

## Abstract

*Background:* College transition is a developmental milestone, and also one of the most stressful events in our lives. Present study aimed at studying the transition process. To examine the underlying factors that may be facilitative of a positive transition, the effects of expectation on adjustment, personal control, perceived adjustment and discrepancy of expectation-outcome on freshmen's well being were examined in the present study. *Material and Methods:* 162 first year undergraduate students completed self-reported questionnaires twice over the course of their first semester in college. The questionnaire assessed their expectation and controllable attribution in the beginning of the school year, and their perceived adjustment and psychological distress at the beginning of the second semester. *Results:* Discrepancy between expectation and academic adjustment positively predicted freshmen's psychological distress. The association between expectation and psychological distress was mediated by perceived adjustment, while the relationship between controllable attribution and perceived adjustment was mediated by expectation. Motivation was not significantly related to academic adjustment. *Conclusions:* Relative to the social cognitive factors measured in the present study, expectation is the most predictive of academic adjustment and subsequent distress among college freshmen. The intervention could aim at helping freshman to set high but realistic expectations for the academic adjustment, which serve as their goal to pursue in the transition.