

Motivating Academic Probation Students at the American University of Sharjah

Simeon D. Fields
American University of Sharjah
University City, Sharjah UAE

ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges of the universities is the number of low performing students who need to improve in the classroom and return to good standing before they are compulsorily dismissed. In the fall of 2006, for example, the American University of Sharjah saw the need to address the issue of student-retention, and one of the ways of meeting students' needs was the creation of the Academic Achievement Center, now known as the Academic support center (ASC), whose main focus is to work with students who are frequently distressed by the university's probation status system. When a student's cumulative grade point average falls below 2.0, he or she is on Academic probation at the university and must attend mandatory meetings with an Academic Support Advisor.

One issue that has been repeatedly noted regarding students on probation is their loss of hope in their academic abilities. Motivating them back to belief in their potential capabilities is vital. One of the main ways of motivating probationary students is to form a bond with the students. By exercising what is known as relationship theory, an Academic Advisor is invested in a student as both a person and a potential graduate. Consequently, the student will want to work for his or her advisor to show commitment to the advising process. Another way to motivate the students is with success stories of past students on Academic probation, students who rose above their situation. Also, personal stories from the advisor can help a student to understand the academic challenges that almost every student faces. With the advisor's help, the students learn that they have numerous strengths they can use in their studies; the advisor targets the struggling student with encouragement, motivating the student to recognize his or her academic capabilities through the process of strength based advising.

An advisor can also use the physical space where students can observe motivational wall posters with quotes by individuals who have overcome hardship, pictures of inspiring events and anything else that a student may see and visualize the archiving of their potential. Social media such as You Tube and Facebook can also stimulate students into realizing their possibilities for success.

With more and more attention being placed on retention rates at universities, academic advising and the skills that are needed to do it will only become higher in demand.

Key words: advice/advise; probation; academic support; relationship theory; dismissal; motivation

Simeon D. Fields:

Upon receiving his BA degree in Sociology from Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington, Simeon Fields began specializing in social services and teaching. As a social worker, he has helped at risk teenagers to learn how to integrate successfully in their communities. As an Academic Support Advisor at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, he has helped probationary students raise their grade point averages and achieve academic success for the past eight years. Through his work in the areas of education and social work fields for almost 30 years, he has gained a wealth of experience in providing guidance for his students and clients from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. He has lived in three different countries—Korea, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, where he now resides, and has traveled to almost 50 other countries.