

Transitioning to College: What Can We do?

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The 116% rise in students earning General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalence diploma which accounted for 19% of high school credentials in 2001 (Smith, 2003), has increased the total number of students who are looking to continue their education once they have obtained their GED. Lance (1998) found that of all GED graduates over 65% of the students work towards an Associate's degree or higher. As such this raise a need for Higher Education settings to look find ways to assist these students transitions to continued education. GED Students who continue their education have increased job satisfaction, socioeconomic status, self0confidence (lance, 1998), employment, and increased income after even just 1 year of postsecondary education (Prince, 1998).

### **Literature Review:**

The purpose of this Literature review is to determine interventions and methods to assist in the transition process. The strategies used with this population will differ from that of the "traditional" college student for several reasons. One of these reasons is that on average GED recipients wait 3.6 years later than the traditional college student (Maralani, 2003). Although the percentage of students who have earned their GED has been increasing these students still make up a minority of their classmates. As such, these students needs are often over looked in many aspects of post-secondary education such as retention, advising, support groups, as well as many others. The studies selected were designed to define, analyses, and summaries interventions, methods, and strategies that have assisted GED students transitions to post-secondary education. This literature review will demonstrate the importance of community, support groups and organizations, financial assistance, life, and study skills, and intrinsic factors as founded based upon the research studies.

*Importance of Community for GED Students' Successful Transition to Post-Secondary Education*

Students who enroll in post-secondary education often feel a need for community. These students often come from a background different from a high percentage of those students in the same classroom as them. These students desire a sense of community while they continue their education so that they can feel that they are not alone, and so they have people they can talk to who have a similar background and will understand where they are coming from. A sense of community significantly increased the likelihood for retention in post-secondary education (Terenzini, 1994).

Four GED Students from Kent State University known as GED Scholars stated that they struggled to find a population where they fit in, mostly due to age, they found the freshmen, whom they were in class with, appeared to be very young (Dowdy, 2004). These four GED Scholars suggested the creation of support groups, peer mentoring and study groups, and advising specifically for GED graduates (Dowdy, 2004). Terenzini (1994) found that when students helped one another through the college experience helped students when they were faced with difficulties in their college experience and allowed the students to be more successful in their goal for furthering their education. The students stated that it was difficult for them to fit in and find a place where they could feel comfortable and even suggested the creation of a student organization. The idea behind this organization would be to allow students with GED to come together for various activities and to allow for social interactions amongst other people at the University who they can feel connected to (Dowdy, 2004).

Another intervention that has been verified to have a positive outcome on GED students' retention in postsecondary is the use of student orientation programs (Terenzini, 1994). Students

can use this program to guide them through what they should expect and what they should do while working toward their postsecondary goals. When the orientation programs combine faculty contact with the program they have been found to be especially helpful in retaining students (Terenzini, 1994). This inclusion of faculty helps validate the importance of what is being covered as well as prepare students for what faculty will expect from them, and get the students used to some of the faculty they will be working with so that they will be more comfortable.

Validation has also been found to play a critical role in the success of students with their GED working to further their education. This validation can come from many sources, family, friends, co-workers, faculty, or any number of sources. Authentication of what the GED student is doing and has accomplished is critical for persistence to continue working towards their goals, as well as diminishing self-doubt (Terenzini, 1994). People like to have the work they have done and what they are doing validated so that they know they are heading in the right direction without this justification of their work it is very difficult to succeed.

Validation is empowering, confirming, and supportive. It is a series of in- and out-of-class experiences with family, peers, faculty members, and staff through which students come to feel accepted in their new community, receive confirming signals that they can be successful in college and are worthy of a place there, having their previous work and life experiences recognized as legitimate forms of knowledge and learning, have their contributions in class recognized as valuable and so on. (Terenzini, 1994 p. 70)

As such, it is important that these students have somewhere they can go where this validation can take place in case they are not receiving this validation elsewhere. Students state that they don't

want to be “Just a Number” that they feel someone needs to care about them and provide them with constructive and reassuring critiques (Terenzini, 1994). Students who feel cared about, and are provided constructive criticism typically do better because they feel that someone other than themselves care about their goal and it helps motivate them to succeed.

### *Financial Effects on Postsecondary Progress*

Students often find that they are concerned about how they will pay both for school as well as housing, food and other cost during the time they are going to school. Many students have reported that they have concerns about their financial aid assistance that will cover them during their time at school (Dowdy, 2004). Financial Aid drastically increases a student’s likelihood for success in the postsecondary program (Prince, 1998). One possible cause is that when students have Financial Aid they are able to concentrate on their school work because they are not having to be concerned with the financial ability to afford daily living while in school. The problem with this situation is that although there is a need for this financial aid, it is rarely received by many Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students (Prince, 1998). The lack of financial assistance often leads to students struggling to complete either because they are forced to work, or work more, which effects their academics or they are not able to pay the tuition forcing them to no longer be able to continue their education. Prince (1998) found that only eighteen percent of ABE students and twenty eight percent of ESL students receive financial aid while working on postsecondary education.

### *Academics and Life Skills*

GED students who are working toward a postsecondary education who have some additional training on study skills and like sills are more likely to excel in continuing their

education. Students have stated that they found tutoring to be extremely helpful in their success in postsecondary (Dowdy, 2004). The need for tutoring could be due to many of the students having been out of the academic classroom for several years and they no longer remember how to do certain aspects of their education and need tutoring in order to help them with content they have forgotten. Prince (1998) stated the importance of developmental education classes for students associated with their success. Currently only thirty three percent of ABE and twenty eight percent of ESL students enroll in developmental education coursework (Prince, 1998). This means that the majority of GED students are not receiving the developmental coursework that has been demonstrated to positively effect the success of the students in the courses.

Student life skills are also key to their success in postsecondary education. Students who have taken student life skills courses are more likely to complete one of the following; earning a community college credential, transferring to the State University System, remaining enrolled in college after five years (Zeidenberg, 2007). The benefits for taking these courses is clear when considering that most of them will remain in some form of postsecondary education as such it is important to make sure that courses are available and that students recognize that they are available. In Florida some students are required to take life skills course work as an elective course (Zeidenberg, 2007). One area that has been found to be especially helpful to GED students, and is desired by many of the students (Dowdy, 2004). Many of the students are unsure how to fit in school, their family, work and other commitments into their life and wished that they had had they assistance of a time management program.

In order to further assist GED students transitions to postsecondary there will need to be institutional changes made. Faculty and advisors need to understand the differences between GED students from traditional students so that they can further assist students in their

postsecondary goals (Terenzini, 1994). Faculty and advisors are often unaware of the different perspective that GED students have when working on postsecondary, if faculty were aware of these differences as well as resources available to these students they could further help these students achieve their goals. There are many resources and policies, that can be taken advantage of such as the Bridges to Opportunity, American Dream: Community colleges count Initiative and pathway to Achievement (Prince, 1998). Another resource that is available at Kent State University is the GED Scholars Initiative (Dowdy, 2004). This initiative provides students with many of the resources discussed in this literature review such as peer mentoring, tutoring, life skills, study skills, and trainings for the students involved.

### *Intrinsic Factors*

Although there are many interventions, as discussed previously in the article, some factors are from within the GED Scholar themselves. When students had a plan for how long they would be working on their postsecondary education they were much more likely to succeed in the endeavors (Prince, 1998). Students need to plan on how long they will be working toward their goals in order to have a realistic timeline of the time it will take them to reach their goals. By having this time frame they will be more confident in their progress and as such been more likely to succeed in their education. When working with GED students it is important to have them figure out their plan for their education. In 1998 Prince found that only thirty four percent of ABE and twenty six percent of ESL plan for less than a year, and that about half of both ABE and ESL students have no plans when they begin postsecondary education. It is important that a change it made so that students can plan for their education from the beginning so that they will be more likely to succeed.

## **Discussion**

In this review it was determined that there are many resources, interventions, and changes that could be made to allow for GED students to successfully reach their goal of a postsecondary education. Postsecondary education locations need to use this information to develop methods of assisting GED students at their location through these changes as well as by finding and providing resources to students. The development of courses or trainings that students can take or made to be part of the standard curriculum can be helpful to not only GED students but also many of these interventions would also help the traditional students increase their chance for success as well. Often times if students had resources brought to their attention they would have an increased chance for success many students when asked stated that they were not aware of programs such as the GED Scholars Initiative at Kent State University and all the help they provide for GED students. If students were made aware of these resources they could increase the chance of their retention in postsecondary education and help more students reach their goals.

## **Further Research**

Further research needs to be conducted on the impact that these changes make on the success of GED students in postsecondary education. Due to many of these research study's depending upon what students suggested would have assisted them in completion of their educational goals, the use of further studies to determine the effect of including these interventions in the postsecondary education settings.

Since the research studies were released the GED Scholars Initiative has begun including many of these tactics in their program. They currently offer tutoring, peer mentoring, a bridges program (this program includes study skills, life skills, advising, and postsecondary planning) ,



and individual and group help sessions as needed. The GED Scholars initiative is currently in the process of collecting data to determine the effect of including these changes in programming.

Their bridges program has been being evaluated for the past few years and many students have determined that this program is key to their success as it provides valuable resources for their success at Kent State University. They have noted that many of the portions of the program that were discussed in this literature review were useful in their start at the university setting. The program has recently added in faculty contact and the chance to sit in on a class during the program prior to their start at the university so that they have an idea of what courses will be like when they start.

Also since the studies were constructed the start of student organizations have begun to appear known as GED United Scholars. These organizations allow students to gain the sense of community that many of the students who were interviewed in the study wished they had had when they were working toward their educational goals. This organization meets for activities, as well as running family activities such as bunny breakfast, and Christmas parties where GED students can bring their families for a day of fun for them and their families that many student have stated has helped them feel connected to other students who are working toward similar degrees as their own.

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