

Approaches/Population Theory to Practice

Joann Zhang

Oregon State University

Introduction

Astin's Involvement Theory addresses how by getting involved on campus, it will positively impact students' intellectual and social development (Roufs, 2015). Astin defines involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that students devote to academic experiences. In other words, an involved student will make time to participate in organizations on campus, interact with staff/faculty and peers inside/outside their discipline and thus be engaged with campus which leads to spending more time on campus. To oppose the involved student, students who are uninvolved on campus may neglect to connect with individuals who can support their academic needs, feel as though they do not matter on campus, and thus are more at risk for dropping out or being unsuccessful in their academics (Astin, 1999).

Summary/Overview

The original study focused on college dropouts and the factors that played into their decision. According to Astin's study, virtually every significant effect could be rationalized in terms of the involvement concept whether it was a positive impact or negative. In other words, a factor for students who were retained year after year was an involvement factor, and for those who dropped out, was the lack of involvement (Astin, 1999). The Student Involvement Theory was based off four assumptions: involvement occurs along a continuum (different students need different levels of involvement), involvement has both quantitative aspects (how much time is spent) and qualitative aspects (how focused the time being spent is), the amount of personal development and learning (in relations to the quality and quantity of the involvement) and lastly, the effectiveness of educational policies, practices or programs (and its commitment to increasing student involvement) (Foubert & Grainger, 2006).

A weakness or limitation to this theory includes populations that are not your traditional students. In other words, students who are not coming from high school, who have other obligations outside of higher education may not have the capabilities of becoming involved in campus organizations or living in a living learning community. “The growing numbers of students who commute, work, and enroll part-time are at risk for learning less because these characteristics limit their time on campus,” (Lundberg, 2003, p. 665). In other words, the involvement aspect of social integration is unclear for non-traditional aged students (Lundberg, 2003). Another weakness this theory has considered is quality versus quantity. Astin indicates the importance of having high-quality involvement rather than lack of quality involvement where students are misusing their time effectively (1999). Strengths to this theory include increasing motivation amongst students and to support the theory of marginalized and mattering. In other words, students have a sense of belonging on campus and thus want to be an active member within campus community (Astin, 1999).

How Astin’s Involvement Theory informs First-Year Students

Based off Astin’s Involvement Theory, “the most important general conclusion I reached from this elaborate analysis was that nearly all forms of student involvement are associated with greater than average changes in entering freshman characteristics,” (Astin, 1999, p. 523). Astin indicates how residence life has strongly contributed to this idea of student involvement amongst first-year students. However, it should not stop only at residence life. Astin’s Involvement Theory can impact the role advisors have on first-year students. “Student personnel workers frequently operate on a one-to-one basis with students, they are in a unique position to monitor the involvement of their clients in the academic process and to work with individual clients in an attempt to increase that involvement,” (Astin, 1999, p. 526). As mentioned in Astin’s theory,

first-year students who are leaving home for the first time will benefit from his theory as they are getting acquainted with their new environment by become involved. Advisors have a primary role with this theory because they have the opportunity to engage with students and develop a relational relationship. By spending time getting to know each student, their passion and career/educational goals, advisors have the tools to connect students to on and off campus resources that can help support what they hope to achieve life after higher education.

Astin's Involvement Theory supports first-year students by encouraging students to become involved with their academic and social development. "Research has also shown that first-year students who join student organizations have higher scores on developing purpose than those who do not join," (Foubert & Grainger, 2006, p. 169). In other words, by becoming involved on campus, students feel as though they play a crucial role on campus or in an organization. Astin argues that Subject Matter Theory, or specialized knowledge courses in the forms of lectured style courses can negatively impact students' success. This is due to the idea of instructors having an impersonal relationship with their students. Given that first-year students within public institutions are bound to take a lectured based coursed during their first year experience, it is important get those students involved so they do not get discouraged from subject-matter learning, (Astin, 1999).

Advisors (in terms of faculty advisors, general academic advisors, career advisors, etc.) have the opportunity to connect students to internships, employment opportunities (on/off campus, research employment) and as a result, students are able to connect what they've learned in class to real world applications. By becoming involved with their field of study (both inside and outside the classroom) students can determine whether or not this is the right field for them, outside of higher education. Students who are not involved with their field of study but chose to

be involved with a different field/type of work, are widening their perspective, experiences and new knowledge which has proven to be beneficial to their cognitive development. In other words, students who are involved with diverse experiences or engaged with diverse individuals are in the multiplicity positions within Perry's Cognitive Development Theory (Perry, 2011).

Conclusion:

Astin's Involvement Theory focuses on getting students involved so they can become active citizens amongst the community campus. By doing so, they are forming relationships with other students, faculty or staff and thus their retention will increase. Academic advisors plays a role in Astin's Involvement Theory in relations to first-year students because as advisors, they should have a basic understanding on their institution, its culture, and campus social and political climates and available resources (Folsom, et. al., 2015). By doing so, they can best support their students by connecting them to campus opportunities and thus, they can develop a personal connection and sense of mattering.

References:

- Astin, A. W. (1999, September). Student involvement: a developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alexander_Astin/publication/220017441_Student_Involvement_A_Developmental_Theory_for_Higher_Education/links/00b7d52d094bf5957e000000.pdf
- Foubert, J. D., & Grainger, L. U. (2006). Effects of involvement in clubs and organizations on the psychosocial development of first-year and senior college students. *NASPA Journal*, 43(1), 166-182. Retrieved from http://www.albany.edu/involvement/documents/effects_of_involvement.pdf
- Folsom, P., Yoder, F., & Joslin, J. (Eds.). (2015). *The new advisor guidebook* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lundberg, C. A. (2003, December). The Influence of time-limitations, faculty, and peer relationships on adult student learning: a causal model. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 74(6), 665-688. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3648234>