ACADEMIC PROBATION AS A DANGEROUS OPPORTUNITY: FACTORS INFLUENCING DIVERSE COLLEGE STUDENTS’ SUCCESS

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The number of minority, particularly Latino, students attending community colleges is on the rise in the United States. Such students frequently lack academic preparation and financial resources. These difficulties, when added to family obligations, often require that minority students attend institutions that offer the most flexible arrangements—typically, community colleges. Due to these issues, however, their successful transition to community college may be difficult. The authors found that up to 35% of first-time freshmen—with a disproportionate number of Latinos—are on probation after their first semester at a large, urban, public community college. The authors developed and instituted a probationary student re-orientation program to both assist these students and understand how their background characteristics and perceptions of the college environment impacted their academic standing. Using Schlossberg’s transition theory as our theoretical framework, this study assessed how students of different ethnicities differed along reported levels of academic motivation, general coping, and receptivity to support services. Results suggest that Latinos are more likely to experience academic difficulties, are more
prone to drop out, and, yet, are more willing to receive institutional assistance as compared to other students. Framing students' probationary status as a “dangerous opportunity” to instill behavioral/attitudinal changes, the authors discuss how counseling faculty and advisors may assist probationary students in achieving success.

Public 2-year colleges enrolled 44% of the total undergraduate enrollment in the United States in fall 2001 (Almanac, 2004). In California alone, 86% of fall 2003 freshmen students in public colleges/universities studied at a community college (California Postsecondary Education Commission [CPEC], 2005). Additionally, the number of minority—particularly Latino—students attending these colleges is on the rise. Just over 60% of all undergraduate Latinos attend a community college (Almanac, 2004). Such students frequently lack academic preparation and financial resources. These difficulties, when added to family obligations, often require that minority students attend community colleges, which are typically more flexible in meeting their students’ diverse needs. Due to these issues, however, the successful transition into college may be difficult.

A review of the literature on community college students readily reveals a set of distinguishing characteristics separating them from their counterparts attending 4-year colleges and universities. Community college students succeed, are retained, and persist at lower rates (Kahn, Nauta, Gailbreath, Tipps, & Chartrand, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993); attend college on a less than full-time and more varied daytime/evening basis (Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Grimes, 1997); typically work at higher rates and more hours per week (Cohen & Brawer, 2002); are often older (U. S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2002); commute, often by public transportation in urban colleges (Gonzalez, 2000); and spend more time in the classroom with their college peers than they socialize outside of school (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Community college students generally have greater family responsibilities (Cohen & Brawer, 2002); more personal issues such as childcare needs, and are strained financially (Sandler, 2000); and have family problems that may also affect their career development process while in college (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Kerka, 1995; Simon & Tovar, 2004).

Given the characteristics outlined above, researchers and practitioners alike have consistently emphasized the importance of addressing these issues in and outside the classroom (i.e., both academically and socially) to ensure a successful transition and adjustment to college. Thus, providing support services such as counseling, academic advising, financial aid guidance, and tutoring are all necessary.
PROBATIONARY STUDENTS

As many as 25% of all students may be on academic probation at some time in their college careers (Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Garnett, 1990), with numbers even higher for community college students. Studies with these students have primarily been descriptive of the population or of the corrective strategies that have been attempted with varying levels of success. Probationary students have typically been defined as earning less than a C grade average, and have been found to possess a few characteristics in common including poor academic preparation—sometimes, regardless of high school grades (Earl, 1988; Tinto, 1993, Trombley, 2000-1); low motivation (Abelman & Molina, 2001; Tinto, 1993); poor time management (Earl, 1998; Thombs, 1995; Tinto, 1993); and unused or poor study skills (Astin, 1993; Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Thombs, 1995). Probationary students were also found to possess an external locus of control (Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Tinto, 1993). In addition, many probationary students have a need for greater clarification of academic, personal, and professional career development goals (Cuseo, 2003, Gordon & Steele, 2003). While there are some characteristics held in common between probationary and at-risk students (Jones & Watson, 1990), these two categories of students are not one and the same (Cruise, 2002). Some well-prepared students attain a probationary status, whereas some who have financial, personal, and work responsibilities are high achievers.

Numerous interventions have been designed and used with probationary students. Many of these stem from a wish to return them to successful standing as soon as possible. Return to good standing is thought to decrease the likelihood that probationary students will be forced to leave the college due to academic disqualification, or because their poor academic progress discourages them from pursuing their education. In spite of their sizeable number, little has been published about probationary students from a theoretical basis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As students are entering college, they are experiencing transitions in their academic and social lives. Astin (1993) and Tinto (1993) have often been cited regarding the need to support students in the integration of their social and academic lives. That successful integration is more complex in nonresidential, underprepared students who typically attend community colleges in greater numbers. However, these theories do not sufficiently explain the experiences of many minority, first-generation college students (Tierney, 1992; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). To connect with these and other
students’ actual experiences, we apply a transition model that considers these freshmen on a more individual basis and, in particular, their needs that arise in adapting to college life.

The transitions students may be experiencing may be seen through the lens of Schlossberg’s transition model (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). This model addresses the individuality of each student, making it particularly relevant for their more complex lives. Minority students tend to enter community college with less academic focus and preparation, and thereby experience greater challenges in order to successfully adapt to their new environments. Specifically, first-generation and minority students must often struggle to balance academic and family responsibilities—whether they are traditional-aged or not. They must learn to coexist in these two worlds, and need to develop the skills to effectively transition between them without becoming lost in the process in order to succeed in college. Required skills may include the need to communicate in two languages and to live in two cultures concurrently. First-generation and minority students often must defend the importance of attending college and studying to significant others who may not understand the value of their college academic and cocurricular experiences. This is especially so when a family faces financial hardships and its student is expected to contribute financially to the household.

Schlossberg’s individual transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995) is directly applicable to the first generation and minority population. The authors examined how transitions are approached by adults. They found that both the resources used by the person—as well as the transition process itself—was highly variable between individuals. This model includes “both events and ‘non-events’ that result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27), and describes the four potential resources that students may use in order to effectively transition. These include the consideration of the assets and liabilities they bring to the transition in the following areas: self, strategies, situation, and support—known as the “4 Ss.” Unlike traditional-aged 4-year college students, the intricacy of community college students’ lives are more like that of typical, highly complex working adults—for whom Schlossberg’s theory was postulated.

Following on Schlossberg’s postulations, it is crucial that professional counselors and academic advisors avail themselves of all information necessary to effectively assess the causes leading students to probationary standing. They also need information on the likelihood and degree to which probationary students will engage in “inner work” to overcome probation (Hirsch, 2001). Thus, this evaluation should, at the very least, assess students’ academic motivation, receptivity to institutional assistance, support systems, and potential obstacles—personal and otherwise.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the multiple issues and problems encountered by probationary community college students, this study explored the link of how motivation, readiness, and mitigating factors affect probationary students’ success in college. Guiding this study were the following research questions directly related to first-semester probationary students attending a large community college:

1. Collegewide, do students of different ethnicities and gender differ in their levels of academic success (i.e., probationary status)?
2. Do probationary students from different backgrounds differ in reported levels of academic motivation, general coping, and/or receptivity to support services as measured by the College Student Inventory (CSI)? If so, to what degree? What consequences (positive and negative) do they face?

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of first-time college students experiencing academic difficulties: namely, those on academic probation (i.e., earning less than a 2.00 semester grade point average on a 4.0 scale); and those on progress probation (i.e., completing less than 50% of attempted coursework). The students had completed their first semester of attendance at a large, urban, public, and ethnically diverse community college in southern California. Concerned with the growing number of probationary students attending this college and by the disproportionate number of Latino students on probation, Simon, Tovar, and Edson (2003) conceptualized and pilot tested an innovative probationary student “reorientation” to which 1,113 students were invited to participate. Of these students, 325 (29%) voluntarily attended and completed the reorientation. A total of 97% (315) provided informed consent to participate in the study. Females were 53% of participants and 47% were males. Additionally, 39% were Latino, 18% Caucasian, 14% African American, 13% Asian/Asian American, and 16% reported being from other ethnic groups. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 48 years ($M = 19.43$, $SD = 3.57$), and 93% were 22 and under. At the time of their orientation, 6% of participants reported an interest in obtaining at least an associate degree, 37% a baccalaureate degree, 38% a master’s degree, and 19% a doctorate. Typical of community college students, those in this study were enrolled primarily on a
part-time basis ($M = 10.04$ units, $SD = 3.33$); worked a significant number of hours per week ($M = 20.69$, $SD = 14.68$); and studied fewer hours than recommended given their course load ($M = 8.57$, $SD = 6.53$). These students also commuted to the college, often by public transportation (30%), resulting in an average travel time of 42 minutes each way ($SD = 29.41$; 11% taking 90 or more minutes). Finally, the students generally attributed their academic difficulties to external sources (e.g., family or work responsibilities, poor instruction).

**Instrumentation**

**College Student Inventory**

The CSI is a multidimensional, standardized, and nationally normed instrument that measures students’ motivation for staying in college, general coping, and receptivity to support services (Stratil, 1988). Its intended use is as an early warning system to identify students likely to experience academic difficulties and/or drop out from college. Version B of the CSI, consisting of 100 items loading on 23 subscales clustering on four dimensions, was used in this study as the primary means for assessing: (a) academic motivation (subscales: study habits, intellectual interests, verbal confidence, math and science confidence, desire to finish college, attitudes toward educators); (b) general coping (subscales: family emotional support, sense of financial security, opinion tolerance, career closure, sociability); (c) receptivity to support services (subscales: academic assistance, personal counseling, social enhancement, career counseling, financial guidance); and (d) composite, predictive outcomes (dropout proneness, predicted academic difficulty, degree of educational stress, and receptivity to institutional help). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (not at all true) and 7 (completely true). Internal consistency ranges from a low of .62 for the financial guidance subscale to .86 for the intellectual interests subscale, and .80 for the total CSI (Stratil, 1988).

**Demographic Questionnaire**

The 11-item questionnaire written by the authors was designed to assess several variables including high school background, parental education, current and planned work and study hours, means of transportation to and from college, perception of probationary status, and self-reported plans to overcome academic difficulties.

**Procedure**

Participants attended a 2-hour probationary student reorientation designed to meet the needs of probationary students. It did this by engaging them
in a small-group counseling discussion on the factors leading to their poor academic performance; readiness, motivation, and commitment for college; understanding of institutional expectations; balancing of personal, academic, and social commitments; connecting with other students and faculty; and identifying means to overcome their probationary status. To fully gain an understanding of students’ academic difficulties, we employed the two instruments described above (a necessary condition for inclusion of students into this study); monitored their level of participation in intrusive/developmental advisement (Earl, 1988; Gordon & Habley, 2000) delivered by professional counselors in our program; and tracked the developmental issues faced by these students, which were used in formulating individual interventions.

During individual meetings with the students subsequent to the reorientation, counselors conducted a holistic assessment of personal, academic, career, and financial difficulties described by the student. Interventions deemed necessary by the counselor were mediated by students’ readiness and/or motivation to work toward change. More specifically, these interventions were based on guidelines offered by Helping College Students Succeed (Hirsch, 2001). Ultimately, all intervention strategies were centered on the students’ ability or amenability to engage in inner work and action-work leading to positive change.

**RESULTS**

**Initial Analyses**

Descriptive statistics were initially derived for the CSI and the demographic questionnaire. They were also assessed for the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homogeneity of variance covariance. Four multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) were conducted to address the research questions with gender (two levels: male, female) and ethnicity (five levels: African American/Black, Asian, Caucasian, Latino/Hispanic, other) serving as independent variables and the CSI scales as dependent variables. Significant MANCOVAs were followed by analyses of covariance (ANCOVA). High school grade point average was used as a covariate.

From the onset, analyses revealed that Latino students comprised the largest proportion of probationary cases collegewide (37%), and of those participating in the probationary student reorientation (39%). These percentages were significantly higher than their proportion collegewide (27%). No other ethnic group proportionately surpassed Latinos in terms of probationary rates.
Effects of Gender and Ethnicity on Readiness/Commitment to College, Academic Motivation, General Coping, and Receptivity to Institutional Assistance

Analyses indicated no significant gender by ethnicity multivariate interactions were present in the four MANCOVAs conducted ($p > .05$). However, main effects for ethnicity were found on all four MANCOVAs, with a significant covariate of high school grade point average at 2.77. Ethnic differences were present in probationary students’ readiness/commitment to college ($\text{Wilks L} = .753$, $F(16, 849.94) = 5.16$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$); academic motivation ($\text{Wilks L} = .795$, $F(24, 964.06) = 2.73$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$); general coping ($\text{Wilks L} = .892$, $F(20, 919.66) = 1.62$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$); and receptivity to support services ($\text{Wilks L} = .766$, $F(20, 919.66) = 3.86$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$). Additionally, a main effect for gender was found for academic motivation ($\text{Wilks L} = .857$, $F(6, 276) = 7.70$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$). Significant main effects were followed by ANCOVAs to determine the specific dependent variables in which probationary students differed. Posthoc pairwise comparisons for ethnic groups and gender were also conducted. Table 1 presents marginal means for these analyses.

Readiness/Commitment to College
In reference to the readiness/commitment to college scales, ethnic differences were found in dropout proneness ($F(4, 281) = 4.38$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$); predicted academic difficulty, ($F(4, 281) = 9.73$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$; and receptivity to institutional help, $F(4, 281) = 6.01$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. Specifically, Latinos were more likely to indicate a higher likelihood to drop out ($M = 6.04$, $SD = 0.13$) compared to African American students ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 0.22$) to a statistically significant degree, $p = .004$. Latinos ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 0.13$) and African Americans ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 0.22$) were also more likely to differ in anticipating more academic difficulties in the future, $p = .007$. Compared to Caucasian students ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.29$), Asians ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 0.35$) were more likely to express a willingness to accept institutional assistance to address difficulties encountered while attending college ($p = .03$).

Academic Motivation
While no gender by ethnicity interactions were found, main effects on various CSI scales were present. Specifically, ethnic differences were found in attitude toward educators, ($F(4, 281) = 3.83$, $p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, and verbal confidence, ($F(4, 281) = 4.33$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Latinos ($M = 41.62$, $SD = 2.56$), compared to African American students ($M = 25.59$, $SD = 4.21$) indicated having a statistically significant ($p = .01$) higher, favorable attitude toward educators. Gender differences
were also found in degree of intellectual interests, math and science confidence, and verbal confidence. Caucasian students \((M = 75.06, SD = 3.83)\) indicated having a higher degree \((p = .001)\) of verbal confidence compared to African American \((M = 56.87, SD = 4.38)\) and Latino \((M = 56.28, SD = 2.66)\) students. Additionally, statistically significant differences were found for intellectual interests, \(F(1, 281) = 21.89, p = .000\), partial \(\eta^2 = .07\); math and science confidence, \(F(1, 281) = 9.19, p = .003\), partial \(\eta^2 = .03\); and verbal confidence, \(F(1, 281) = 6.55, p = .01\), partial \(\eta^2 = .02\). Females were more likely to express a higher degree of both intellectual interests \((M = 63.53, SD = 2.32, p = .000)\) and verbal confidence \((M = 66.84, SD = 2.48, p = .01)\) than males \((M = 47.54, SD = 2.50; M = 57.75, SD = 2.60, respectively)\). Males on the other hand, indicated a higher level of math and science confidence \((M = 59.32, SD = 2.58)\) than females \((M = 48.62, SD = 2.39\), \(p = .01\).

**General Coping**

A main effect for ethnicity was found in the opinion tolerance scale, part of general coping, \(F(4, 281) = 2.40, p = .05\), partial \(\eta^2 = .03\). However, when marginal means were estimated, paired comparisons did not reveal specific, statistically significant differences by ethnic group.

**Receptivity to Institutional Assistance**

A main effect for ethnicity was found along four CSI subscales measuring receptivity to institutional assistance in various forms. In reference to financial guidance, \(F(4, 281) = 3.52, p = .008\), partial \(\eta^2 = .05\), compared to Caucasian students \((M = 41.26, SD = 3.98)\), African American and Latino students were more willing to receive this type of assistance \((M = 58.91, SD = 4.56, p = .04\); and \(M = 57.64, SD = 2.77, p = .009\); respectively).

Ethnic differences were also found in receptivity to personal counseling, \(F(4, 281) = 4.03, p = .003\), partial \(\eta^2 = .05\). Asian students, in particular, were more willing to meet with a professional counselor to discuss issues of a personal nature \((M = 73.43, SD = 4.10)\), compared to Caucasian students \((M = 57.37, SD = 3.44, p = .03)\), and those of other ethnicities \((M = 53.25, SD = 3.65, p = .003)\).

In terms of obtaining information on opportunities for social enrichment while attending college, statistically significant differences were found by ethnicity, \(F(4, 281) = 8.56, p = .000\), partial \(\eta^2 = .11\). Asian students \((M = 50.08, SD = 4.42, p = .03)\), compared to Caucasian students \((M = 33.64, SD = 3.70)\) were more likely to express needing such assistance. The same was true for Latinos \((M = 55.56, SD = 2.58)\) compared to Caucasian students, \(p = .000\) and to those of other ethnicities \((M = 34.44, SD = 3.93, p = .000)\).
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<td>(SSD: 2 &amp; 4*; 3 &amp; 4**; 3 &amp; 5***)</td>
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<td>Academic motivation scales†</td>
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General coping scales:
- Career closure: 45.86 (4.56), 38.24 (4.75), 41.69 (2.77), 37.81 (3.99), 42.06 (4.23)
- Family emotional support: 47.47 (4.62), 33.43 (4.81), 46.52 (2.81), 48.64 (4.03), 44.60 (4.28)
- Opinion tolerance: 50.23 (4.55), 40.33 (4.74), 54.39 (2.77), 56.83 (3.97), 47.24 (4.22)
- Sense of financial security: 39.88 (4.71), 47.65 (4.91), 42.12 (2.86), 50.69 (4.12), 49.19 (4.37)
- Sociability: 60.95 (4.19), 50.01 (4.37), 59.06 (2.55), 51.70 (3.67), 50.85 (3.89)

Receptivity to support services:
- Financial guidance: 58.91 (4.56), 58.02 (4.75), 57.64 (2.77), 41.26 (3.98), 51.12 (4.22)
- Personal counseling: 61.00 (3.93), 73.43 (4.10), 64.14 (2.39), 57.37 (3.44), 53.25 (3.65)
- Social enrichment: 49.31 (4.24), 50.08 (4.42), 55.56 (2.58), 33.64 (3.70), 34.44 (3.93)
- Academic assistance: 61.06 (4.29), 53.24 (4.47), 59.18 (2.61), 37.08 (3.75), 45.54 (3.98)
- Career counseling: 47.91 (4.56), 58.95 (4.76), 58.75 (2.77), 50.24 (3.99), 47.76 (4.23)

SSD = Statistically significant differences based on Tukey honestly significant difference comparison (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) for the ethnicities indicated.
† Means measured as stanine.
‡ Means measured as percentile.
* *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
Finally, ethnic differences were also present with students’ receptivity to academic assistance, $F(4, 281) = 7.49, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. More specifically, African American and Caucasian students differed from one another to a statistically significant degree, $p = .000$ ($M = 61.06, SD = 4.29, M = 37.08, SD = 3.75$; respectively). Furthermore, Latinos ($M = 59.18, SD = 2.61$) differed from both Caucasian students ($M = 37.08, SD = 3.75, p = .000$) and from “other” ethnic group students ($M = 45.54, SD = 3.98, p = .05$).

**DISCUSSION**

This study sought to assess the impact that students’ readiness/commitment to college, academic motivation, general coping, and receptivity to institutional assistance had on probationary students. Findings indicated that Latino students comprised the largest proportion of probationary cases—39% though they constituted 26% of the college’s population. Latinos also expected they would continue to experience academic difficulties and perhaps drop out. Latinos also possessed a much more favorable impression toward educators compared to African American students, who had the least favorable. Both were just as likely to express concerns over their financial security while attending college, and wanted to affect this by receiving financial guidance. Both also wished to secure academic assistance (e.g., tutoring) to help them overcome their probationary status.

Compared to students of other ethnicities, Asian students were more willing to receive institutional assistance to aid them in a smoother transition into the college. Specifically, they wanted to meet with a college counselor to discuss issues of a personal nature, and to help them connect with the social communities of the college—this was also true of Latino students. Somewhat consistent with traditional gender roles, women in this study indicated having a higher degree of verbal confidence and intellectual interests. Men, on the other hand, expressed a higher confidence where math and science courses were involved.

Based on our findings we conclude that probationary Latino students (and African Americans to a lesser extent) are more likely to experience academic and social difficulties when entering community colleges compared to Caucasian and Asian students. While they anticipate precipitating events leading to continued poor academic performance and eventual drop out from college, Latinos also possess a much more favorable impression and attitude toward educators—a characteristic reported in the literature as a significant, positive factor in successful adaptation to college. This characteristic also relates to Latinos’ likely greater acceptance of a more
intrusive advisement process. Such an advisement process has previously been demonstrated to be more effective with probationary students in a nondiverse sample (Abelman & Molina, 2001; Earl, 1988).

As our findings indicate, probationary community college students in this study expressed a desire for institutional assistance to help them return to good academic standing. This assistance was to come primarily from professional counselors. Based on these findings, we affirm the need for community colleges to continue to provide a supportive environment for at-risk students. Academic and student support services must account for students’ academic preparation, background (e.g., race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, first-generation status), employment and commuting issues, personal problems, and motivation levels in designing support services and academic programs.

While it is possible that some probationary students will succeed without support services, many others will simply give up, perform poorly, or disappear altogether from our colleges without effective intervention. Professional counselors who are trained to utilize student development and counseling theories in their interventions may readily and effectively apply Schlossberg’s theory with probationary students. Students who have recently attained probationary status are in need of this particular expertise even more than the information of how to return to good academic standing. The core issue is more than a lack of knowledge that they need to change in order to succeed. What they need is support, more and clearer goal directedness based on greater self-understanding, and the motivation to change.

The use of Schlossberg’s transition theory is a particularly applicable form of intrusive/developmental advisement with probationary students. Addressing students’ transitional needs—whether in a group or individual-session format—positively impacts students more than solely providing information of how to return to good status.

Students who enter probationary status do so (typically) as an “unexpected” event (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Falling on probation may be viewed as a temporary crisis or as a dangerous opportunity, as in the Chinese symbol, Wei-ji. In the case of probationary students, the opportunity is one that requires a new focus on self-control to return to successful academic standing. It is dangerous in that not acting upon it will lead to more serious consequences (i.e., dismissal from college). Students recognizing the opportunity presented in this crisis are likely to emerge from it with positive outcomes or advantages (Stevens & Ellerbrock, 1995).

Providing an intervention which addresses not just information about what probation is and how to overcome that status, but also addresses the academic and psychosocial components (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995) which led to it, would address probationary community college
students’ more complex needs. According to Schlossberg, the transition process consists of three stages: moving in (becoming aware of the transition event); moving through (experiencing the effect of the transition); and moving on (entering post-transition stage). Students on probation—especially if for the first time—may be in any one of these three stages. Those who are in the “moving in” and “moving through” stages of the transition may be most effectively impacted in order to successfully resolve their transition and return them to successful academic standing. Student participation in a workshop and subsequent counseling sessions that address the transition components described above would seem most effective to their long-term success in college. This would facilitate the exploration of the core issues—academic and psychological—that might impede long-term success in college.

Each of the 4 Ss (i.e., self, strategies, situation, and support) may be examined by the probationary student. In terms of the situation, students must ask themselves such questions as what has caused or triggered the lack of success in courses? In what ways has their behavior (or lack thereof!) impacted this probationary status? Such a self-examination could be considered from psychosocial, demographic, and personal characteristics, or resources available to the students. What types of support do students have in their lives? How might they further develop support? What strategies could be employed to resolve the probationary status? Once the students identify these issues, they must then figure out how to implement various strategies that will work for them. Essentially, application of this model requires an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966) orientation toward their personal life situations. Actively taking charge of one’s life situation may be foreign to first-year (particularly first-semester) college students who have never needed to do so before. The workshop will introduce the need for self-determination, and the follow-up counseling sessions will reinforce the concept.

For those students who do not wish to embrace opportunity by attending the probationary workshop and implementing the strategies needed for returning to successful academic standing, probationary status may be overwhelming. The outcome will be greater loss and higher likelihood of transitioning completely out of college. At greatest risk are bicultural students who commute back and forth to school up to 2 hours daily (Simon, Tovar, & Edson, 2003), and continually must balance between academic and home cultures that may not place value on higher education. For such students, there is an even greater need for support from community college professionals during this transition so that they have maximal access to a successful and personally meaningful educational experience.

This study has demonstrated that probationary students welcome such intrusive interventions as the reorientation discussed herein. Probationary
students believe such interventions will impact their level of motivation, personal and self-understanding, and commitment to college. This should lead to transitioning into successful academic standing. Hirsch’s (2001) multiple intervention model for helping students in academic difficulty directly addresses counseling strategies for identifying motivational “flashpoints” to act on students’ behalf. He states that students are less likely to succeed in college unless they are sufficiently motivated to do so. Academic uncertainty may be a true transition point for students on probation, especially those who have recently become aware of their probationary status. This moment of crisis may present a flashpoint at which students may choose to actively move toward taking personal responsibility for their own academic outcomes. Support for implementing new learning strategies at such a turning point may make the difference between future success or failure. Thus, the need for a proper support system speaks directly to a critical need for highly trained college counselors cognizant of these complex issues. Careful professional counseling necessitates significant skill in both counseling and an understanding of appropriate multicultural, learning, and adult-development models. It is not enough to care, or teach a student how to manage their time, or learn how to study. The ability to assess and meet the multiple and complex needs for these high-risk students is critical for their academic and personal success.

**LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

Though student affairs professionals do not necessarily commonly directly use Schlossberg’s and Hirsch’s models, counselors and academic advisors in particular would benefit from the application of these models in their work with probationary students. Facilitating students’ return to good academic standing by effectively intervening will potentially impact their long-term careers and increase their lifetime earning power through successful educational experiences. While Latino students anticipate factors leading to eventual academic difficulty or dropping out from college, this study demonstrated they also possess a higher favorable attitude toward educators and amenability to institutional assistance. Thus, instructional and counseling faculty should avail themselves of this opportunity for early intervention. This should be done by designing strategies in which both student affairs and academic affairs may participate (in-and-out of the classroom) to facilitate students’ success. These strategies may include sharing of information helpful to faculty and counselors alike via such methods as early warning systems, cocurricular activities, ongoing professional development activities, intrusive advising, and mentoring, among others.
While this study expands the literature on probationary students, it should be noted that it might not be representative of all community colleges. Also it does not distinguish between probationary and nonprobationary students’ background and behavioral/attitudinal characteristics that may lead to success. Future research on probationary students should systematically assess the direct link of interventions and its impact on key success indicators (i.e., GPA, retention, persistence). Additionally, further research with the College Student Inventory, as used in this study, should be conducted across broader populations.

REFERENCES


