

Project. Even today, this study remains the most ambitious attempt ever to identify the determinants of success in young adulthood.

The project was funded by the Educational Testing Service. ETS, as it's more commonly called, occupies a sprawling campus in Princeton, New Jersey, and employs more than a thousand statisticians, psychologists, and other scientists—all devoted to the development of tests that predict achievement in school and the workplace. If you've taken the SAT, you've taken an ETS test. Ditto for the GRE, TOEFL, Praxis, and any one of three dozen advanced placement exams. Basically, ETS is to standardized testing what Kleenex is to tissues: Sure, there are other organizations that make standardized tests, but most of us are hard-pressed to think of their names.

So, what motivated ETS to look beyond standardized tests?

Better than anyone, Willingham and other scientists at ETS knew that, together, high school grades and test scores did only a half-decent job of predicting success later in life. It's very often the case that two kids with identical grades and test scores will end up faring very differently later in life. The simple question Willingham set out to answer was *What other personal qualities matter?*

To find out, Willingham's team followed several thousand students for five years, beginning in their senior year of high school.

At the start of the study, college application materials, questionnaires, writing samples, interviews, and school records were collected for each student. This information was used to produce numerical ratings for *more than one hundred* different personal characteristics. These included family background variables, like parent occupation and socioeconomic status, as well as self-declared career interests, motivation for a college degree, educational goals, and many more.

Then, as the students progressed through college, objective measures of success were collected across three broad categories: First, did the student distinguish him or herself academically? Next, as a young adult, did this individual demonstrate leadership? And, finally,