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## Brief report

## The academic adjustment scale: Measuring the adjustment of permanent resident or sojourner students

Joel R. Anderson<sup>a,\*</sup>, Yao Guan<sup>b</sup>, Yasin Koc<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> School of Psychology, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Florida, FL, United States<sup>c</sup> School of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we developed and validated the Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) – a new scale for measuring academic adjustment, which was developed with a focus on student sojourners who temporarily relocate to a new culture for the purpose of tertiary education, but also is validated for use with local students. Exploratory factor analysis (Study 1) demonstrated that the AAS comprises 9-items that highly and accurately factor onto the three hypothesized subscales: academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation. We controlled for acquiescent response styles, and then verified the structure using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (Studies 1–2). Evidence of the validity (convergent, discriminant, criterion, known-groups, and face validities; Study 2), and evidence of reliability (internal consistency: Studies 1–3; test-retest reliability: Study 3) suggest stable psychometric properties for this new measure. In summary, we provide evidence for the validity and reliability of the AAS in permanent resident and student sojourner samples, and present self-report findings by sojourner students that this scale is preferred to existing academic adjustment scales.

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The concepts of measuring and monitoring the cross-cultural adjustment of sojourners (i.e., individuals residing in a foreign culture without intention of permanent settlement; Church, 1982) are not new to psychology. Originating from concepts of culture shock (Oberg, 1960), *sojourner adjustment* has contemporarily been conceptualized as an outcome of inter-cultural relocation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993), and is typically considered in terms of stress and coping (see Berry, 1997; Ward, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Researchers have developed a series of psychometrically stable measures to capture sojourner adjustment (e.g., Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer, & Lee, 2011). Individuals who reside abroad to pursue higher education are *student sojourners*. This very specific case differs from other sojourners in several important ways, including their goals, expectations upon them for success, motivations for leaving home, and post-sojourn intentions.

An important component of a successful student sojourn is how they manage their social, psychological, and scholarly challenges as they transition to tertiary education. Processes around managing these challenges are broadly referred to as *academic adjustment* (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Early research focused on academic abilities, with the assumption that this was indicative of all aspects of adjustment (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). However, researchers quickly realized that academic performance was only a small component of this transition. Satisfaction with the student lifestyle, management

\* Corresponding author at: Faculty of Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University, Room 5.17, 8-14 Brunswick St, The Daniel Mannix Building, Fitzroy VIC 3065, Australia.

E-mail address: [joel.anderson@acu.edu.au](mailto:joel.anderson@acu.edu.au) (J.R. Anderson).

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that conceptual distinctions have sometimes been made between adjustment as a process, and adjustment as an outcome.

of expectations, and levels of motivation are examples of related aspects that form contemporary conceptualizations of academic adjustment (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Baker & Siryk, 1999; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Of course, all students transitioning to tertiary education face an array of barriers to successfully adjust to their new role as a university student. However, comparatively little is known about the specific processes of academic adjustment for sojourner students. Indeed, the literature yields several scales that measure either the academic adjustment of local students (Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Vallerand et al., 1992) or acculturation stress for sojourner students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). To our knowledge, there is no existing scale designed that crosses this nexus, and thus the major aim of this paper is to develop and validate a measure of the academic adjustment that is equally suitable for use with sojourner students and permanent resident students.

The measures of student adjustment that exist are not necessarily valid in a sample of student sojourners. These scales tend to measure issues specific to local students, and therefore miss problems that are unique for student sojourners (e.g., whether being away from their family and friends impacts their ability to study, dealing with issues related to culture shock, etc.). Moreover, the items are typically underpinned with cultural specificities (an immediately apparent example is “Enjoys living in a dormitory”; Baker & Siryk, 1999. This item is futile in cultures where students lodge in solitude). Given that the academic experience of sojourner students is qualitatively different to that of local students, a measure that captures differences in academic adjustment is needed that can be used with either sojourner students or permanent resident students.

## 1. Overview of studies and predictions

The academic adjustment scale (AAS) and its psychometric properties are presented here. After consultation with sojourner students, we derived three conceptual components to academic adjustment, which are: (a) academic lifestyle: AAS-L – conceptualized as the fit between the individual and their temporary role as a student; (b) academic achievement: AAS-A – conceptualized as satisfaction with academic progress and performance, and; (c) academic motivation: AAS-M – conceptualized as the drive for the student to continue and complete their academic sojourn. Each subscale comprises three items, to be used flexibly as a three-dimensional construct, or as a single factor tapping global academic adjustment. We tested the psychometric properties of the AAS following these hypotheses:

- 1) Factor structure hypotheses: we predict the emergence of a three interrelated, yet distinct factors. In CFA, we expect values of CFI > 0.90 and RMSEA < 0.08 (Kline, 1999), and SRMR < 0.060 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
- 2) Reliability hypotheses: we predict alpha Cronbach coefficients that are above 0.70 (demonstrating internal consistency; Kline, 1999),<sup>2</sup> and a test-retest reliability coefficient that is above 0.70 (demonstrating temporal stability; Cronbach, 1990).
- 3) Validity hypotheses:
  - a) *Convergent validity*: Student academic adjustment is related to positive responses to tertiary education (Pekrun, 2000) and also to increased levels of motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). We predict the AAS will positively correlate with the positive affect subscale of the College Adjustment Test (Pennebaker et al., 1990) and with higher motivation scores on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation subscales of the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992).
  - b) *Criterion validity*: We predict that higher scores on the AAS will predict higher levels of satisfaction with student's grade point average (GPA).
  - c) *Known-groups validity*: Given issues typically associated with a sojourn (i.e., acculturation stress, culture shock, etc.), we expect adjustment scores from non-sojourner students (Study 1) to be higher than scores reported by sojourner students (Study 2).
  - d) *Face validity*: We predict that student sojourners will rate this scale as being easier to respond to, and that the content is more relevant for them, than those measures of academic adjustment that are not designed for sojourner students.

## 2. Study 1

Study 1 aims to demonstrate (EFA) and then confirm (CFA) that the AAS is comprised of the three expected underlying structures.

### 2.1. Participants and method

An MTurk™ sample of 355 students ( $M = 29.55$ ,  $SD = 8.51$ , 201 males) participated in exchange for AUD\$0.20. Average length of time studying was 3.54 years ( $SD = 1.81$ ). The sample largely comprised Indians ( $n = 171$ ) and Americans ( $n = 168$ ), which is typical geographical distribution of a sample recruited on MTurk. Participants responded to demographic questions followed by the items of the AAS presented in a randomized order to limit order effects (see Appendix A).

<sup>2</sup> We note that some researchers prefer the alpha Cronbach coefficient to be above .80 as originally recommended by Cronbach (1990). However, Kline (1999) has argued that the diverse content that comprises psychological constructs means that a less stringent coefficient is more appropriate.

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