

Executive Summary

Teaching the Whole Student: Perceived Academic Control in College Art Instruction
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The first study of *perceived academic control* (PAC) in an art/design college student population was conducted at Otis in 2007-08. Key concepts and findings include:

- Students who attribute academic successes and failures to things that *they do* are oriented "internally." Students who attribute academic outcomes to forces beyond their control, such as luck, fate, or powerful others, are oriented "externally." Internal control attributions are linked to academic success, and PAC is a singularly important academic marker in college settings. When controllable attributions improve, so do students' motivation, task-persistence, affect, and creativity.
- Early in the fall term, 38.9% of Otis' first-year students indicated externality. Since first-year college student externality is linked to failure-proneness and attrition, classroom interventions were tried and measured. By mid-year, transient externality had increased slightly. But by year-end this shift had stabilized, and *reversed*.
- At mid-year student attrition fell to a record low: 51.9% below its prior five-year trend (see table 3, p. 24).
- As control attributions shifted toward internality, students' academic performance also increased. In fact, the impact of Foundation instructors' classroom interventions compares favorably to shifts toward student internality previously associated with *four* terms of college.
- Year-end attrition (rising sophomores) fell to a record low: 28.1% below its five-year trend (see table 3, p. 24).
- The sample indicated no significant differences in student PAC scores by ethnic group. Similarly, no significant gender differences were found in mean PAC scores, nor in the proportions of males to females in any category at any measurement point.
- Qualitative analysis of student focus group responses revealed that internal, external, and "turnaround" students all perceived positive impact on their academic success from classroom interventions. A review of literature, changes in PAC scores throughout the year, and student focus group findings led to seven recommendations for control-enhancing teaching methodology in college art settings.
- Results indicate that student internality can serve as a valuable new *predictor* for college art student success. Thus this study also has implications for art/design school admissions (some colleges have begun to lace PAC measures into their applications).
- Unfortunately, young Americans' control attributions are *trending* toward externality. This is significant for future college retention and graduation rates, and strongly suggests that the time is *now* for cognitive-affective theory-based teaching.
- Aspects of student cognitive makeup impact academic performance in college art/design, and attention to PAC should become a core component of college art/design instruction at all levels.