EVENT-HISTORY MEDIATOR MODELS OF COLLEGE ATTRITION: RISK GROUPS AND RISK FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Early withdrawal (attrition) from college is a common and costly problem to individuals and institutions of higher learning. First-generation (FGEN) college students, whose parents have not attended college, comprise a large faction of enrollees and are particularly at risk for attrition. Because attrition is over-represented among FGEN students, they are a potential target group for decreasing attrition rates, provided the phenomenon of college attrition in this group is understood. The present study estimated the effects of a number of factors on college attrition, in 3,290 FGEN and non-FGEN students over four years, using event-history analysis. Results showed that, FGEN students were indeed more likely to leave college than their non-FGEN peers. Equally important, ACT scores, scholarships, college grade point averages and amount of time devoted to paid employment mediated the relationship between FGEN status and attrition. Some additional psychological variables predicted attrition among all students, such as drug and alcohol use, psychological distress and few reported academic challenges. These findings have implications for the formulation of interventions.