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## The Motivation of an Obliger, Upholder, Questioner, and Rebel: How Tailored Academic Planning Can Suit Unique Student Tendencies

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The Motivation of an Obliger, Upholder, Questioner, and Rebel:  
How Tailored Academic Planning Can Suit Unique Student  
Tendencies

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
University Honors Scholar Designation

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## EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMICS

### **I. Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the tendency of humans to meet or resist inner and outer expectations and uncover how these tendencies influence academic performance. Past research has primarily focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, revealing what may ultimately motivate us to behave, but little research has been done to investigate how we act based on what is expected of us. The framework of expectation styles created by Gretchen Rubin was chiefly drawn upon to explore the four different tendencies regarding expectations: Upholder, Obliger, Questioner, and Rebel (2017). Our study involved student participants who were given a questionnaire to assess their academic habits, motivation, and personality traits. They were also asked to take The Four Tendencies Quiz to identify their tendency regarding how they react to expectations (Rubin, 2017). They were then asked to select a small academic plan to carry out each week; there were plans designed for each tendency. It was hypothesized that these small, individual plans would help students perform better academically. The hypothesis was supported using feedback from participants. This research reveals that understanding one's own tendency towards meeting or resisting expectations is beneficial in shaping plans to enhance academic performance. Furthermore, it suggests that we may be able to mold our environment for better productivity.

### **II. Introduction**

Academic performance is a worldwide concern of students, parents, and teachers. Moreover, countries compete on the subject of test scores and academic achievement of students. In 2009, Obama proclaimed in his first State of the Union address that, “the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow” (West, 2012). There is a large emphasis on performance but also a large gap in research to be filled with further consideration of the various factors that contribute to high quality performance.

How do we become motivated, and how is it that we succeed academically? Some people believe it is what we are motivated by while others believe that it is an element of our personality. It is important to take both personality and motivators, especially both extrinsic and intrinsic, into account when investigating academic performance. However, these components have been more widely researched while other factors remain more of a mystery.

Such a component that suggests a need for investigation is the way we respond to expectations. Much of what we do is a result of expectations. If we are expected to complete assignments, get high marks on examinations, and attend lectures, then the way we respond to expectations is essential in what we will choose to do. Whether these expectations are internal or external may influence how we respond to them; whether we expect ourselves to do our own laundry may result in a different response than if our friend expects us to do our laundry. Some people will feel the urgent need to do their laundry if someone else expects them to do it while others may respond only if they, themselves, feel they need to do it. Identifying how we respond can help us become more aware of ourselves and others.

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Gretchen Rubin argues that there are four main tendency types depending on how people react to inner or outer expectations: Obliger, Upholder, Questioner, or Rebel. An Obliger is identified as someone who tends to meet outer expectations but resists inner expectations. An Upholder is someone with the tendency to meet both outer and inner expectations. A Questioner tends to resist outer expectations but meets inner expectations, and a Rebel tends to resist both outer and inner expectations. By helping students become familiar with and aware of their tendencies, teachers and students may be able to construct a better suited environment and ease pushback on academic work.

Some students need to be held accountable while others need the freedom to make their own choices. A recommendation to improve student retention strongly suggests that universities “determine their student characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and implement a formal, comprehensive retention program that best meets their institutional needs” (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Identifying students based on the way they respond to expectations may have the ability to improve retention rates by understanding students' needs and highlighting ways in which students can shape their environment to make it most conducive to their natural tendency.

There is some literature that inspects the distinction between inner and outer expectations, but no study, to the best of our knowledge, has truly applied these theories. It is crucial that these ideas are implemented to determine whether plans tailored to the way we respond to expectations have the power to improve our production. Tailored assignments for multiple intelligences like verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, etc. have been long studied, yet they do not focus on individual expectations as motivating factors in learning

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and achievement (Lazear, 1992). Working with information regarding tendency styles and applying plans to better suit these tendencies may help propel performance and motivation from another angle.

This study aimed to apply these ideas by identifying the tendency styles of students and determining if simple academic plans suited to each tendency style could help improve academic performance. We intended to evaluate how effective the plans were for each tendency and what was most beneficial for student performance overall. Additionally, a measurement of academic motivation and the Big Five personality traits were used to determine whether intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and personality factors affected performance. We wanted to discover whether the personality and type of academic motivation people had impacted the role of expectations on academic performance. This project primarily aimed to determine the role of one's own response towards expectations on performance and if tailored plans may be advantageous.

### **III. Theoretical Context**

When considering the effects and influences on academic performance, there are a multitude of variables to consider. What may explain one student's performance may not explain another, and what may help one student may not help others. Academic performance itself can be explained by various factors. Perhaps it is grade point average (GPA), standardized test scores, attendance, or effort that is meant by "academic performance." Perhaps it is all of these factors. It is important to examine different types of academic performance and the elements that might affect them in order to best improve outcomes. For this study, we examined GPA along with self-report measures of academic performance. Elements believed to affect academic performance that were explored in this study are personality traits, academic motivation, and responses to expectations.

#### **Personality**

Personality traits commonly studied in social science research are the Big Five: openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness involves a curiosity and an eagerness to learn new things. Conscientiousness entails self-regulation, organization, persistence, reliability, and responsibility. Extroversion incorporates a search for new experiences and social connections. Agreeableness implies a trusting, affectionate, and altruistic behavior. Finally, neuroticism is a trait characterized by emotional instability like anxiety, depression, moodiness, and self-doubt.

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People with a high score in openness are comfortable with new, unfamiliar things and like variety in their experiences. People with a high score in conscientiousness tend to set and keep long-term goals. Those who score high in extroversion tend to be more talkative, energetic people. Those who score high in agreeableness tend to be cooperative, polite, and friendly. People with a high score in neuroticism tend to have more sensitive, obsessive, or tense characteristics.

These five personality traits are thought to represent an individual's personality at the broadest concept, and a four-year long study revealed that the Big Five personality traits remained stable across time without any significant changes (Cobb-Clark & Schurer, 2012). This suggests that personality is an especially important concept to view as stable throughout an individual's life. It also suggests we should mold academic plans to fit students' personalities rather than trying to mold students' personalities to fit one academic plan.

Past research has explored the association between personality traits and performance. One study of 308 undergraduates found that conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism, and agreeableness accounted for 14% of the variance in GPA (Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009). This suggests that these personality traits are influential to GPA and ultimately to academic performance. Moreover, a study of 188 first-year university students found that those who scored high in conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness performed better (Koseoglu, 2014). Conscientiousness explained the most variance, and this is consistent with other findings that show that conscientiousness is positively correlated with exam performance and academic success (Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009; Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000). This research suggests that people who are more conscientious may naturally perform better;

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however, people who are less conscientious may still be able to find other ways to keep themselves driven and self-regulated, perhaps through tailored academic plans.

Regardless of personality, people can still find ways to achieve and succeed. One personality trait regarded with controversy is neuroticism. Although higher scores of neuroticism have been associated with better performance, neuroticism has also been positively correlated with escapism. This indicates that more neurotic individuals may avoid academics and instead escape their duties (Koseoglu, 2014). This escapism may negatively affect performance or their neuroticism may push them to work harder to avoid anxious or unsettling feelings. Therefore, lower scores of neuroticism may be advantageous or disadvantageous for academic success depending on the individual and other factors, such as motivation and responses to expectations.

Unlike neuroticism which is has more mixed findings, agreeableness is a personality trait commonly associated with better achievement. A study of 105 students in an economics course found that students who scored high in conscientiousness and agreeableness performed better in the class than those who had low scores (Chowdhury & Amin, 2006). Another study measuring academic performance involved 1,013 students from four British Universities. Academic performance was measured with exams and coursework. The study revealed that conscientiousness and agreeableness were the strongest predictors of academic performance among the five personality traits studied and were positively associated with good grades (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003). This suggests that people who are more conscientious and agreeable tend to do better academically than those who score lower in these traits.

Although other traits have been reported as stronger predictors, openness and extroversion have also been noted as influential. In regards to learning involvement, higher

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scores were found in participants with greater openness and extroversion (Koseoglu, 2014). People who tend to be more open and extroverted seemed to involve themselves more in the learning process. Extroverts were more active in their learning while introverts were more reflective; additionally, people with higher openness levels preferred deep-learning to focus on mastery rather than surface-learning (Koseoglu, 2014). This may help explain why certain personality traits are more advantageous for different learning processes. However, more involvement does not necessarily lead to better performance and neither does a lack of escapism. This poses the question of how personality truly influences performance. Further, it induces the discussion of whether academic plans can be tailored to different personalities to ultimately improve performance since personality traits have been found to influence learning styles (Kamarulzaman, 2012). Personality is thus worthwhile to measure when contemplating the various facets of academic achievement.

### **Academic Motivation**

#### *Self-Determination Theory*

A prominent theory in psychology is the self-determination theory. This theory argues that people have the ability to make their own decisions and control their own life. In order to make their own choices, people must have three needs met: competence, connection, and autonomy. If these needs are met, then people are able to become self-determined. This self-determined behavior tends to be intrinsically motivated while extrinsic motivators are believed to lower self-determined behavior.

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In keeping aligned with this theoretical framework, we wanted to measure the academic motivation of students with intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation dimensions. Furthermore, we wanted to follow the three fundamental needs of the self-determination theory. In doing so, we wanted to assure that participants had autonomy by allowing them to pick their academic plans, that they felt connected by having weekly meetings that most participants chose to have in-person, and that they felt competent and able to fulfill their plans by measuring this with a self-report each week.

### *Intrinsic*

Intrinsic motivation is one of the most common types of motivation studied. Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviors that are done for an internal benefit. If someone is intrinsically motivated, then they are willing to act for the sole purpose of that act bringing them inner joy or fulfillment. Unsurprisingly, motivation influences academic performance. A study involving 200 college students measured academic motivation and academic performance. They found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were positively associated with academic performance (Ayub, 2010). This suggests that people with more motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, are likely to have better academic performance than people with a lack of motivation.

Intrinsic motivation, specifically, is found to have many benefits, including academic achievement. A sample of 69 college students attending a university in the United States and 256 students attending a university in Germany revealed that students with higher intrinsic motivation persisted longer and completed more challenges than students who were extrinsically

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motivated (Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). However, competing literature has revealed other findings. A study involving Hong Kong college students conducted a follow-up study on their participants to assess first-year GPA and found that it was negatively correlated with intrinsic motivation. Yet, they found that extrinsic motivation was positively correlated with their first-year GPA (Moneta & Siu, 2002). A potential explanation for this is that the college environment tends to discourage Hong Kong students' intrinsic motivation (Wong, 2010). The college atmosphere in Hong Kong places particular importance on examinations which teachers may use as a motivator to encourage students, creating a passive learning environment based on an extrinsic motivation for passing exams for a good career. Thus, in addition to intrinsic motivation, it is essential to account for the environment and extrinsic motivation when investigating academic performance.

### *Extrinsic*

Extrinsic motivation involves behaviors that are done for external rewards outside of the individual. These rewards may be things like grades, praise, or money. Oftentimes, extrinsic motivation consists of external, introjected, and identified regulation. External regulation refers to increased motivation to perform because of an external influence. If individuals act for an external reward, then they are motivated by external regulation. Introjected regulation refers to motivation for approval. Individuals with introjected regulation act because they feel motivated by guilt, worry, shame, or other internal pressure. Identified regulation refers to the motivation to act based on the action's influence in achieving an important goal later. These actions based on

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identified regulation are more directed towards individuals' well-being and desires; they act because they believe it will be important in molding their self-concept and personal importance.

These different types of regulation are valuable in assessing extrinsic motivation, especially when considering what academically motivates students. Based on a meta-analysis of 212,468 studies regarding performance and motivation, extrinsic incentives were found to be a better predictor of the quantity of performances than intrinsic motivation (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). This suggests that extrinsic motivation may contribute to a greater quantity of performance but may not reflect on the quality of the performance. Furthermore, it is helpful to identify whether incentives are either directly or indirectly tied to performance. When extrinsic incentives were directly tied to performance, then intrinsic motivation was found to be less important to performance; however, when the incentives were indirectly tied, then intrinsic motivation was more important (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). Consequently, it is vital to acknowledge the interwoven role of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on performance.

### *Amotivation*

Amotivation is the lack of motivation; amotivated people are not intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Amotivated individuals tend to believe that they are not in control of their behavior, so they are unmotivated to do many things. It is beneficial to compare people who score high in amotivation to those with extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. In regards to academic performance, measured by final first-year academic results, a study involving 194 first-year university students in South Africa revealed that amotivation was associated with poorer

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academic performance (Petersen, Louw, & Dumont, 2009). This suggests that, as expected, students who have less motivation tend to perform worse.

While there is an expansive amount of research supporting relationships between motivation and academic performance, some findings uncover no relationship. A study involving university students found no correlation between motivation and subsequent academic achievement (Baker, 2004). This suggests the importance of continuing to research motivation when examining the factors involved in academic performance but also the significance of inquiring and hypothesizing about other variables.

### **Expectations**

Another component involved in both learning and performance which is important to consider is the perceptions that people have of inner and outer expectations. Some people may be inclined to meet outer or inner expectations while others may resist them. It may be important to study how people view and respond to expectations in order to improve their motivation and performance.

When researching the role of outer expectations on student performance it may be important to consider parents' expectations. A study of 868 students who were 8-12 years old investigated the effect of parents' expectations on their child's achievement. They found that students with parents who had high academic expectations got higher academic achievement scores than students whose parents had low academic expectations (Davis-Kean, 2005). Students with parents who have high expectations may feel obliged to do well for their parents, or they

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may have more resources and opportunities to perform better. Another study revealed that parental expectations greatly impacted achievement. The study used data from 8,522 students as they transitioned from elementary school to high school and into college or career. They found that the 8th-grade standardized test scores could be predicted in part by educational expectations (Pearce, 2006). Furthermore, a study involving 9,494 eighth graders found that parental educational expectations were positively correlated with educational attainment (Vartanian, Karen, Buck, & Cadge, 2007). This again may suggest that parents with higher expectations of academics may provide their children with more tools necessary to achieve better results.

Along with parents' expectations, it is important to consider students' and teachers' expectations. A small focus group of 43 students in Year 9 or Year 10 in a New Zealand school sought to investigate parents', students', and teachers' expectations. Results revealed that unrealistically high expectations ended in students being disappointed with their performance which had negative effects on motivation and self-efficacy (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010). Regardless of who holds the expectations, if the individual feels that they are faced with unrealistically high demands, then their motivation may be impacted and ultimately detrimental to their academic performance.

High demands may also be a result of perception or lack of autonomy due to age. A study of 10 students in the 6th-8th grade were interviewed regarding their motivation, engagement, and parental expectations. They found that 6th and 7th graders felt more academically motivated when their parents had fairly strict expectations of academic performance (Mauro, 2014). However, 8th graders were found to be more motivated if their parents were less academically

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involved because they wanted to establish their own expectations of their academic performance (Mauro, 2014). This may suggest that age influences responses to expectations.

When accounting for age, it is important to acknowledge that students in college typically live independently from their parents and are accustomed to their own expectations than their parents' expectations. A study of 4,012 university students found that academic performance was positively correlated with students' expectations. Student expectations were also positively correlated with motivation (Tavani & Losh, 2003). Expectations were found to most greatly affect the students' academic performance (Tavani & Losh, 2003). This suggests that students who have greater expectations of performing well tend to succeed more. However, whether these expectations that students have are a reflection of their parents' or teachers' expectations are not explored. Perhaps the students report that they have high expectations because they truly, innerly want to perform well, or perhaps they have high expectations because they believe that someone else, an outer force, expects them to perform well. While these studies investigate expectations in a broad sense, they still do not uncover the tendency individuals have to naturally resist or meet expectations.

Gretchen Rubin has created a model of four tendencies that is designed to distinguish the way individuals respond to inner and outer expectations (Rubin, 2017). These tendencies people have might help reveal whether there are ways to adjust and tailor academic plans to improve academic performance. This project aimed to expand on academic research by studying how expectations relate to academic performance. There may be patterns yet uncovered within individual expectations that could provide information on the best practices to improve academic performance. The way people respond to expectations has not been thoroughly explored, and this

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study helps examine how different tendencies may better form academic habits. Working with tendency styles to apply unique learning strategies may help produce plans that can be designed for any task, even outside of academia. If plans are designed to fit individual tendencies, then there may be more adherence and motivation, ultimately leading to better performance.

### **Tailored Academic Plans**

When conducting research on differences in individuals, it can be favorable to use tailored designs. Since our study intends on helping improve academic behavior and performance based on four different tendencies regarding expectations, it is valuable to have academic plans that suit different individuals. With varying levels of personality traits, motivation types, and responses to expectations, adapted plans are particularly useful.

One intervention study involving socially isolated older adults tailored volunteer work to the individuals' interests and values. There were 8 participants involved in the intervention, and the qualitative data revealed positive experiences from all participants (Avins & Altschuler, 2016). Some participants even expressed profound changes that improved their quality of life. Another research design recruited 198 overweight adults to receive either tailored or non-tailored weight loss material. Non-tailored material that was still a good-fit performed as well or better than tailored material, while non-tailored material that was a moderate- or poor-fit was consistently worse than tailored material (Kreuter, Oswald, Bull, & Clark, 2000). This leads to the notion that tailored material is more effective than non-tailored material in most cases but not all. Therefore, it is necessary to further test tailored designs, especially in variable scenarios.

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In further investigation of tailored plans, a journal article explores the use of Rubin's Four Tendencies model to tailor healthcare treatment plans for better adherence from patients (Kirk et al., 2017). The authors propose that an individual's tendency towards expectations may contribute to their adherence to treatments. If this may be the case, then students' adherence to their academics is likely affected by their tendency towards expectations. Therefore, tailored plans using Rubin's Four Tendency model has the potential to benefit academic performance, which is what we aimed to explore in our study.

#### **IV. Methodology**

##### **Participants**

After initial enrollment in the study, there were 18 participants that had begun the process. Among those participants, 56% were female, 33% were male, 6% were non-binary, and 6% preferred not to disclose. Ages ranged from 18 to 59 where 73% were between 18 and 21 years old. The participants were all students from the University of Maine at Farmington, a small liberal arts college in rural Maine. The majority of participants, 45%, were at a Sophomore standing, and the average GPA was 3.146. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional instruction was transitioned to remote learning. Students were sent away from campus, making it more difficult to be consistently reached and meetings could no longer be held in person. Retention of the study reflected this; only 13 participants were able to set weekly plans and reflect on their performance changes.

##### **Procedure**

Participation was voluntary, and students heard about the opportunity by professors either via email or in-class. They were asked to participate if they were struggling with an academic behavior that they wanted to improve by following simple plans as part of the study. Once they had signed up, students provided their consent to be involved (Appendix A). They were then asked to complete an online quiz developed to identify which one of the four tendency styles

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they have regarding expectations (Rubin, 2017). They were also given a survey to assess types of academic strategies they currently preferred and used, their academic motivation, and their scores on the Big Five personality traits before the experiment (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallieres, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999; Appendix B).

Once completed, students were contacted to set up short, individual meetings weekly. The first meeting involved a further explanation of the study and then participants were asked to select a plan from a list of plans divided into the four different tendencies to carry out for the week. For example, an Obliger is someone who needs accountability because they meet outer expectations and resist inner expectations. If they are not attending class regularly, then they might choose to pair up with another student in their class to bring each other a snack each class. The outer expectation that someone is relying on them to come to class may be more crucial to them than the student relying on their own inner expectation that they should go to class. The students were encouraged to choose a plan that was tailored to their tendency type, as described, but they were provided a list of all plans to choose from (Appendix C).

Almost all weekly meetings were conducted in-person. These meetings involved interviewing participants on how they believed the plan affected their academic performance, what could be improved about their plan, how committed they are to their plan, etc (Appendix D). They were given the opportunity to change or tweak their plan each week or keep it the same if they believed it was working for them. The study lasted for a one-month period with four weekly meetings per participant.

## Measures

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There were two main measures included in the questionnaire of this study. The first was The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) (Vallerand et al., 1992). The AMS is the English version of the original measure created in France and has since been validated cross-culturally. There are 28 items which divide into 7 sub-scales. The sub-scales consist of the motivation to know, the motivation to accomplish things, the motivation to experience stimulation, external motivation regulation, introjected motivation regulation, identified motivation regulation, and amotivation.

The AMS was built on the principles of self-determination theory. Thus, there are three dimensions of motivation composed of the sub-scales. The first dimension is intrinsic motivation which consists of the motivation to know, to accomplish things, and to experience stimulation. These sub-scales are categorized as intrinsic motivators because they focus on the interest or enjoyment gained from learning itself. The second dimension is extrinsic motivation which consists of the external, introjected, and identified regulation sub-scales. These types of regulations are not inspired by an inner enjoyment of or interest in learning but rather for an outer reward. The third dimension is made up of the amotivation sub-scale to provide a measure for a complete lack of motivation in learning. All three dimensions were used to help understand academic performance.

The other main measure used was the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John & Srivastava, 1999). It is a self-report measure to assess personality based on 44 items. The personality dimensions assessed are openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. This is a frequently used and reliable measure of personality traits that may be advantageous when discussing different factors that affect student performance.

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Academic performance was measured initially by GPA. Changes in academic performance were measured with questions regarding the number of classes students had missed, how well they believed the plan was working for them, and a self-report on how they believed the plan affected their academics, whether it was taking notes, actively listening, or doing assignments.

Along with the questionnaire, case studies were used to measure qualitative data. Case studies are used to get in-depth information from individual participants. Therefore, in order to tailor small academic plans for each participant, case studies were needed. This allowed us to gain insight into how the plans worked for each participant over the one-month period. It also provided useful information about which plans worked for different individuals and what strategies were most commonly beneficial.

### **V. Results**

#### **Academic Performance**

Analyses focused on academic performance in relation to personality traits, academic motivation, and responses to expectations. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used. Academic performance was measured at the beginning of the study by grade point average (GPA). The average GPA among the participants was 3.146. We also measured academic performance with self-assessment questions forming qualitative data.

#### *Personality*

Extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness were all assessed. The average score among participants was 2.67 for extroversion, 3.51 for agreeableness, 2.94 for conscientiousness, 2.98 for neuroticism, and 3.37 for openness. These scores range from 1 (the lowest score signaling a low level of the trait) to 5 (the highest score signaling a high level of the trait). The participants, on average, scored highest in agreeableness; this suggests that participants tended to be more trusting, friendly, cooperative, and altruistic. Participants scored lowest, on average, in extroversion. This proposes that the participants tended to be more reserved and less talkative and that they solicit fewer social interactions.

We were particularly interested in how these traits might correlate with academic performance. However, we found essentially no correlation between GPA and conscientiousness,

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agreeableness, or extroversion. There were weak, negative correlations between GPA and neuroticism and openness (Table 1). Those scoring higher in neuroticism and openness tended to have a bit lower GPA. Nevertheless, the findings failed to indicate that personality traits have a strong relationship with GPA.

### *Academic Motivation*

There were seven subsets of academic motivation attributing to three dimensions of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. The scores ranged from 1 (the lowest score indicating that this is not a strong motivator) to 7 (the highest score indicating that this is a strong motivator).

The average score for motivation towards knowledge was 4.61, towards accomplishments was 3.99, towards stimulation was 3.22. These three scores contribute to intrinsic motivation and average to 3.94. Learning information to gain knowledge appears to be a high motivator among the participants.

The average score for identified regulation was 5.08, introjected regulation was 5.01, and external regulation was 5.13. Extrinsic motivation consists of these sub-scores which average to 5.07. This suggests that participants have quite high levels of extrinsic motivation.

The average score for amotivation was 2.69 which is relatively low, suggesting that the participants are fairly motivated. It suggests that the participants tend to have motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, which should indicate fairly high pre-existing academic achievement. Participants scored higher in extrinsic motivation than in both intrinsic motivation

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and amotivation. This indicates that participants in the study are more academically motivated for external rewards like grades, praise, or future career opportunities.

When analyzing the relationship between academic motivation and GPA, all seven sub-scores were examined. All three sub-scores associated with intrinsic motivation showed no correlation with GPA. All three sub-scores associated with extrinsic motivation showed weak relationships with GPA (Table 2). Amotivation and GPA had a moderately strong, negative relationship (Graph 1). This reflects the concept that less motivation is related to a lower GPA. Nevertheless, it is unclear about how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are related to GPA with the given findings from this study.

### *Expectations*

Among all 18 participants, over 90% were Obligers. Among the population it is estimated that about 41% of people are Obligers, 24% are Questioners, 19% are Upholders, and 17% are Rebels, so it was not entirely surprising that almost all participants in the study were Obligers (Rubin, 2017). The Obligers' tendency is characterized by meeting outer expectations and resisting inner expectations. This may further suggest why people with an Obliger tendency are the students who are seeking help, utilizing a study that may put them in the position to feel obligated to do well. This is especially apparent since the strongest recommendation for Obligers is to have some sort of accountability.

Students were asked a series of questions regarding how strongly the statements about academic strategies and components were true for them at the beginning of the study. After

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analyzing this data, the academic statement that the participants agreed most strongly with was being more likely to do homework if it is graded. This statement had a 4.39 average out of 5; where 5 meant that the statement was very true for them. This highlights the significance of receiving grades as extrinsic motivation along with the added accountability of turning in assignments to be graded.

When given the option to choose an academic plan for the week, almost all participants chose to have an accountability partner or a reward for completing their desired behavior. Most participants didn't struggle with class attendance, and this didn't change throughout the study. The academic behaviors that the participants wanted to focus on were either studying more, completing more assignments, or taking better notes in class. After assessing the data asked at each meeting, participants strongly believed that they had the skills and resources necessary to work on their plan. They also felt a moderate to strong commitment to their plan. Moreover, the majority of participants felt that their plan wasn't too difficult to use.

Nevertheless, there were some difficulties. The majority of participants were Obligers; yet, participants scored lower in extroversion. This may signal a discordance. Obligers need accountability from others, yet people who score lower in extroversion may have a harder time seeking out accountability partners and classmates who can help keep them motivated and perform well. One participant, in particular, noted that they found it difficult to be an introvert trying to maintain their plan of seeking out an accountability partner. Others noted that they had difficulty finding someone who would truly hold them accountable or the proper motivator to make them feel that there were consequences if they didn't follow-through.

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While many participants chose to find an accountability partner as their plan, many also selected a plan to create small rewards for accomplishing their desired academic behaviors. The difficulty commonly found within creating a reward-system was setting rewards with the right balance. They either felt that their rewards were given too easily or were too big. Regardless of the difficulty, though, participants knew what they needed to do to improve their plans. They worked on communication with accountability partners and self-control on rewards.

Although there were some adjustments, participants generally felt that the academic plans benefitted their performance. One participant remarked that it heightened their awareness of how much homework they were doing and another commented on the plan as helping them complete more homework. Moreover, one particular participant divulged that they were able to use their plan to find an accountability partner which contributed to them studying longer and, in doing so, they aced their exam.

Most participants had originally chosen plans each week that were tailored to the Obliger tendency type. However, upon the transition to remote, online learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of participants decided to change their plans to ones tailored for Upholders. Plans for Upholders tend to focus more on structure, planning, and routine, so it is likely that the Obligers were trying to create the daily routine they no longer had since being away from school. Additionally, many original plans involved having an accountability partner which was made very difficult once everyone was ordered off-campus and social-distancing was put into practice.

In further reflecting on the impact of the pandemic during this time, participants expressed that the plans seemed to be helping their academic performance. However, the

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majority of responses indicated a need to rework and tweak their plans while they adjust to a new, online class format. Participants also found it a bit more challenging to stick with the plans because of the transition, but they were hoping to utilize the plan as a way to stay on track and normalize their schedules better. This reveals how changing environments affect students, and creating plans in general may attribute to performance.

### **VI. Discussion**

The results indicate that participants' academic performance benefitted from weekly plans suited to the way participants respond to expectations. The results also reveal that participants were more extrinsically motivated than unmotivated or intrinsically motivated. There were no significant findings among personality and motivation in regard to GPA, but qualitative data suggest that tendency styles around expectations can be utilized for better academic performance.

Since the majority of participants were Obligers, the results are best generalized for the Obliger tendency. The results indicate that Obligers can greatly benefit from having accountability partners and setting small rewards. Additionally, participants scored high in external academic motivation. This suggests that Obligers may be more likely to gain motivation externally rather than internally. Obligers meet outer expectations, so it makes sense that they are more externally motivated.

While participants scored higher in external academic motivation than internal, the participants scored highest in agreeableness than the other four personality traits. We can speculate that Obligers may be more agreeable since they meet the outer expectations people have of them. Following agreeableness, openness was the second strongest personality trait of participants. The participants voluntarily signed up for the study, so they may be more open to trying new things and strategies to improve their academic performance. This may suggest that people who are more open tend to be more willing to participate in research studies which would suggest a bias in the sampling. Additionally, those who are more open to trying new things may

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perform better if they are more willing to try. Therefore, we cannot generalize the results to students who would be less willing to change their behaviors or try new academic plans.

Randomized sampling would be the best strategy for obtaining participants that may be less likely to sign up for this type of study. However, if these participants do not want to be involved, perhaps the classroom environment or lesson plans would need to be altered to help suit different tendencies. For example, Obligers who are less open to these methods may benefit from being held accountable with graded homework rather than seeking out accountability partners themselves. Rebels may need more choice in their assignments, Questioners may need more details or information about why the material is important, and Upholders may need more structure built into assignments or the syllabus.

### **Limitations**

This is the first study to our knowledge that applies the framework of the Four Tendencies in hopes to improve academic performance. The majority of past research has not focused on the way people respond to expectations. We hope that this study can help others gain insight on and application of this expanding research in behavior and expectations, yet this study has limitations we will address.

One limitation of this study is the sample. Our sample size was small, and it was a sample from a small, liberal arts university lacking diversity. Almost all participants were Obligers, making it difficult to justify whether the plans tailored to the other three tendencies would work as well. Thus, our results can really only speak for the Obliger tendency type. Having primarily

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Obligiers participate in the study suggests that there was a selection bias. The participants were mainly Obligers and scored high in openness, revealing that they may be the types of people who respond more favorably to voluntary studies. Obligers like to be held accountable from others, so it makes sense that they would be more willing to seek help from a study designed to monitor weekly performance. Additionally, people who score higher in openness would tend to be more willing to try new methods and plans to improve their performance while others may be more opposed.

Another limitation is the possibility that simply having a plan is better than having no plan. We cannot be certain that the plan worked best for them because it was tailored to the way they view expectations. Participants were more interested in the academic plans that were tailored to their tendency style, but it is unclear whether they would have performed as well using a plan that was not specifically tailored for their tendency.

There may have also been experimental demand or response bias within the study. Participants were asked questions about their academic behavior and their academic plan. Since the questions were self-reports, students may have answered the questions in a way to make themselves look favorable. They might have reported better academic behaviors or estimates than what is true. Additionally, participants could have anticipated the purpose of the study and felt the need to report that they were performing better academically since they were following a plan designed to help them do so. Self-assessments are always limiting in the regard in which we can never safeguard against all biases.

We measured successfully improving academic performance with a self-report measure. However, academic performance can be seen in many ways. GPA, class attendance, effort,

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quantity of assignments, and quality of assignments are all different ways to assess academic performance. It can be difficult to measure success in improving academic performance since it can take various forms. We were unable to measure all the different ways that participants' academic performance may have changed. We did not get to look at how GPA may have changed over time when using these plans. Additionally, we couldn't measure the potential change in the quality of the participants' work during the study.

Furthermore, success may be different for each tendency. Obligers may be more focused on external measures like GPA or test scores while Questioners might be more focused on the quality of their assignments if it meets their inner expectations. Rebels may not be interested in traditional types of academic performance measures, and Upholders may be interested in all areas of improvement. Therefore, it is important to consider and measure various dimensions of improvement in academic performance.

A final limitation to be touched upon is that of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the outbreak, all learning was transitioned remotely, and students were sent home from university. This made it difficult to retain participants, and it made it difficult for participants to continue their plans. Nevertheless, some chose to continue the study and select different plans. This shed light on the unpredictability of some circumstances and how academic performance may be affected when students face changing environments.

## **Implications**

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One implication for this study is the development of unique plans to help improve student performance. If further research is conducted, then there is the potential that simple academic plans can be dispersed to students to help with their academic performance. Finding ways for students to improve their academic behaviors is advantageous for not only students but also parents, teachers, and school systems. Helping students create plans that will mold their environment in ways that suit their response to expectations may help their academic performance and likely other areas in their life.

Another important implication of this study to highlight is retention. Schools are concerned about keeping students, and a major role in retention is academic performance. Students need to do well to stay in college, and providing students with plans that benefit their performance may help. Providing students with the knowledge of their tendency towards expectations and plans that fit their tendencies may enhance academic performance. It may allow students to feel like they have the information and skills necessary to do well in college, ultimately improving retention.

### **Future Research**

Future research could involve larger sample sizes and more diversity. Having more participants may help uncover information on tendency types other than Obligers. It is important to look at how people who resist outer expectations perform academically. It is also useful to consider people who meet inner expectations and how their academic performance may compare. We were unable to utilize the different types of plans because we did not have the

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diversity that future research would hopefully explore. Participants were volunteers who actively wanted to improve their academic performance, and Obligers may be more willing to ask for help from others since they need to be held accountable. Perhaps, in the future, incentives could be used to encourage more participation. Additionally, people with other tendencies may be more willing to participate if they are given more information on the study. Questioners may need more details on what the study entails as well as a chance to ask their own questions. Rebels may gain more interest if they are made aware of the choices and variety that will be involved in the study. Rebels may also benefit if the study is framed as a sort of challenge where they would compete with others or themselves to improve, and Upholders may be more willing to participate if the study isn't designed as a way to help improve academic performance but rather to maintain it.

The way that the present study was framed was to improve academic performance. Instead, more diverse participants may be acquired with a different method. Many students may not believe that they need to improve their academic performance. It would be interesting to recruit participants with different tendencies but also those who may not necessarily want to improve their performance. This would be helpful in assessing whether these plans could work for less motivated individuals or those who are less self-aware of their need to improve their academic performance. Participants may be more willing to be a part of the study if it was framed as a study on academic plans rather than a way to improve academic performance or if it had monetary incentives.

Additionally, future research could look into different avenues of assessing academic performance. There may be more specific, detailed questions that could be used to reveal how

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plans might impact academic performance. Furthermore, future studies could involve control groups that receive no academic plan and groups that are matched with plans that are not tailored to them. This may help gain knowledge on whether tailored plans or general plans are the most advantageous.

It would be beneficial if this research on tendency styles was replicated in regards to academic performance but in other fields, as well. It would be of great value to investigate whether understanding expectation styles could improve adherence in healthcare. Elaborating on and growing the literature in the area of expectations is significant. Expectations are imposed on us daily, whether by ourselves or others, so understanding how people respond to expectations may have the power to shape behavior in ways we were unable to before.

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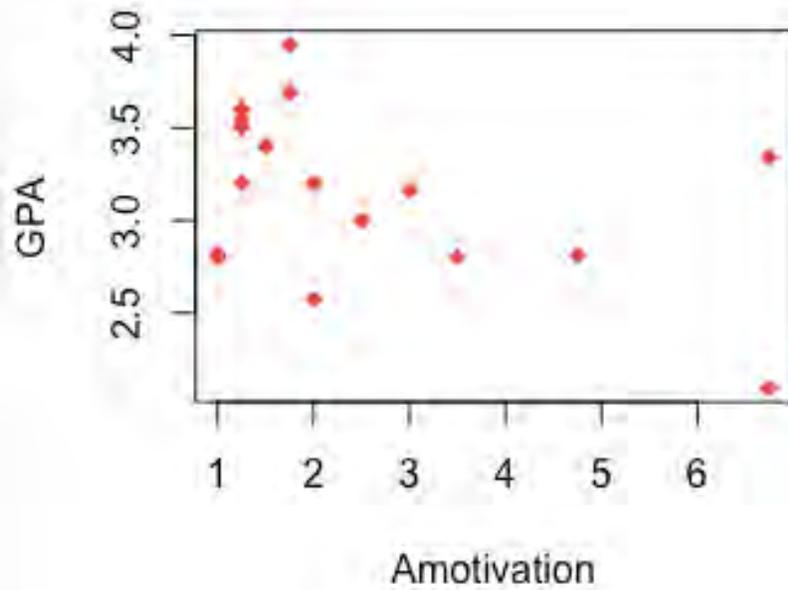
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**VIII. Graphs**

**Graph 1: Amotivation x GPA Correlations**



**IX. Tables**

**Table 1: Personality x GPA Correlations**

|                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| GPAXAgreeableness     | -0.0294563334102951 |
| GPAXConscientiousness | 0.0436683650071154  |
| GPAXExtroversion      | -0.0247722338693711 |
| GPAXNeuroticism       | -0.179151322921398  |
| GPAXOpenness          | -0.172820692345141  |

**Table 2: Motivation x GPA Correlations**

|                                    |                    |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| MotivationAccomplishxGPA           | 0.0913132292258557 |
| MotivationAmotivationxGPA          | -0.454301236841844 |
| MotivationExternalRegulationxGPA   | 0.241163478707098  |
| MotivationIdentifiedRegulationxGPA | 0.141277335651519  |
| MotivationIntrojectedRegulationGPA | -0.162608169982109 |
| MotivationKnowledgexGPA            | 0.0626474251187335 |
| MotivationStimulationxGPA          | 0.0213815155887864 |

## **X. Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Adult Informed Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Jennifer Hart, a student at the University of Maine at Farmington. The purpose of the research is to understand individual expectations and motivation habits.

What Will You Be Asked to Do? If you decide to participate, you will be asked to individually answer a questionnaire at the beginning of the study. This will take roughly 10 minutes to complete. During the study, you will be given academic tips to guide your learning and engagement, and you will be asked to focus on them each week. After each week, you will be asked questions pertaining to how you felt the strategies worked.

Risks? There is the possibility that you may be uncomfortable providing information asked. The time involved and inconvenience of the study may be risks of participating in the study as well.

Benefits? There are no direct benefits to you from participating in the study. However, as a participant you may gain valuable insight into learning styles more tailored to your individual tendencies. This may help you perform better academically and in other areas of your life. Aside from this benefit to the participant, this research will help Jennifer Hart learn more about individual performance.

Confidentiality? Names will not be connected to responses. Participants will be asked to provide a 4-digit code that will be used to connect their pre-measures with the data from each interview. The documents and files from this study will all be kept in a secure database. Some data may be shared with Dr. Lori Koban. This data will be unidentifiable since a 4-digit code will be used to connect responses. Interviews with the students will be conducted by Jennifer Hart and coded using each 4-digit code. Jennifer Hart will be aware of each participant's name, but the qualitative data will be recorded under the 4-digit code. Data may be shared with Lori Koban after the study has ended for data analysis purposes. All data from the study, including the participant key, will be kept until the end of the semester and then destroyed.

Voluntary? Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. There are no repercussions for not continuing or declining to take the study questionnaire. Furthermore, you have the opportunity to withdraw from the study and lesson plans at any time without penalty.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, fully understand the purpose of this research and the procedures to be followed. I understand that my records will be kept confidential, my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also recognize that I may skip any questions I don't wish to respond to. Results of this research will be shared in the form of one or more publications and verbal presentations. If you have any

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questions about this study, please contact me, Jennifer Hart, at [jennifer.a.hart@maine.edu](mailto:jennifer.a.hart@maine.edu). You may also reach the faculty advisor, Dr. Lori Koban, on this study at [lori.koban@maine.edu](mailto:lori.koban@maine.edu). By signing below, I assert that I am 18 years or older, fully understand the above, and give my consent to serve as a subject in this research. (If you would like a summary of the results, please make the request of the researcher at the contact given above).

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### Appendix B: Pre-Questionnaire

What year in school are you?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other:

What is your age?

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- Other:

What is your GPA?

What three things do you do to succeed academically?

Academic habits

On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing *not at all* and 5 representing *very true* rate the following:

- I make sure to study on a regular basis
- I dedicate at least 6 hours a week to this course outside of class
- I almost always put forth my best effort in this class
- I do all of the homework assignments
- If homework is graded, then I am more likely to do it
- I prefer homework assignments with specific deadlines rather than ones that have flexible deadlines
- I am more likely to do homework if I am working with other students
- I look over class notes in between classes to make sure I understand the material
- I am organized
- I take good notes in class
- I listen carefully in class
- I come to class each time it meets
- I see myself as a role model for other students
- I think about my future-self when studying or attending class
- I think about why I should do my homework
- The way I study is unique to me
- I focus on why I want to study

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- I approach my studies in a way that makes me different from others
- I schedule a specific time to study
- I reward myself for doing my homework

Academic Motivation (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallieres, 1992)

On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing *does not correspond at all* and 7 representing *corresponds exactly* rate the following:

- Because with only a high-school degree I would not find a high-paying job later on
- Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things
- Because I think that a college education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen
- For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others
- Honestly, I don't know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school
- For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies
- To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my college degree
- In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on
- For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before
- Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like
- For the pleasure that I experience when I read interesting authors
- I once had a good reasons for going to college; however, now I wonder whether I should continue
- For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments
- Because of the fact that when I succeed in college I feel important
- Because I want to have "the good life" later on
- For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me
- Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation
- For the pleasure that I experience when I feel completely absorbed by what certain authors have written
- I can't see why I go to college and frankly, I couldn't care less
- For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities
- To show myself that I am an intelligent person
- In order to have a better salary later on
- Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me
- Because I believe that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker
- For the "high" feeling that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects
- I don't know; I can't understand what I am doing in school
- Because college allows me to experience personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies
- Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies

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Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999)

On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing *disagree strongly* and 5 representing *agree strongly*, rate the following:

- I see myself as someone who:
  - is talkative
  - tends to find fault with others
  - does a thorough job
  - is depressed, blue
  - is original, comes up with new ideas
  - is reserved
  - is helpful and unselfish with others
  - can be somewhat careless
  - is relaxed, handles stress well
  - is curious about many different things
  - is full of energy
  - starts quarrels with others
  - is a reliable worker
  - can be tense
  - is ingenious, a deep thinker
  - generates a lot of enthusiasm
  - has a forgiving nature
  - tends to be disorganized
  - worries a lot
  - has an active imagination
  - tends to be quiet
  - is generally trusting
  - tends to be lazy
  - is emotionally stable, not easily upset
  - is inventive
  - has an assertive personality
  - can be cold and aloof
  - perseveres until the task is finished
  - can be moody
  - values artistic, aesthetic experiences
  - is sometimes shy, inhibited
  - is considerate and kind to almost everyone
  - does things efficiently
  - remains calm in tense situations
  - prefers work that is routine
  - is outgoing, sociable
  - is sometimes rude to others
  - makes plans and follows through with them

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- gets nervous easily
- likes to reflect, play with ideas
- has few artistic interests
- likes to cooperate with others
- is easily distracted
- is sophisticated in art, music, or literature

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### Appendix C: Academic plans

#### Upholder:

- Schedule homework for a specific time each day
- Keep a checklist for each homework assignment or problem to check off each time you finish something
- Create a list of all of the classes in the semester left and only cross off each day you attend class
- Add SI to your schedule and attend each week

#### Obliger:

- Have an accountability partner to tell each other what you want to accomplish by the end of the week and hold each other to it
- Go to SI each week where they will expect your attendance
- SI leader will message you each night before homework is due asking if you have completed the assigned work
- Partner with a student in the class to work on homework outside of class each week
- Pair up with someone in the same class and agree to meet somewhere and walk together to class 15 minutes early
- Plan a small reward for when you finish your daily assignments

#### Questioner:

- Chart your progress in the class by keeping information on your grades and attendance
- Think about and reflect on why you want to attend class more or keep up on the homework
- For each assignment, begin by writing down why it is important that you do it
- Think and plan out your future path and how this class is important for it
- Meet with the professor during office hours to discuss the importance of the material

#### Rebel:

- Focus on what academic habits you want to improve on and write a small reflection
- Jot down ideas on how the coursework allows you to be true to yourself and identify with the work
- Instead of scheduling time to do homework, do it when it feels most convenient for you each day
- Use a path to get to class that other students may not take
- Find a unique location to do school work that other people do not typically use

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### Appendix D: Weekly Questions

Which plan did you choose for the past week?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What is the extent to which you feel you have the skills and resources necessary to attain your plan?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all          Very much

How committed do you feel to your plan?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all          Very much

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How difficult do you believe your plan is?

|            |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |           |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
|            | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     | 8                     | 9                     |           |
| Not at all | <input type="radio"/> | Very much |

What do you believe is the difficulty of your plan?

Your answer

What can be improved about your plan? How?

Your answer

How many days did you miss class this week? Why?

Your answer

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How do you believe this week's plan affected or influenced your academic performance?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Below is the link to the Google Doc with tailored academic plans. Feel free to choose one or two from the list or use them to create your own for the week.**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KQ6\\_NT4LwJsTlSAk5IPk5Wt44L0M0bX2vvHLtoLdwG4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KQ6_NT4LwJsTlSAk5IPk5Wt44L0M0bX2vvHLtoLdwG4/edit?usp=sharing)

What plan do you want to use for the next week?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_