

'Passionately curious' or curiously passionate? Measuring students' emotional engagement with their study programme

Objectives: Passion has been found to be an important and advantageous characteristic in many diverse contexts. The aim of this study was to measure students' engagement with their study programme through the attribute 'academic passion'.

Design: Following a thematic analysis of qualitative responses from a previous study which investigated retention and engagement, the Academic Passion Scale (APS) was developed to test the salience of emotional engagement with students' programme of study. The scale was tested on two diverse cohorts, one from arts-based courses and the other from science-based courses, at two UK universities.

Methods: 303 participants were recruited and invited to complete a 26-item Likert type scale. Data reduction techniques suggested excluding 5 items from the scale, producing the APS21.

Results: Preliminary analysis showed no correlation between mean APS21 scores and Key Information Sets data for each of the courses, nor was there a difference between science-based and arts-based courses. However the two NHS programmes that provided bursaries produced significantly higher APS21 scores than the other programmes ($z=7.13$, $P<.001$).

Conclusions: We suggest that the competitive nature of applications for bursary funded courses is likely to result in positive affirmation of course choice by the successful which would account for the higher scores on the APS21 found in this study. Future work with APS21 will explore its role in understanding retention and identifying those at risk of non-completion of their programme of study.

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