Risky Business: Cultivating Academic Risk-Taking

Presented By:
Natalie Stepanov and Amanda Gandy
Session Objectives

• Define academic risk-taking

• Understand advisor and student viewpoints about risk-taking

• Understand circumstances where academic risk-taking can be encouraged

• Reflect on how to apply new knowledge to advising and student success practice
Student Development Theory and Research

• **Identity Development** - Arthur Chickering

• **Self-authorship** - Marcia Baxter Magolda

• **Risk-taking** - Russell Ravert, Jessica Gomez-Scott, and Jacqueline Schneller
Identity Development
Chickering

- Developing Competence
- Managing Emotions
- Moving Through Autonomy toward Interdependence
- Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
- Establishing Identity
- Developing Purpose
- Developing Integrity

Education and Identity, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
Self-authorship
Baxter Magolda

college experiences and challenges

dependent on others' values
begin to question
form own values
self-authorship

externally focused
internally focused
Self-authorship
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dependent on others' values
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Engaging in behavior that involves uncertainty and holds some probability of danger or negative outcome. (Ravert & Schneller, 2019, p.792)

How can we as advisors, coaches, and other student success professionals encourage risk-taking and lessen fears about negative outcome?
Factors to consider

- Socioeconomic Status
- First Generation
- Social Identity
- Mental Health

(Gore et. al, 2016)
The Academic Comfort Zone

A place where students are at ease & experience limited stress

Why Student Stay In The Comfort Zone

- Intuitional Requirements
- Fear of Uncertain Outcomes
- Lack of Knowledge
### Table 1. Risks that students should take more often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># (%)</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Psychological** | 24 (48.0%) | • “Don’t be afraid to fail”  
• “Slow down, be mindful”  
• “Self-reflection”  
• “Be OK with being yourself” |
| **Self-Assertion** | 32 (64.0%) | • “Speak up for injustices”  
• “Leave home, move to new cities”  
• “Taking paths with resistance”  
• “Pursue passions” |
| **Exploration**   | 34 (68.0%) | • “Travelling, experiencing new cultures”  
• “Take a course in a new topic”  
• “Academic exploration”  
• “Study abroad” |
| **Interpersonal** | 34 (68.0%) | • “Talk to professors, ask for help”  
• “Communicating”  
• “Speak up/ask questions”  
• “Meet new people” |

Percentage refers to the percentage of academic advisors (n = 50) who cited this theme in their response.

(Ravert & Schneller, 2019, p.792)
# Negative Risk-Taking: Student Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons For Not Taking Risk</th>
<th>Consequences in Academic Risk-Taking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Harm to oneself or others</td>
<td>• Sense of failure or actual failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Going against one’s beliefs</td>
<td>• Not meeting expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifiable consequences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ravert & Gomez-Scott, 2015, p.573)
Positive Risk-Taking: Student Perceptions

In a 2015 study by Ravert & Gomez-Scott, students thought of risk-taking as *positive* ways to achieve, experiment, and learn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have fun</td>
<td>• Gain Something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience excitement</td>
<td>• Be rewarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet desires</td>
<td>• Have everything one deserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do what one wants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid Missing Out</th>
<th>Personal Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid regret</td>
<td>• Reach full potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not knowing what could have been</td>
<td>• Learn about self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take chance before it’s gone</td>
<td>• Push self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be the best possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ravert & Gomez-Scott, 2015, p.575)
Academic Risk-Taking Importance In College Success

• Increases exploration
  • Majors, Career, Co-Curricular Options
• Exposure to new ideas and skills
• Moves students to growth mindsets
• Allows students to use their strengths
• Allows students to self-author experiences  (Baxter Magolda)

(Ravert & Schneller, 2019) (Baxter Magolda, 2008)
How to Promote Academic Risk-Taking

• Make risk-taking part of programming and curriculum
  • Examples:
    • Research,
    • Internships
    • Ignite
    • Honors
    • University of Tennessee Success Academy

• Create supportive environments
  • Physical
  • Cultural/Social
How to Promote Academic Risk-Taking

• Have the conversation
  • Ensure you have knowledge of the risk and resources
  • Reframe ideas around “success” and “risk”
  • Use self-disclosure appropriately
  • Normalize risk taking
  • Emphasize strengths

• Follow up on outcomes of the risk
Practice In Groups
Case Study

Jordan is a currently a exploratory student that has highly educated parents with advanced degrees in the sciences. Jordan has excelled in the social science classes he has taken and has considered majoring in one. However, in your advising session Jordan says they “can’t” major in a social science and needs to pick a major that will allow them to be “successful.”

1. What is the academic risk?
2. Are there other risks to consider?
3. How would you approach this conversation with student?
Case Study

Julia is a junior, majoring in Biology. She has heard that research experience will benefit her graduate school applications, but she is unsure how to find opportunities. She is unsure if she is cut out to devote the extra time to research commitments, especially because she doesn’t want to jeopardize her 3.9 GPA.

1. What is the academic risk?
2. Are there other risks to consider?
3. How would you approach this conversation with student?
Case Study

Tony, a first generation junior, has a 2.7 GPA. His academic plan has two elective courses built in for his senior year. He has expressed interest in some of the upper division English courses based on the descriptions but stated he would rather take an “easy” class to bring up his GPA and does not want to write “so many” papers.

1. What is the academic risk?
2. Are there other risks to consider?
3. How would you approach this conversation with student?
Case Study

Pat is interested in a co-op for their engineering degree but doesn’t think they are qualified enough. They are also worried about delaying their graduation due to being off-campus for that semester. Even though the co-op would be “perfect,” Pat is reluctant to apply.

1. What is the academic risk?
2. Are there other risks to consider?
3. How would you approach this conversation with student?
Thank You!

Questions?
References


