

# **AALS Sections on Academic Support & Empirical Study Joint Program**

## **Breakout Session: Fostering Growth Mindset through UW Resilience Lab**

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### **Key Concepts and Pioneers**

#### **Growth Mindset**

- A mindset is the belief system we adopt to process information. People with a growth mindset look at challenges and change as a motivator to increase effort and leaning; people with a fixed mindset look at challenges and change as a threat.
- In educational setting, Dweck's research identified 4 key factors: Students' beliefs about themselves, their goals, their feelings of social connectedness, and their self-regulatory skills.
- Carol Dweck

#### **Grit**

- Grit is the perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Ability can be developed through dedication, perseverance, and effort.
- Angela Duckworth

#### **Self-Compassion**

- Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself as you would another when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a "stiff upper lip" mentality, you stop to tell yourself "this is really difficult right now," how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?
- Three main components: self-kindness, recognition of common humanity, and mindfulness.
- Kristin Neff

#### **Psychological Capital**

- PsyCap is defined as an individual's positive psychological state of development, which is characterized by having high levels of four elements: Hope, (Self-)Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (HERO). Originally developed in an organizational context, has been linked to job as well as life satisfaction.
- Fred Luthans

#### **Resilience**

Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from adversity and grow stronger from overcoming negative events; ability to recover from or adjust quickly to change.

*Question: Is the amount of grit, self-compassion, resilience, and psychological capital something that you're born with and limited to, or are these resources that you can deplete or expand?*

## University of Washington Resilience Lab

- Formed in 2015 as space to discuss the strengths and challenges observed in UW students. UWRL examines national trends and aligned efforts at other institutions such as Harvard and Stanford. Led by Dr. Anne Browning.
- UWRL endeavors to bring the UW community into connection with one another through programming that normalizes the wide-ranging experiences of hardships, failures, and setbacks community members face and helps students to develop compassion for themselves and others and exhibit behaviors that lead to their growth and resilience.
- At the core of UWRL's work on resilience is the need to foster a growth mindset and ongoing, leading-edge research on the connection between resilience and self-compassion using the work of Dr. Kristin Neff and her colleagues. UWLR is currently studying undergraduates and measuring the change in resilience and self-compassion as incoming freshman, at the end of their first quarter, and at the end of their first year.

## Existing Research Relating to Law Students and Academic Success

- Literature on grit in the law school context is limited. The primary research was conducted by Emily Zimmerman and Leah Brogan in *Grit and Legal Education*, 36 Pace L. Rev. 112 (2015). In that study, which was limited to a small sample from one law school, Professors Zimmerman and Brogan studied the relationship between grit and law school GPA and found no statistically significant correlation. This important finding differs from the positive correlation found with undergraduate GPAs.
- Another study, described in Margaret L. Kern and Daniel S. Bowling III, *Character strengths and academic performance in law schools*, 55 J. of Research in Personality 25 (2015), examined law student character strengths and academic performance of incoming law students. Perseverance, an aspect of grit, was one of the traits studied (others included judgment, curiosity, love of learning, and fairness). Their findings suggested that character traits were more important for admission to law school than for academic success once students were enrolled.
- Existing scholarship relating to growth mindset in the law school setting is focused on pedagogy, classroom, and assessment techniques.
- Although attention has been given to resilience and self-compassion, when addressed these concepts typically are tied to student well-being rather than academic performance. See, e.g., Penelope Watson and Rachael Field, *Promoting Student Well-Being and Resilience at Law School*, in EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION IN LEGAL EDUCATION (Sally Kift, Michelle Sanson & Jill Cowley eds., 2011). This work provides the foundation for future research on the relationship between law student well-being and academic performance.
- The importance of grit and growth mindset to success in the legal profession has gained attention outside of the academy. The American Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession created the Grit Project in 2015, and last year published Milana L. Hogan, GRIT, THE SECRET TO ADVANCEMENT: STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN LAWYERS (ABA 2018). The project conducted empirical research demonstrating that grit and growth mindset impact the success of women lawyers. The studies, however, were limited to attorneys and did not include law students.

## **Areas for Future Research**

We are still at the beginning of exploring the concepts of resilience, grit, self-compassion, PsyCap, and growth mindsets in legal education, and particularly in understanding the relationships between these concepts and their influence on academic success. Once we have data, we will be better equipped to explore how we can support students.

Academic support programs and law school communities generally would benefit from more research in the following areas:

- The relationship between grit, growth mindset, resilience, PsyCap, and self-compassion and law student academic performance, satisfaction, perseverance, and well-being.
- An exploration of differences in grit (and other) scores between male and female participants. Both the ABA and the Zimmerman and Brogan research found women reported “grittier” than men. The reasons and significance of these findings should be explored, especially in light of other research demonstrating that women’s grades in law school are lower than men’s and that women underperform in law school compared to past academic performance.
- An exploration of interventions to promote these skills and mindsets, and overall resilience in law school.
- Other ideas?
- Priorities?

## **Benefits of Future Research**

- The benefits of presenting these questions in the second part of the plenary session include:
- Identifying and narrowing potential topics and methods.
- Enhancing law school academic success programs through the identification of actionable recommendations and interventions based on research.
- Increasing the opportunity for academic success professionals and faculty to coach struggling students.
- Development of best practices around learning objectives and assessment.
- Refining law school pedagogy to intentionally and better prepare students to manage challenge by developing skills that can help them persevere in the face of setbacks.
- Other benefits?

## **Conducting Future Research**

Existing scales:

- Mindset
- Grit
- Self-Compassion
- PsyCap
- UWRL

Other ideas for scaling, measuring, assessing?