

A formula for success?

I originally graduated as a theoretical physicist. It wasn't that I was particularly bright - it was just that after the third time I'd melted the Geiger counter and nearly electrocuted myself my supervisor decided it would be safer all round if I was trusted with nothing more dangerous than a pencil and a piece of paper [it's surprising how dangerous the pencil turned out to be but that's another story].

Anyway that experience left me with a taste for formulae and it was with some interest that I recently came across a formula for student success promulgated by Dr Alan Seidman editor of the US Journal of Student Retention. I've adapted it freely [partly in the hope that the Seidman-Simpson equation will one day become as famous as Einstein's $E = mc^2$] and here it is:

$$S = \text{Acc} + (\text{E} + \text{I} + \text{C})\text{CoT} + \text{ExS}$$

where S = success, Acc = Accurate course choice, E = Early, I = intensive, C = continuous, CoT = contact with your tutor, and ExS = External support.

Let me explain the terms:

- **Acc** = Accurate course choice. The best thing you can do to ensure success is to make sure you're on the right course for you in terms of level, length and content. Check the course description on the Web, see if you can find out what other students think of it, check if there's a 'Taster' of the course if there is one, do the diagnostic quiz if there is one. Change to another course if the one you first thought of is unsuitable.
- **(E + I + C)CoT** = Early, Intensive and Continuous Contact with your Tutor. In theory your tutor should be contacting you regularly but in practice he or she may not want to bother you if everything's going well but has no way of telling when things aren't so good. So take the initiative and contact them. They'll be glad to hear from you and if there's something holding you up no matter how seemingly trivial they'll want to help.
- **ExS** = External support. When we researched student dropout recently we concluded that students who survived the life events that happen to happen [birth, death and everything in between] were those who'd got good support networks. These could be from families and friends - or from other students. Many students even find their employer a good source of support.

So there you go – the Simpson-Seidman formula for success – look out Einstein!

Ormond Simpson