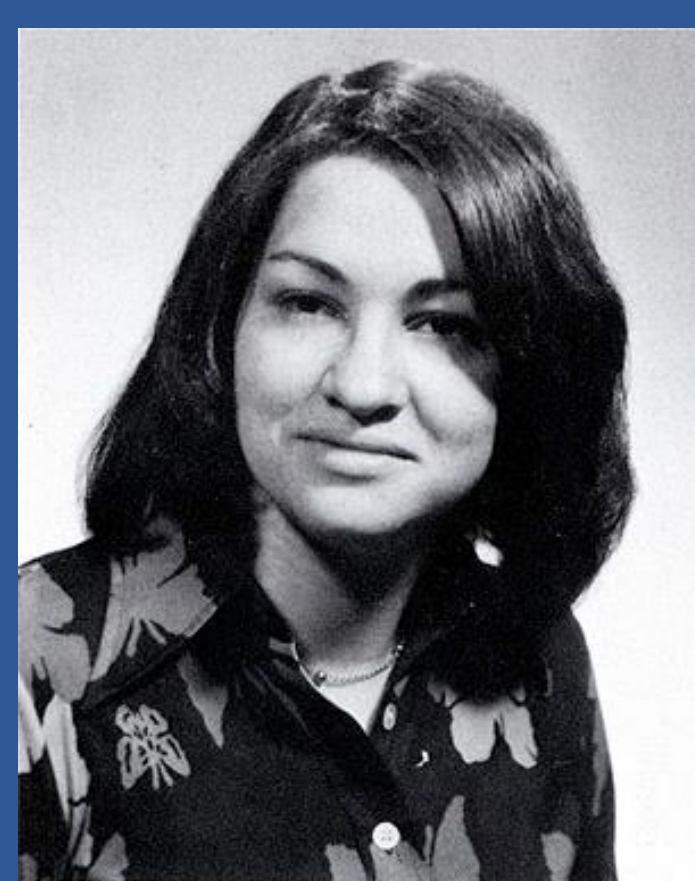


How to Support Struggling College Students

Secrets from Social Psychology

Christine Logel, PhD





[In college, I felt like] a visitor landing in an alien land . . . I have spent my years since Princeton, while at law school, and in my various professional jobs, not feeling completely a part of the worlds I inhabit.

- Sonia Sotomayor (memoir)

My experiences at [university] have made me far more aware of my “Blackness” than ever before . . . no matter how liberal and open-minded some of my White professors and classmates try to be toward me, I sometimes feel like a visitor on campus; as if I really don’t belong . . .



- Michelle Robinson (1985)

Today's Breakout Session

- Purpose: Describe social-psychological factors that affect students' college completion and persistence
- Discuss some solutions
- Based on decades of rigorous social psych research
- A year of talking to students across the US

- I talk fast
- I am Canadian

Today's Breakout Session

- Focus on Doing Well Academically
 - Required to be allowed to stay in a program
 - Psychologically beneficial for choosing to stay

Achievement in College



Ability

- Our culture teaches us that academic ability / intellectual ability is:
 - A stable characteristic
 - Something people are born with
 - An explanation behind:
 - Great accomplishments (“Genius”)
 - Failures (“I’m not a math person either”)

Ability

- Problem:
 1. It's a lie
 2. When students struggle or fail:
 - Conclude that they must not have that natural ability
 - Give up
 - (Connects to growth mindset)

Achievement in College

Working
Memory
Capacity

Ability

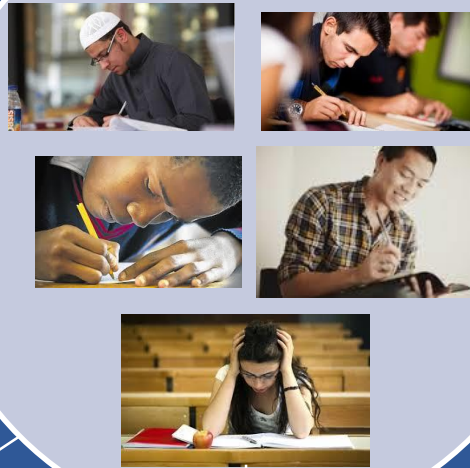
Attention

Long Term
Preparation

Motivation

Short Term
Preparation

Accessibility



What is the Truth? Can People Improve Their Academic Ability?

- Is intelligence mostly fixed at birth, or can it change with our environment and our effort?
- = is it mostly genetic?
- Evidence for the role of genes in intelligence is weaker than most people think
- = The environment – and our own effort – is more important for intelligence than people think

Can People Improve Their Academic Ability?

- Molecular genetics
 - Attempts to isolate genes
- Measure people's intelligence or academic success
- Look at their genes
- Many, many studies have been done.
- No intelligence genes have yet been found

Can People Improve Their Academic Ability?

- Studies often identify genes that correlate with IQ in one study
- But doesn't replicate – coincidence
- Doesn't mean genes don't matter
- It means that many, many genes play a complex role in intelligence
- The role they play depends on the environment

Can People Improve Their Academic Ability?

- Evidence to tell your students:
Intelligence is not determined by our genes.
We can grow our intelligence.

Education Improves Intelligence

- Tell your students:
 - Studies of young students at war
 - Studies of higher education

Intelligence is Increasing Over Time

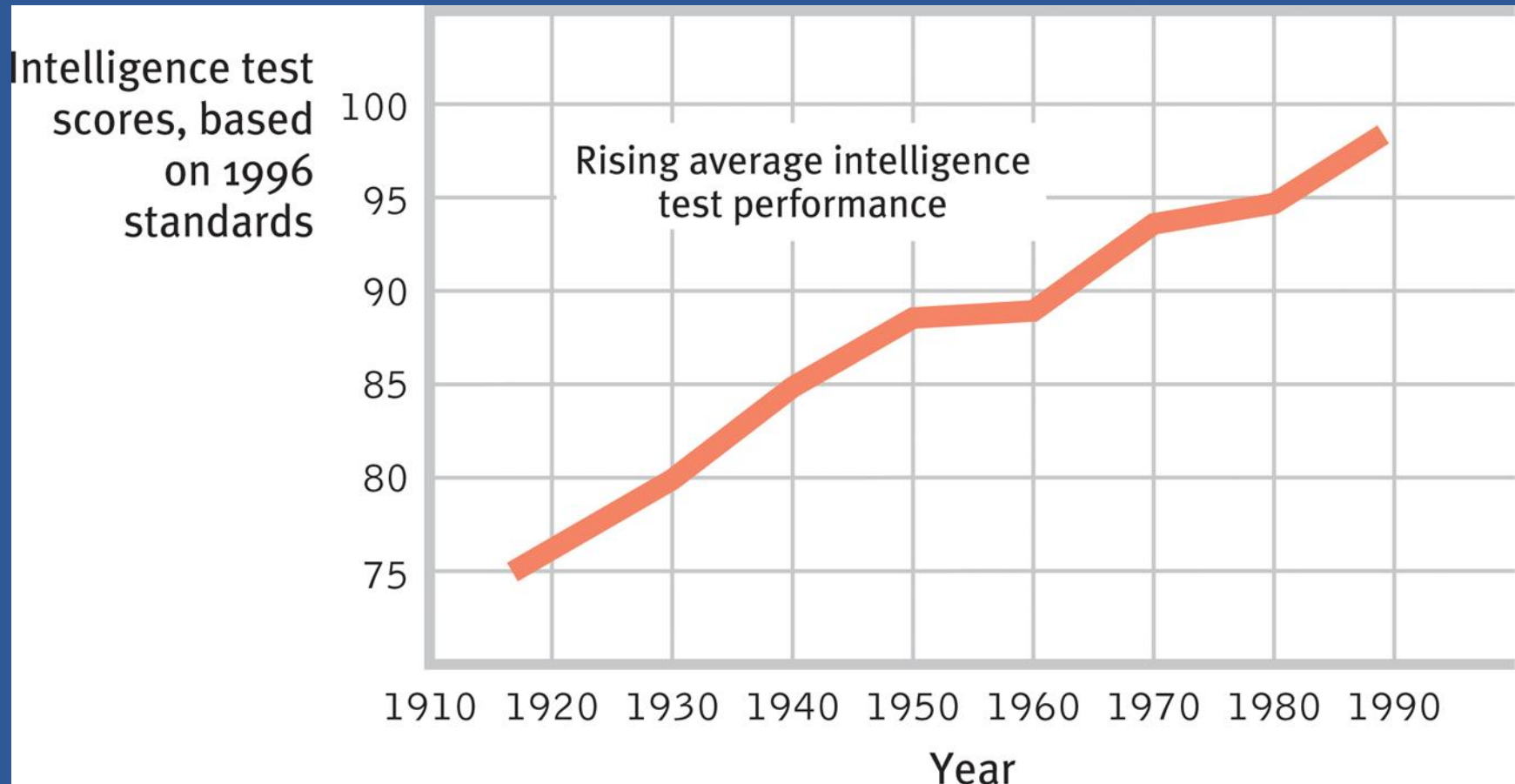


Figure 30.3 Getting smarter?
Myers: Psychology, Tenth Edition in Modules
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Why Has Average Intelligence Increased Over 100 Years?

- Genes have not changed
- Some of this IQ increase is due to improvements on test-taking skills
- Some of it is real – people are getting smarter, on average
- Tell your students they are probably smarter than their parents
- More evidence that intelligence can grow

Can People Improve Their Academic Ability?

- Tell your students:
- High-performing students put in many hours of studying
 - Sister's story
- High-performing students ask a lot of questions to find the best strategies for studying
 - See the prof
 - See the TA
 - Ask their friends
 - Take study skills courses

Some Solutions

1. Normalize challenges

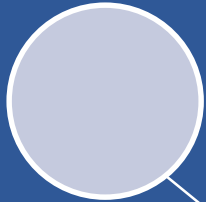
- “Put up your hands if...”
- Imposter syndrome
- Duck syndrome

2. Warn students

- Grades will go down
- Will need to re-learn how to study and read and write
- College gets easier over time

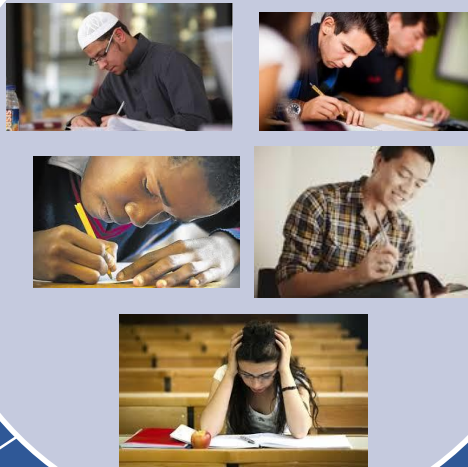
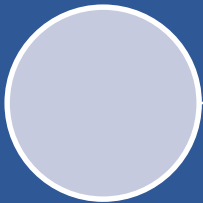
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Memory
Capacity

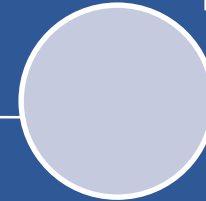


Ability

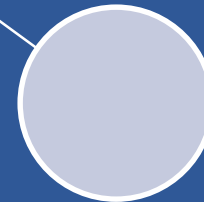
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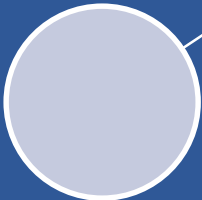
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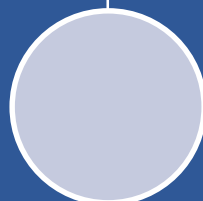
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Motivation



Accessibility



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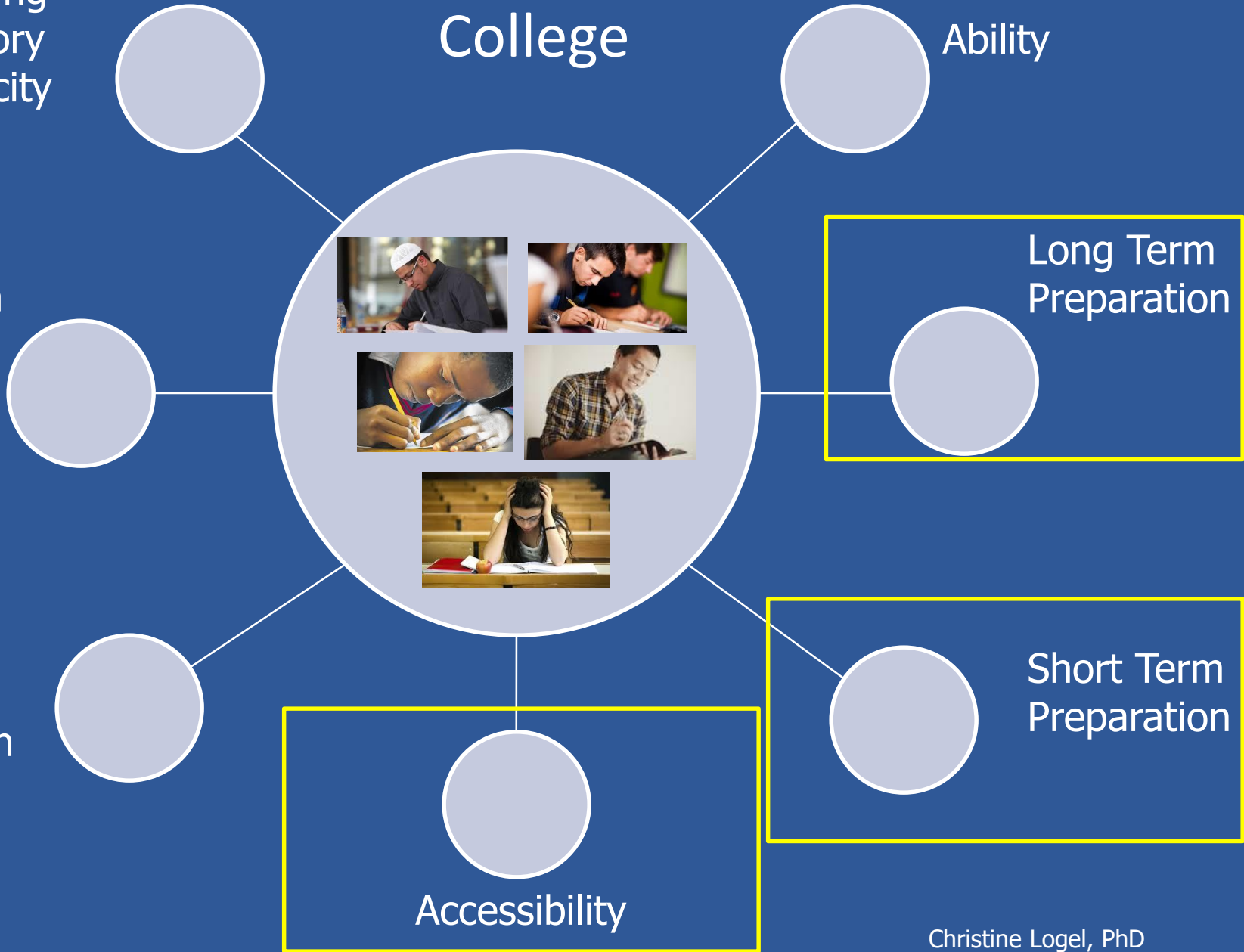
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Motivation

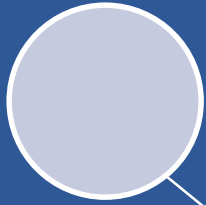
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Accessibility

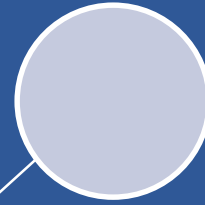


Achievement in College

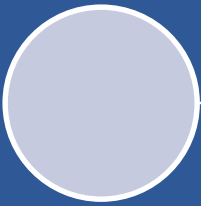
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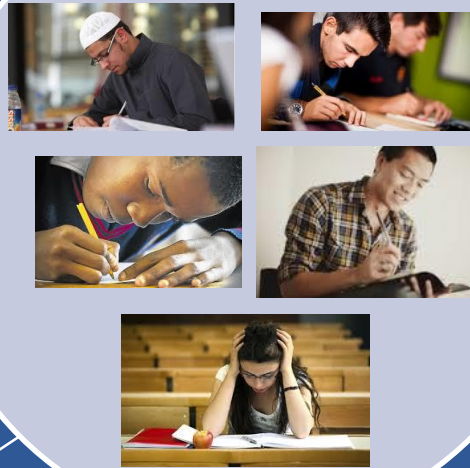
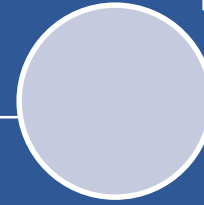
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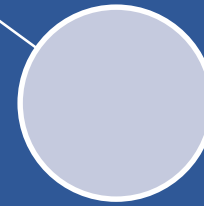
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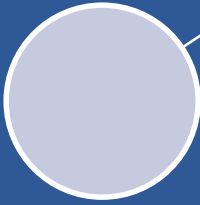
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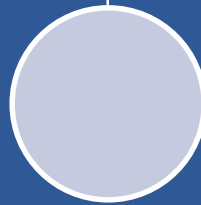
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Accessibility



Stress and Academic Success

- Affects motivation, ability to pay attention, and impairs working memory capacity

Stress and Academic Success

- Vulnerable students face additional stressors
 - Second shift
 - Part-time jobs
 - Financial strain
 - Sending financial aid home
 - Feeling different
 - Being a numerical minority
 - Attributional ambiguity

Some Solutions to Lower Stress and Increase Coping

- Structural changes
 - Increase financial support
 - Increase diversity
 - Fight prejudice

- In addition
 - Social-psychological interventions
 - Interventions that address students' thoughts, feelings and behaviors as they relate to the interaction between them and the people around them

What NOT to Do

- Well-Meaning But Misguided Interventions
 - Get-to-know each other game
 - Check your privilege game

What NOT to Do

- Anything that you can't evaluate
 - Funds are limited
 - Easy to randomize when you legitimately don't know which intervention is better
 - Randomly assign half of students to the old program
 - Half to the new one
 - Look at their retention and persistence
 - Unethical?
 - It's the only ethical thing to do

Some Solutions to Lower Stress and Increase Coping

- Fund and prioritize cultural associations
 - Strong case evidence
 - Provides belonging, culturally-specific support, mentors, community

Some Solutions to Lower Stress and Increase Coping

- Encourage instructors to lower the stakes
 - Intro Psych tests



Some Solutions to Lower Stress and Increase Coping

- Consider partnering with researchers to develop and test social-psychological interventions
 - Usually 45-minute online modules done independently
 - Students read quotes from upper-year students
 - Write responses
 - Use cutting-edge psychological theory
 - Address the factors that cause stress among vulnerable students
- Rigorously evaluate them using randomized-controlled trials

Some Solutions to Lower Stress and Increase Coping

- Interventions showing promising results
 - Growth mindset
 - Guides students to see academic ability as something that grows with effort and strategies
 - Purpose for learning
 - Guides students to see their school work as meaningful and connected to their future plans
 - Social belonging
 - Assures students that fears that they don't belong in college are normal and temporary
 - Affirmation Training
 - Teaches students to notice when they are stressed and take times to put things in perspective by connecting with values outside of college



Applying research to raise academic
achievement across the nation

TEAM

Our interdisciplinary team includes behavioral scientists, software developers, analysts, and logistics coordinators.

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Dave Paunesku

Executive Director
PERTS
Stanford University



Carissa Romero

Director of Programs
PERTS
Stanford University



Greg Walton

Assistant Professor
Stanford University
Faculty Advisor



Carol Dweck

Professor
Stanford University
Faculty Advisor

The College Transition Collaborative



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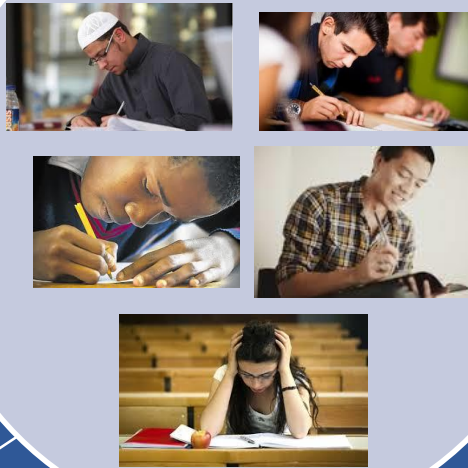

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Thank You