

Forgotten duties: universities should be anxious for students' learning styles

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate a need of a pedagogical and psychological support for Polish students to develop by them their style of studying, especially for first and second course students with aspect to academic cramming. Moreover, the paper was aimed to show the examples of organizational frames for such support successful practiced at American universities.

Material and methods: The questionnaire investigation on coping with stress and attitude to academic cramming was carried out among 200 Polish students. The results were validated with histograms and Cronbach's alpha and then compared with known from literature results of analogous research on 161 American students using 95% confidence intervals. The survey of American academic sites was made in aspect of a pedagogical and psychological support for students.

Results: It was stated that Polish students are quite similar to their American peers, so they both need similarly extensive support in the matter.

Conclusions: Polish universities should develop organizational forms for a pedagogical and psychological support for their students. It seems that American experience can be helpful there.

Key word: academic cramming, tutoring, learning assistance.

Introduction

American universities and colleges contain the structure charged with mission defined in such words as: supporting the

university commitment to ensure a balance between high academic achievement and holistic personal development. Then, they provide suggestions how about coping with stress, anxiety and attitude to procrastination. In this area they encourage students to require for individual consultations and diagnostic testing, especially in the dangerous situations: In case you feel that your coursework is overwhelming, in case if you have three exams in five days and you are now in justifiable panic – don't be afraid to ask for help! All they put great effort on academic cramming. There focus can be on negative effects related to academic defeats and/or to health's emergency. The Polish universities didn't manifested a noticeable activity in this area yet. The hypothetic cause could be that it is superfluous here. Alas, Authors of this paper carried out two-years investigation on cramming behaviour among Polish students [1,2]. Generally, it was proved that all three Polish groups under study from 1st, 2nd and 3rd course, are in this quite similar to their American peers described in [3], so they all need similarly extensive support in the matter.

Material and methods

The 200 Polish students were reviewed. The used cramming questionnaire [3] included seven items, each with four-level Likert scale: frequency of cramming for exams during the current semester (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always), general preference to not cram or to cram for exams (1 = definitely not cram, 2 = probably not cram, 3 = neutral, 4 = probably cram, 5 = definitely cram), how often one crammed by choice (preferring to wait to study even if one didn't have to) and by necessity (being forced to because of work, lack of time, or other external circumstances) (1 = never, 5 = always), how often one gave oneself enough time to study (1 = never, 5 = always), overall level of satisfaction with study habits (1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat satisfied, 5 = very satisfied), and frequency of engaging in last-minute or last-second cramming just before an exam is passed out in class (1 = never, 5 = always). The standard Cop-

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ing Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) consist of 48 items [4]. The responders showed good attitude to research. The non-response rate was about 5%. The histograms for CISS principal components were regular, Cronbach's alpha was about 0.80.

The survey of American universities was made by general Internet browsers with key words like Academic Success Center or Academic Resource Center, Learning Assistance Center, and then with key words: academic cramming, academic procrastination.

Results

For seven items of the cramming questionnaire there are not any significant differences between group of American students [3] and all three Polish groups under study. In aspect of frequency of cramming for exams the second and third course Polish students don't differ from the American ones, but the first course Polish students (95%CI: 2.7÷3.2) differ significantly from American ones (95%CI: 3.4÷3.7). Similarly, only first course Polish students declared (95%CI: 2.2÷2.6) that they rarely crammed by choice (preferring to wait to study even if one didn't have to) than American ones (95%CI: 2.8÷3.1). All Polish groups differ significantly (95%CI: 1.9÷2.4; 2.2÷2.8; 1.9÷2.7) from American group (95%CI: 3.4÷3.75) in aspect of in last-minute or last-second cramming just before an exam is passed out in class. The opinions about goals of academic studying don't correlate with attitude to cramming and they were omitted there, besides they were discussed in our earlier papers [1,2].

The Web survey showed great activity of almost all American universities in fighting with academic cramming among their students. Usually, they provide 24/7 access to their online collection of the supplemental instruction named like Study Guides and Strategies web site; Guidelines for Taking Multiple Choice Exams; see for example: <http://www.studygs.net>; <http://www.questia.com/aboutQuestia/eventsj.html>; <http://www.american.edu/privacy.html>. (<http://www.eiu.edu/~lrnasst/finals.htm>; http://www.usu.edu/arc/idea_sheets.php?site_id=30&page=test_anxiety; http://www.ncwc.edu/Offices/Student_Support/academic_skills_enrichment.htm). For example <http://www.ignoututor.com/does-last-minute-cramming-help.html> argues: There are a few very good reasons why you should not cram for your exams. The biggest one is that it doesn't work. Here are some others: Your anxiety level will go up; You will lose sleep and eat poorly because of this; You will get sick more easily because of this. Similar warnings can be found in many other sites: <http://success.oregonstate.edu/study/testprep.cfm>; <http://www.arc.sbc.edu/testpreparation.html>; <http://www.american.edu/ocl/asc/studyskills/timemanagement.html>; <http://www.umass.edu/sas/html/skills.html>. The <http://www.stfrancis.edu/arc/study.htm> cited the thought by Huxley TH: "Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be taught". Some hosts, like <http://www.studygs.net>; and <http://www.dso.iastate.edu/dept/asc/handouts/cramming.doc> represent another philosophy: Although students been told to avoid cramming (studying the

night before), there are times when they left with no other choice – thus they need guidance on how to cram. The task-oriented advices for cramming include: preview material to be covered; write out own a course summary; be selective: skim chapters for main points; concentrate on the main points. The health-oriented advices include: Get at least 6hrs sleep. If you have an exercise program, stay with it, and don't forget to eat well!

Discussion

The most confusing result is that student's opinions about goals of academic studying don't correlate with attitude to cramming. It means that some ambitious and prudent students don't restrict cramming at all, just in contrary they perceived it as ordinary learning strategy, as way to get more time for their holistic development [5,6]. Then, some Authors avowal their disappointment that academic cramming persists in spite of all obstinate counteraction [7,8]. Nevertheless, there the general agreement should be noted that costs of academic cramming distinctly exceed the eventual benefits from this, and that the looking for effective ways to overcome it should be continued.

Conclusions

Polish universities should develop organizational forms for a pedagogical and psychological support for their students. The practicable American strategy in the matter includes 24/7 access to specialized sites in the Web, usual talks for all students groups and individual consultation given by specialized university's pedagogues and psychologists.

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