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A belief in free will found to be the key to exam and academic success for students, claims new study

Students who hold stronger beliefs in free will perform better on academic tasks and achieve better course grades throughout a semester, says study's author

[Aftab Ali](#) Student Editor | Wednesday 6 January 2016 | [0](#) comments



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The practise of studying relentlessly to achieve exam success may have just been quashed if one new study's theory is anything to go by which claims to have found the key to academic success - the belief in free will.

Yes, forget those pesky all-nighters and believe in your own ability to do well, according to Gilad Feldman - a postdoctoral research fellow at the Maastricht University in the Netherlands -

who has conducted a study in *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Along with a team of psychologists, Feldman sought to examine the relationship between the belief in free will and academic performance - with the expectation that individual differences in the endorsement of the philosophical notion of free will would predict better academic performance - by way of two studies.



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The first study saw the team ask 116 undergraduates from a university in Hong Kong to report their belief in free will - measured using a “slider” scale - from 0, ‘I do not have free will’, to 100, ‘I have free will’.

These participants then moved on to a spell-checking task where, those who said they had more free will performed better at spotting errors, therefore finding more mistakes in less time.

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The second study looked to assess three factors from 614 students: actual academic performance by measuring undergraduate course and overall semester performance over time - as opposed to performance on a simple singular academic task - and measuring the belief in free will more comprehensively using a well-validated scale. Finally, the effect of the belief in free

will for performance was compared to effects of trait self-control and implicit theories, two related concepts, the study says, “have been well-established as predictors of positive outcomes.”

At the end of the semester, those students who had previously highlighted having stronger beliefs in their free will were inclined to have scored a higher grade in their studies - and they received better performance appraisals from their tutors: an added bonus.



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Overall, the study concludes that free will is not merely an abstract philosophical idea, but one that holds relevance for people in their daily lives, adding: “The belief in free will predicted positive implications for real-life academic performance, showing that those who held stronger beliefs in free will performed better on academic tasks and achieved better

so, there you have it. Believe in yourself and the nature of your ability to do well when exam season rolls around again and you’ll be on your way to scholarly success. No studying needed. (Well, don’t write it off completely).

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