

Research: The Possible Selves Strategy

Overview

This study investigated the effects of participation in the Possible Selves Program on college students' performance in college courses. Sixty freshman student athletes were randomly selected into three groups. One group participated in the Possible Selves Program: one group participated in the university's career-counseling program; and one group was the control group. All the groups had access to unlimited tutorial assistance in their college courses. Students in all the groups also met bi-monthly individually with a counselor in the athletic program to discuss academic progress. The Possible Selves Program was taught by a member of the athletic department staff. The career counseling was provided by members of the staff of Counseling and Psychological Services at the university. There were no differences among the groups in ACT scores, ethnicity, gender, reading achievement scores, and personal goals at the beginning of the school year. Outcome measures included student reported goals, semester grades in college courses, and graduation rates.

Results

At the end of the first year of college, the students in the Possible Selves group identified significantly more goals associated with areas outside of athletics than students in the other two groups. Surprisingly, the students in the other two groups wrote fewer goals for themselves at the end of the school year than at the beginning, while students in the Possible Selves group wrote about the same number of goals or more goals. After 6 years had elapsed, the mean GPA for the Possible Selves group was 2.65, for the career-counseling group was 2.41, and for the control group was 2.25. With regard to graduation, 75% of the Possible Selves group had graduated after 6 years, while 60% and 45% of the career-counseling and control groups had graduated, respectively. The six-year graduation rate for the university at large was 54%. These graduation rate results were replicated in a follow-up study where freshmen were taught the Possible Selves Program by 5th-year student athletes.

Conclusions

Thus, the Possible Selves Program is associated with students earning higher grades in courses and with higher graduation rates than a traditional career counseling program. Students who participated in the Possible Selves Program had a graduation rate that was 21 percentage points higher than the university at large, which is a remarkable feat for student athletes, whose graduation rates typically lag behind the rates of university populations at large.

Reference

Hock, M.F. Deshler, D. D. & Schumaker, J. B. (2005). Enhancing student motivation through the pursuit of possible selves. In C. Dunkel & J. Kerpelman (Eds.) Possible selves: Theory, research, and application. Nova Science Publishers.