Academic Box Checking: A Tool to Measure the Stigmatized Behavior

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Introduction

As a professor, have you ever had a student come to you who wants to do research to "add it to their resume" or "prepare for med school"? Is this stereotyped behavior harmful or not? Students who seem to "check boxes" in their education rather than follow their passions is a commonly stereotyped and stigmatized behavior. However, an adequate definition has not been provided in literature nor has an efficient tool been established to measure this behavior. Thus, research to study if academic box checking behavior is actually detrimental has not been performed. This project serves as an attempt to define academic box checking and a development of a standard tool to effectively measure this behavior.

Methodology

10 Semi Structured Interviews

5 Student:
3 Pre-Professional
2 Professional

5 Staff:
3 Advisors/Faculty
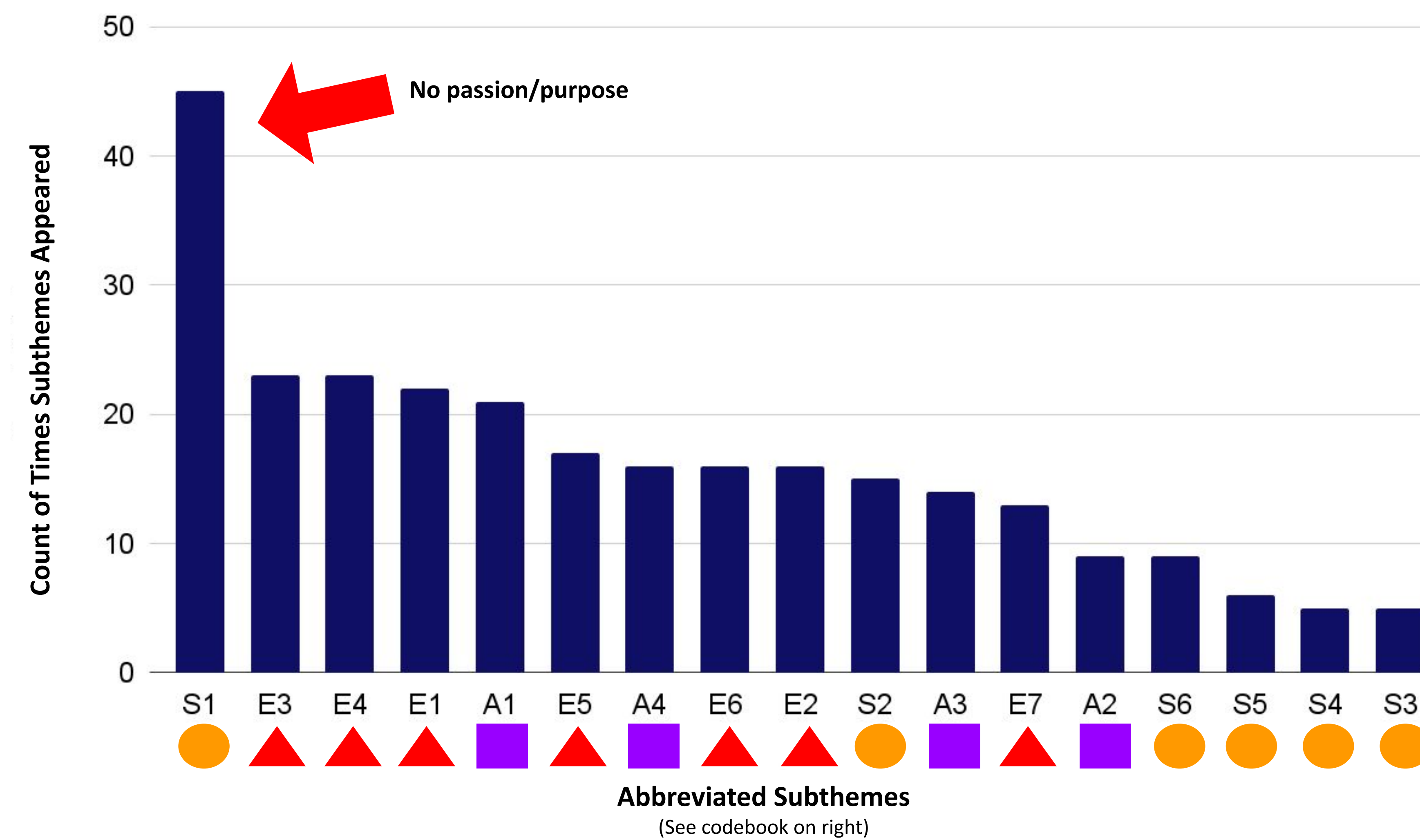2 Admissions

Thematic Coding

3 Themes - 17 Subthemes

Extrinsically Motivated
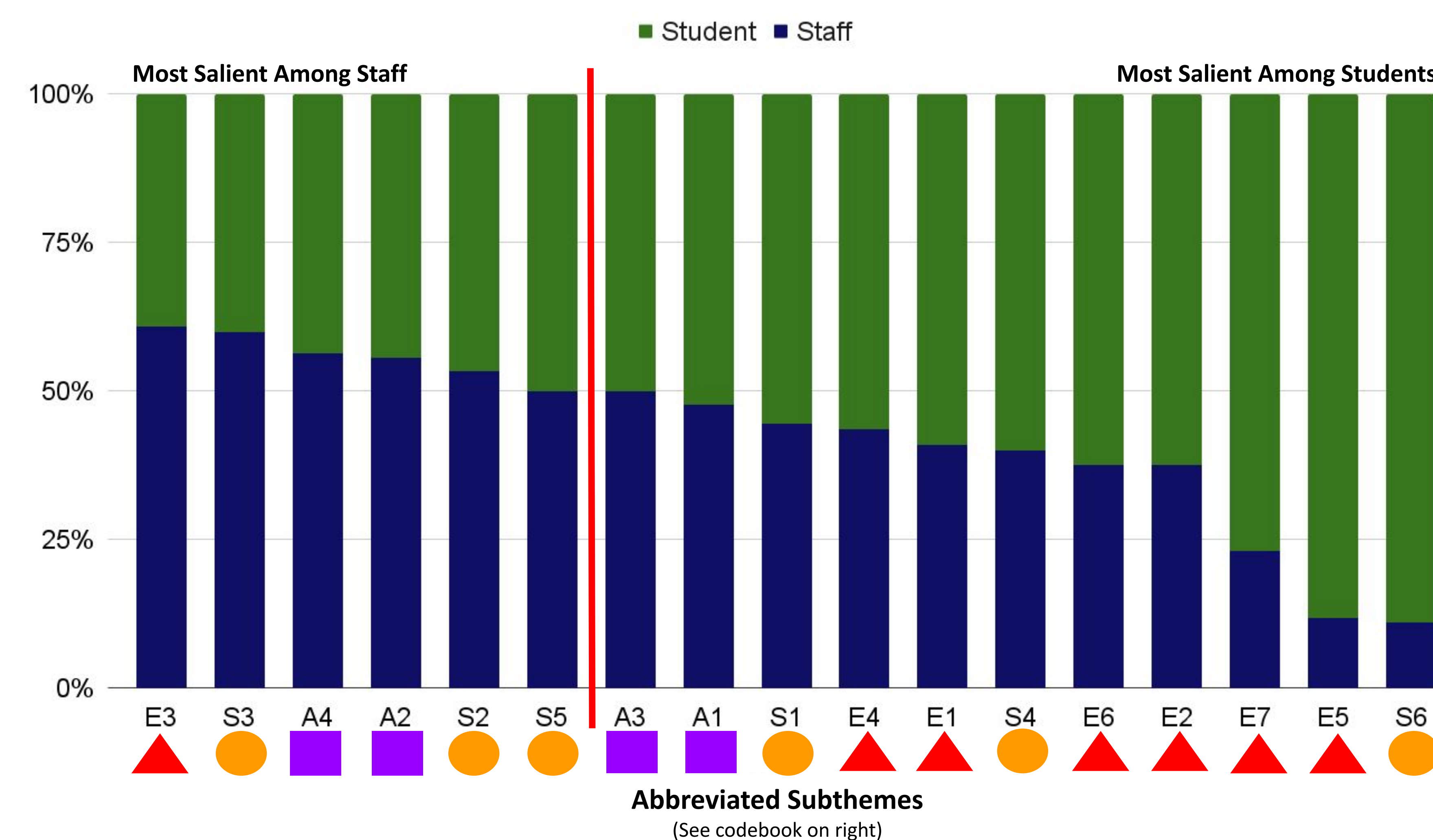7 Subthemes
▲

Box Checking Symptoms
6 Subthemes
●

Driven By Admissions
4 Subthemes
■

Results

Prominence of Themes From Box-Checking Interviews After Thematic Analysis

No passion/purpose

Y-axis: Count of Times Subthemes Appeared (0–50)
X-axis: Abbreviated Subthemes (See codebook on right)
S1, E3, E4, E1, A1, E5, A4, E6, E2, S2, A3, E7, A2, S6, S5, S4, S3

Ratio of Staff Salience vs Student Salience for Each Subtheme

Legend: ● Student ● Staff

Most Salient Among Staff — Most Salient Among Students

Y-axis: 0% to 100%
X-axis: Abbreviated Subthemes (See codebook on right)
E3, S3, A4, A2, S2, S5, A3, A1, S1, E4, E1, S4, E6, E2, E7, E5, S6

Code Book

Code	Theme	Explanation
E1	Task oriented	Students are focused solely on completing a given task
E2	Not autonomous	Students are not acting on their own will or volition
E3	Performance oriented goals	Students set goals involving demonstrating competence or avoiding appearing incompetent, rather than mastery
E4	Subjective norms	Students are influenced by the judgement of others or societal norms
E5	Perceived behavioral control	Students are motivated if they believe they "can do it."
E6	Positive Attitudes	Students are motivated by their attitude toward or their beliefs about a behavior
E7	Rewards/punishments	Students are motivated by rewards or punishments
S1	No passion/purpose	Students are not passionate about or find deep purpose in activity
S2	Minimal effort/time	Students invest the minimal time in the activity and do not go above requirements
S3	Reluctance to take risks	Students do not take creative risks or apply creative liberties with the activity
S4	Burnout	Students experience symptoms of burnout such as exhaustion, fatigue, and detachment
S5	No Flow	Students do not experience flow, characterized by concentration, a feeling of being perfectly challenged or a sense that "time is flying."
S6	Catalyst/Open Doors	Students learned new things or discovered new opportunities from task
A1	Better prepared for program	Students want to be a better prepared candidate
A2	Competition	Students worry about acceptance in competitive programs
A3	Set self apart	Students want to stand out from other candidates
A4	Authority told me to	Students are being encouraged to boxcheck by outside influences such as advisors, faculty, or admissions

Discussion

- "No passion/purpose" (S1) was vastly the most prominent subtheme
- "Performance oriented goals" (E3) was the most salient subtheme in the "extrinsically motivated" theme and "better prepared for program was the most salient subtheme in the "driven by admissions" theme
- Subthemes in the extrinsic motivation theme were the most prominent in interviews
- Subthemes in the "box checking symptoms" and "driven by admissions" themes were more salient in the interviews with staff, whereas extrinsic motivation factors were more salient in interviews with students
- "Catalyst/Open Doors' (S6) subtheme was vastly more salient among students compared to staff

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Are You a Box-Checker??
Scan the Code to Find Out!!