Examining Associations between Individualism, Collectivism, and Undergraduate Students' Decisions to Seek and Give Academic Help

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Abstract

Help-seeking and help-giving are critical learning behaviors that contribute to academic success in higher education, yet limited research has explored these behaviors from a cultural perspective. The purpose of this study was to examine how different elements of individualism and collectivism predict undergraduate students' (N = 645 students from a university in the United States) decisions to seek and give academic help. Results showed that: a) students who perceived themselves as unique and different from others reported being more likely than their peers to both seek and give academic help; b) students with competitive beliefs and attitudes were no more or less likely to seek or give academic help than their peers; c) students who valued advice in decision-making were more likely than their peers to both seek and give academic help; and d) students who prioritized group harmony over personal goals were less likely to seek help but equally likely to provide help as their peers. Overall, the findings add nuance to existing understandings of students' help-seeking and help-giving behaviors and illustrate the importance of investigating culture through a multidimensional lens.

Keywords: help-seeking, help-giving, individualism, collectivism, undergraduate student

Highlights

- Examined cultural influences on academic help-seeking and help-giving.
- Personal uniqueness predicted greater participation in help-seeking and help-giving.
- Value for advice predicted greater participation in help-seeking and help-giving.
- Prioritization of group harmony predicted lower participation in help-seeking.

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1 Introduction

During the transition from high school to college in the United States, undergraduate students typically find themselves in a new environment where they are expected to be self-motivated, monitor their own learning process, and know how to address academic difficulties effectively as they arise (Pintrich, 1995; Seli & Dembo, 2020). This shift reflects several key differences in higher education, including the accelerated pace at which course content is delivered, lower frequency of class meetings, reduced number of assignments, and decreased instructor involvement throughout the learning process (Seli & Dembo, 2020).

Given these changes, it is essential that undergraduate students actively participate in opportunities to overcome academic difficulties. Therefore, *academic help-seeking* and *academic help-giving*—the acts of requesting and providing assistance when a student is faced with an academic problem—are two reciprocal learning behaviors that play key roles in the learning process (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Webb, 1989). Consequently, over the past few decades, researchers have demonstrated a sustained interest in understanding the motivational factors underlying students' help-related interactions (e.g., Bornschlegl et al., 2020; Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003).

Despite existing work in this area, relatively little research has attempted to explore help-related behaviors from a cultural perspective (Jeng, 2024). This gap in the literature is critical to address, for at least two reasons. First, given that culture plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals view themselves in relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995), a

student's culturally situated perspective on the meaning, purpose, and value of personal relationships could shape how and why support is sought or given in response to academic difficulties (Wang & Lau, 2015). Second, students transitioning into higher education often navigate shifts in their cultural environment (Jenert et al., 2017); for example, minoritized students in the United States may face academic struggles due to cultural mismatches between their home and school environments (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2021). As such, it is critical to understand how culture plays a role in help-seeking and help-giving in order to find ways of supporting students from diverse cultural backgrounds and foster their academic success.

This exploratory study investigates how academic help-seeking and academic help-giving relate to elements of individualism and collectivism, two well-studied cultural patterns in psychology (Oyserman et al., 2002), among a sample of undergraduate students at a university in the United States. Specifically, the research goal is to investigate how different elements of individualism (e.g., a sense of personal uniqueness) and collectivism (e.g., the prioritization of group harmony over personal goals) may predict students' decisions to seek and give academic help in higher education settings.

These constructs may be particularly salient for understanding help-related behaviors because they reflect fundamental ways in which individuals relate to others. For example, collectivism emphasizes connectedness and interdependence, while individualism emphasizes uniqueness and independence. Although previous research has shown that attitudes related to independence and interdependence can influence students' help-related behaviors (e.g., Ryan et al., 2001), this study extends existing work by situating these motivational dynamics within broader cultural frameworks. By doing so, this work aims to develop a nuanced and culturally

sensitive understanding of the factors motivating students to seek, avoid, give, or withhold academic help.

2 Theoretical framework

This paper adopts Markus and Hamedani's (2007) definition of culture as the "patterns of representations, actions, and artifacts that are distributed or spread by social interaction" (p. 11). *Collectivism* is a cultural pattern where individuals view themselves primarily as members of collectives (e.g., family, student population, nation) and are motivated by the norms and goals of those collectives (Triandis, 1995). *Individualism* is a cultural pattern where individuals view themselves primarily as distinct from collectives and are motivated by their personal values, goals, and preferences (Triandis, 1995). Traditionally, individualism and collectivism have been framed as broad, overarching constructs that explain behavioral differences between countries and ethnic groups. For instance, the United States has often been identified as having an individualist culture, while many Latin, Asian, and African nations have often been identified as collectivist (Greenfield, 1994). Indeed, evidence suggests that on a broad scale, societies that prioritize economic security, modernization, and egalitarian norms tend to place greater emphasis on individualist values, such as personal rights and self-fulfillment (Inglehart, 2018).

However, research suggests that this approach—treating individualism and collectivism as broad, coherent systems that lead to reliable differences across contexts—may be overly simplistic and limiting (Lomas et al., 2023; Schwartz, 1990), particularly when examining how these cultural phenomena manifest in individual psychological processes. For example, due to the broad nature of individualism and collectivism, there has been a lack of consensus on how to define these constructs, which has led to conceptual ambiguity regarding the specific psychological elements they encompass (Wong et al., 2018).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that all societies contain elements of both individualism and collectivism, and thus all individuals are socialized to exhibit both of these cultural patterns to some degree (Oyserman et al., 2002; Tripathi, 2019). For instance, in North American contexts, individuals regularly navigate situations that elicit both individualist (e.g., personal choice, individual rights) and collectivist (e.g., group concerns, obedience) cultural concerns. In these instances, individuals do not necessarily adhere to one cultural pattern over the other. Rather, they may balance competing demands by giving precedence to certain elements of each pattern over others, depending on the particularities of the context (Wainryb & Recchia, 2014). This experience may be pronounced for minoritized individuals, who often navigate multiple, evolving cultural influences on their identity in complex ways (Craig et al., 2018).

This work adopts Wong et al.'s (2018) conceptualization of individualism and collectivism as a "constellation of loosely connected, independent constructs" (p. 257). Within this framework, individualism and collectivism are not unified systems but rather collections of key cultural elements that can function independently in various social contexts (Oyserman et al., 2002; Shulruf et al., 2007). This perspective shifts the focus of research from examining individualism and collectivism as holistic categories to analyzing the specific cultural elements that constitute these cultural patterns (e.g., a sense of personal uniqueness, the prioritization of group harmony over personal goals) (Wong et al., 2018).

It is important to note that although culture encompasses more than just individualism and collectivism (Oyserman, 2006), previous research has shown that elements of individualism and collectivism—such as the balance between personal needs and concern for others—can be particularly influential in explaining cultural variations in motivation (Markus, 2016), especially for emerging adults who are making the transition to college (Nelson et al., 2004). Thus,

although limited in scope, elements of individualism and collectivism represent useful starting points for investigating the cultural factors underlying undergraduate students' participation in key learning behaviors.

3 Literature review

3.1 Students' motivation for academic help-seeking and help-giving

Help-seeking and help-giving are crucial for fostering academic environments where students can draw on the expertise and support of others. Extensive empirical research has shown that undergraduate students who seek academic help demonstrate improved academic outcomes, including achievement (Almeda et al., 2017; Fong et al., 2023), engagement (Elmi & Asadzadeh, 2020), and the adoption of important learning strategies (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). Although less studied than help-seeking, help-giving is equally important to understand, as effective help-giving ensures that struggling students receive adequate academic support (Jeng, Williams-Dobosz, et al., 2023; Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). Additionally, help-givers themselves stand to benefit from providing academic support; when students explain academic concepts to others, they are presented with an opportunity to clarify and solidify their own understanding of course material (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003).

Research suggests that to support student success, these behaviors should be enacted appropriately; that is, with a focus on learning. For instance, scholars have emphasized the importance of seeking adaptive help—the assistance necessary to achieve long-term understanding and independent mastery (e.g., hints, examples, explanations)—over expedient help, which involves support aimed at having a help-giver complete a task on one's behalf (e.g., providing the final answer to a problem) (Newman, 1994). Similarly, the benefits of giving help have been uniquely linked to elaborated help-giving—explanations that describe how one arrives

at an answer. This is because when students help their peers by providing detailed explanations instead of quick answers, they are afforded an opportunity to strengthen their own understanding of material through in-depth reflection (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003).

Given the importance of help-related behaviors for learning, researchers have sought to understand the factors contributing to undergraduate students' reasons for seeking, avoiding, providing, or withholding academic help. A scoping review by Bornschlegl et al. (2020) found that, across diverse learning environments, undergraduate students who have decreased stigma surrounding help-seeking, more prior experience in seeking help, and a more positive attitude towards seeking help typically exhibit a greater willingness to seek help in the face of academic difficulty. Although less work in comparison has examined the factors predicting students' academic help-giving behaviors, existing studies have demonstrated that one's motivation to give academic help can be influenced by their level of understanding (Davison et al., 2023), norms set by instructors (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003), and the degree to which instructors focus on mastery goals (i.e., where one's focus is on developing understanding of a topic) versus performance goals (i.e., where one's focus is on appearing competent) (Poortvliet & Darnon, 2014).

Recent empirical work has highlighted the important role of undergraduate students' social environments in shaping their experiences with help-seeking and help-giving. For example, research shows that among undergraduate students, language barriers can deter students from seeking academic help (Bimerew & Arendse, 2024). Moreover, undergraduate students who experience a strong sense of relatedness to their peers and instructors (Oh et al., 2024), as well as a strong sense of belonging to their institution (Won et al., 2021), are more likely to seek academic help. Similarly, students experiencing a higher sense of belonging to

their course community are more likely than their peers to perceive help-giving interactions as beneficial for their learning (Jeng, Bosch, et al., 2023).

3.2 Individualism, collectivism, help-seeking, and help-giving

Existing research suggests that cultural elements associated with individualism and collectivism may be related to the frequency with which students seek and give academic help, their underlying reasons for engaging in or avoiding these behaviors, their preferred sources for receiving academic help, and their preferred targets for giving academic help (Jeng, 2024). Nevertheless, there is inconsistent and limited evidence on how these constructs predict students' decisions to seek and give academic help. Different studies have suggested that, compared to an individualist orientation, a collectivist orientation can be associated with similar (e.g., Crystal et al., 2008), less frequent (e.g., Cerna & Pavliushchenko, 2015; Covarrubias et al., 2019), or more frequent (e.g., Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014) academic help-seeking. Moreover, relatively few studies have examined how these cultural patterns impact academic help-giving. That said, some research has suggested that higher levels of collectivism may be related to more frequent help-giving (e.g., Asterhan & Bouton, 2017; Bouton et al., 2021) and increased consideration for others' academic struggles (Petrella & Gore, 2013).

It is possible that limited research has explored help-seeking and help-giving from a cultural perspective because of traditional conceptualizations of these behaviors as strategies of self-regulated learning. Existing scholarship has demonstrated that students who seek and provide academic help exhibit self-regulatory abilities by monitoring their understanding and developing strategies to navigate academic challenges (Newman, 1994; Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). Although these perspectives have been crucial for understanding how students become proactive learners, self-regulated learning theories also predominantly assume a Western,

individualist cultural perspective: these theories emphasize how behaviors emerge from individual agency and personal motivation (Jackson et al., 2000), which effectively places the responsibility for help-seeking and help-giving on the individual student. In doing so, such approaches may inadvertently overlook cultural influences that shape learning interactions, particularly those rooted in more collectivist perspectives.

Furthermore, the inconsistent findings on help-seeking and help-giving in cultural contexts may stem from limited attention to the specific elements of individualism and collectivism that influence these behaviors. Hence, this paper focuses on five key elements of individualism and collectivism, as outlined by Shulruf et al. (2007)—uniqueness, responsibility, competition, advice, and harmony—that may influence students' academic help-seeking and help-giving decisions. These elements have been shown to be critical to understanding individualism and collectivism in prior research (Oyserman et al., 2002) and may provide a deeper understanding of how culture shapes students' help-related interactions, for several reasons.

First, existing work shows that within individualist cultural orientations, individuals tend to perceive themselves as unique and different from others (referred to as "uniqueness") and adopt a sense of personal responsibility for their actions (referred to as "responsibility") (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These traits have, in turn, been linked to a greater involvement in one's learning process. For instance, Li (2012) found that, in Western cultural contexts, learning is typically viewed as an agentic and active process, where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning process. In this context, help-seeking becomes a self-regulated learning strategy that enables students to monitor their learning, recognize gaps in understanding, and obtain support proactively (Newman, 1994, 2002). Likewise, academic help-giving supports

active learning by fostering an awareness of one's own understanding of course material (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). A sense of personal uniqueness and responsibility may thus drive students to seek and give academic help. However, it is also possible that feeling distinct and separate from others may create a sense of disconnection from one's peers, which could discourage students from offering help in times of need.

Additionally, individualism has been associated with a competitive orientation, where individuals strive to achieve their personal goals and surpass their peers (referred to as "competition") (Oyserman et al., 2002). Research has shown that highly competitive students are more likely to engage with instructors to develop a thorough understanding of course material (Shimotsu-Dariol et al., 2012); thus, competitiveness may encourage academic help-seeking, although this has not been directly explored from a cultural perspective in prior work. However, competition could discourage help-giving, as sharing knowledge might be seen as detracting from one's competitive advantage (Hernaus et al., 2019). Nevertheless, competitive students may still help others when these behaviors are perceived as instrumental to their academic success; for example, when providing help could lead to future reciprocation (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017).

On the other hand, collectivism is often associated with a dependent style of decision-making, where individuals make decisions based on the preferences of others, rather than purely their own interests and judgment (referred to as "advice") (Guess, 2004; LeFebvre & Franke, 2013). This reliance on advice may motivate help-related behaviors in academic contexts, as students may seek and give academic help to maintain close interpersonal relationships and mutually supportive peer networks (Glazer, 2006; Hwang & Kim, 2007). However, to my knowledge, no study has examined how undergraduate students' decision-making styles relate to their approach to help-related interactions in academic settings.

Research has also shown that collectivism often involves giving precedence to group harmony over personal goals (referred to as "harmony") (Triandis, 1995). Prior research has shown that students with predominantly collectivist cultural orientations may refrain from seeking psychological help due to concerns about burdening others with their difficulties (Han & Pong, 2015; Hao & Liang, 2007). It is possible that this emphasis on group harmony also discourages students from seeking help when faced with academic problems. For instance, the expectation that one should refrain from burdening others with one's challenges may discourage vulnerability about one's academic difficulties, not just psychological ones.

3.3 Gaps in the literature

Thus, existing research indicates that although cultural elements linked to individualism and collectivism may influence students' help-related behaviors, further research is needed to clarify the relations between these constructs. In an integrative review of research on the influence of individualism and collectivism on students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors, Jeng (2024) identified four gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation:

1. There is a need for studies on this topic that directly measure participants' adherence to individualism and collectivism. Many existing studies use nationality and ethnicity as proxies for cultural orientation (e.g., Crystal et al., 2008; Janoff-Bulman & Leggatt, 2002; Zusho & Barnett, 2011), which overlooks cultural diversity within nations and ethnic groups (Green et al., 2005), and incorrectly treats individualism and collectivism as broad, discrete, and mutually exclusive categories.
2. Given that individualism and collectivism are complex and multidimensional constructs (Oyserman et al., 2002; Shulruf et al., 2007), there is a need for scholarship that highlights specific elements of individualism and collectivism (e.g., uniqueness,

responsibility, competition, advice, harmony) that may motivate or deter academic help-seeking and help-giving, rather than treat these cultural patterns as unidimensional.

3. Although researchers have shown some interest in understanding how collectivism can shape students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors (e.g., Chang, 2015; Hwang & Kim, 2007), far less work has examined how individualism, as a unique cultural pattern, predicts help-related behaviors in ways that may be similar to or different from collectivism.
4. Compared to help-seeking, help-giving remains underexplored in the literature, both in general and from a cultural perspective (Huang & Law, 2022). More research is needed to understand the cultural factors that influence help-giving, given its importance for learning and its close connection to help-seeking.

4 The present study

The purpose of the present exploratory study was to address the gaps identified in the literature by clarifying how uniqueness, responsibility, competition, advice, and harmony predict students' decisions to seek and give academic help, while accounting for their demographic background. In doing so, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how these behaviors are embedded within a cultural context. Instead of focusing on a specific subject, this research examined help-seeking and help-giving behaviors in a general academic setting to provide broader insights into the relations between cultural orientations and help-related behaviors. Although students' help-related behaviors vary based on factors such as subject or course difficulty, an examination of these behaviors in a general context provides a more comprehensive understanding of how students apply general strategies for navigating academic

difficulties across different courses. This approach, in turn, yields insights that are applicable across diverse educational environments.

The research questions (RQs) were as follows:

- **RQ1:** How does adherence to elements of individualism and collectivism predict undergraduate students' decisions to seek academic help, after controlling for demographic background?
- **RQ2:** How does adherence to elements of individualism and collectivism predict undergraduate students' decisions to give academic help, after controlling for demographic background?

Based on prior research and theory, the following hypotheses were developed regarding the associations between elements of individualism and collectivism and students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors. While the study remains largely exploratory, the following relations were anticipated:

- As individualism broadly emphasizes personal achievement and responsibility for learning (Li, 2012), it was hypothesized that competition and responsibility would be positively associated with academic help-seeking.
- As a dependent decision-making style involves seeking input from friends and family (Guess, 2004), it was hypothesized that advice would be positively associated with academic help-seeking.
- Drawing from research indicating that prioritizing group harmony over individual goals can discourage students from seeking help (e.g., Han & Pong, 2015), it was hypothesized that harmony would be negatively associated with academic help-seeking.

- Given that help-giving is often rooted in relationship-oriented values (Hwang & Kim, 2007), it was hypothesized that uniqueness would be negatively associated with academic help-giving. For the same reason, both advice and harmony were hypothesized to be positively associated with academic help-giving.
- Based on findings that sharing knowledge might be perceived as decreasing one's competitive advantage (Hernaus et al., 2019), it was hypothesized that competition would be negatively associated with academic help-giving.

5 Methods

5.1 Data statement

This study's design was preregistered prospectively, before data were collected; see https://osf.io/bwsrc. Preregistration involves specifying and submitting a research plan (including research questions, hypotheses, and analyses) in advance of a study. This practice promotes transparency and scientific rigor by safeguarding the research process against biases that may cause researchers to present exploratory findings as confirmatory, cherry-pick results, or engage in *p*-hacking (Crüwell et al., 2019; Yamada, 2018). During the course of the study, multiple deviations from the preregistered data collection and analysis plan occurred; these deviations are documented and justified throughout the "Methods" as they arise.

Data were analyzed using the *Hmisc, lavaan, ltm, MissMech, mice, MVN, semTools,* and *tidyverse* packages in R version 4.3.1 (Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011; Harrell Jr, 2024; Jamshidian et al., 2014; Jorgensen et al., 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2014; Rizopoulos, 2006; Rosseel, 2012; Wickham et al., 2019). All study materials, data, and data analysis scripts have been made publicly available at the Open Science Framework and can be accessed at https://osf.io/s953z.

5.2 Study design

The present study employed a cross-sectional survey design. Self-report questionnaires may be the most appropriate data collection method for addressing the RQs of interest, for multiple reasons. First, in academic settings, an individual's likelihood of seeking help is dependent on their level of academic need. For example, a student who is typically open to seeking help may not do so, not necessarily because they are unwilling, but rather because they are not currently struggling with course material. Thus, it is important that researchers control for individuals' levels of need for help when assessing their help-seeking behaviors. Self-report questionnaires allow researchers to accomplish this goal by asking students to rate their likelihood of seeking academic help, if they were struggling with course material (Karabenick, 2003).

Second, self-report questionnaires allow researchers to gain information on students' academic help-seeking and help-giving decisions across various avenues (e.g., discussion forum, office hours, classroom interactions). This broader perspective on help-seeking and help-giving is often not feasible in observational or experimental studies, which typically focus on a limited subset of observable help-seeking or help-giving behaviors. In other words, survey methods are uniquely positioned to account for the fact that different students may participate in a diverse range of help-seeking and help-giving behaviors.

Third, in this study, questionnaires offered a direct avenue for addressing the RQs of interest. Specifically, they allowed me to quantify students' academic help-seeking and help-giving decisions, as well as gauge the degree to which students perceived themselves as adhering to each element of individualism and collectivism. These data, in turn, enabled me to assess how

each element of individualism and collectivism predicted students' decisions to seek and give academic help.

However, although self-report questionnaires offered clear advantages for addressing the RQs, it is important to also acknowledge their limitations. Because distinct subscales were used to assess elements of individualism and collectivism (see "Measures"), the present study's design inherently treated these orientations' elements as separate constructs, thus potentially obscuring their intertwined nature. Consequently, multiple steps were taken in the study's design and analysis to address this limitation and remain consistent with the theoretical framework. First, I avoided using overarching individualism and collectivism scores in analysis and instead focused on distinct elements within each orientation that students could endorse independently. Second, the data collection and analysis approaches were designed to allow participants to score high on both individualist and collectivist elements simultaneously, rather than assuming these orientations are mutually exclusive. Finally, including elements of individualism and collectivism in the same analysis model allowed for the possibility that these constructs are related, while also recognizing that each may uniquely contribute to help-seeking and help-giving behaviors (see "Data analysis").

5.3 Participants and procedure

Participants ($N = 645$) were undergraduate students recruited via convenience sampling from an introductory statistics course at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. Although the help-related scales used in this study were domain-general (i.e., they assessed students' orientations towards academic help-seeking and help-giving across subjects), the decision to sample from this statistics course was intentional. This particular course fulfilled a quantitative reasoning requirement for non-STEM majors at the university, thereby increasing

the likelihood of students in this course experiencing the need for or requests for help. Consequently, students enrolled in this large introductory statistics course—which typically attracts students from diverse majors with limited prior exposure to the subject—were equipped to offer valuable perspectives on navigating academic difficulties in college settings. In other words, by using domain-general measures within a context where students were likely to experience academic difficulty, this study aimed to capture students' general approaches to help-seeking and help-giving while also drawing on a sample with recent relevant experience.

During the Fall 2023 academic semester, the course instructor distributed information about the study to all students, who could complete the survey for extra credit online, in one session, and at a time of their choosing. Initially, the survey received 791 submissions. However, 130 submissions were excluded for failing at least one of the three attention checks (e.g., "For this statement, please select '2 = Slightly disagree' to demonstrate your attention") embedded throughout the survey. An additional 16 duplicate submissions were identified and excluded from the analysis.

The remaining 645 submissions were included in the final sample, representing a diversity of racial/ethnic identities, gender identities, immigration statuses, college generation statuses, and years in school (Table 1 provides a full demographic breakdown of the sample). During the Fall 2023 semester, the course enrolled 1,240 students, which indicates a high response rate from potential participants.

5.4 Measures

Three measures were used to collect data on participants' adherence to different elements of individualism and collectivism, help-seeking, and help-giving. Within each measure, the order in which items were presented to each participant was randomized. Additionally, I collected

information on participants' gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, college generation status, and year in school because these characteristics have been shown to play a role in predicting students' help-seeking and/or help-giving behaviors in prior work (Abe-Kim et al., 2007; Bornschlegl et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2020; Oortwijn et al., 2008; Winograd & Rust, 2014). Although the preregistration only specified controlling for race/ethnicity, gender, and college generation status, the inclusion of additional demographic characteristics was deemed necessary to provide a better understanding of how participants' backgrounds predict the outcomes of interest.

5.4.1 Individualism-collectivism

The Auckland Individualism and Collectivism Scale (AICS) is a 26-item measure developed by Shulruf et al. (2007) to assess three elements of individualism (uniqueness, responsibility, and competition) and two elements of collectivism (advice and harmony). Participants indicated the frequency of their attitudes and behaviors (on a scale from 1 = *Never or almost never* to 5 = *Always or almost always*) as described in statements reflecting individualism and collectivism (e.g., "I consider myself as a unique person separate from others."). Higher scores reflected greater adherence to the relevant element of individualism or collectivism. Previous work has validated the factor structure of the AICS among diverse populations (Shulruf et al., 2007, 2011), including undergraduate students (Affum-Osei et al., 2019). Appendix A contains the AICS.

5.4.2 Help-seeking

Although academic help-seeking is a multifaceted process involving several decisions (e.g., determining what kind of help to pursue; Karabenick & Berger, 2013), the aim of this study was to focus specifically on students' decisions about whether to seek help when confronted with

a problem they cannot solve independently. To this end, help-seeking was assessed using the construct of help-seeking avoidance, which captures students' likelihood of seeking or avoiding help when needed.

Five items from the Help-Seeking Avoidance subscale of Pajares et al.'s (2004) Computer Science Help-Seeking Scale (CSHSS) were adapted to assess the degree to which participants seek or avoid help when faced with academic problems. This measure was originally developed to assess participants' help-seeking behaviors in the computer science classroom context. In the original version of the CSHSS, participants indicated their level of agreement (on a scale from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*) to statements related to their academic help-seeking behaviors in their computer science class (e.g., "I would put down any answer rather than ask for help in this class").

These items were modified to focus on academic help-seeking, generally, rather than in a particular course or for a particular topic. For example, the item "I don't ask for help in this class even if I don't understand the lesson" was revised to "I don't ask for help with schoolwork, even if I don't understand the lesson." All items were reverse scored so that higher scores reflected greater participation in academic help-seeking. This scoring approach was used to ensure that across both the help-seeking and help-giving measures, higher scores represented greater participation in the respective behavior. Previous research has validated the factor structure of the CSHSS (Pajares et al., 2004). The full measure of help-seeking used in this study is provided in Appendix B.

5.4.3 Help-giving

Four items from the consideration subscale of Williams and Shiaw's (1999) Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (OCBS) were adapted to assess the degree to which

participants give help to others faced with academic problems. This measure was originally developed to assess employees' participation in prosocial behaviors at work. In the original version of the OCBS, participants indicated the frequency of their behaviors (on a scale from 1 = *Never or almost never* to 5 = *Always or almost always*) as described in statements related to organizational citizenship (e.g., "I help others who have been absent").

These items were modified to focus on academic help-giving. For example, the item "I give my time to help others with work problems willingly" was revised to "I give my time to help other students with academic problems willingly." Higher scores reflected a greater likelihood of giving academic help to others. Previous research has examined the factor structure of the OCBS via principal components analysis (Williams & Shiaw, 1999) and adapted the OCBS to assess students' help-giving behaviors in academic settings (Petrella & Gore, 2013). The full measure of help-giving used in this study is provided in Appendix C.

Initially, the preregistration specified that the following items adapted from the consideration subscale of the OCBS were also to be included in the measure of help-giving: "I take steps to prevent problems with fellow students," "I try to avoid creating problems for fellow students," and "I am mindful of how my behavior affects other students' work." However, upon closer examination, it was evident that these items focused more on consideration (i.e., mindfulness of other students' difficulties) rather than direct acts of helping. Thus, to maintain conceptual alignment with the primary construct of interest, these items were not included in the present study.

5.5 Data analysis

5.5.1 Preliminary analyses

Prior to addressing the RQs, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) with robust maximum-likelihood estimation (MLR) were performed to validate the factor structure of each of the three measures included in this study. For all models tested, overall fit was evaluated using several fit indices: the scaled χ^2 test statistic, Robust Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Robust Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). Generally, a failure to reject the null hypothesis of the χ^2 test indicates acceptable fit, as do values of RMSEA < .06 and SRMR < .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Additionally, CFI values > .95 indicate excellent fit, whereas values < .90 suggest substantial room for improvement (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Hu & Bentler, 1999). However, it is important to note that fit indices can be influenced by various factors such as model complexity, sample size, estimation method, and data characteristics (Niemand & Mai, 2018; Xia & Yang, 2019). The χ^2 test statistic in particular is known for its high sensitivity to both sample size and model complexity, where the test can frequently produce statistically significant results, even in instances where models are well-fitted to the data (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Therefore, although these cutoffs were employed as general guidelines, fit indices were interpreted in conjunction with one another to make comprehensive judgments about overall fit.

Furthermore, standardized factor loadings were included to represent the strength of the relations between observed variables and their corresponding latent factor. Originally, the preregistered data analysis plan specified a cutoff of .30 for factor loadings. However, following Stevens's (2009) recommendation, a more stringent cutoff of .40 was employed to ensure that only meaningful loadings were considered for interpretation. Moreover, in each model, unique variances (i.e., the variance in each item unaccounted for by the relevant latent factor) were specified to be independent of one another. Finally, Cronbach's α was computed as a measure of

reliability for every set of survey items aligning with a latent factor, with values of $\alpha > .70$ suggesting acceptable internal consistency.

5.5.1.1 Individualism-collectivism

CFA was performed on a five-factor model of the AICS scale (Model A), where uniqueness, responsibility, competition, advice, and harmony were specified as correlated latent factors underlying their respective survey items. Although values for RMSEA and SRMR indicated acceptable fit, results of the χ^2 test indicated that the model did not perfectly fit the data ($p < .001$), as did the value for CFI. Moreover, an examination of the model's standardized loadings revealed that one item within the competition subscale (IC12: "I try to achieve the best grades among my peers") had a low loading of .29.

Furthermore, although most subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, the responsibility subscale showed low reliability ($\alpha = .56$). This suggests that the items comprising the responsibility subscale may have targeted different aspects of a broader underlying construct. A closer examination of the content of the items within the responsibility subscale revealed that they targeted a range of concepts, including the respondent's communication preferences (IC5), desire for independence when acting (IC6), willingness to take responsibility for one's actions (IC7), and interactions with superiors (IC8). Thus, although these items may all relate to a common underlying construct, their diverse content indicates that they may not consistently measure the same facet of the construct of responsibility.

Given these findings, the results of preliminary analyses indicated room for improvement. Subsequent CFAs were conducted on three revised versions of Model A: 1) Model B, which omits item IC12 but retains the responsibility subscale items; 2) Model C, which omits the responsibility subscale items but retains item IC12; and 3) Model D, which omits both item

IC12 and the responsibility subscale items. Among these models, Model D demonstrated the best fit, with the highest CFI value, as well as the lowest χ^2, RMSEA, and SRMR values. Furthermore, in Model D, all standardized loadings and values for Cronbach's α were within the acceptable range. Thus, although the full version of the AICS was initially to be used in the present research, the four responsibility subscale items and item IC12 were excluded from subsequent analyses. Table 2 contains the standardized loadings and fit indices associated with Models A through D.

5.5.1.2 Help-seeking

CFA was performed to validate the factor structure of the measure assessing participants' participation in academic help-seeking. This construct was specified as a single latent factor underlying the five reverse-scored help-seeking items (α = .89). Results of the χ^2 test indicated that the model did not perfectly fit the data, $\chi^2(5, N = 645) = 22.26$, $p < .001$. Additionally, RMSEA yielded a value of .08, which, while traditionally indicative of poorer fit, may be less reliable in models with small degrees of freedom (Kenny et al., 2015). Given that the remaining fit indices suggested excellent fit (CFI = .99 and SRMR = .02), the model was considered to fit the data adequately. Standardized loadings for items HS1 (.87), HS2 (.74), HS3 (.78), HS4 (.75), and HS5 (.84) all fell within the acceptable range.

5.5.1.3 Help-giving

CFA was performed to validate the factor structure of the measure assessing participants' participation in academic help-giving. This construct was specified as a single latent factor underlying the four help-giving items (α = .89). Results of the χ^2 test indicated that the model did not perfectly fit the data, $\chi^2(6, N = 645) = 11.25$, $p < .001$, as did the RMSEA value of .08. However, akin to the help-seeking model, given the excellent fit suggested by the remaining fit

indices (CFI = .99 and SRMR = .02), the model was considered to fit the data adequately. Standardized loadings for items HG1 (.82), HG2 (.80), HG3 (.85), and HG4 (.82) all fell within the acceptable range.

5.5.2 Multiple regression

The RQs were addressed using multiple linear regression with ordinary least squares estimation. Although the preregistered analysis plan specified using structural regression, multiple regression was employed instead due to constraints related to sample size and the complexity of the proposed model. After validating each of the study measures with CFA, factor scores were computed for each latent variable and used as observed variables in subsequent analyses. Following recommendations by Skrondal and Laake (2001), regression factor scores were used for the predictor variables (i.e., uniqueness, competition, advice, harmony), while Bartlett factor scores were used for the outcome variables (i.e., help-seeking, help-giving). All scores were fully standardized prior to analysis.

To address RQ1, help-seeking was regressed on uniqueness, competition, advice, and harmony. To control for participants' demographic characteristics, gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, college generation status, and year in school were also included as predictors. Gender and college generation status were coded as binary variables, with "non-man" and "continuing generation" serving as the reference groups for comparison, respectively. Race/ethnicity was coded into four variables ("Asian or Asian American," "Black or African American," "Hispanic or Latino," and "other/multiracial"), with "White" as the reference group. Immigration status was coded into four variables ("first-generation," "second-generation," "other immigration status," "not sure"), with "third-or-higher-generation" as the reference group. Year in school was coded into two variables ("sophomore," "upperclassman"), with "freshman" as the

reference group. To address RQ2, help-giving was regressed on the same set of predictors in a separate model.

5.5.3 Missing data

Within the sample, 5 participants (0.78%) were missing information on gender, 14 participants (2.17%) were missing information on race/ethnicity, 28 participants (4.34%) were missing information on immigration status, 22 participants (3.41%) were missing information on college generation status, and 1 participant (0.16%) was missing information on year in school. No participants were missing information on the measures of individualism-collectivism, help-seeking, and help-giving.

Although the preregistration specified the use of full information maximum likelihood estimation to handle missing data, multiple imputation was used instead, as it provides a more robust method for estimating missing values for categorical variables. Multiple imputation generates replacement values for missing data under the assumption that the data are missing at random (MAR) or missing completely at random (MCAR). Results of Jamshidian and Jalal's (2010) nonparametric test of MCAR indicated a failure to reject the MCAR assumption (p = .46); hence, multiple imputation was considered an appropriate method for handling missing data in the sample, and a total of 20 imputed datasets were created and analyzed for the present study. All analyses involving multiple regression were performed on each imputed dataset, and the results were pooled to obtain the findings described in the "Results."

6 Results

Table 3 contains the range, skewness, kurtosis, and Pearson correlations for all scale factor scores included in analysis. Detailed item-level descriptive statistics, including the means,

standard deviations, and Pearson correlations for all observed variables, are provided in the Supplementary Materials.

6.1 Help-seeking

The included predictors accounted for 9.11% of the variance in help-seeking. Among these, uniqueness ($p < .001$), advice ($p < .001$), and harmony ($p < .001$) significantly predicted help-seeking. Specifically, participants who perceived themselves as distinct from others (uniqueness) and sought advice from others when making decisions (advice) were more inclined than their peers to report that they seek help when encountering academic difficulties. Conversely, individuals prioritizing in-group harmony over personal goals (harmony) reported a lower willingness to seek help than their peers in similar situations. The effect of competition on help-seeking was non-significant ($p = .056$), indicating that participants valuing achievement were neither more nor less likely to seek academic help than their peers. None of the demographic variables, including gender ($p = .199$), race/ethnicity ($ps > .05$), immigration status ($ps > .05$), college generation status ($p = .949$), and year in school ($ps > .05$), emerged as predictors of help-seeking. Table 4 contains the full results of multiple regression for RQ1.

6.2 Help-giving

The included predictors accounted for 12.49% of the variance in help-giving. Among these, uniqueness ($p = .006$) and advice ($p < .001$) significantly predicted help-giving. Specifically, participants who perceived themselves as distinct from others (uniqueness) and sought advice from others when making decisions (advice) were more inclined than their peers to report that they provide help to other students encountering academic difficulties. On the other hand, harmony ($p = .125$) and competition ($p = .806$) did not significantly predict help-giving. Among the demographic variables, race/ethnicity significantly predicted help-giving, with Black

or African American students reporting a lower frequency of academic help-giving behaviors compared to their White peers ($p < .001$). Additionally, immigration status significantly predicted help-giving, with first-generation immigrant students reporting a greater frequency of academic help-giving behaviors compared to their third-or-higher generation peers ($p = .033$). Gender ($p = .096$), college generation status ($p = .285$), and year in school ($ps > .05$) did not predict help-giving. Table 5 contains the full results of multiple regression for RQ2.

7 Discussion

7.1 General discussion

As nations and communities around the world become increasingly diverse (Oyserman, 2017), it is essential to equip educators with the insights needed to support students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, it is critical that students learn to navigate an increasingly interconnected world by developing the ability to communicate and collaborate across cultures and contexts (Teo, 2019). However, there remains a gap in existing understandings of how cultural phenomena motivate undergraduate students' help-related interactions, where students receive support from others and offer assistance to their peers (Jeng, 2024). To this end, the primary purpose of the present study was to investigate how different critical elements of individualism and collectivism relate to undergraduate students' decisions to seek and give academic help within academic settings. In doing so, this research provides valuable insights for developing culturally sustaining educational practices that can better serve students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Undergraduate students with a strong sense of personal uniqueness reported significantly higher levels of participation in both academic help-seeking and academic help-giving, compared to their peers. Although this result aligns with previous scholarship suggesting that cultural self-

concept may influence students' learning behaviors (e.g., Li, 2012), the mechanisms driving this relationship were not examined in the present study. It is possible that in contexts that emphasize personal uniqueness, students may be more inclined to take personal responsibility for their learning, which, in turn, motivates them to seek and offer academic help. However, further research is needed to investigate whether other factors might also contribute to this observed association.

Furthermore, students with competitive behaviors and attitudes were equally as likely as their peers to seek and give help in academic settings. This finding supports previous research suggesting that within an individualist cultural orientation, students may be motivated to seek, avoid, give, or withhold academic help based on their perception of how help-seeking and help-giving will enable them to achieve their academic goals (Jeng, 2024; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). For example, past research examining the intersection of culture and school-related knowledge-sharing has shown that undergraduate students with a competitive orientation may decide to share knowledge with their peers based on whether they expect that help to be reciprocated in the future (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017). Therefore, within individualist contexts, it may not be one's competitiveness alone that determines their willingness to seek or give academic help, but rather their belief in how help-seeking and help-giving can contribute to their academic success.

However, it is possible this finding was influenced by the specific context of the present study. In particular, students may not have perceived the introductory statistics course environment as especially competitive, since the course primarily fulfills a quantitative reasoning requirement for non-STEM majors and therefore often falls outside students' primary fields of study. Consequently, competitive tendencies may have been less salient in this setting, meaning

that even when students identified as being competitive, they may not have drawn heavily on these values when deciding whether to seek or give academic help. Thus, future work should explore in more detail how students' views on academics and achievement contribute to their experiences with seeking and giving academic help in a variety of disciplines and learning environments.

Moreover, students who sought advice from friends and family members before making decisions were significantly more likely than their peers to both seek and give academic help. This finding suggests that these constructs—a dependent style of decision-making, tendency to seek academic help, and tendency to give academic help—are interrelated. More specifically, they may all be reinforced by the inclination to view individuals as interdependent within a group (Glazer, 2006). In other words, students who seek input from family and friends before making decisions may also be more inclined to seek and give academic help because they highly value close relationships and the exchange of support. This interpretation aligns with previous research, which shows that within a collectivist orientation, students may be motivated to share knowledge with their peers because such behaviors are consistent with their relationship-oriented values (Hwang & Kim, 2007).

In addition, students who prioritized group harmony were significantly less likely to seek academic help but equally likely to give academic help, when compared to their peers. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that cultural concerns about burdening others can discourage students from seeking help for academic stressors (Chang, 2015; Chang et al., 2020). For example, in a qualitative examination of how collectivism shapes Asian and Latino American students' use of social support in response to various stressors, Chang (2015) found that "relational concerns constrained [both groups'] use of social support. They generally did not

want to worry or burden family or friends with their problems and also sought to avoid criticism by concealing their problems" (p. 11). The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that this relation between group harmony and help-seeking may generalize to the academic context and a larger sample of students.

This finding may also have been influenced by the specific context of the study. In large introductory college courses, such as the one examined here, students are often expected to manage their own learning and navigate course material independently. As such, in these environments, seeking help may be more likely to be perceived as imposing on others. In contrast, in course contexts where consistent academic support is more normalized (e.g., courses with smaller classes or those emphasizing collaborative group work), help-seeking may be viewed as an expected part of the learning process, which could weaken its association with the value of group harmony. Thus, future research should explore how the norms of different classroom environments may interact with students' cultural values to shape their help-seeking and help-giving behaviors.

Overall, the findings revealed that the studied elements of individualism and collectivism were associated with students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors in distinct and sometimes different ways. Specifically, the two examined elements of individualism—uniqueness and competition—did not predict help-seeking and help-giving in the same manner. Likewise, the two examined elements of collectivism—advice and harmony—also showed different patterns of association with help-related behaviors.

This pattern of results suggests that treating individualism and collectivism as broad, unidimensional constructs fails to provide a reliable framework for understanding undergraduate students' help-related interactions from a cultural perspective. Instead, consistent with this

study's theoretical perspective, the findings indicate that, in higher education contexts, individualism and collectivism should be viewed as collections of cultural elements that function independently rather than as coherent systems (Wong et al., 2018). It is possible that academic difficulties—whether they pertain to oneself or others—and the cultural shifts that accompany the transition to college can evoke both individualist and collectivist elements. Moreover, although individualism and collectivism were originally studied as separate constructs, cultural and historical changes may have blended these constructs in contemporary contexts. Thus, students may draw from elements of either or both cultural patterns when deciding to seek, give, avoid, or withhold academic help.

Although not the direct focus of the present study, the findings also revealed associations between demographic characteristics and students' help-seeking and help-giving decisions. Notably, first-generation immigrant students reported greater help-giving than their third-or-higher-generation peers. Research has demonstrated that immigrant students adjusting to the American college environment often rely on peer networks of the same ethnicity over other sources of academic support (e.g., institutional resources) (Kim, 2009). This emphasis on peer support in immigrant student communities may explain why first-generation immigrant students exhibited greater participation in help-giving, compared to other students.

Additionally, Black and African American students reported significantly lower participation in help-giving than their White peers. This result points to the need for further research on the prosocial behaviors of minoritized populations, an area that remains underexplored in the existing literature (Armstrong-Carter & Telzer, 2021). Specifically, following from previous studies on Black and African American students' prosocial behaviors (Harris & Kruger, 2021; Lozada et al., 2017), critical theoretical perspectives (e.g., sociopolitical

developmental theory, intersectionality) should be adopted to help situate racially minoritized students' help-giving behaviors within broader systems of discrimination, oppression, and inequality. Such approaches would allow researchers to develop more nuanced understandings of how diverse groups participate in academic help-giving, beyond what could be captured in this study.

7.2 Implications and directions for future research

This research has implications for theory and practice that pave the way for future research. First, one longstanding discussion in cultural studies concerns whether cultural patterns should be understood as coherent systems or collections of narrower elements (Tay et al., 2010). In this regard, the present study contributes to theory by suggesting that, in help-related interactions within higher education settings, individualism and collectivism may be more accurately conceptualized as the latter; that is, assortments of elements that contribute independently to students' learning. Thus, the present research allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of how individualism and collectivism motivate students to seek and give academic help, and future studies should continue to explore the intricate ways in which cultural elements within these patterns predict help-related behaviors. As Wong et al. (2018) have stated, "flowing from our conceptualization of [collectivism and individualism] as a loose constellation of independent constructs, is to give more attention to researching the narrower constructs associated with [collectivism and individualism] than to the generic concepts" (p. 257).

Although including cultural elements and demographic characteristics as separate predictors in the analysis allowed this study to isolate the effects of psychological perceptions of individualism and collectivism on students' help-seeking and help-giving decisions, it is important to recognize that, in practice, culture is deeply intertwined with students' social

identities (Brewer & Yuki, 2007). To further advance theories of individualism and collectivism in educational contexts, future research should examine how these cultural values influence academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors across diverse social groups and backgrounds. For example, students of different gender identities may interpret the individualist value of competitiveness in ways shaped by gendered norms, as prior research has found that men who endorse competitive masculine norms (e.g., viewing oneself as a "fighter" or "winner") are less likely to seek academic help when needed (Brown et al., 2021). In other words, the effects of individualist and collectivist values on help-seeking and help-giving may differ across social groups, depending on how these values are understood. Thus, future work should investigate whether and how demographic characteristics, such as gender, moderate the relationship between cultural orientations and help-related behaviors.

Furthermore, the present study highlights the importance of refining existing theories and measures of individualism and collectivism in higher education contexts. During preliminary analyses, the responsibility subscale of the AICS showed poor reliability and was excluded from subsequent analyses. This finding suggests that the subscale items may have targeted a range of concepts—including communication preferences, desire for independence, willingness to take responsibility for one's actions, and interactions with superiors—rather than a unified construct. Moving forward, researchers would benefit from greater clarity in defining and measuring personal responsibility among undergraduate students. Such insights would enable more precise investigations into how personal responsibility influences learning in higher education.

The present research informs practice by contributing to understandings of how educators can effectively motivate students to seek and give help in academic settings. This study found that both individualism and collectivism contain elements—a sense of personal uniqueness and

value for advice, respectively—that positively predicted participation in academic help-seeking and academic help-giving. This result suggests that in practice, educators can foster help-seeking and help-giving among diverse students in a culturally sustaining manner by developing teaching strategies that accommodate multiple cultural perspectives. Specifically, instructors can empower students from predominantly individualist backgrounds to recognize their unique qualities and characteristics, as well as support students from predominantly collectivist backgrounds by creating interdependent peer networks that facilitate the exchange of support.

In this regard, Karabenick and Berger (2013) previously outlined various interventions instructors can implement in courses to encourage their students to seek adaptive help. For instance, they described the importance of creating a mastery-oriented learning environment that focuses on developing understanding of a topic and emphasizes the "autonomy or authority learners are allowed in classroom activities" (p. 250). In light of the present study's results, this pedagogical strategy likely aligns well with an individualist sense of personal uniqueness, as it empowers students to take ownership and personal involvement in their learning process.

Furthermore, Karabenick and Berger (2013) also stressed the importance of "establishing and explaining norms for help-seeking" (p. 251) early on in a course (e.g., when it is appropriate to get help, how to appropriately ask for help to promote long-term understanding), as clear expectations help normalize appropriate help-seeking behaviors for students. Webb and Mastergeorge (2003) similarly emphasized the importance of establishing norms for both help-seeking and help-giving, observing that "the norms that teachers explicitly communicated emphasized the role of students as active help seekers and help givers" (p. 84). This approach may be particularly well-aligned with relationship-oriented values within a collectivist

perspective, as it fosters a culture of interdependence by making adaptive help-seeking and elaborated help-giving routine and expected behaviors.

Finally, the only cultural construct in this study that showed a negative association with either help-seeking or help-giving was harmony, where students who prioritized group harmony over personal goals were less inclined than their peers to seek academic help. Thus, future research should focus on understanding how educators can alleviate students of the feeling that requests for help are a burden to their instructors or the class. However, it is important to address this issue with a culturally affirming approach. Rather than discouraging students with a predominantly collectivist cultural perspective from prioritizing group goals (which could be perceived as devaluing their cultural perspective), educators should aim to communicate to students that their requests for help, particularly when they are oriented towards promoting long-term understanding, are not a burden to them or others. For example, educators could explain that when students assist struggling classmates by offering adaptive help, they simultaneously create opportunities for reflecting on their own understanding and reinforcing problem-solving strategies. Additionally, instructors may wish to provide opportunities for students to seek help both individually (e.g., by scheduling private meetings) and in group settings (e.g., during review sessions), which could further mitigate concerns related to burdening others by accommodating different students' preferences.

7.3 Limitations

Although the study sample was large, diverse, and purposefully selected to shed light on the RQs of interest, the participants were drawn from a single course at a single institution. As help-seeking behaviors have been shown to vary across disciplines (Zusho & Barnett, 2011), students in this study may have had different experiences with academic challenges and help-

seeking compared to students enrolled in other disciplines. This limitation highlights a gap in understanding how students' disciplinary cultures and professional backgrounds influence their help-seeking and help-giving behaviors. For example, research shows highly competitive undergraduate programs, such as pre-health and engineering, often foster a culture of self-reliance and thus discourage students from seeking support for mental health concerns (Dyrbye et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2023). Consequently, students in these environments, compared to those who participated in this study, may face greater cultural barriers to seeking and providing help. Therefore, future research should explore how students' personal cultural values interact with those encountered in various disciplinary settings. Such work could provide further insight into how cultural perspectives at different levels influence the choices students make regarding help-related interactions.

Additionally, given that higher education settings in the United States often promote individualist ideals (Guiffrida et al., 2012), the specific institutional context of the present study may have contributed to its findings by enabling more individualist expressions of help-seeking (e.g., by emphasizing students' personal responsibility in the learning process) and constraining more collectivist expressions of help-seeking (e.g., by overlooking students' concerns about burdening others). Similarly, although this study aimed to expand on traditional conceptualizations of help-seeking and help-giving by adopting a cultural perspective, the methods used to assess these behaviors remained rooted in self-report measures that emphasize individual agency and personal ownership over the help-seeking and help-giving process. Therefore, future research should adopt more culturally sensitive approaches to conceptualizing, measuring, and studying help-seeking and help-giving that account for how these behaviors may play out from more collectivist perspectives. This could involve studying these behaviors in

predominantly collectivist cultural environments and foregrounding shared agency by examining students' collaborative problem-solving interactions as the primary unit of analysis, rather than focusing on individual student behaviors. Such work would help contribute to culturally grounded theories of academic help-seeking and help-giving that do not solely emphasize individual agency but rather account for how these behaviors can emerge from the collective practices, values, assumptions, and beliefs of groups.

Furthermore, several variables not included in this study may also partially explain students' help-seeking and help-giving decisions. For example, past research indicates that other personal, social, and cultural factors—such as empathy (Betancourt, 1990), sense of belonging (Won et al., 2021), and power distance (Hong et al., 2024)—can also shape individuals' help-seeking and/or help-giving behaviors. Future studies should seek to incorporate these variables, to provide a richer understanding of how individualism and collectivism interact with other influences to shape students' participation in academic help-seeking and help-giving.

Finally, although this study measured the overall frequency of help-seeking and help-giving among students, it did not evaluate the specific types of help requested or provided. This limitation leaves an important gap in our understanding of how cultural perspectives influence learning through these behaviors. Specifically, research indicates that the effectiveness of help-related interactions depends on whether students seek and provide help with the goal of fostering detailed, long-term understanding (Newman, 1994; Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). This distinction raises questions about the qualitatively different types of help students request and offer, as well as how these relate to their cultural perspectives. For instance, students with a more dependent decision-making style reported seeking help more frequently, but it remains unclear whether this help is primarily adaptive or expedient in nature. Conversely, students who

prioritize group harmony reported seeking help less often, yet this behavior may not be maladaptive if they are primarily avoiding expedient help that they perceive as a burden to others. Therefore, future research should explore how cultural perspectives influence the types of help students are inclined to seek, avoid, provide, or withhold.

8 Conclusion

This study was the first to take a multidimensional approach to understanding the relations between individualism, collectivism, academic help-seeking, and academic help-giving, thus offering novel insights into help-related interactions from a cultural perspective. Undergraduate students' sense of personal uniqueness, competitiveness, value for advice, and prioritization of in-group harmony were each related to their decisions to seek and give academic help in distinct ways. Ultimately, this work offers researchers a culturally situated understanding of the factors motivating undergraduate students to seek, avoid, give, or withhold academic help. These findings have the potential to inform educational practices aimed at fostering supportive behaviors in diverse classroom settings.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT to assist with readability improvements. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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Table 1

Participant Demographic Breakdown

	n	***%***
Race/ethnicity		
Asian or Asian American	120	18.60
Black or African American	39	6.05
Hispanic or Latino	100	15.50
White	329	51.01
Multiracial	34	5.27
Other	9	1.40
Prefer not to say	14	2.17
Gender		
Man	171	26.51
Woman	462	71.63
Non-binary	5	0.78
Other	2	0.31
Prefer not to say	5	0.78
Immigration status		
First-generation	29	4.50
Second-generation	225	34.88
Third-or-higher-generation	300	46.51
Not sure	34	5.27
Other	29	4.50
Prefer not to say	28	4.34
College generation status		
First-generation college student	179	27.75
Continuing-generation	444	68.84
Prefer not to say	22	3.41
Year in school		
Freshman	424	65.74
Sophomore	146	22.64
Junior	60	9.30
Senior	14	2.17
Prefer not to say	1	0.16

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results – Auckland Individualism-Collectivism Scale (AICS)

	Parameter Estimate			
	Model A	**Model B**	**Model C**	**Model D**
Standardized Loadings				
Uniqueness (α = .76)				
IC1	.74	.74	.77	.77
IC2	.65	.65	.66	.66
IC3	.71	.70	.68	.68
IC4	.58	.58	.56	.56
Responsibility (α = .56)				
IC5	.52	.53	—	—
IC6	.59	.58	—	—
IC7	.46	.46	—	—
IC8	.40	.40	—	—
Competition (α = .84)[a]				
IC9	.78	.78	.78	.78
IC10	.71	.71	.71	.71
IC11	.83	.84	.83	.84
IC12	.29	—	.29	—
IC13	.78	.79	.78	.79
IC14	.53	.52	.53	.52
IC15	.62	.61	.62	.61
Advice (α = .79)				
IC16	.76	.76	.77	.77
IC17	.67	.67	.67	.67
IC18	.55	.55	.56	.56
IC19	.63	.63	.63	.63
IC20	.43	.43	.43	.43
IC21	.67	.67	.66	.66
IC22	.44	.44	.43	.43
Harmony (α = .68)				
IC23	.66	.66	.66	.66
IC24	.61	.61	.62	.62
IC25	.64	.64	.64	.64
IC26	.47	.46	.46	.46
Fit Indices				
Scaled χ^2	808.19***	672.32***	586.409***	486.185***
Robust RMSEA	.05	.05	.06	.05
Robust CFI	.88	.90	.90	.92
SRMR	.07	.06	.06	.05

*$p < .001$

[a] The internal consistency of the competition subscale increased to α = .86 when item IC12 was removed in Models B and D.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations for Factor Scores

	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5
1. Help-seeking	-2.54	1.43	-0.33	-0.93	—				
2. Help-giving	-2.26	2.50	0.21	-0.09	.16***	—			
3. Uniqueness	-3.28	1.99	-0.22	-0.45	.19***	.13***	—		
4. Competition	-2.71	2.28	0.08	-0.48	.05	.05	.40***	—	
5. Advice	-3.48	2.51	-0.01	-0.18	.12**	.25***	.23***	.13**	—
6. Harmony	-3.07	2.89	0.32	0.18	-.14***	.14***	.00	-.09*	.38***

Note. All factor scores were fully standardized (mean = 0, *SD* = 1).

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 4

Results of Multiple Regression: Help-Seeking

Predictor	β	*SE*	*t*	β 95% *CI*
(Intercept)	-0.02	0.07	-0.29	[-0.16, 0.12]
Uniqueness	0.18	0.04	4.20***	[0.10, 0.27]
Competition	-0.09	0.05	-1.91	[-0.18, 0.00]
Advice	0.18	0.05	3.94***	[0.09, 0.27]
Harmony	-0.22	0.04	-5.20***	[-0.30, -0.14]
Gender				
Man	0.12	0.09	1.28	[-0.06, 0.31]
Race/ethnicity				
Asian or Asian American	0.05	0.13	0.35	[-0.21, 0.30]
Black or African American	0.01	0.18	0.06	[-0.33, 0.35]
Hispanic or Latino	-0.13	0.14	-0.96	[-0.40, 0.14]
Other or multiracial	-0.11	0.16	-0.66	[-0.42, 0.21]
Immigration status				
First-generation	-0.05	0.21	-0.24	[-0.46, 0.36]
Second-generation	0.06	0.11	0.58	[-0.15, 0.27]
Not sure	0.09	0.18	0.48	[-0.27, 0.45]
Other	0.10	0.21	0.51	[-0.30, 0.51]
College generation status				
First-generation college student	-0.01	0.10	-0.06	[-0.20, 0.19]
Year in school				
Sophomore	-0.12	0.09	-1.28	[-0.31, 0.06]
Upperclassman	0.05	0.12	0.42	[-0.19, 0.30]

Note. For continuous predictors, fully standardized estimates are reported (i.e., β reflects the *SD* change in help-seeking associated with a 1 *SD* increase in the predictor). For categorical predictors, partially standardized estimates are reported (i.e., β represents the *SD* difference in help-seeking between groups).

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Table 5

Results of Multiple Regression: Help-Giving

Predictor	β	*SE*	*t*	β 95% *CI*
(Intercept)	0.09	0.07	1.32	[-0.04, 0.23]
Uniqueness	0.12	0.04	2.78**	[0.03, 0.20]
Competition	0.01	0.04	0.25	[-0.08, 0.10]
Advice	0.17	0.04	3.77***	[0.08, 0.25]
Harmony	0.06	0.04	1.54	[-0.02, 0.15]
Gender				
Man	-0.15	0.09	-1.67	[-0.33, 0.03]
Race/ethnicity				
Asian or Asian American	0.04	0.13	0.29	[-0.21, 0.28]
Black or African American	-0.65	0.17	-3.82***	[-0.99, -0.32]
Hispanic or Latino	-0.21	0.14	-1.56	[-0.49, 0.06]
Other or multiracial	-0.02	0.16	-0.11	[-0.33, 0.30]
Immigration status				
First-generation	0.44	0.20	2.14*	[0.04, 0.84]
Second-generation	0.06	0.11	0.58	[-0.15, 0.27]
Not sure	0.00	0.18	0.01	[-0.34, 0.35]
Other	-0.20	0.21	-0.95	[-0.61, 0.21]
College generation status				
First-generation college student	0.11	0.10	1.07	[-0.09, 0.31]
Year in school				
Sophomore	-0.11	0.09	-1.13	[-0.29, 0.08]
Upperclassman	-0.20	0.12	-1.61	[-0.44, 0.04]

Note. For continuous predictors, fully standardized estimates are reported (i.e., β reflects the *SD* change in help-giving associated with a 1 *SD* increase in the predictor). For categorical predictors, partially standardized estimates are reported (i.e., β represents the *SD* difference in help-giving between groups).

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Appendices

Appendix A

Auckland Individualism-Collectivism Scale (AICS)

The purpose of the following items is to find out how you think or behave regarding yourself and the groups to which you belong. Please read the following statements and indicate how often you would think or behave as described in each of the items.

1 = Never or almost never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often, 6 = Always or almost always

[Uniqueness]:

IC1. I consider myself as a unique person separate from others.

IC2. I enjoy being unique and different from others.

IC3. I see myself as “my own person.”

IC4. My personal identity independent of others is very important to me.

[Responsibility]:

IC5. I like to be accurate when I communicate.

IC6. It is important for me to act as an independent person.

IC7. I take responsibility for my own actions.

IC8. I consult with superiors on work-related matters.

[Competition]:

IC9. I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others.

IC10. Winning is very important to me.

IC11. I define myself as a competitive person.

IC12. I try to achieve the best grades among my peers.

IC13. I prefer competitive rather than non-competitive recreational activities.

IC14. Without competition, I believe, it is not possible to have a good society.

IC15. I believe that competition is the law of nature.

[Advice]:

IC16. It is important to consult close friends and get their ideas before making a decision.

IC17. I consider my friends' opinions before taking important actions.

IC18. Before taking a major trip, I consult with my friends.

IC19. I ask the advice of my friends before making career-related decisions.

IC20. I consult my family before making an important decision.

IC21. Before I make a major decision, I seek advice from people close to me.

IC22. I discuss job or study-related problems with my parents/partner.

[Harmony]:

IC23. I do not reveal my thoughts when it might initiate a dispute.

IC24. I prefer using indirect language rather than upset my friends.

IC25. Even when I strongly disagree with my group members, I avoid an argument.

IC26. I sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group.

(adapted from Shulruf et al. [2011])

Appendix B

Help-Seeking Items

The following statements are related to how you view help-seeking in course settings. For each statement, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Slightly disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Slightly agree, 5 = Strongly agree

HS1. I don't ask for help with schoolwork, even if I don't understand the lesson.

HS2. If I didn't understand something in a course, I would guess rather than ask someone for help.

HS3. Even if my schoolwork was too hard to do on my own, I wouldn't ask for help.

HS4. I would rather put down any answer than ask for help with schoolwork.

HS5. I don't ask questions about schoolwork, even if I don't understand the lesson.

(adapted from Pajares et al. [2004])

Appendix C

Help-Giving Items

The following statements are related to how you view helping others in course settings. Please read the following statements and indicate how often you would behave as described in each of the items.

1 = Never or almost never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often, 6 = Always or almost always

HG1. I help other students who have heavy workloads.

HG2. I give my time to help other students with academic problems willingly.

HG3. I help other students who are behind on schoolwork.

HG4. I help other students who are struggling to understand course material.

(adapted from Williams & Shiaw [1999])