Student Success in College: Lessons from High Performing Colleges and Universities

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We all want the same thing—an undergraduate experience that results in high levels of learning and personal development for all students.
Overview

- Pre-college and early college factors related to persistence
- Why engagement matters
- What educationally effective colleges look like
- Lessons from high-performing institutions
Advance Organizers

❖ To what extent do your students engage in productive learning activities, inside and outside the classroom?
❖ How do you know?
❖ What must you do differently -- or better -- to enhance student success?
Student Success in College

Academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance
Pre-college Characteristics Associated with Student Success

- Academic preparation
- Ability and college-level skills
- Family education and support
- Financial wherewithal
Early College Indicators of Persistence and Success

- Goal realization
- Psycho-social fit
- Credit hours completed
- Academic and social support
- Involvement in the “right” kinds of activities
What Really Matters in College: Student Engagement

Because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of impact, institutions should focus on the ways they can shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement.

Student Engagement Trinity

- What students do -- time and energy devoted to educationally purposeful activities
- What institutions do -- using effective educational practices to induce students to do the right things
- Educationally effective institutions channel student energy toward the right activities
Good Practices in Undergraduate Education
(Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)

- Student-faculty contact
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- Time on task
- High expectations
- Respect for diverse learning styles
- Cooperation among students
College student surveys that assess the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development
NSSE Survey

Student Behaviors

Institutional Actions & Requirements

Reactions to People & Environment

Student Background Information

Student Learning & Development
In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
9. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

- # of hours per week
  - More than 30
  - 26-30
  - 21-25
  - 16-20
  - 11-15
  - 6-10
  - 1-5
  - 0

a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)

b. Working for pay on campus

c. Working for pay off campus
9. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

- # of hours per week:
  - More than 30
  - 26-30
  - 21-25
  - 16-20
  - 11-15
  - 6-10
  - 1-5
  - 0

- e. Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, exercising, etc.)
- f. Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)
- g. Commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.)
To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

a. Acquiring a broad general education
b. Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills
c. Writing clearly and effectively
Effective Educational Practices

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active & Collaborative Learning
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment
- Student Faculty Interaction
Grades, persistence, student satisfaction, and engagement go hand in hand
Effect of Engagement on First-Year GPA by Pre-college Ability

Engagement in Educationally Purposeful Activities (Standardized)

ACT score of 36
ACT score of 32
ACT score of 28
ACT score of 24
ACT score of 20
ACT score of 16
ACT score of 12
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Indicator</th>
<th>First-year students*</th>
<th>Seniors*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Challenge</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active &amp; Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching Educational Experiences</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus Environment</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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</table>

*All correlations are significant at $p<.01$
What does an educationally effective college look like?
Project DEEP

To discover, document, and describe what high performing institutions do to achieve their notable level of effectiveness.
DEEP Selection Criteria

Controlling for student and institutional characteristics (i.e., selectivity, diversity, institutional type), DEEP schools have:

- Higher-than-predicted graduation rates
- Higher-than-predicted NSSE scores
- Region, institutional type, special mission
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctoral Extensives</th>
<th>Liberal Arts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>California State, Monterey Bay</td>
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<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Macalester College</td>
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<td>Sweet Briar College</td>
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<td>The Evergreen State College</td>
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<td>Sewanee: University of the South</td>
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<td>Ursinus College</td>
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<td>Wheaton College (MA)</td>
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<td>Wofford College</td>
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<td>Doctoral Intensives</td>
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<td>George Mason University</td>
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<td>Miami University (Ohio)</td>
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<td>University of Texas El Paso</td>
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<td>Master’s Granting</td>
<td>Baccalaureate General</td>
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<td>Fayetteville State University</td>
<td>Alverno College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gonzaga University</td>
<td>University of Maine at Farmington</td>
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<td>Longwood University</td>
<td>Winston-Salem State University</td>
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</table>
DEEP Guiding Questions

- What do strong-performing institutions do to promote student success?

- What campus features -- policies, programs, and practices – are related to higher-than-predicted graduation rates and student engagement?
Research Approach

Case study method

✓ Team of 24 researchers review institutional documents and conduct multiple-day site visits

✓ Observe individuals, classes, group meetings, activities, events

  2,700+ people, 60 classes, 30 events

✓ Discover and describe effective practices and programs, campus culture
What We Learned from Project DEEP

Jossey-Bass
2005
Points to Ponder

- Which of these practices are transferable and adaptable to your setting?
- What are the implications of DEEP for:
  - For faculty members?
  - For academic administrators
  - For student affairs staff?
  - For others (e.g., librarians, info tech personnel, etc.)?
Hay muchas maneras de matar pulgas

There are many ways to kill fleas
Many roads to an engaging institution

- No one best model
- Different combinations of complementary, interactive, synergistic conditions

> Anything worth doing is worth doing well at scale
Six Shared Conditions

- “Living” Mission and “Lived” Educational Philosophy
- Unshakeable Focus on Student Learning
- Environments Adapted for Educational Enrichment
- Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success
- Improvement-Oriented Ethos
- Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality
DEEP Lessons about Creating Conditions That Matter to Student Success

We can’t leave serendipity to chance
1. Lay out the path to student success

   a. Draw a map for student success
   b. Front load resources to smooth the transition
   c. Teach newcomers about the campus culture
   d. Create a sense of “specialness”
   e. Emphasize student initiative
   f. If something works, maybe require it?
   g. Focus on underengaged students
Teaching the Culture

Macalester College students, faculty and staff understand and articulate the College’s core values of academic excellence, service, multiculturalism and internationalism. These values are enacted in the curriculum and co-curriculum.
Socialization to academic expectations

Wofford first-year students read a common novel and write a short essay connecting it to their own lives. The eight best essays are published and distributed to all new students, creating the first class celebrities.
Intentional acculturation

Rituals and traditions connect students to each other and the institution

KU’s “Traditions Night.” 3,000+ students gather in the football stadium to rehearse the Rock Chalk Chant, learn “I’m a Jayhawk”, and hear stories intended to instill students’ commitment to graduation
2. Align initiatives with:

a. Student preparation, ability, interests
b. Resources and reward systems
c. Existing complementary efforts

✓ AAC&U “Greater Expectations”
✓ Gen ed reform
✓ Carnegie SOTL/CASTL
✓ Service learning/Campus Compact
✓ Internationalization and diversity
“Meet students where they are”

Fayetteville State

- Faculty members “teach the students they have, not those they wish they had”
- Center for Teaching and Learning sponsors development activities on diverse learning needs

Cal State Monterey Bay

- “Assets” philosophy acknowledges students’ prior knowledge
What to Do?!?

Student success requires that professors explain more things to today’s students that we once took for granted –

“You must buy the book, you must read it and come to class, you must observe deadlines or make special arrangements when you miss one”

Prof. Richard Turner (1998, p.4)
Learning-intensive practices

George Mason requires every student to take from 1-3 writing-intensive courses. Most DEEP schools have strong writing centers to emphasize and support the importance of good writing.
Redundant early warning systems: “Tag Teaming”

- Wheaton first-year student advising team includes faculty, student preceptors, librarians and administrative staff.

- At Ursinus, Miami, and Wheaton representatives from both academic affairs and student affairs serve as academic advisors.
Redundant early warning systems

FSU’s Early Alert program enables faculty to contact first-year student mentors and University College personnel to alert them to students experiencing difficulty during the first two weeks of the semester. Mentors contact students to advise and refer as appropriate.
Intrusive advising

University of Kansas “Graduate in Four” advising notebook:

☑ Distributed at orientation

☑ Describes to students how to make the most of undergraduate study

☑ Students required to meet with advisor to review progress to degree

☑ Section for each of the four undergraduate years

☑ “Checklist” for students to weigh choices and monitor if they are making progress.
POSSE (Pathways to Student Success and Excellence) students at U of Michigan are assigned to a counselor and learn the importance of faculty office hours, study tips and how to connect to tutoring services.

“POSSE taught me how to survive the University of Michigan.”
Ample applied learning opportunities

University of Maine at Farmington’s Student Work Initiative employs students in meaningful work in student services, laboratories, and field-research. Such experiences provide opportunities to apply what they are learning to practical, real-life situations.
U of Kansas faculty make large lecture classes engaging via PowerPoint, Blackboard software, and other technology including slides and videos, and “interactive lecturing,” which incorporates various opportunities for students to participate.
Lessons from National Center for Academic Transformation

✓ If doing something is important, require it (first-year students don’t do ‘optional’)
✓ Assign course points to the activity
✓ Monitor and intervene when necessary

http://www.thencat.org/Newsletters/Apr06.htm#1
Worth Pondering

How do we reach our least engaged students?
3. Attract, socialize and reward competent people

a. Recruit faculty and staff committed to student learning

b. Emphasize student centeredness in faculty and staff orientation
Focus on Student Success

“Sea change” at KU to emphasize undergraduate instruction

- Experienced instructors teach lower division and introductory courses
- Faculty members from each academic unit serve as “Faculty Ambassadors” to the Center for Teaching Excellence
- Course enrollments kept low in many undergraduate courses; 80% have 30 or fewer students; 93% 50 or fewer students.
3. Attract, socialize and reward competent people

a. Recruit faculty and staff committed to student learning

b. Emphasize student centeredness in faculty and staff orientation

c. Make room for differences

d. Reward and support competent staff to insure high quality student support services
4. Put money where it will make a difference in student engagement

a. Align reward system with institutional mission, values, and priorities

b. Invest in activities that contribute to student success

c. Invest in staff members who are doing the right things

d. Invest in physical plant improvements that facilitate learning

e. Sunset redundant and ineffective programs; feed those that are demonstrably effective
Something Else That Really Matters in College

The greatest impact appears to stem from students’ total level of campus engagement, particularly when academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular involvements are mutually reinforcing...

It Takes a Whole Campus to Educate a Student
5. Promote and reward collaboration

a. Tighten the philosophical and operational linkages between academic and student affairs
   - Peer tutoring and mentoring
   - First year seminars
   - Learning communities

b. Harness available expertise

c. Make governance a shared responsibility

d. Form partnerships with the local community
Linking campus and community

California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) requires all students to complete both a lower and upper-level service learning experience as a means to apply knowledge and connect with the local community.
Difference Makers

Staff members

Student success is the product of thousands of small gestures extended on a daily basis by caring, supportive educators sprinkled throughout the institution who enact a talent development philosophy.
6. Focus on culture sooner than later

Ultimately, it’s all about the culture...

a. Identify cultural properties that impede success

b. Expand the number of cultural practitioners on campus

c. Instill an ethic of positive restlessness
Positive restlessness

✓ “We know who we are and what we aspire to.”
✓ Confident, responsive, but never quite satisfied…
✓ Self-correcting orientation
✓ Continually question, “are we performing as well as we can?”
“Checking the Truth”

*Institutional Cultures*

- What is distinctive about this institution: To students? To staff?
- How do these distinctive aspects of the institution affect the campus climate? Student success?
- In what ways do the institutional culture and dominant subcultures promote, or inhibit, student learning and success?
“Checking the Truth”

**Student Cultures**

- How do students describe what, how and from whom they learn? In what ways are their experiences consistent or not with what the institution desires?
- How do the student culture and/or dominant student subcultures promote or inhibit student learning and success?
- What opportunities exist to celebrate students and their learning? Campus community?
STUDENT SUCCESS in COLLEGE

CREATING CONDITIONS THAT MATTER

George D. Kuh
Jillian Kinzie
John H. Schuh
Elizabeth J. Whitt
and Associates

ASSESSING CONDITIONS to ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The Inventory for Student Engagement and Success

DEEP Practice Briefs

Promoting Student Success

Available: www.nsse.iub.edu
7. Put someone in charge

When everyone is responsible for something, no one is accountable for it...

a. Get senior leadership on board

b. Some individual or group must coordinate and monitor status of initiatives

c. Those ‘in charge’ not solely responsible for bringing about change

d. Form high profile ‘think force’ or similar group
8. Stay the course

The good-to-great-transformations never happened in one fell swoop. There was no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment. Sustainable transformations follow a predictable pattern of buildup and breakthrough...

(Collins, 2001, p. 186)
8. Stay the course

a. Emphasize quality

b. Focus on “spread”

c. If it works, consider requiring it

d. Front-load resources

e. Sunset ineffective programs and activities

f. Beware the implementation dip
Using NSSE & DEEP Findings

- How well do our programs work and how do we know?
- How many students do our efforts reach in meaningful ways and how do we know?
- To what degree are our programs and practices complementary and synergistic?
- What are we doing that is not represented among the DEEP practices? Should we continue to do it?
- What are we not doing that we should?
A university cannot change the lineage of its students. Campus cultures do not change easily or willingly. But we can do far more to shape the way students approach college and what they do after they arrive.

Do we have the will to more consistently use promising policies and practices to increase the odds that more students “get ready,” “get in,” and “get through?”
Questions & Discussion