Title: The Impact of Self Confidence on Retention and Achievement

Does on entry confidence (measured via ILP scores) predict student retention and academic performance?

Background

During their first week at the University of Portsmouth (UK), all students complete a self-assessment questionnaire focusing on a number of key skill areas. The questionnaire, the Individual Learning Profile (ILP), is processed by optical mark reader and then forwarded to teaching colleagues to initiate discussions about areas that may require development or enhancement. Tutors and students discuss the options available and appropriate courses of action.

The questions are divided into six sections: Speaking and Listening; Reading and Researching; Writing; Time Management; Numeracy; Information Technology. There are also a number of questions relating to disabilities, spoken English, students’ perceived strengths and weaknesses, and any concerns that they may have that will affect their studies.

The ILP is part of a range of personal development activities that have been introduced institution-wide at the University and has been operating for four years.

In 2004, over 3,000 first year students completed the ILP questionnaire; this represents approximately 66% of first year student registrations. Subsequently, we reviewed data for 1,170 of these undergraduates, analysing their progress over their first year.

Research design

Areas of interest:

- Retention: if and when students interrupted or withdrew from their studies. Measurements: withdraw or suspended; timing – semester 1, semester 2; or still active.
- Academic performance: the mean mark (as a percentage) that they obtained during their first year of study; or if they withdrew/interrupted their studies, while still studying.

Variables used:

- Entry age.
- Level of concern: whether or not they had any on entry concerns about their ability to cope with year 1.
- Disability status: whether or not they considered themselves to have a disability.
- Confidence scores from the six factors of the ILP: Speaking and Listening; Lower Level Academic Skills; Higher Level Academic Skills; Time Management; Numeracy; Information Technology.
- Overall Confidence scores: a total score for all above factor.
- Responses to each of the questions of the ILP were also examined separately.
Implications

It is suggested that:

- Institutions consider implementing interventions to enhance students’ confidence in their academic skills; this may involve the development of dedicated university academic support units or targeted departmental provision.
- Individual course teams examine the demographics of their students and if necessary, consider curriculum re-design.
- Tutors monitor levels of performance and activate supporting mechanisms at the earliest possible stage.
- Institutions consider introducing academic pre-entry activities to help boost student confidence.