

Simon Says: What Should I Study?

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Abstract : SIMON (Study capacities and Interest Monitor) is a freely accessible online self-assessment tool that allows secondary education pupils to evaluate their interests and capacities in order to choose a post-secondary major that maximally suits their potential. The tool consists of two broad domains that correspond with two general questions pupils ask: 'What study fields interest me?' and 'Am I capable to succeed in this field of study?'. The first question is addressed by a RIASEC-type interest inventory that links personal interests to post-secondary majors. Pupils are provided with a personal profile and an overview of majors with their degree of congruence. The output is dynamic: respondents can manipulate their score and they can compare their results to the profile of all fields of study. That way they are stimulated to explore the broad range of majors. To answer whether pupils are capable of succeeding in a preferred major, a battery of tests is provided. This battery comprises a range of factors that are predictive of academic success. Traditional predictors such as (educational) background and cognitive variables (mathematical and verbal skills) are included. Moreover, non-cognitive predictors of academic success (such as 'motivation', 'test anxiety', 'academic self-efficacy' and 'study skills') are assessed. These non-cognitive factors are generally not included in admission decisions although research shows they are incrementally predictive of success and are less discriminating. These tests inform pupils on potential causes of success and failure. More important, pupils receive their personal chances of success per major. These differential probabilities are validated through the underlying research on academic success of students. For example, the research has shown that we can identify 22 % of the failing students in psychology and educational sciences. In this group, our prediction is 95% accurate. SIMON leads more students to a suitable major which in turn alleviates student success and retention. Apart from these benefits, the instrument grants insight into risk factors of academic failure. It also supports and fosters the development of evidence-based remedial interventions and therefore gives way to a more efficient use of means.

Keywords : academic success, online self-assessment, student retention, vocational choice

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