'Seeds of Success:' Short-Term and Long-Term Success, and the Barriers that University Students May Face

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We all want to be successful. The problem is that we stay focused on what others do, including the grades they get, instead of caring for ourselves. For university students, this can have a negative impact on their ability to be successful—as every student is different, the idea that they all want to, or can, attain the same goal is ridiculous. Real success, however, is about making your own goals and measuring your progress against yourself, so that you can aim towards the best possible outcome for yourself. Outside of university, it is important for students to work towards their own goals for success and think about how that will help them to grow and improve in the future. UK higher education institutions (HEIs) need to acknowledge this and find new ways to engage and encourage the ever-changing student body so that they can achieve success. This piece examines what HEIs can do to ensure students can succeed, irrespective of their circumstances, and how representing differences in students' success can improve the university experience for all.

Seeds of Success

Success can be defined in many ways, but I believe that it can be described best as the achievement of something that you have been trying to do (Roy, 2019). By this logic, a clear understanding of what success 'is' should mean that students can more easily attain it. However, there are many problems that students face in achieving success, both during and after university. Fundamentally, the expectation to be successful in education can be difficult for many students, and the pressures they may face can often overwhelm them. The desire and need to be successful has been ingrained in many students' minds from the beginning of their lives. The issue that I see with this is that it leads us to lose focus on the other things that are important for our well-being, outside of classrooms and exam halls, that can help us to get to a point of success in university (University of Western Sydney, 2021). Therefore, I believe that success is like a plant seed that is influenced by a variety of factors that can either impede or support the growth of that seed.

For university students, the idea of success needs to be realized at the start of their degree when people can set their own realistic goals for success. To care for their 'seeds' (continuing the analogy) that will lead to success, students need to realize what they need to do within university and outside of it to ensure that the seeds grow into their own idea of success (University of Western Sydney, 2021). Furthermore, students need to understand that there are barriers to success, such as self-doubt when comparing one's own ideas of success with others. It is important to make sure that students stay focused on themselves and not on other people, as this helps to ensure that success is truly achieved.

Other barriers to success that I find are overlooked are those related to EDIS (equality, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability). Feeling a lack of inclusion has been shown to distance students

during their time at university, impeding their level of engagement, which in turn reduces their likelihood of being successful, as they do not aspire to achieve any goals (Bush, 2021). As inclusion is strongly influenced by equality and diversity, through the welcoming of people from a variety of backgrounds or groups, it can be seen why an inclusive environment is so important. Inclusion is therefore an imperative to improve the probability of success for students at HEIs (City, University of London, 2020). Through these factors working together, a welcoming environment can be created so that success can grow and flourish at university. Another factor is sustainability, which may seem at first glance to be unrelated to the topic of success, but in fact is just as important as other factors. Sustainability education relates to all school subjects and includes knowledge that extends far beyond the classroom, since it educates and gives students real-world skills which they can use to enrich their lives by helping the planet (Setó-Pamies & Papaoikonomou, 2015). Providing students with broader knowledge about the world around them and how they can act sustainably greatly benefits students after university, helping many of them to have higher aspirations post-studying.

There are still many barriers that students face at university. While HEIs should be obliged to work towards removing these, finding solutions to these problems is not easy. During my time at university, I worked as a student inclusion consultant, helping to remove the barriers that students faced, hoping that I could help students be more successful by improving their university experience. Here I was able to work with staff and help to improve university-produced materials so that they were more inclusive and useful for students. This experience helped me, not only by being able to talk about the issues I faced with inclusion at university, but also by allowing me to develop new skills for achieving success, both short and long term.

Short and Long-Term Success

Success should be thought of as comprising both short-term and long-term goals, due to the amount of work that is required to achieve them. For both time frames, the most important thing that I can say about success is that it cannot be achieved overnight, as the work a person does throughout their time at university and in their career is what leads to success. This is important to remember when defining both sets of goals. Long-terms goals can be described as the goals you set for your future, while short-term goals are an integral part of the planning to achieve them (Columbia College Calgary, 2018). Short-term goals help as a sort of stepping stone for students to achieve their long-term goals. Moreover, the idea of short-term success can be seen best when students graduate and leave university to pursue further education or employment, as these coincide with their longer-term goals (O'Shea & Delahunty, 2019). On the other hand, the routes to long-term success can be just as varied and idiosyncratic as those to achieving short-term success. Often, the efforts of further work and development can lead to people reaching their long-term goals, as the experience and skills that students pick up from university carry through into later life—skills such as critical thinking, which can help people be successful in other aspects of their lives. It is therefore imperative that students realize a structure for reaching success through short and long-term goals. But it is also important not to feel upset or disheartened if these goals change due to unforeseeable circumstances, as seen within the global pandemic.

Conclusion

Success is a complex and ever-changing entity, and one that is difficult to define. There are many different lenses through which to view success, as it can only be defined based upon what an individual thinks it means be successful in their own life. Every student is different, so the idea that they all want to, or can, attain the same goal is ridiculous (Smith & White, 2014). Some people may prioritize educational success from university, while others will favor financial success after completing their degree (University of Western Sydney, 2021). Nonetheless, it is possible for everyone to be successful—it just depends on their ability to work towards their goals and their ideologies of success. The only benchmark by which you should measure success is through your own progress and achievements. It takes time and effort to achieve your goals— just like it takes time for a seed to grow.

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