

MEDIA RELEASE

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Student goals and interest important for university success

Developing interest is critical to long-term success in university studies, according to a visiting US psychologist.

Professor Judith M. Harackiewicz will deliver a keynote address at the ACER Research Conference, *Supporting Student Wellbeing*, in Adelaide today.

Professor Harackiewicz is researching why some students become involved and interested in their studies, and why they continue in a particular academic discipline. She also raises the issue of whether highly motivated students learn more and obtain higher grades in their courses. The research involved survey studies with college psychology students in the United States.

Professor Harackiewicz's theory relates to two kinds of goals: mastery and performance. When pursuing mastery goals, an individual's reason for engaging in an activity is to develop competence. In contrast, when pursuing performance goals, an individual's reason for engagement is to demonstrate competence relative to others.

The study concludes that it is optimal that both mastery and performance goals are adopted because both kinds of goals promote important educational outcomes. Students who adopted mastery goals reported more interest in the class. However, mastery goals had no effect of any measure of academic performance. Success in college and university contexts depends on both performance and interest.

The research also looked at students' interests. Two types of interest are identified: interest that resides with the individual over time; and interest that emerges in response to situational cues.

There is not much that educators can do about individual interest, but they can have an enormous impact on the development of situational interest. After situational interest is aroused, it may or may not last. If situational interest endures, it can eventually become a deep, individual interest, according to Professor Harackiewicz.

Considering students' goals and interests gives a richer understanding of motivational dynamics that can promote academic success and lifelong learning as adolescents enter university, take courses and make academic choices.

Professor Harackiewicz will deliver her address at 9.30am this morning at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Adelaide.

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