

# **Developing a Process Model of Academic Success Using the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Academic Standards**

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**ABSTRACT** Using the grounded theory method, this study described what academic success is in terms of the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Academic Development Standards and how it was achieved by 30 financially challenged college students studying in a Philippine university that offers teacher education courses. Results indicated that the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes was significant in the academic achievement of the students through three factors responsible for their success in college: physical survival skills amidst poverty, illnesses, fatigue, and personal as well as family challenges; mental determination to improve their lives; and emotional control to mediate physical and emotional suffering. These three factors, despite financial challenges, accounted for the students' choice of an academic track after secondary education and the application of such choice to their life roles. The process of academic success that was created is cyclical, with outcomes enhancing students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The results can be utilized by counselors as a guide in understanding similarly situated students and in creating more relevant programs.

Further, the findings implied that the ASCA Standards are achievable not only through the school counseling program, but also through the participation of significant persons such as parents, relatives, teachers, and peers. It is suggested, though, that more research be undertaken towards the participation of significant persons in achieving academic success.

**Keywords** : academic success, ASCA Academic Standards, financially-challenged, Process Model

## **Introduction**

Attaining a tertiary education is undeniably challenging. Aside from the rigors of academic requirements, funding to sustain the completion of a degree confronts a considerable number of tertiary students in our country. A study conducted by the Department of Education (2011) indicated that the highest percentage of students dropped out of school due to employment reasons, while 19.9% did so because of the high education cost. These results indicate that 50.40% dropped out due to financial constraints. In the tertiary level, the latest gross survival rate or graduation rate indicating the percent of college students who were able to reach 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year level for school year 2011-2012 was 65.93% (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2011). While the data do not include the reasons for dropping out of college, it could be surmised that financial difficulties could be a major reason, given the high poverty rate in the Philippines at 24.9% (NSCB, 2011). Another indication of dropping out due to financial difficulties is the filing of a Leave of Absence (LOA) in state universities. A review of the LOA filed for the past three years at the Office of Student Affairs and Student Services (OSASS) at the university where this study was conducted revealed that financial reason ranked first at 38.46% , while

work schedule conflict ranked second at 17.31%. Students who filed for LOA due to work schedule conflict usually had an underlying problem of financial difficulties. Hence, it could be assumed that 55.77% of those who filed for LOA for the past three succeeding years (2010-2013) in said university had financial difficulties. This percentage corresponded to the statistics of the Department of Education (2011) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (2011).

It is generally understood that there are various practices of achieving academic success despite financial challenges. A deep understanding of these practices in terms of a model is important to enable counselors to devise ways to assist students in this situation. A model which combines these practices, however, is difficult to find. Existing related literature are not compatible to this idea of a model. In some researches, academic success is just one of the components of specific theories like Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Attribution Theory (Graham & Weiner, 1996), Expectancy-Value Theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997) and Goal Theory (Elliot, 1999). Other researches contain separate variables affecting academic success like resilience (Vinluan, 2012), poverty, teachers/school, parents (Nava, 2009), and failing grades (Aller, Capuyan & Aquino, 2007). Hence, this paper attempted to create a model which aims to assist counselors in understanding and eventually mentoring students to succeed academically despite financial challenges.

One lens for academic success is through the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) National Standards for School Counseling Programs, which are as follows: “Standard A - Students acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the lifespan; Standard B - Students complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range

of substantial post-secondary options, including college; and Standard C - Students understand the relationship of academics to the world of work and to life experiences at home and in the community” (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

The ASCA Standards set goals for counseling programs, establish school counseling as essential to all schools, promote access to all students, and describe the competencies that students will be able to demonstrate at the end of their K-12 years (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008). The United States (US) has a heavy influence in the Philippines’ guidance and counseling structure (Salazar-Clemeña, 2010). To illustrate, in 2007, the Guidance Counselors Circle, an association of guidance counselors and practitioners in the Philippines, discussed the ASCA Model with the intention of pursuing efforts towards establishing standards for the Philippine setting (Salazar-Clemeña, 2010). Then, in 2010, a book “Developing National Standards for School Counseling Program” was published by Dr. Rose Marie Salazar-Clemeña, (Salazar-Clemeña, 2010).

There are already many initiatives of utilizing the ASCA Model, but this paper posits a process model of academic success using the ASCA Standards. It specifically examined how financially challenged tertiary students achieve academic success through the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the selection of an academic track after secondary school, and the application of academics to life experiences at home and in the community (ASCA Academic Standards A, B, and C). While the ASCA Model centres on the realization of the standards through counseling programs, this paper attempted to explain how financially challenged students achieved academic success through gathering and analysis of pertinent qualitative data.

The usage of theoretical frameworks in quantitative research is common but rarely in qualitative research. The usage of theoretical frameworks in qualitative research is possible under the following situations: (1) presence of a previously developed framework which can supplement, lengthen, and confirm the findings; (2) presentation of alternative explanations; (3) offering of comprehension, direction, and primary concepts; and (4) determination of a methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### **Methodology**

There are many research designs for a qualitative study. The grounded theory method is an excellent design to explain a process and generate abstractions from data (Creswell, 2007). The aim of grounded theory is to advance description to generate a theory, procedure, action and/or interaction seen from the view of a large number of participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The study was conducted in a premier university in the Philippines which offers teacher education courses. Hence, all of the student-participants were taking teacher education courses with different majors.

Thirty third year college students-were selected and invited to participate in the study. They had a general weighted average (GPA) of 85%, with no grade lower than 85%, and belonged to a household whose income is below the poverty threshold of Php7,821.00 a month (NSCB, 2013). Twenty-two female and eight male students comprised the study's participants. All were Filipino nationals, single, with a predominant age range of 18-21. Twenty-four students garnered academic and non-academic awards in the elementary level while sixteen students did so in high school.

Data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews, observation, journal writing of the college students, and keeping a research diary for the researcher. The instruments used are the demographic file and the open-ended questionnaires validated by faculty-counselors and the students themselves. Another instrument was the journal which recorded day-to-day activities of the college students for three weeks. Reliability was addressed during the data collection phase by; (1) validating the questionnaires by faculty-counselors and the students; (2) employing a sensitive digital recorder; (3) training of transcribers to faithfully encode what the college students said; and (4) showing the transcribed documents for validation to the college students.

Data analysis in grounded theory consisted of open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis proceeded in this research by: (1) open coding in which line by line analysis of the interviews and journals of the participants were undertaken; (2) open coding wherein similar open codes were combined into conceptual categories; and (3) selective coding in which all the major themes were analyzed for a central theme of the research.

Validity of the study was established by (1) triangulation of data in terms of sources (30 participants, the researcher, and related literature), methods (in-depth interview, participants and researcher's journals), investigators (participants, researchers, and peer reviewer); (2) peer review of the research methodology; and (3) peer validation of the themes.

Ethical issues in the research were addressed by (1) getting the informed consent of the participants; and (2) assuring confidentiality and anonymity.

## Results and Discussion

The ASCA Academic Standards A refer to the achievement of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Knowledge was achieved by excelling academically despite three challenges: (1) poverty; (2) illness and fatigue; and (3) personal and family problems. Data showed that the students developed and applied their knowledge in solving problems despite poverty, illness and fatigue, and personal and family problems.

Poverty refers to the lack of financial resources to sustain adequate physical nourishment and school needs such as books and allowance. The students learned to surmount limited food by consuming what was edible without complaining to tide them over with their next meal. Physical nourishment maintains the biological faculties and is indispensable in maintaining intellectual, mental, and emotional balance.

Table 1 presents the summary of indicative statements and the narratives of the students.

Table 1. *Summary of Indicative Statements and Narratives of Students on Knowledge*

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Indicative Statements</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Excelling Academically Despite :		
Poverty	Learning from parents, other significant persons, and own initiative how to surmount physical and material deprivation.	We wake up late so instead of having breakfast, we would have lunch. Lunch is always sumptuous, but dinner consists only of fried or boiled eggs with onions

or tomatoes. Anyway we will only sleep at night. Later, I started work as a tutor (Ernie).

We only have a makeshift tarpaulin house. Sometimes, we would go to school without breakfast and lunch. Sometimes, we only have water (Jose).

Lack of money for computer rental and shyness in asking my dorm mate to lend me her computer again troubled my mind. I strengthened my resolves and prayed, and so I was able to borrow her computer again (Rhian).

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Illness and fatigue

Attending school and keeping class performance high despite illness and fatigue.

I do not want my academics to suffer because of my other priorities. That's why I really try my best to actively participate in class, even though I am always tired and lack sleep (Charm).

After 15 minutes of trying to do my best in the group, my vision became blurry, and I almost lost my consciousness. My fellow scholars and our director



attended to me with much concern that I felt loved (Marie).

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Personal  
and Family  
Challenges.

Learning from parents the habit of trying again after failing.

In one competition when I was in elementary, I wrongly interpreted the song "*Anak*". I felt ashamed because all my competitors correctly did it. I did not want to join competitions after that. However, I thought of trying harder... and my father also pushed me to try again (Pam).

In high school, when I lost in a quiz bee in Biology and thought of how my teacher put all her efforts in training me, I cried. To make up, and prove to her that I deserved the trust she she had given me, I studied very well in her class. I coped by using my previous knowledge in dealing with that failure on interpreting the song "*Anak*." (Pam).

I was very close to my father who taught me basic reading and writing. I cried when he and mother separated He told me to take care of my

mother and be more independent. I obeyed him, learned to be independent and started working as a tutor (Betty).

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Ernie's mother structured their family's eating time and quality of food so that they do not go hungry. As for Jose, he attended classes despite having an empty stomach. Jose and Ernie knew that their families had limited resources, but rather than blaming their parents for their poverty, they learned and practiced techniques in keeping the body and soul together. Instead of giving up, the deprivation further stimulated Ernie's desire to work.

A student needs to produce written work in order to pass the course. Having no budget for these expenses could make a student fail in class. The student-participants learned how to obtain resources, aside from food, needed for school without spending. They also learned how to obtain school needs without spending, like Rhian.

Hence, Ernie, Jose, and Rhian as well as the other students developed physical survival skills which made them cope on less food and resources. The literature indicates that the Philippines continues to have a high poverty level at 27.09% (NSCB, 2011). The participants could have really felt the effects of poverty at home and in school which result in social challenges, recurring stressors, intellectual delays, and health and security concerns (Jensen, 2009). On health concerns, the literature indicates that adolescents are prone to illnesses. In the Philippines, illness/disability is the 6th reason why students drop out of school (DepEd, 2011). Consequently, in the US, the goals for adolescent health are: (1) to reduce health-compromising behaviour; and (2) to increase health-enhancing behaviours (Santrock, 2004). In this study, the students attended school and kept their class

performance level high despite illness and fatigue. Charm actively participated in class recitations despite feeling sleepy and tired. Marie narrated in her journal that she attended a training sponsored by her scholarship donor despite being sick. These practices made them develop a strong mental determination and endurance to physical pain in order to maintain their academic rankings.

Personal and family challenges, in this study, refer to failures in academics and for some, participants, parental separation. Pam related how she learned to try again after failing in a competition she participated in during her elementary days. She developed a built-in mechanism of trying again. It was inspiring to note that Pam graduated as Valedictorian of her elementary and high school classes. Another failure that the students encountered was parental separation. Betty narrated the pain of losing her father with whom she was so attached to. She learned independence and earning for her family due to her father's suggestion. Thus, Pam and Betty as well as the other students learned, accepted, and surpassed failure by encountering it. Their descriptions of failure were detailed, signifying familiarity with the conditions and emotions surrounding it. The students, however, exercised emotional control by modulating emotional experience. Research indicates that the brain has a natural network for modulating emotional experience through interpretation and labelling (Hariri et al., 2000). Modulating emotional experience results in emotional control and mediates physical and emotional suffering. This is evident when, after their emotional experiences, the students learned that failures are really attempts to succeed. They even developed a built-in mechanism of rising again. Connected with modulating emotional experience is *mindsight* or being aware of mental processes without being swept away with them. *Mindsight* enables people to avoid autopilot of behaviors and habitual responses. It subdues emotions and prevents the feeling of being overwhelmed by them (Graham

et al., 2010). Literature likewise suggests that the belief that failure is due to a personal cause, like what happened to Pam, builds self-belief. Success-oriented pupils gain confidence in their abilities while failure makes them work harder (Mc Lean, 2009).

For some participants, skills were achieved by joining competitions. The students were usually the ones sent by the schools to compete due to their high grades. This meant being coached by teachers who were skilled in the specific areas. They were also taught self-composure and how not to feel the pressure during the competition.

Table 2 presents the summary of indicative statements and the narratives of the students.

Table 2. Summary of Indicative Statements and Narratives of Students on Skills

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Indicative Statements</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Developing skills by joining competitions	Developing skills in academics and emotional toughness through coaching by special trainers and self-realization.	I learned how to answer difficult questions which were not ordinarily asked inside the classroom due to the training given by my special trainer (Ron).  I gave my best in Grade 5, but I did not realize that my competitor was earning more points from his co-curricular activities. Hence, I endeavoured to excel in both academics and co-curricular and became first honor in Grade 6 (Carlo).

Ron was deliberately trained to answer difficult questions and be emotionally tough during contests. Carlo developed insights on why he was outranked by his competitor. Hence, by joining competitions, the students gained skills. Competitions, similar to challenges like poverty, illnesses, and personal and family problems, developed mental determination and emotional control among the students. Apparently, the literature stipulates that competition performs many functions, but the following could be the most relevant to our students: (1) competition assigns to each individual or group his/her place in the social system; (2) it encourages achievement; and (3) it contributes to social change by motivating people to adopt new forms of behaviour to attain desired goals which could lead to innovation and change (Myers, 2005). Consequently, attitudes were developed by utilizing negative circumstances for positive outcomes. The students deliberately used their unfavourable situations to plan and achieve their goals in life.

Table 3 offers the indicative statements and narratives of students on how they developed the attitudes towards academic success.

Table 3. Summary of Indicative Statements and Narratives of Students on Attitudes

<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Indicative Statements</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Utilizing negative circumstances for positive outcomes	Creating positive beliefs out of negative circumstances	They called me “gay, devil, a plague.” I ignored them and instead studied very well. Now, they just looked at me whenever I passed by wearing my school uniform. These bullies had

remained bystanders. I feel that I have evened up the score (Rod).

I was hurt that our family was snubbed by our relatives just because we are poor. I realized that I have to study well in order to vindicate my family (Denise).

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Table 3 presents how Rod utilized being bullied by his neighbours as a motivation to study very well. Similar to Rod, Denise employed her experience of being snubbed by their relatives as a motivation to finish her studies. The narratives showed that the students were neither callous nor indifferent to negative experiences. They felt hurt, humiliated, and disappointed in encountering negative personal and social events. Instead of making these as excuses for giving up, Rod, Denise, and the others came up with a positive belief that staying in school will stop bullying and being belittled. Once again, mental determination to improve their lives and emotional control was born out of this negative situation.

The ASCA Academic Standards B refer to completing school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial post-secondary options, including college. The selection of a teaching course emerged from the data analysis of the ASCA Academic Standard B. The teaching course was chosen for the following reasons: (1) the influence of significant persons; (2) possessing content skills; and (3) perceived benefits of the teaching course.

Table 4 illustrates how the students selected the teaching course.

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Table 4. Summary of Indicative Statements and Narratives of Students on the Selection of an Academic Track after Secondary School

<b>Selection of an Academic Track</b>	<b>Indicative Statements</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Influence of Significant Persons, Personal Orientation and possessing content skills	Family and teacher influences  Personal orientation  Having content skills	I got influenced by my grandmother who was a Filipino teacher. Further, I got good grades in Communication Arts. Hence, I chose Filipino as my major (Charm).
Perceived benefits of the teaching course	Practical reasons  Personal satisfaction	I can immediately work after graduation. I also enjoy it so I think I will last here (Annie).

The students attributed their choice of a teaching course to the influence of significant persons. Some of them were from a family of teachers. They had grandmothers, older siblings, and other close relatives who were teachers. Being proficient in a subject added to their choice of a teaching career. These characteristics were evident in the narrative of Charm. The high demand for teachers, the assurance of a job after graduation, and perceived benefits likewise contributed to the choice of a teaching course for Annie. Apparently, Super et al. (1996) has fourteen (14) theoretical propositions regarding career development. Three propositions apply to the findings of this research, as follows: (1) career development is resolved by the socioeconomic level of parents, mental ability, education, skills, personal traits and career maturity and by favourable chances; (2) the individual can synthesize and compromise careers by role-playing, learning from feedback, counseling interview or in real life activities; and

(3) work and life happiness hinge on arriving at expression for abilities, values, needs, personality traits, interests and self-concepts.

The ASCA Academic Standard C indicates the application of academics to life at home and in the community.

Table 5 describes how the students applied academics at home and in the community.

Table 5. Summary of Indicative Statements and Narratives of Students on the Application of Academics to Life at Home and in the Community

<b>Application of Academics to Life at Home and in the Community</b>	<b>Indicative Statements</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Fulfilment of tasks at home and in the community	Fulfilment of financial tasks at home and church roles in the community	I pawned my automated teller machine (ATM) card when we are unable to pay electricity, water, and other bills (Jose).  I spend three hours every Saturday handling ministries in our church (Ernie).

The students did domestic tasks and contributed to their family's finances at home. The narrative of Jose indicated that the money for his scholarship was used for other purposes. It was notable that he did not complain or rebuke his family for this. He readily pawned his ATM card so his family's electricity and water connection would not be cut. Like Jose, the others also willingly shared with their



families their scholarship benefits or the money they earned by working. After fulfilling their tasks at home, the students performed roles in churches, as related by Ernie. Immersion in academics and co-curricular activities left very little time for other endeavours. Hence, some of the students, like Ernie, actively participated in the church. This involvement exposed them to the community as well as realized their needs for a spiritual connection.

This observation manifests the social constructivist learning theory that indicates the importance of interaction in knowledge construction (Eggen & Kauchack, 2010). In serving their families and communities, the students encountered real world problems which facilitated their adjustment to their communities.

Figure 1 presents the process of achieving academic success using the ASCA Academic Standards.

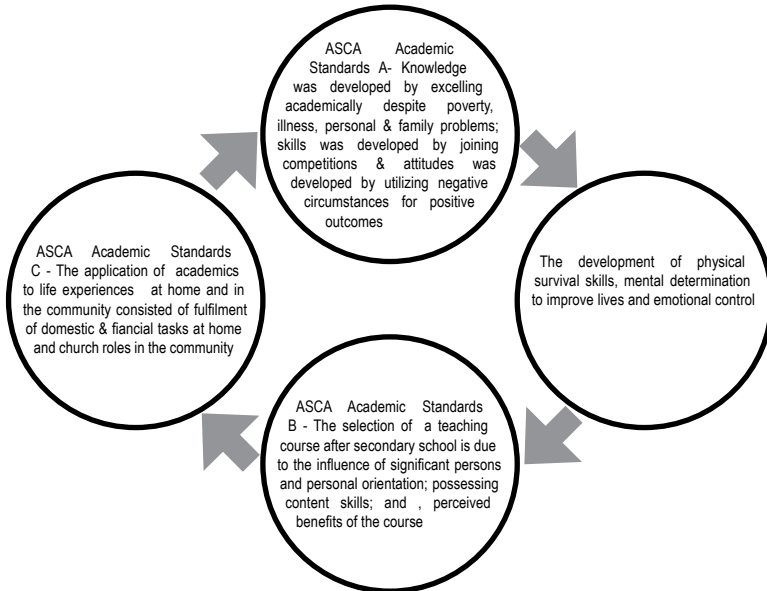


Figure 1. The Process of Achieving Academic Success Using the ASCA Standards

Figure 1 describes the cyclical process of achieving academic success using the ASCA Standards. ASCA academic Standards A, the first circle, is achieved by excelling academically despite poverty, illness, personal and family problems; joining competitions; and utilizing negative circumstances for positive outcomes. The fulfilment of Academic Standards A led to the second circle, the development of physical survival skills, mental determination to improve lives, and emotional control to mediate physical and emotional suffering. This is the reason why, despite the lack of financial support and other problems, the students still selected an academic track consisting of a teaching course indicated in the third circle, ASCA Academic Standards B. The selection of a teaching course was due to the influence of significant persons, possessing content skills, and the perceived benefits of the course. It led to the realization of ASCA Standards C, the fourth circle, which was the fulfilment of domestic and financial tasks at home and church roles in the community. All of which that have been attained were utilized again in knowledge, skills, and attitudes, enhancing further their physical survival skills; mental determination to improve their lives; and gain in emotional control. This makes the process of achieving academic success using the ASCA Standards a cyclical one.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The results indicated that the achievement of ASCA Academic Standards A leads to the development of physical survival skills; mental determination to improve lives, and emotional control to mediate physical and emotional suffering. These developments are very important to ensure biological survival on which physical and other higher mental functions are dependent upon. Mental determination also strengthens emphasis on goals, adding to the students' focus

on academic success. Emotional control was achieved when the students modulated their emotional experiences. Hence, modulation of emotional experiences is important in order to achieve emotional control. These results imply that having physical survival skills, mental determination, and emotional control are very important to the survival of tertiary students with financial challenges. Hence, counseling programs of universities in the Philippines could assist students in building up on these three attributes.

The selection of a course, ASCA Academic Standards B, is dependent on the influence of significant persons and personal orientation; possessing content skills; and the perceived benefits of the course. The results imply that these attributes could be considered by counselors in predicting the career choice of similarly situated students.

The application of academics at home consisted of doing domestic tasks and fulfilling financial responsibilities. This suggests that students were not only concerned with academic success but also in accomplishing household duties and financial responsibilities. Counselors could guide scholars in managing their finances, so they will have adequate resources for their studies. The process model of academic success that was created in this study is expected to assist counselors in understanding how financially challenged students achieve their academic goals. It supplies the data on how students are able to survive physically and gain access to resources without spending. It is expected likewise to facilitate the appreciation of counselors on how students develop mental determination to improve their own lives by utilizing negative circumstances for positive outcomes. Further, it links the modulation of emotional experiences with emotional control. These understanding and realizations could pave the way for a counseling program that is more responsive to the needs of financially challenged students.

This study proves that the achievement of the ASCA Academic Standards are important in academic success. The study also implies that these standards are achievable not only through the school counseling program but also through the participation of significant persons such as parents, relatives, teachers, and peers. The data indicated that students were able to overcome deprivation and academic failure through the support of parents. They were able to choose an academic track through the influence of significant persons and realized their roles at home and in the community through their own decision.

It is suggested that more research be undertaken towards the participation of significant persons in achieving academic success. This would identify other persons who could support students in their quest. A more definite role of significant persons could be described by guidance counselors or teachers during parent-teacher conferences in order to assist struggling students. The role of significant persons should also be studied by the Department of Education in order to assist students who are struggling to finish their course. The development of counseling programs for financially challenged students could also be done. Creation of this type of program could increase the chances of students achieving academic success despite financial challenges.

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