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THRIVERS AND DIVERS: USING NON-ACADEMIC MEASURES TO PREDICT COLLEGE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

ABSTRACT

We introduce a novel method for collecting a comprehensive set of non-academic characteristics for a representative sample of incoming freshman to explore which measures best predict the wide variance in first-year college performance unaccounted for by past grades. We focus our attention on student outliers. Students whose first-year college average is far below expectations (divers) have a high propensity for procrastination they self report cramming for exams and wait longer before starting assignments. They are also considerably less conscientious than their peers. Divers are more likely to express superficial goals, hoping to 'get rich' quickly. In contrast, students who exceed expectations (thrivers) express more philanthropic goals, are purpose-driven, and are willing to study more hours per week to obtain the higher GPA they expect. A simple seven-variable average of these key non-academic variables does well in predicting college achievement relative to adding more variables or letting a machine-algorithm choose, and improves our ability to predict at-risk students when used jointly with past grades.

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