

Using the GoodWork™ Model to Introduce First-Year Students to the Expectations of Academia

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In this article, we present a GoodWork™-inspired Summer Reading Assignment and Freshman Orientation program to introduce first-year students to the culture of higher education. We believed that the GoodWork™ model would be a useful tool for helping students to understand our university's expectations for excellence, ethics, and engagement in their academic work. Assessment data showed students' ability to apply the concept of GoodWork™ as well as their high level of satisfaction with the program and the value that they found in learning about GoodWork™ as they embarked on their first year of undergraduate study.

The GoodWork™ model was developed almost two decades ago by three prominent psychologists, Howard Gardner, William Damon, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001). The model arose from in-depth interviews of professionals who were nominated by their peers for achieving “good work” during a time when it would be easy to abandon good work because of strong market forces and rapid technological advances. Those interviews revealed three characteristics of good workers: their work was excellent (i.e., of the highest quality), ethical (i.e., socially responsible), and engaged (i.e., meaningful and pleasurable).

Since the inception of the model, Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, Damon, and their collaborators have published a variety of GoodWork™-related books and research papers (*The Good Project Timeline*, 2012). Additionally, GoodWork™ collaborators Fischman and Barendson created a GoodWork™ Toolkit (2004, 2010) specifically designed to encourage high school and college-aged students to reflect upon their own current work and the work they hope to do as future professionals. The toolkit and other GoodWork™-related materials, while the intellectual property of Project Zero and Harvard's Graduate School of Education, are freely available online (*The Good Project Timeline*).

In fall of 2011, we, along with our colleague Joan Miller, introduced our academic community to GoodWork™ through discussions inspired by the

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aforementioned toolkit. These conversations revealed that students held some misconceptions about the three *Es* of GoodWork™ as applied to their academic work. For example, students commonly mistook “doing their best” as an example of excellence without regard to the quality of the work. Additionally, students considered “making good personal choices” as ethical, failing to consider the impact of their choices on others. As members of our university learned more about the concept of GoodWork™, they embraced opportunities to embed the model into campus programs. In spring of 2012, we were invited to incorporate GoodWork™ into our university’s Summer Assignment and Freshman Orientation program. The following text describes the program and its findings.

Summer Assignment

Our university’s Summer Assignment provides a forum for welcoming students to the academic community by requiring a common literacy experience that is discussed among small groups of first-year students and faculty/staff/administrators during Freshman Orientation.

In the first part of the Summer Assignment, we used a survey to assess incoming students’ understanding of the three *Es* of GoodWork™. We considered this a way to gauge their perceptions of college-level expectations for academic work. In the second part of the Summer Assignment, students read and analyzed a case study. They then wrote two essays on the extent to which the case study illustrated the three *Es* of GoodWork™.

Method

Students completed the Summer Assignment through our university’s online course management system. First, students ($n = 2128$; $M_{age} = 18$; 1228 female) completed the Expectations of Undergraduates’ Behavior Survey (EUBS). We created this survey for students to rate 34 behaviors (e.g., doing one’s own work, trying one’s best) as *average*, *above average*, or *outstanding*. Faculty/staff/administrators ($n = 120$; 68 female) rated the same behaviors as *meeting expectation*, *exceeding expectation*, or *outstanding*. We compared responses from the two samples using descriptive statistics.

After completing the survey, students analyzed a case study about Sam Eshaghoff—a high school student convicted of charging thousands of dollars to take college entrance exams for his peers. Students watched a video (*The Perfect Score*, 2012) and read a transcript and two news articles. Students ($n = 1957$) also wrote two 1-page essays. In the first essay, students judged whether Sam thought his own actions were excellent, ethical, and engaged. In the second essay, students judged whether a student who was denied admittance to a dream school would consider Sam’s actions to be excellent, ethical, and engaged. We conducted content analyses on both essays from a random sample ($n = 100$) of the submitted essays.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with our expectations, results from the EUBS revealed divergent beliefs about what constitutes excellent and ethical academic behaviors. In terms of excellence, three-quarters of students reported the following behaviors as *above average* or *outstanding*: attending all classes, studying hard, passing all classes, trying one's best, and turning in neat and organized assignments. In contrast, only one-quarter of faculty/staff/administrators considered these behaviors to *exceed expectation* or be *outstanding*. In terms of ethics, three-quarters of students reported the following behaviors as above average or outstanding: prioritizing school over socializing, doing one's own work, not allowing peers to copy one's work, and not telling peers the content of exams. In contrast, less than one-quarter of faculty/staff/administrators considered these behaviors to *exceed expectation* or be *outstanding*. This divergence in expectations between incoming students and the academic community suggests an institutional misalignment which can deter the pursuit of GoodWork™ by its members. Having discovered this misalignment, we are in a better position to develop university-wide initiatives to address it.

Content analysis of the first Summer Assignment essay ($n = 100$) revealed that nearly all students reported that Sam would consider his actions to be good work (97% believed that Sam thought his work was excellent, 97% ethical, and 83% engaged). These findings suggest that students were able to apply the concepts of GoodWork™ to this case analysis. When taking an outsider's perspective in the second essay ($n = 100$), most students recognized that Sam's actions were not good work because not all three Es were satisfied. While the majority recognized that Sam's work was excellent (73%) and engaged (70%), most acknowledged that his work was not ethical (94%). Interestingly, many students revealed a strong emotional response to Sam's behavior in the second essay—68% used anger-related terms—suggesting their strong disapproval of Sam's actions. We were encouraged by students' emotive response in contrast to feelings of apathy or hopelessness.

Freshman Orientation

To address the misalignment between students' and our academic community's perceptions of academic good work and to discuss the Sam Eshaghoff case in relation to GoodWork™, we developed a script to guide a 1-hour discussion between students and faculty/staff/administrators. Discussions occurred at the end of the second day of a three-day Freshman Orientation program.

Method

Students were split into groups of 30 and were assigned a faculty/staff/administrator facilitator. During the first five minutes, students ($n = 1450$) completed the High School Experiences Inventory (HSEI). We created this 16-item

survey to assess students' typical high school experiences such as whether notes were provided, the ease of obtaining an excused absence, whether they could make up tests without penalty, whether extra credit could raise unsatisfactory grades, and the number of hours spent completing homework. We analyzed students' responses using descriptive statistics.

Facilitators then addressed the misalignment between students' and the academic community's perceptions of academic good work by presenting results from the EUBS. Facilitators also reviewed the GoodWork™ model and engaged students in a discussion of Sam Eshaghoff's actions. Facilitators were encouraged to discuss how the three *Es* translate into academic good work and how all three *Es* must be present for good work to occur.

Finally, students ($n = 1517$) completed a Post-program Assessment Survey. Students wrote one thing they would take away from the discussion that might help them in their freshman year. We conducted content analyses on the responses. Then, students rated their overall satisfaction with the Summer Assignment and the Freshman Orientation discussion on a scale of 1 (*very low*) to 10 (*very high*), which we analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

HSEI results revealed that 45% of students were provided notes in high school, 72% could easily obtain an excused absence, 94% could make up missed exams without penalty, and 48% could complete extra credit to raise their grades. Furthermore, the average time spent completing homework on a typical school night was 1.25 hours. These results provide further insight into the misalignment between students' and our academic community's perceptions of academic GoodWork™. With only one-quarter of these students reporting earning college credit through advanced placement or college coursework, the majority may be operating under the misimpression that university expectations will mirror those of high school because they lack any experience to suggest otherwise. Also, one-quarter of our sample reported being first-generation college students. This lack of generational experience with university expectations may be an additional precipitant of misalignment.

We were pleased to find that responses to the Post-program Assessment revealed high levels of satisfaction with both the Summer Assignment and Freshman Orientation discussions (modal responses of 8 out of 10 for both). Content analyses of responses also revealed that most students (66%) valued learning more about the three *Es* of GoodWork™ and having the opportunity to reflect upon the academic expectations of higher education during Freshman Orientation discussions. The remaining 34% did not mention GoodWork™-related concepts; however, of those, 12% reported motivation to approach their first year with enhanced effort, and the remaining 22% reported learning about campus resources and study skills. We were pleased to find that only a handful of students reported no value in the mandatory Freshman Orientation discussion session.

Conclusions

In this paper, we presented a GoodWork™-inspired Summer Assignment and Freshman Orientation program to introduce first-year students to the culture of higher education. Students showed the ability to apply the concept of GoodWork™, reported a high level of satisfaction with the program, and noted the value of learning about GoodWork™ as they embarked on their first year of undergraduate study. To reinforce the concepts of GoodWork™ throughout the academic year, small groups of first-year students discussed a time when they had demonstrated academic GoodWork™ and their role models of academic GoodWork™. Also, William Damon visited campus to speak to students about the importance of finding purpose while pursuing GoodWork™. We have been invited to expand our Freshman Orientation program to a full day of GoodWork™-inspired interactive workshops, self-assessments, and programs to showcase campus resources. We also plan to integrate other GoodWork™-inspired programming into existing first-year seminars and to invite other distinguished speakers to support our students' pursuit of GoodWork™.

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