

Becoming a dentist: characteristics, experiences and performance of students in the early years of the Adelaide dental course



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Abstract

The aim of this longitudinal study was to explore factors influencing the performance of a group of Australian undergraduate dental students during the early years of their education (1998-2001). Factors related to becoming a dentist and a selection of non-academic experiences were examined via closed- and open-ended survey questions and focus group discussions. Relationships between selected pre-admission variables and outcome variables were examined using tests of association and logistic regression analyses. Students' perceptions of factors believed to contribute to success and difficulties were examined using open-ended survey questions and analysed using content analysis. Levels of success of dental students associated with changes in learning and teaching practices and admission practices were also investigated.

Most students had chosen dentistry as their first-career choice. Despite their demanding lifestyles, the majority of first-year students were successful. Second year was more demanding for some students however most progressed into third year. Academic failure was the main reason why some students were unsuccessful. No single factor or group of factors characterised a successful student. Good secondary school academic achievement, having previous tertiary educational experience and being a local student, predicted good academic performance in first year but not subsequent years. Performance on an admission interview had some predictive ability for subsequent academic success. In addition, academic achievement in some first-year dental subjects predicted subsequent academic success. Study behaviours, external motivating factors, having supportive peers and positive student-staff interactions were perceived to have contributed to success. Personal difficulties, a demanding workload, negative student-staff interactions and adjusting to first-year university studies, were perceived to have contributed to difficulties.

This thesis contributes to a growing body of knowledge about factors that influence academic success of university students, including those in health profession faculties. The results should be of particular interest to dental schools, both internationally and nationally, that have adopted multifaceted admission processes and/or have changed from conventional to more student-centred dental curricula.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Dimitra Lekkas and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Dimitra Lekkas

Dated this.....day of 2009

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'The road to success is always under construction' Arnold Palmer