

HBCU Students and Career Opportunities:

Self-Evaluation in the Job Market

Author: Ahmed Gandema

MBA Student

College of Business Administration

Savannah State University

3219 College Street, Savannah, GA 31404

Tel: 912-541-1648

Fax: 912-358-3903

Email: gandemahmed@hotmail.com

Ahmed Gandema is a MBA student in the College of Business Administration at Savannah State University. He earned his BBA in Finance from Georgia Southern University. Gandema plans to pursue his doctorate in Finance. His research interests include e-learning and business education.

Co-Author: Ulysses J. Brown, III

Associate Professor of Management

College of Business Administration

Savannah State University

3219 College Street, Savannah, GA 31404

Tel: 912-358-3402

Fax: 912-358-3903

Email: brown@savannahstate.edu

Ulysses J. Brown, III is an associate professor of management in the College of Business Administration at Savannah State University. Prior to joining the professoriate, Dr. Brown served ten years in the United States Navy. He earned his bachelor's and master's from Valdosta State University and a Ph.D. in Business Administration from Jackson State University. His

research interests are in the areas of social exchange theory, work-family conflict, propensity for military service, organizational performance in military units and management education.

Abstract

This study examines college students and their self-evaluation of career opportunities in the job market. We also investigate the antecedents of academic achievement, and employment perceptions. Using a structural equation modeling framework, we found that general self-efficacy, cognitive perceived social support, and state of hope influenced perception of employment opportunities. In addition, state of hope and core self-evaluations predicted academic achievement in our model. Further, no gender difference exists across the nomological network. The authors of the study also discuss the implications, limitations, and future research directions.

Key Words: Achievement, career opportunities, college students.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recession of 2008 hit the labor market decreasing opportunities for college students. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2012), the unemployment rate has been over 8% in the past 43 months, but has seen a slight decrease by 0.3% point to 7.8% in September 2012; these numbers are subject to change depending on the economic recovery. Students are unable to find full time employment. Over the past decades the growth in new college graduates has outpaced the growth in college-level jobs, leading to an over-supply of college graduates for a limited number of quality jobs (Vedder, Denhart, Denhart, Matgournis, & Robe, 2010). The increasing number of college graduates associated with the economic slowdown has meant that merely getting a degree does not guarantee students will land a good paying job (McGrath, 2002). The challenges facing past and recent graduate students in finding a college-level job forced us to ask ourselves if getting a college degree really is worth it. However, with the slow economic recovery combined with the improvement in the labor market may mean that employment opportunities will continually increase for college students in the future.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of general self-efficacy, academic motivation, perceived social support, state of hope, and core self-evaluation on the perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 General Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) conceptualized self-efficacy as a person's belief concerning his or her ability to perform a given task or behavior. Betz and Hackett (1997) applied Bandura's self-efficacy theory to career behavior, and defined it as "career-related behaviors, educational and occupational choice, and performance and persistence in the implementation of those choices" (p. 383). A person's perceived self-efficacy influences how one may perceive his or her ability to land a college-level job after graduating. Further, Luthans (2002) extended self-efficacy to student behavior and found that "the more confident the individual, the more likely the choice will be made to pursue the task and welcome the challenge" (p. 700). Individual with high level of self-efficacy will have an optimistic attitude in adverse situations. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H₁: General self-efficacy will influence both academic achievement and perception of employment opportunities.

2.2 Academic Motivation

People choose to pursue higher education to increase their earnings or opportunities of getting a high paying job, or for the simple desire to learn. Research has found that motivation is related to various educational outcomes such as curiosity, persistence, learning, and performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Individuals who are highly motivated tend to perform better in school and have a positive attitude about their academic achievement.

Academic achievement and employment opportunities are interwoven as employers use students' overall grade point average (OGPA) and other determinants when screening job applicants. Albrecht, Carpenter, and Sivo (1994) argued that although employers value both high grades and high involvement in college activities, the value placed on grades is somewhat higher.

Academic motivation not only determines how successful students will be in college, but also how it will shape their professional life. Therefore, we propose that:

H₂: Academic motivation will influence both academic achievement and perception of employment opportunities.

2.3 Perceived Social Support

Social support refers to social assets, social resources, or social networks that people can use when they are in need of aid, advice, help, assistance, approval, comfort, protection, or backing (Vedder, Boekaerts, & Seegers, 2005). The larger the number of people individuals can count on for support, the lower their level of depression. Extending perceived social support to college students, previous studies found that perceived social support is associated with academic achievement (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Eccles 2007; Wentzel 1998). Rosenfeld, Richman, and Bowen (2000) found that the level of support students receive from their peers, parents and teachers is a determinant of their performance in school; high support leads to better grades. We also believe that perceived social support influence how optimistic we are about our abilities to find a job. In light of these findings, we will evaluate the following hypothesis:

H₃: Perceived social support will be a significant predictor of academic achievement and perception of employment opportunities.

2.4 State of Hope

Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1991) conceptualized hope as “a positive motivational state that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 287). Hope allows individuals to

be optimistic about their expectancies for goal attainment. Consistent with previous studies, Conti (2000) suggested that the stronger the hope of college students, the more likely they will attain the goals they set for themselves. Accordingly, the level of hope may contribute to students' success or failure in a given situation. Based on the existing literature, we come to the following hypothesis:

H₄: Higher state of hope will predict academic achievement as well as the perception of employment opportunities.

2.5 Core Self-Evaluations

The concept of core self-evaluations was introduced by Judge, Lock, and Durham (1997) to describe the fundamental beliefs people hold about themselves, other people, and the world. The concept includes four distinct traits; self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism. Each of these traits contribute to how individuals evaluate themselves with respect to their abilities, capabilities, level of confidence, emotional stability, and perceived degree of control of events in their lives. Judge, Erez, and Bono (1998) argued that the concept of core self-evaluations may influence an individual's performance and life satisfaction through motivation. In view of the previous discussion, we believe that core self-evaluations may also influence academic achievement and perception of employment opportunities. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H₅: Core self-evaluations will influence both academic achievement and perception of employment opportunities.

2.6 Academic Achievement and Perception of Employment Opportunities

Research studies have found that African-American women tend to have higher level of achievement than men (Mickelson & Smith, 1989; Jones, 1985). As stated previously, academic

achievement has become widely important to recruiters when screening job applicants. Recruiters believe that undergraduate academic achievement or grade point average predicted job performance across many types of organizations, especially for job performance measured closer in time to the GPA (Roth, Campion, & Jones, 1996). Males and females have to compete for the fewer jobs available in the job market and those with high academic achievement will have a better chance to be interviewed by potential employers compare to those with low academic achievement. Therefore, we advance the following hypothesis:

H₆: There will be gender difference across the students' perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement.

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample and Procedures

The participants were 200 students at a comprehensive historically black university in the southern part of the United States. The respondents completed a survey instrument during regular class hours. The data collection took approximately 15 minutes. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. The subjects completed the following instruments: general self-efficacy, academic motivation, perceived social support, state of hope, core self-evaluation, and perception of employment opportunities, and a background information form. The authors distributed and received 200 surveys for an overall response rate of 100 percent. As can be seen in Table 1, Males represented 54.8 percent of the sample. Also, the sample included 172 African Americans (86.9%), 16 Caucasians (8.1%), 3 Asians (1.5%), 2 Hispanic-Blacks (1%), 1 Hispanic-White (0.5%), 1 Native American (0.5), and 3 participants who reported their racial identity as Other (1.5%). Most of the participants (80.5%) were between 18 to 29 years of age. The majority of the participants were full-time students (97.5%). The participants who were

included in this study are graduate and undergraduate students; freshmen (32.2%), sophomores (24.6%), seniors (21.6%), juniors (20.6%), and graduates (1%). The College of Business represented 44% of the sample; the remaining 56% were student in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and the College of Science and Technology.

3.2 Measures

Perception of Employment Opportunities (Appendix 1). Since there were no existing scales that measure perception of employment opportunities, the authors developed an eight-item scale to closely assess a student's perception of employment opportunities. An example item is "I believe there will be a job for me when I graduate from college." The anchor ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The internal reliability (alpha) for the instrument was above the minimum threshold level of greater than or equal to 0.70, as the alpha was 0.85 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Nunnally, 1978).

Academic Achievement. We measured academic achievement using a five-item scale developed by Powers (2008). An example of item is "I typically get better than average grades in my classes." A seven-point likert scale was used to measure this scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The internal reliability was 0.88.

General Self-Efficacy. Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001) developed an instrument that assessed general self-efficacy with eight items. An example item is "I will be able to achieve most of the goals I set for myself." A five-point Likert scale was used to measure this construct with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The alpha was 0.95.

Academic Motivation. We measured student motivation using the academic motivation scale. It is a 28-item measure with a 7-point likert response scale (Vallerand et al., 1992). The response

scales ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An example item is “Because with only a high school degree I would not find a high paying job later on.” The alpha was 0.93.

Perceived Social Support. To assess perceived social support, we used the 12-item instrument developed by Zimet (1988). An example item is “I can count on my friends when things go wrong.” A five-point Likert scale was used to measure this construct with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability estimate was 0.92.

State of Hope. Snyder et al. (1996) developed a six-item scale with anchors ranging from definitely false (1) to definitely true (8) to assess this construct. An example item is “There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now.” The reliability estimate was 0.89.

Core Self-Evaluations. Twelve items were developed by Judge, Erez, Bono, and Thoresen (2003) to measure this construct. An example item is, “I do not feel in control of my success in my career.” The anchors ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Cronbach alpha was 0.84.

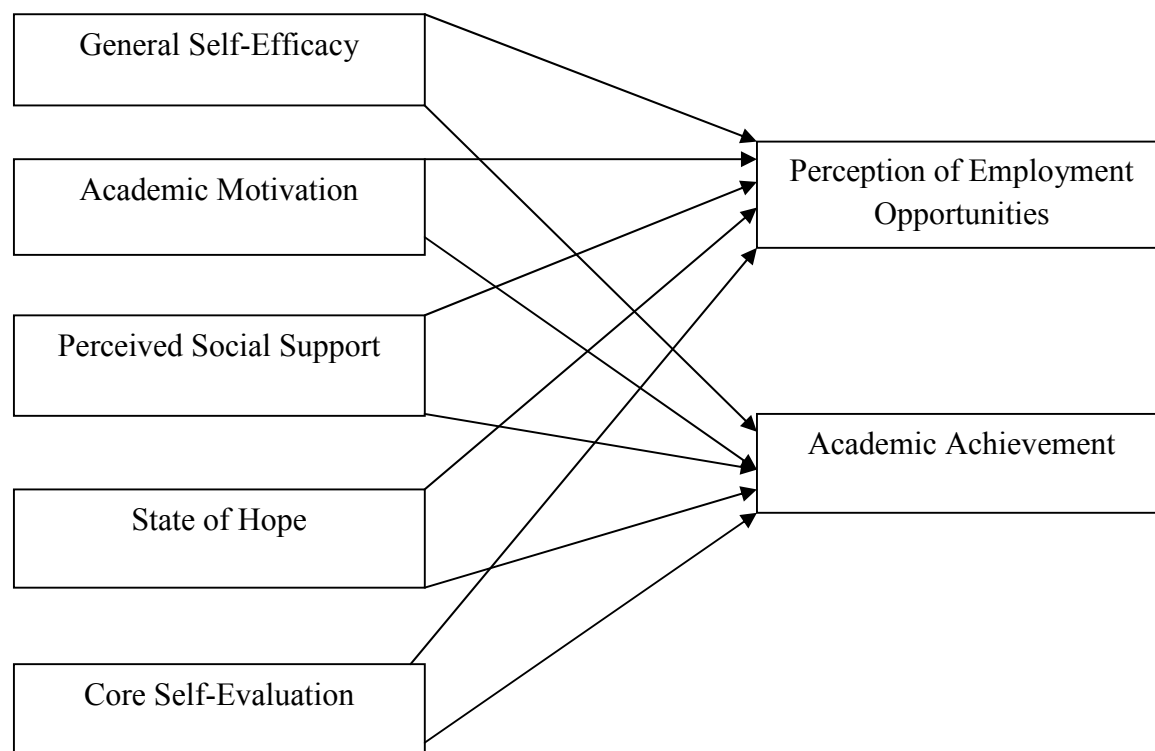
3.3 Analysis

We employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses. LISREL (8.8) was used to develop and test all structural models. SEM is a sophisticated technique that establishes relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables simultaneously (Bollen, 1989; Hair et. al, 1998; Rakov & Marcoulides, 2000). It also accounts for measurement error by providing various indices on the fitness of the proposed covariance structural model and the data (Rakov & Marcoulides, 2000). SEM has been used in several fields such as psychology, econometrics, biology, sociology, education, marketing, organizational behavior, and genetics (Hair et al, 1998).

We also performed a one-way ANOVA test with general self-efficacy, academic motivation, perceived social support, state of hope, and core self-evaluations, perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement as the dependent variables and gender as the categorical variable. The sample means, standard deviations, and scale intercorrelations were reported. All statistical tests were performed using SPSS.

In our hypothesized model (Figure 1), general self-efficacy, academic motivation, perceived social support, state of hope, and core self-evaluations were expected to influence perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement.

FIGURE 1: Hypothesized Model



3.4 Assessment of Model Fit

Several indices were used to assess the goodness of fit of the model: (1) chi-square, (2) root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), (3) incremental fit index (IFI), (4) goodness of fit index (GFI) and (5) comparative fit index (CFI). The most common goodness-of-fit index

is the chi-square value. The rule of thumb is that if the p-value of the chi-square statistic is greater than 0.05 (i.e., the chi-square value is non-significant), then the proposed model is acceptable (Gerbing & Anderson, 1993; Hayduk, 1987). However, because the chi-square test is very sensitive to sample size, the RMSEA is often used as the principal goodness-of-fit index (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Steiger & Lind, 1980; Steiger, 1989). When the value of RMSEA is less than 0.05, it indicates a well fitting model. RMSEA values up to 0.08 represents reasonable errors of approximation. Bollen (1989) and Bentler (1990) have demonstrated that IFI and CFI are much less dependent on sample size. The values of GFI, IFI, and CFI can vary between 0 and 1, while values closer to 1 indicate a well fitting model (Hair, et al, 1998; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993).

The authors of this study used SEM to evaluate the significance and direction of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables (Bollen, 1989). We used the recommended two-step procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, we tested the measurement model and evaluated the overall fit. The second step consisted of examining the significance of the relationships among the independent and dependent variables. The covariance matrix for the observed variables was used as input for all models (Bollen, 1989).

4. RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations, and reliability estimates are provided in Table 2.

TABLE 1. Means, standard deviations (S.d) and zero-order correlations.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. PEO	33.15	5.65	(.85)						
2. AA	21.49	3.59	.199**	(.88)					
3. GSE	34.33	6.30	.309**	.186**	(.95)				
4. AM	154.40	24.99	.310**	.199**	.283**	(.93)			

269	5. PSS	49.40	9.84	.422**	.297**	.269**	.352**	(.92)
270	6. SOH	38.30	8.02	.443*	.456**	.362**	.490**	.519** (.89)
271	7. CSE	46.58	7.95	.328**	.164*	.156*	.358**	.413** .537** (.84)

272 n=200; Reliability estimates are on the diagonals in parentheses. *p≤ .05 **p≤ .01. PEO = Perceived Employment
 273 Opportunities; Academic Achievement = AA; General Self-Efficacy =GSE; Academic Motivation = AM; Perceived
 274 Social Support= PSS; State of Hope = SOH; Core Self-Evaluation = CSE.

275

276 4.1 Interpretation of Structural Equation Model

277 As shown in Table 3, the proposed model indicated an acceptable fit to the data [$\chi^2 =$
 278 0.04 (3), p = 0.99, GFI = 1.00, NFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, IFI = 1.01, RMSEA = 0.000]. That is, the
 279 chi-square was at its minimum value, the p-value was non-significant, and the GFI, NFI, CFI, IFI
 280 and RMSEA were within acceptable limits for good fitting models (Bollen, 1989; Steiger &
 281 Lind, 1980).

TABLE 2: Fit Indices for Face-to-Face Learning Versus E-Learning Measurement Model.

Model	χ^2 (df)	p-value	χ^2 /df	RMSEA	GFI	NNFI	NFI	CFI	IFI
Baseline	0.04(3)	0.99	0.013	0.000	1.00	1.04	1.00	1.00	1.01
Statistics are based on a sample of 200 respondents. Degrees of freedom are in parentheses after the chi-square value. RMSEA = Root mean square error approximation. GFI = Goodness-of-fit index TLI = Tucker Lewis index (Non-Normed Fit index) NFI = Normed Fit index CFI = Comparative Fit index IFI = Incremental Fit index df = Degrees of freedom									

282 4.2 Results of Hypothesis Testing

283 Table 4 presents the structural coefficients for the model. Hypothesis one (H₁) stated that
 284 general self-efficacy will influence both academic achievement and perception of employment
 285 opportunities; Partial support was established because the path from general self-efficacy to
 286 perception of employment opportunities was positive and in a significant direction; however, the

path from general self-efficacy to academic achievement was not significant. Hypothesis two (H₂), which posited that academic motivation would influence the perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement, did not have significant paths, and thus no support was established. Partial support was established for Hypothesis three (H₃) as the path from perceived social support to perception to employment opportunities was significant in a positive direction; however, the path from perceived social support to academic achievement was not significant. For Hypothesis four (H₄), state of hope was a positive significant predictor for both perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement. Hypothesis five (H₅) was partially supported because the path from core self-evaluation to academic achievement was significant in the negative direction; the path from core self-evaluation to perception of employment opportunities was not significant.

TABLE 3. Unstandardized Path Coefficients for the Baseline Model.

Parameter	Path Coefficient	T-value	SMC
Perception of Employment Opportunities			28%
General Self-Efficacy	0.13	2.20*	
Academic Motivation	0.02	1.29	
Perceived Social Support	0.13	2.98*	
State of Hope	0.14	2.34*	
Core Self-Evaluations	0.006	1.10	
Academic Achievement			23%
General Self-Efficacy	0.01	0.16	
Academic Motivation	0.00	-0.36	
Perceived Social Support	0.04	1.13	
State of Hope	0.19	5.50*	
Core Self-Evaluations	-0.06	-1.70**	

Statistics are based on a sample of 200 respondents.

These are the endogenous variables in the model; the exogenous are listed underneath.

*Significant at the 0.05 level; **Significant at the 0.10 level.

SMC= Squared Multiple Correlation.

4.3 One-way ANOVA Test

A one-way ANOVA test was analyzed with Gender as the factor variable and perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement as the dependent variables. As indicated in Table 5, the omnibus F-tests for both dependent variables were not statistically significant. Thus, support was not establish for Hypothesis six (H_6) because gender difference did not exist for both perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement. Although not hypothesized, we found that the omnibus F-test of academic motivation and perceived social support were statistically significant. The between-subject t-test indicated that females reported significantly higher academic motivation and perceived social support scores than males.

TABLE 4. One-way ANOVA testing procedure for the categorical variable (n=200).

Factors	F-value	P-value
Perception of Employment Opportunities	0.751	0.387
General Self-Efficacy	0.432	0.512
Academic Achievement	0.006	0.937
Academic Motivation	7.087	0.008*
Perceived Social Support	5.451	0.021*
State of Hope	0.319	0.573
Core Self-Evaluations	0.001	0.970

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the antecedents of perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement. The authors employed a structural equation modeling to evaluate the hypotheses; we found that general self-efficacy, perceived social support, and state of hope predicted perception of employment opportunities. In addition, state of hope and core self-evaluations predicted academic achievement in our model. Furthermore, using analysis of variance procedures, although not hypothesized, we found that that females reported significantly higher academic motivation and perceived social support scores than males.

6. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study help to understand the factors that may influence students' perception of employment opportunities and their academic achievement. College administrators and professional advisors may consider designing programs that will assist college students in improving their academic achievement and prepare them for their future jobs by holding regular workshops and mentoring programs; students who graduated from the school and already working may come and share their work and academic experiences with students to help them have a practical understanding of the job market.

There are several limitations to our study that needed to be acknowledged. For instance, the use of self-report measures to collect our data may have led to the problem of method bias and inflated the predicted relationships. Also, the size of our sample ($n = 200$) limited the generalization of our findings. Therefore, replication is warranted to substantiate the results of this study.

Despite the limitations, our findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge because we used a large sample of African-Americans, which adds to the richness of the extant literature. Identifying the factors that influence perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement may be useful to faculty, career research and placement center, and staff of higher learning organizations.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research is needed to determine whether perception of employment opportunities and academic achievement differ from one major to another. Another research avenue would be to conduct a subscale analysis of the Core Self-Evaluations scale to better understand this construct and its influence on our endogenous variables. Finally, investigating the influence of

these constructs across historically black universities and predominantly white universities may be of some value, mostly if differences exist among students.

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464 Appendix 1

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Perception of Employment Opportunities Scale					
Please circle the one number for each statement that comes closest to reflecting your opinion about it.	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I expect to obtain a job before I graduate from college	1	2	3	4	5
2. For my college major, the employment opportunities look pretty good	1	2	3	4	5
3. I believe there will be a job for me when I graduate from college.	1	2	3	4	5
4. There will be job opportunities available for me upon graduation.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I will be able to find a job by using the career service of my university.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I have a family member who can help me to find a job.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students who participate in internships often are hired by the sponsoring company.	1	2	3	4	5
8. If offered an interview, I believe that I can successfully perform.	1	2	3	4	5

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