

PIE Proposal for NITOP 2018

Investigating Student Preparedness and Academic Success in General Psychology

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Success in General Psychology seems related to students' ability to comprehend and produce written information. Unfortunately, not all students are prepared for the level of work required. In courses using an average textbook, students must read approximately 30-50 pages per week of highly technical material. Instructors may also assign other books, articles, or materials with each chapter. Thus, the ability to read, understand, and think critically about complex material would seem to be key to success in such a course.

Our research has shown that there is a positive but weak relationship between the ACCUPLACER reading and writing tests and individual's grades in General Psychology in a large sample of community college students.

In addition, even though colleges may provide remedial courses, they are problematic for three major reasons. First, we found that the effects of remedial courses were not what most of us would hope for. Students who failed the ACCUPLACER tests but who received remedial education prior to taking General Psychology may have been somewhat likely to do well in the course, but those who received remedial education concurrently with General Psychology were more likely to do well.

Second, students who are borrowing money to attend college may end up spending their loan money on a number of remedial courses with credits that will not transfer, leaving them with too little to pay for the courses they may need to graduate.

Third, students' motivation may be a mediating variable in the lack of continuity between remedial reading and the failure to see significant improvement in subsequent General Psychology. It is possible that the majority of students who require remedial classes are less than enthusiastic (at best) and downright resentful (at worst) about taking them. They may not feel that they need such courses, may not see their applicability, or may not give their best effort.

With these problems in mind, it may be more productive to incorporate remediation into the credit-bearing General Psychology course, rather than presenting remediation as a set of stand-alone, non-credit courses. We suspect that this may work because students should see greater relevance to the skills they're building, and may be more motivated to work on those skills.

Join us to discuss these issues, and to find out about how to participate in series of large-scale investigations of the impact of students' literacy levels on their academic achievement in general psychology across different types of institutions, and on whether incorporating remediation into the courses will, in fact, be more effective.

Trigger Questions:

1. How prevalent are reading deficits among our students at different types of institutions?
2. What effects do these deficits have on their performance in introductory psychology?
3. How can we work with admissions and advising staffs to help ensure students' success?
4. Will designing remediation directly into our introductory psychology courses provide better overall results for our students?