

## **Research Note**

# **Students' Experiences Classified on Academic Probation**

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Students that do not meet institutional academic expectations abandon or are separated from their programs of study (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Martínez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009; Miller, Janz, & Chen, 2007). For example, in the Dominican Republic between 20% and 35% of students in higher education do not finish their programs of study (MESCYT, 2013).

One way that institutions assist academically struggling students is through academic probation (Arcand, 2013; Duffy, 2010; Holland, 2005). Nonetheless, some students still struggle academically and are dismissed from their institutions (Houle, 2013). Findings have been consistent in terms of the negative experiences students have during academic probation (Arcand & Leblanc, 2012; Houle, 2013; Lindo, Sanders, & Oreopoulos, 2010; Sage, 2010). Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra (2007) suggested that some students might have worried that others associated their academic probation classification with having low ability; further research was recommended (Hsieh et al., 2007).

Despite the aforementioned studies there is an absence of research on students' perspectives when classified on academic probation. For this reason, the present study examined students' experiences when classified as such.

## **Method**

I interviewed 14 students classified on academic probation at a research-intensive four-year college in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. For this study students classified on academic probation were those that had below a 2.0 grade point average (cumulative or term). Full-time student enrollment in this institution was approximately 5,000. Descriptive information of participants is presented in Table 1.

## **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were set for 60 minutes (Bernard, 2006). These were conducted until no new information was heard, achieving data saturation and the final number of participants (Seidman, 2006).

## **Data Analysis**

Data were coded in a first cycle, In Vivo coding, to stay close to participants' voices and a second cycle of coding, or pattern coding (Saldana, 2015).

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants.*

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender
Derek	22	Male
Esther	21	Female
Jonathan	19	Male
Lucia	22	Female
María	19	Female
Mary	22	Female
Pamela	19	Female
Carol	19	Female
Eva	18	Female
Juan	19	Male
Kevin	22	Male
Lala	19	Female
Laura	19	Female
Paola	18	Female

## Results

A main theme resulted by a combination of phrases used by more than one participant. “Mediocre, you do not belong here.” This theme described what being classified on academic probation meant for these students. Students also voiced their concerns over what others thought of their classification. An underlining aspect of students’ experiences was the negative emotional implications of being classified as such.

Derek shared that being classified as academic probation meant mediocrity: “I am a mediocre person because I am not fulfilling my duties ... I do not know ... Mediocre ... That I am not fulfilling my requirement, as a student.” Further he described:

To tell you the truth, you feel so bad [referring to when he was classified on academic probation] because you are in a group; you are the black sheep of the group [group referring to students in the university]. Students classified on academic probation are like the black sheep, it’s like we are not giving it our all. We do not have the potential that they [referring to the institution] require.

Maria alike voiced what being classified meant for her: “classified on academic probation, sounds like you are being put in a box. ‘Here ... this is where you belong ... This is what you are’ ... It’s giving you a name.”

Students’ descriptions shed light on their meanings related to the classification of academic probation. As part of their experiences, students also described their concerns over what others might think of their being classified. Ester shared, “There are people that say, oh, she’s classified on academic probation, she must be dumb or something.” Similarly, Maria voiced:

They [referring to other people] put a label...they will draw conclusions of who you are because of that [referring to being classified on academic probation]. And if a teacher knows that you are classified on academic probation he will sort you in that small group of people that do not study, that do not improve. It feels like you are excluded.

In addition to students' meanings of being classified on academic probation and their concerns of what others think of them, their experiences often had emotional implications. Kevin described:

I said "well, I'm going to have to change schools already, I'm going to have to start again and change my major." I disconnected from everything/everyone, I did not speak. For two weeks I did not talk to anyone. I was spoken to through social media and I would make up excuses to not talk to anyone. I was terribly ashamed; I did not tell anyone [referring to being on academic probation].

Eva alike described her feelings when classified on academic probation:

I felt terrible when I learned about being classified on academic probation. It was a hard situation ... I told myself that I could not graduate with honors. It hurts because, I am here [referring to being in the institution] and it is a sacrifice. I have always been an excellent student all my life in school ... and it hurts, so much ... I am mediocre because I am classified on academic probation. It's like that voice [referring to being classified on academic probation], that tells you, you're mediocre ... It's a constant battle ... I am failing God, I am failing my parents.

Overall, students described what it meant to be classified on academic probation. Students also expressed concerns over what others thought of them while being classified as such. Further, negative emotional implications were present throughout their experiences.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

A plethora of negative experiences have been described during academic probation (Arcand & Leblanc, 2011; Duffy, 2010; Houle, 2013). Understandings of students' experiences being classified on academic probation are absent. The aim of this study was to examine the experiences of Dominican students classified on academic probation. Students described how being classified as such was deemed negative by them. In addition, they expressed concerns with what others might think of their classification. The aforementioned were often accompanied by negative emotional implications. Recommendations are related to creating interventions that tap into the meanings students give this classification, their concerns with what others think, and the emotional implications of being classified as such.

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