motivation is a persistent and persuasive problem for faculty and staff at all levels of postsecondary education. Faculty at community colleges, comprehensive universities, small liberal arts colleges, and private and public research universities all bemoan the lack of student motivation. The questions that college faculty and staff raise include: why don't the students seem to care about their work, why don't they seem more interested in the disciplinary content of the courses, why do they only care about their grades but not learning, why don't they try very hard, why don't they study very much, why do they procrastinate and try to study for an exam at the last minute, or try to write a paper the day before it is due, why can't they be more organized and plan their work better, and why don't they learn or perform very well. All of these issues can be partially explained by a motivation and self-regulation perspective on student learning in the college classroom. Of course, there are other models of college student cognition and learning that are relevant, but in this chapter we will focus on motivational and self-regulatory constructs. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of current research on college student motivation and self-regulated learning that should provide some insights into these general problems.

Given the scope and page limitations of this chapter, we cannot review all the different theoretical models and all the research literature on the topic. In fact, we do not think a review of all the different theories and models is that helpful at this point in the development of our understanding of college student motivation and self-regulation. Accordingly, we organize our chapter around some general constructs that cut across different theoretical models; we hope that the model will then provide a conceptual framework that is useful for higher education researchers, college faculty, and college administrators and staff. In addition, we will propose some first-order principles or generalizations

about motivation and learning based on empirical studies from our research program at Michigan as well as other studies. These generalizations should be useful in guiding future research as well as practice. The model explicitly focuses on college student motivation and self-regulation regarding academic learning, not motivation for non-academic activities (e.g., relationships, friendships, athletics, careers). Finally, the model is best applied to the college classroom or course level, not college in general, as there are other models that attempt to explain how college attendance influences a host of student outcomes including motivation and learning (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

This focus on the college classroom level has both theoretical and practical value. First, most of the current research on student motivation and self-regulation at the college and precollegiate levels has been at the classroom level and therefore is very relevant for developing a model of academic motivation and learning. More importantly, most academic student learning is situated in a college classroom or course context that includes not just the time spent in the actual classroom itself, but also the time spent outside formal class time working on the specific course tasks and assignments. Finally, a classroom level focus is the most meaningful and pragmatic for college instructors and our own teaching. We cannot change or easily influence factors outside our classroom (such as the institutional and community norms and structures, the attitudes and beliefs of the students' friends and roommates, or the students' family background and beliefs), but we can change and control what we do in our own classrooms. Of course, we are always operating under constraints in our classrooms, such as class size, time, and curriculum demands; nevertheless, we still have more control over our own classrooms than other aspects of the college environment. Accordingly, we have focused this chapter on the college classroom context and students' motivational beliefs and self-regulation in relation to various classroom and course features.

Before we discuss our general model, a description of two students who show differing patterns of motivation and self-regulation may help to ground the model in the realities of college student learning. Both Mike and Lyndsay were good students in high school, but both are having some difficulties in college. Mike studies in the same way for all his classes, even though they differ greatly in terms of their requirements (papers, exams, lab reports) and the nature of instruction (discussion, lectures, small group work). He doesn't think much about his goals for different classes, he just wants to get good grades such as an A or a B in all his courses. He studies by reading the course material over and over and when he studies for an exam, he concentrates on memorizing important terms and ideas. He finds some of his classes interesting, but others are fairly boring to him. He spends much more time on those classes where he likes the content, and as the term progresses, he finds it harder and harder to do the

work in the boring classes. It always seems that when he sets aside time to work on those classes, his roommates ask him to go out with them; and he usually goes, instead of studying. He tends to wait until the week of an exam or the week a paper is due to start working on it and often feels rushed and realizes that he did not do his best work. In some of his classes his grades are fine, but in others he is getting C's or lower. When he thinks about why he does not do well in those classes, he thinks that he lacks the ability to do well in those classes — and they are boring anyway. He rarely asks other students or the instructors for help. He just keeps on working and studying the way he did in high school, since it worked for him then — although he does worry about his ability to succeed in college, since it is much harder than high school. Mike is not a terrible student. He does try to do his work and he does study, just as most college students do, but he is not as successful as he could be if he were more self-regulating.

Lyndsay approaches the same courses differently. She, too, wants to get good grades; but she also wants to learn and understand the material. She knows she will be able to use the course material in other classes and in her career, so she focuses not just on grades but on understanding. In addition, she thinks about how the courses are different and realizes that different tasks like exams and papers require different approaches to studying and learning. In some classes, where the exams test for recall, she does spend some time memorizing the important terms. However, in all her classes, when she reads the material, she tries to paraphrase it, write summaries, or make outlines of the text. This helps her see the connections between the lectures and the readings. Also, when she is studying, she gives herself mini-quizzes on the material and these self-tests help her to monitor her understanding. When she finds that she can't get 100% of the questions correct on her own quizzes, she goes back over the material and figures out what she did not understand. She also tries to keep a regular study schedule and plans her work by the week and month, so that she is not starting a paper the week it is due. Of course, when an exam is coming up or a paper is due, she concentrates on that course, but she usually feels prepared since she is not doing the work at the last minute. Of course, she finds some of the course material boring, but she makes sure she spends more time on those courses since she knows it is harder for her to concentrate on that material. She often studies with her friends. They work together, and then go out for a pizza after several hours of studying. She thinks of these pizza breaks as a reward for her studying. She also incorporates her friends into her study routine, which helps her regulate her studying and keep focused on her task, rather than having her friends be a distraction that takes her away from school work as in Mike's case. In the long run, Lyndsay will be much more successful than Mike. She may struggle with the transition to college, as do most college students, but she



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