

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Pursuing What They Want: How Students' Hopes for Their Learning Experience Affect Their Engagement Behaviours

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Abstract: The behavioural model underpinning national surveys of university students' engagement (e.g., NSSE, UKES) considers students' experiences but neglects their motivation. To remedy that, we surveyed second year undergraduates ($N=236$) about what they had wanted from their university experience (hopes) and their engagement behaviours and analysed the relationship between the two sets of variables. Students strongly endorsed five main hopes: *explore subject*, *apply learning*, *grow as a person*, *explore subject*, *apply learning*, *interact with peers* and *interact with staff*, suggesting that they value multiple hopes, but to varying degrees. As expected, hopes significantly predicted related engagement behaviours. Hopes to *grow as a person* and to *explore subject* significantly predicted behaviours related to growth and exploration. *Apply learning* significantly predicted *proactive career research* and *work experience*. *Interact with peers* was the strongest predictor of whether students reported *interacting with peers*. Likewise, *interact with staff* was the only significant predictor of *interactions with staff*.

Paper:

Introduction

Through surveys of engagement like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and its offspring, such as the UK Engagement Survey (UKES), we have a growing body of knowledge on students' experiences and outcomes (Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, & Paine, 2016; Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh, 2008; Kuh, 2009; Miller, Rocconi, & Dumford, 2018). However, the behavioural model of student engagement underpinning these surveys considers students' actions and self-assessed skills but not motivational constructs such as students' goals or hopes (Astin, 1984). Thus we know little about what students want from and value about their learning experiences in higher education, though their hopes and goals likely influence their behavioural engagement (Kahu, 2013), and opportunities to realise their goals also likely influence persistence (Kuh, 2016).

Quinlan and Salmen (2019) identified five main hopes students had for their learning experience through coding open-ended responses: *grow as person*, *explore subject*, *apply learning*, *interact with peers* and *interact with staff*. Their approach identified hopes, but did not account for students' holding multiple hopes and cannot be scaled up readily to further investigation of linkages with engagement behaviours or other processes or outcomes.

Research Aims and Questions

We aimed to develop a quantitative tool with Likert-scale type items for measuring Quinlan and Salmen's (2019) five hopes. We then asked: do students' hopes for their university learning experience predict their engagement behaviours? We expected that their hopes would be aligned with related engagement behaviours.

Method

Second year undergraduate psychology students completed an online survey ($N=236$; 189 female). On the survey, students rated 15 hope-related items on a five point scale (1=unimportant; 5 very important). On a Principal Components Analysis, the newly developed items grouped into Quinlan and Salmen's (2019) five dimensions and reliability of the new scales was good (Table 1). Students also rated six engagement behaviours on a five point scale (1= strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) (3 items each scale, Table 2). Students indicated their gender, ethnicity, age, whether they were first generation in family to study at university, and domicile (UK/EU or overseas students). We calculated descriptive statistics, correlation analyses and regression analyses.

Results and Discussion

Mean scores were high on all five hopes, suggesting that all of them are important to students and that students hold multiple hopes simultaneously. *Explore subject*, *apply learning* and *grow as a person* were notably higher than *interact with peers* and *interact with staff*. In terms of engagement, students were most likely to report an *opening of interests* and least likely to endorse *interactions with staff*. There were significant differences between male and female students on all of the hopes and most of the engagement variables (Table 3). There were no significant differences on race or first generation status. There were significant correlations amongst the hopes (Table 4) and amongst the engagement behaviours (Table 5).

Hierarchical regression analyses showed that hopes predicted related engagement behaviours, as expected (Table 6). Specifically, hopes to *grow as a person* and to *explore subject* significantly predicted *opening of interest*, an outcome that is consistent with growth and exploration. As expected, *apply learning* significantly predicted *proactive career research* and *work experience*. The hope to *interact with peers* was the strongest predictor of whether students reported *interacting with peers*, although *explore subject* and *apply learning* also predicted that behaviour. A hope to *interact with staff* was the only significant predictor of *interactions with staff*. *Interact with staff* also was the only significant predictor of *talked with professionals*, although we expected *apply learning* would also predict it insofar as it was about career applications. As *interactions with staff* and *talked with professionals* were highly correlated behaviours, it may be that second year students do not clearly differentiate teaching staff from professionals in the field beyond HE.

Conclusion

This study makes an important empirical contribution by demonstrating that students' hopes are related to what they engage in during HE. Methodologically, the new scales for measuring students' hopes contribute to supporting further research on the effects of hopes on students' engagement behaviours and other educational processes and outcomes. Conceptually, the study contributes to a

more holistic view of student engagement that considers students' hopes for HE, not just their behaviours. Furthermore, it suggests an intermediate theory of students' specific hopes for HE, rather than relying on broad psychological constructs drawn from universal theories of motivation, as other holistic engagement models do (e.g. Kahu, 2013). Further research is needed on students in a variety of fields and in different universities and countries.

References:

References

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Table 1. Items, pattern matrix of students' hopes for their learning experience and scale reliabilities (When you decided to come to this university, what learning experiences did you want? Please rate each statement: 1=unimportant; 5 very important)

	Component					Scale
	1 (H5)	2 (H4)	3 (H1)	4 (H3)	5 (H2)	
1. become more confident	.076	.086	.712	.021	-.013	H1. Grow as person (3 items; $\alpha=.711$)
2. become more independent	-.005	-.014	.904	.081	-.015	
3. mature and grow as a person	-.042	.012	.699	-.227	.091	
4. gain a deeper understanding of a subject that interests me	-.020	-.020	.088	.031	.942	H2. Explore Subject (3 items; $\alpha=.926$)
5. explore in depth a subject that I enjoy	.014	-.021	.006	-.008	.945	
6. pursue my interest in my subject	.035	.048	-.077	-.017	.900	
7. apply knowledge and skills to the real world	.027	.138	-.069	-.719	.166	H3. Apply learning (3 items; $\alpha=.801$)
8. learn the knowledge and skills needed for a career.	.069	-.177	.113	-.829	-.001	
9. gain knowledge/skills that are useful in the real world.	-.021	.107	-.010	-.884	-.060	
10. Learn from and with other students	.051	.796	-.002	-.082	.063	H4. Interact with peers (3 items; $\alpha=.862$)
11. Interact with other students	-.049	.913	.093	.029	-.040	
12. be part of a community of students	.073	.869	-.020	.013	.000	
13. have help and advice from teachers	.849	.064	.060	.036	-.021	H5. Interact with staff (3 items; $\alpha=.873$)
14. interact with teachers with expertise in their subject	.875	-.041	-.017	-.035	.082	
15. have a good relationship with teachers	.923	.006	-.022	-.015	-.038	
Eigenvalue	5.678	2.215	1.657	1.084	1.015	
% Variance explained	37.9	14.8	11.0	7.2	6.8	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations. H1=Grow as person; H2=Explore subject; H3=Apply learning; H4=Interact w/Peers; H5=Interact w/staff.

Table 2. Engagement behaviours scales, items and reliability (Please rate the extent to which you agree with each of these statements about your experiences during university; 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)

Scale	Items	Reliability
E1. Opening interests	My modules exposed me to new topics that interest me. My modules made me aware of career paths I didn't know existed. My modules opened up new interests.	$\alpha=.697$
E2. Proactive career research	I've done my own research into career options. I've taken the initiative to learn about different careers. I've taken time to read about possible careers.	$\alpha=.906$
E3. Work experience	Work or volunteer experience helped me hone my interests. Work or volunteer experience allowed me to get a taste of what this field is like. Work or volunteer experience helped me clarify my future plans.	$\alpha=.921$
E4. Talked with professionals	I've attended career fairs or career talks. I've talked with professionals in this field. I've met people who work in this field	$\alpha=.745$
E5. Interacted with peers	I've learned from and with other students. I've interacted with other students about my field. I've been part of a community of students who care about this field.	$\alpha=.813$
E6. Interacted with staff	I've communicated with teaching staff about my career interests. I've communicated with teaching staff about the content of my course outside of taught sessions. I've communicated with teaching staff about my academic performance.	$\alpha=.862$

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and T-test by gender for five hopes scales (H1-H5) and six engagement scales (E1-6)

	Range	Mean	SD	Mean F (SD)	Mean M (SD)	t	Cohen's d
H1. Grow as person	3.33	4.08	.73	4.12 (.71)	3.88 (.73)	2.04*	.34
H2. Explore subject	3.67	4.47	.69	4.54 (.64)	4.17 (.78)	3.32**	.56
H3. Apply learning	3.00	4.33	.67	4.37(.63)	4.13 (.79)	2.10*	.36
H4. Interact with peers	3.67	3.71	.92	3.77 (.88)	3.39 (1.04)	2.51*	.43
H5. Interact with staff	4.00	3.83	.88	3.93 (.83)	3.33 (.95)	4.18***	.71
E1. Opening interests	4.00	3.99	.71	4.02 (.72)	3.85 (.70)	1.47	.25
E2. Proactive career research	4.00	3.85	.98	3.92 (.94)	3.53 (1.12)	2.36*	.40
E3. Work experience	4.00	3.03	1.03	3.13 (1.01)	2.63 (.99)	2.97**	.50
E4. Talked with professionals	4.00	3.20	1.02	3.28 (.99)	2.79 (1.07)	2.88**	.49
E5. Interacted with peers	4.00	3.85	.87	3.91 (.83)	3.56 (1.02)	2.41*	.41
E6. Interacted with staff	4.00	2.76	1.09	2.80 (1.06)	2.64 (1.23)	.85	.14

N=236 for overall mean. N(F)=189; N(M)=43; N (Nonbinary)=4; SD=Standard Deviation; *p<.05 (2 tailed); **p < .01 (2-tailed); ***p<.001 (2 tailed)

Table 4. Pearson product moment correlation among demographic variables and hopes

	Gender	Race	Domicile	FirstGen	Grow as person	Explore subject	Apply learning	Interact with peers	Interact with staff
Gender (F=1;M=2)	1.000								
Race	.076	1.000							
Domicile	.087	.450***	1.000						
FirstGen	.019	.090	.117*	1.000					
H1. Grow as person	-.064	.113*	.050	-.072	1.000				
H2. Explore subject	-.164**	-.058	.070	-.090	.191***	1.000			
H3. Apply learning	-.068	.110	.138*	-.013	.358***	.478***	1.000		
H4. Interact with Peers	-.108	.062	.094	.093	.392***	.219***	.288***	1.000	
H5. Interact with Staff	-.184**	.024	.080	.032	.303***	.444***	.368***	.509***	1.000

Notes: Gender (1=Female;2=Male); Race (0=White; 1=Home/EU BAME); Domicile (1=Home/EU; 2=Overseas); FirstGeneration in family to attend university (1=yes; 2=no). N=234; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 5. Pearson product moment correlation among demographic variables and engagement behaviours

	Gender	Race	Domicile	FirstGen	Opening interests	Proactive career research	Work experience	Talked with Professionals	Interacted with Peers	Interacted with staff
Gender	1.000									
Race	.078	1.000								
Domicile	.088	.450***	1.000							
FirstGen	.022	.097	.119	1.000						
Opening interests	-.060	.049	.145*	.007	1.000					
Proactive career research	-.109	-.038	.055	-.007	.239**	1.000				
Work experience	-.205**	.088	.106	.016	.234**	.326**	1.000			
Talked with professionals	-.110	-.003	.170**	-.039	.217**	.495***	.384***	1.000		
Interacted with peers	-.082	-.109	.014	.077	.397***	.290***	.272***	.330***	1.000	
Interacted with staff	-.070	.076	.145*	.106	.235**	.367***	.326***	.399***	.379**	1.000

Notes: Gender (1=Female;2=Male); Race (0=White; 1=Home/EU BAME; Domicile (1=Home/EU; 2=Overseas); FirstGeneration in Family (1=yes; 2=no). N=234; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 6. Hierarchical regression analyses of hope (H1-H5) as predictors of engagement (E1-E6)

	DV: E1. Opening interests		DV: E2. Proactive career research		DV: E3. Work experience		DV: E4. Talked w/ professionals		DV: E5. Interacted w/ peers		DV: E6. Interacted w/staff	
	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	B
Model 1 (Constant)	.248		.341		.350		.350		.302		.378	
Gender	.107	-.073	.147	-.112	.151	-.218**	.151	-.122	.130	-.079	.163	-.085
Race	.108	-.013	.149	-.069	.152	.061	.152	-.094	.131	-.142	.165	.012
Fee Status	.170	.158	.234	.097	.239	.097	.240	.230**	.207	.075	.259	.137
First Generation	.094	-.007	.130	-.007	.133	.004	.133	-.056	.115	.086	.144	.090
Model 2 (Constant)	.463		.633		.644		.642		.526		.700	
Gender	.105	-.028	.144	-.067	.146	-.170**	.146	-.052	.119	-.004	.159	-.025
Race	.105	-.013	.144	-.094	.146	.046	.146	-.089	.119	-.131*	.159	.006
Fee Status	.164	.130	.225	.056	.229	.057	.228	.181**	.187	.030	.249	.114
First Generation	.092	.022	.126	-.004	.128	-.024	.127	-.045	.104	.072	.139	.079
H1. Grow as person	.071	.194**	.097	.038	.099	-.104	.099	.003	.081	.062	.108	.054
H2. Explore subject	.081	.227**	.111	-.031	.113	-.114	.113	.094	.092	.193***	.123	-.052
H3. Apply learning	.081	-.063	.111	.263**	.113	.219**	.113	.111	.093	-.145*	.123	-.046
H4. Interact with peers	.060	.123	.081	.021	.083	.105	.083	-.065	.068	.394***	.090	.003
H5. Interact with staff	.065	-.092	.089	.121	.090	.232**	.090	.276***	.074	.019	.098	.354***
R ² for Model 2	.125		.130		.180		.182		.241		.149	
F for Model 2 (9, 225)	3.56**		3.73***		5.49***		5.56***		7.00***		4.38***	

SE= Standard Error. Gender (1=F; 2=M); Race (0=BAME; 1=White); Fee Status (1=UK/EU; 2=Overseas); First Generation to attend university (Yes=1; No=2) *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Boldface indicates relations that confirm hypotheses.