



Student Engagement in the First Year of College

George D. Kuh

I want to use and abuse this school to the fullest. I want to experience everything this institution has to offer. I do not believe my college experience would be the same if I don't. I want to make this the best four years of my life and getting a hand in everything I possibly can is the only way I know how to.

—Emily, first-semester student

For many new students, especially first-generation students and those living away from home for the first time, the initial weeks of the first academic term are like being in a foreign land. With only intermittent feedback and classes meeting but two or three times a week, students who think they are doing well are sometimes surprised to discover after their first midterm exam reports that their academic performance is subpar. After six or eight weeks, some have dug a hole so deep that getting back to ground level seems almost impossible. It does not have to be this way. Colleges and universities committed to student success intentionally organize the first weeks and months of college to reduce the prospects that their students will find themselves in such straits.

In this chapter, I offer some suggestions for what schools can do to increase the odds that more of their students will survive and thrive in the critical first year of college. I base these observations on more than a quarter-century studying undergraduate students, scores of campus consultations, and two national databases of student reports about their college experiences. I also draw on examples from institutions making headway in this regard, including my own campus, Indiana University, which received national recognition for creating a challenging and supportive campus environment for first-year students (Barovick, 2001). Because student engagement is a key factor in student success, broadly defined, I first summarize some of the more important findings about student engagement in the first year of college. Then, I provide some suggestions for what institutions should focus on to promote student engagement and success in the first college year.

STUDENT SUCCESS IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

There are many definitions of student success. Some would argue that student success is simply a matter of earning grades good enough to be awarded a college degree. Others would assert that successful students should have achieved desired learning outcomes and personal objectives. The book editors in their Introduction offer a comprehensive eight-part definition of first-year student success that is broad, holistic, and inclusive. While we in higher education may not know all the variables that contribute to this broad definition of student success, we do know that the best single predictor of student academic success is the individual student's academic preparation and motivation. Thus, some would conclude that the surest way for an institution to increase the number of its students who succeed academically is to admit only well-prepared, academically talented students. Such an approach has been fueled in recent years by collegiate rankings that reward institutions with improved positions in the hierarchy if they are able to raise their entering students' average SAT scores.

From a human capital and public policy perspective, enhancing student success by focusing on well-prepared, high-ability students is indefensible. Colleges and universities must educate more people than ever before from a much wider, deeper, and more diverse pool of undergraduates. Both the proportion and number of people with a postsecondary education are at unprecedented levels, far exceeding that of any other country. And for a host of reasons, the number must grow as more students today than ever before need to go to college. One recent estimate is that as many as 85 percent of high school graduates in the coming decade will need some form of postsecondary education to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies to be able to manage effectively the increasingly complex social, economic, and political issues the future will bring (McCabe, 2000).

This is a daunting challenge. Since admitting only the most talented and well-prepared students is not the solution, are there other promising approaches to enhancing student success? The answer is yes. After controlling for student background characteristics (such as ability and academic preparation), the student development research indicates that a key factor in student success is student engagement (Kuh, 2001).

Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is student driven: the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is institution driven: how a school deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation). Higher education has recognized the importance of student engagement for years (Astin, 1977, 1985; Chickering, 1969, 1974; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pace, 1979;



ence everything
e would be the
e and getting
how to.

s and those liv-
of the first aca-
ly intermittent
, students who
after their first
par. After six or
to ground level
ges and univer-
first weeks and
will find them-

n do to increase
the critical first
r-century study-
nd two national
I also draw on
cluding my own
on for creating a
-year students
in student suc-
ortant findings
ovide some sug-
ent engagement

Kuh, 1981; Sanford, 1962). Even so, many colleges and universities have not yet created the conditions that research studies show to be effective educational practice.

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THEIR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR

Before an institution can take steps to enhance student success, it must first understand who its students are, what they are prepared to do academically, and what they expect of the institution and themselves. Expectations are especially important today because so many students appear to start college already disengaged from the learning process, having acquired a cumulative deficit in terms of attitudes, study habits, and academic skills (Levine & Cureton, 1998a; Marchese, 1996, 1998). For example, in the mid-1990s, high school seniors reported studying only about six hours per week on average, well below the amount that is traditionally assumed necessary to do well in college. Compared with their counterparts of a decade earlier, they were also more frequently bored in class and missed more classes due to oversleeping or other obligations (Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 1997). Even so, record numbers reported B+ or better high school grades and expected to earn at least a B average in college and to attend graduate school. Because behavioral patterns established in elementary and secondary school tend to persist through the college years (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Schilling & Schilling, 1999), we should not be surprised that this generation of students expects to get reasonably good grades for less academic effort compared with previous cohorts.

Assuming students today come to campus with an entitlement mentality, what they expect to do in college and what faculty members and institutions of higher education are providing could result in a problematic mismatch of sizable proportion, advantaging neither party. This is because expectations serve as a filter through which students compare what is unfolding with what they think should happen and decide whether certain activities are appropriate, meaningful, relevant, and worth their time, and what opportunities or activities to ignore (Bandura, 1982; Cantor & Mischel, 1977; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Feldman, 1981). Thus, what students expect shapes their behavior, which in turn affects their academic performance and social adjustment to college life (Kuh, 1999).

To find out more about the relationships between student expectations and experiences we developed the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) for a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) project (Schilling & Schilling, 1999) in the mid-1990s (Kuh & Pace, 1998). It is typically administered to first-year students during orientation and asks students what they expect to do during the first year of college in selected areas, such as study time, course-learning activities, interaction with faculty members and peers, cocurricular activities, and other educationally purposeful college

activities. The CSXQ is adapted from its parent survey, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Now in its fourth edition, the CSEQ was introduced in 1979 by C. Robert Pace and has about double the number of questions as the CSXQ, covering more college experiences in greater detail. The CSEQ is usually administered near the end of the academic year. This allows us to compare what students expected to do when they entered college (CSXQ results) with what they subsequently experienced (CSEQ results). Where appropriate, I corroborate trends from the CSEQ data with information from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), an annual survey of first-year and senior students established in 1999 with a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Conceptually similar to the CSEQ, NSSE includes some of the same items as the CSEQ and is also administered near the end of the academic year. Additional information about the CSEQ and NSSE projects including the survey instruments can be found at their respective Web sites (www.iub.edu/~cseq and www.iub.edu/~nsse).

THE EXPECTATIONS-EXPERIENCE GAP: THE EVIDENCE

In many respects, what students actually do in the first year of college falls short of what they expected to do (Gonyea, Kish, & Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 1999; Olsen et al., 1998). That is, when starting out, most first-year students say they will engage in more academic and other educationally purposeful activities more frequently than they actually reported doing near the end of the first year. Although students may be somewhat idealistic in terms of what they can accomplish during college, their expectations are generally unrealistic in terms of the amount of reading and writing that faculty members assert is appropriate. At the same time, it is possible that the gap is even wider than the data suggest, as some fraction of students who answered the CSXQ at the beginning of college were no longer in school the following spring. It is quite likely that among those students who left school early is a disproportionate number who were less motivated and had lower aspirations and expectations compared with their peers who persisted through at least the first year.¹

Women expect to engage in more activities compared with men. And they do, except for recreational sports and science-related activities. Older first-year students (twenty-four years of age or older) are much less likely to use electronic technology to complete assignments or discuss course topics with peers and instructors (Kuh et al., 2001). Older students also are disproportionately attending part time, taking fewer classes compared with their younger counterparts (more of whom are full time), and spending more time working and caring for dependents. Younger students (twenty-three years of age or younger) interact more frequently with peers from diverse backgrounds because they are more likely to live on campus and thus spend more time in the company of

diverse peers. With these unsurprising differences in mind, certain student and institutional behaviors need to be better understood to promote student success.

The expected and reported levels of engagement vary in predictable ways by institutional type (Astin, 1993; Pace, 1990). For example, students at smaller, selective colleges have greater expectations across the board, and they subsequently report being involved to a greater extent in more activities. They also, on average, expect and find their campus environments to be more supportive. However, some large schools outperform some small schools on these dimensions (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2001; Kuh, 2003).

Preparing for Class

First-year students fall into four groups in terms of the number of hours they expect to study in college. About a quarter think they can get by with ten or fewer hours per week, another quarter between eleven and fifteen hours, the third quarter between sixteen and twenty hours, and the remaining group expect to study more than twenty hours per week. Of the last group, only 9 percent say they will study at least twenty-six hours per week, which is what most faculty members declare is necessary to do well in college—at least two hours preparing for every class hour (Table 5.1). So one area where student expectations are much lower than institutions espouse is in the amount of time they think they will need to study.

Table 5.1. First-Year Student Responses to Selected CSXQ and CSEQ Items:
Participation in Course-Related Learning Activities

Item	Response Options	Percentage	
		Percentage of CSXQ Respondents	Percentage of CSEQ First-Year Respondents
During the time school is in session this coming year, about how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to your academic program, such as studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	5 or fewer hours weekly	4	13
	6-10 hours weekly	22	28
	11-15 hours weekly	25	22
	16-20 hours weekly	25	18
	21-25 hours weekly	14	10
	26-30 hours weekly	6	5
During the coming school year, about how many textbooks or assigned books do you expect to read?	More than 30 hours	3	4
	None	0	2
	Fewer than 5	7	24
	Between 5 and 10	38	40
	Between 10 and 20	39	26
	More than 20	16	9

<i>Item</i>	<i>Response Options</i>	<i>Percentage of CSXQ Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage of CSEQ First-Year Respondents</i>
During the coming school year, about how many term papers and other written reports do you expect to write?	None	0	3
	Fewer than 5	8	23
	Between 5 and 10	31	31
	Between 10 and 20	39	29
	More than 20	21	13
During the coming school year, about how many essay exams in your courses do you expect to write?	None	1	7
	Fewer than 5	11	29
	Between 5 and 10	33	31
	Between 10 and 20	36	23
	More than 20	20	10
Take detailed notes during class	Never	1	1
	Occasionally	10	10
	Often	39	29
	Very often	49	60
Contribute to class discussions	Never	1	3
	Occasionally	24	32
	Often	44	36
	Very often	31	29
Try to see how different facts and ideas fit together	Never	1	5
	Occasionally	18	30
	Often	47	36
	Very often	34	28
Prepare a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources	Never	1	3
	Occasionally	22	26
	Often	49	38
	Very often	28	33
Write a major report for a class (20 pages or more)	Never	22	78
	Occasionally	55	13
	Often	18	5
	Very often	5	4

Note: The items listed are from the CSXQ; CSEQ items differ slightly. CSEQ items are worded in the past tense to reflect activities in which students engaged over the course of the academic year.

The biggest drop in number of study hours per week in the first year of college is in the eleven- to fifteen-hour range. Although about two-thirds (64 percent) of students start college expecting to spend at least that much time studying, by the end of the first year, only half actually do (Table 5.1). By the end of the first year, more than two-fifths spend ten or fewer hours per week studying. NSSE data show that somehow, 9 percent of full-time first-year students get by with no more than five hours, ranging from a low of 5 percent of students at baccalaureate liberal arts colleges to more than a tenth (11 percent) at master's-level colleges and universities. In addition, more than a fifth of students say they "frequently" come to class unprepared. That is, they have not done the assigned reading or completed written and other assignments (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2001, 2002).

Course Learning, Advising, and Academic Support

In a few areas related to classroom activities, students do a bit more than they expected to do, such as taking detailed notes during class. But in other areas, they fall short, such as contributing to class discussions, summarizing major points, and applying class material to other areas of their lives (Table 5.1).

Academic Advising. One of the more important things educationally effective institutions do to help promote student success in the first year of college is provide high-quality academic advising. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2001) shows that students who rate their advising as good or excellent are more likely to interact with faculty in various ways, perceive the institution's environment to be more supportive overall, are more satisfied with their overall college experience, and report they gain more from college in most areas. Moreover, the quality of academic advising is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment.

Fortunately, students are reasonably satisfied with the quality of their academic advising. Only 7 percent of first-year students describe it as "poor." At Carnegie classification liberal arts colleges and general colleges, advising is "very good" for first-year students and even better for seniors. A smaller percentage (65 percent) of part-time first-year students say advising is good or excellent; more say advising is poor (11 percent). Why? Possibly because part-time students spend less time on campus and have less time to meet with an adviser, which may translate into less favorable ratings because student needs are not being met. They are also twice as likely to be undecided in terms of major, which may require different types of advising skills (less information dispensing and more career exploration).

Academic Support. When starting college the vast majority of students (87 percent) say they will at least "occasionally" use campus academic support services such as writing skills centers. Yet by the end of the first year, almost half (46 percent) have not done so. For a point of contrast, only 15 percent never used campus recreational facilities (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. First-Year Student Responses to Selected CSXQ and CSEQ Items:
Out-of-Class Learning Activities

<i>Item</i>	<i>Response Options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
		<i>of CSXQ</i>	<i>of CSEQ</i>
		<i>Respondents</i>	<i>First-Year</i>
		<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Use the library as a quiet place to study or read	Never	7	26
	Occasionally	48	48
	Often	33	16
	Very often	12	10
Read assigned materials other than textbooks in the library (reserve readings, etc.)	Never	8	38
	Occasionally	48	42
	Often	33	15
	Very often	11	5
Use email to communicate with an instructor or classmates	Never	6	4
	Occasionally	21	10
	Often	29	15
	Very often	44	70
Participate in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serv, chat group, etc.)	Never	28	55
	Occasionally	46	22
	Often	18	11
	Very often	8	12
Search the World Wide Web or Internet for information related to a course	Never	2	4
	Occasionally	14	18
	Often	32	26
	Very often	52	52
Attend a lecture or panel discussion	Never	14	35
	Occasionally	55	41
	Often	24	15
	Very often	7	9
Use a learning lab or center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.)	Never	13	46
	Occasionally	48	33
	Often	29	14
	Very often	10	7

Note: The items listed are from the CSXQ; CSEQ items differ slightly. CSEQ items are worded in the past tense to reflect activities in which students engaged over the course of the academic year.

Information Sources: Libraries and Electronic Technology

Almost everyone starting college today expects to have access to a computer to do academic work—if not their own machine, then one available somewhere on campus or at their place of employment. This is true for older students as well, although they use the technology much less frequently. It is a good thing computers are ubiquitous because it is clearly the medium of choice for acquiring information. In fact, searching the Web for course material is as popular an activity as using campus recreational facilities, with 78 percent of all first-year students doing both “frequently” (combination of “often” and “very often”). That said, fewer students use electronic technology to discuss course topics (56 percent say they “never” did it). And it is mildly surprising that students use e-mail more than they expected and the library less. Indeed, the library is no longer a popular study venue: only about a quarter of first-year students go there “frequently” for this purpose, and another quarter “never” study there. Faculty members may be contributing to this trend, as 38 percent of students never read assigned materials there, although 92 percent of incoming students thought they might at least “occasionally” do so when they started college.

Grades

Although on average students spend far less time studying than faculty members assert is necessary, most do surprisingly well. For example, no one starting college expects to get a C or lower average, although about 6 percent report such grades at the end of the first year. Two-thirds think they will earn at least B+ or better grades, and 44 percent actually do. About 28 percent have B- or lower grades, more than three times the number who expected these grades. Interestingly, the same fraction—14 percent—who began college expecting to achieve an A average did so during the first year, at least by their own report.

Contacts with Faculty

Virtually everyone agrees that student-faculty interaction is an important factor in student success (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Students starting college seem to agree. For example, 94 percent say they will at least occasionally ask their instructor about their performance. However, less than two-thirds actually do so. The majority (69 percent) expect to socialize at least “occasionally” with faculty members outside the classroom, but only about two-fifths (41 percent) report doing so. More than three-quarters (77 percent) expect that they will “frequently” ask their teachers for information about the course (assignments and such), but only about half (54 percent) do so. Perhaps the difference is that students are not certain how often they will need to ask faculty members for information, and so they err on the high side (Table 5.3). The discrepancy between what students expect and experience in terms of interacting with faculty is also partly due to reward systems and large first-year classes that discourage such contacts.

Table 5.3. First-Year Student Responses to Selected CSXQ and CSEQ Items: Faculty Interaction

<i>Item</i>	<i>Response Options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
		<i>of CSXQ</i>	<i>of CSEQ</i>
		<i>Respondents</i>	<i>First-Year</i>
		<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Ask your instructor for information related to a course you are taking (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.)	Never	1	5
	Occasionally	22	41
	Often	44	34
	Very often	33	19
Discuss ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member	Never	4	21
	Occasionally	43	46
	Often	40	23
	Very often	13	10
Socialize with a faculty member outside the classroom (have a snack or soft drink, etc.)	Never	31	59
	Occasionally	56	27
	Often	10	9
	Very often	3	5
Ask your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance	Never	7	34
	Occasionally	43	40
	Often	37	18
	Very often	13	8

Note: The items listed are from the CSXQ; CSEQ items differ slightly. CSEQ items are worded in the past tense to reflect activities in which students engaged over the course of the academic year.

For some topics and forms of interactions, "occasional" or infrequent contact between students and faculty members may be quite acceptable. For example, it is sufficient for most students to talk once or twice a term with a faculty member about matters such as career plans, to clarify assignments, or to ask for elaboration on course requirements. Faculty members could require such meetings, but apparently not many do so.

But we should be concerned about the relatively little interaction related to such areas as discussing term papers. More than a fifth (22 percent) of students say they "never" did so through the entire first year. This is in large part because faculty members do not require students to write many such papers. For example, more than three-quarters (78 percent) of students say they did not prepare any major reports (twenty pages or more) during the first year. Thus, we should not be surprised that there is a substantial gap (20 percent) between the number of students who expected to "frequently" put together

different facts and ideas (81 percent) and students at the end of the year who say they did so (61 percent).

Cocurricular Activities

There is still a core group—the “collegiate tenth,” I call them—that expects to participate actively in the formal cocurriculum such as student government, clubs, and other social organizations (“very often” worked on a campus club or organization). And about this same fraction does (Table 5.4). However, close to two-fifths (38 percent) of all first-year students never went to an organizational meeting of any kind, and only about half as many students who expected to work on a campus committee (78 percent) actually did (40 percent).

This is consistent with a growing body of evidence that today’s students (especially men) prefer more spontaneous, informal peer group-initiated activities (Kuh, 1999; Levine & Cureton, 1998a; Marchese, 1996, 1998). Of course, more students are working while going to school and may find it difficult to fit

Table 5.4. First-Year Student Responses to Selected CSXQ and CSEQ Items: Extracurricular Activities

Item	Response Options	Percentage	Percentage
		of CSXQ Respondents	of CSEQ First-Year Respondents
Use recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.)	Never	4	15
	Occasionally	21	27
	Often	34	26
	Very often	40	32
Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group	Never	13	38
	Occasionally	40	27
	Often	30	15
	Very often	17	20
Work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.)	Never	22	61
	Occasionally	44	18
	Often	23	10
	Very often	11	11
Manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus	Never	29	68
	Occasionally	46	16
	Often	18	9
	Very often	7	8

Note: The items listed are from the CSXQ; CSEQ items differ slightly. CSEQ items are worded in the past tense to reflect activities in which students engaged over the course of the academic year.

traditional campus organization meetings into their schedules. Also, television, computers, and other visual media have had a pervasive influence on how this generation of students spends their time and prefers to learn.

Diversity Experiences

Experiences with diversity have substantial and positive effects for virtually all students and on a wide range of desirable college outcomes (Chang, 1999, 2001; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). For example, Gurin (1999) argued that a diverse student body creates a learning environment that increases the probability that students will interact with peers from different backgrounds. Such interactions positively affect critical thinking (Pascarella et al., 2001) and also make students more open to subsequent diversity experiences (Pascarella et al., 1996; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001).

If behavior is a window into what people value, first-year students seem to think diversity is important. However, they expect to have more interactions with students from different backgrounds than they subsequently experience. Their expectations in this respect are fairly high, with two-thirds thinking they will become acquainted with students from racial and ethnic backgrounds different from their own. But substantially fewer have "frequent" substantive discussions during the first year (42 percent) than they anticipated (60 percent) (Table 5.5). A fifth "never" had such discussions, about four times the number (5 percent) who thought this starting college.

First-year students were more likely than sophomores, juniors, and seniors to interact with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Hu & Kuh, 2001b; Umbach & Kuh, 2003); this difference is likely a function of the fact that more first-year students live on campus in close proximity to people who are different. Students at doctoral and research-extensive universities are slightly more likely to interact with students from different backgrounds, perhaps because there are proportionately more students from diverse backgrounds attending such institutions. It might also be a result of concerted efforts to provide diversity-related programming.

THE EXPECTATION-EXPERIENCE GAP: IDEALISM OR SYMPTOMS OF SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS?

One explanation for the gap between students' expectations and their subsequent behavior during the first year is the "freshman myth." This view holds that matriculating traditional-age students see the college experience as interesting and exciting and wish to take advantage of everything that is within reach (Berdie, 1966; King & Walsh, 1972; Pace, 1970). As a result, they overstate what they can and will do, not to impress or be disingenuous but rather to express enthusiasm for what is before them (not unlike the broken New Year's resolution

Table 5.5. First-Year Student Responses to Selected CSXQ and CSEQ Items:
Interactions with Diverse Students

<i>Item</i>	<i>Response Options</i>	<i>Percentage of CSXQ Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage of CSEQ First-Year Respondents</i>
Make friends with students whose interests are different from yours ^a	Never	1	2
	Occasionally	22	30
	Often	46	41
	Very often	32	27
Make friends with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours ^a	Never	1	2
	Occasionally	17	25
	Often	47	41
	Very often	35	33
Make friends with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours ^a	Never	1	3
	Occasionally	18	32
	Often	46	34
	Very often	36	31
Have serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours	Never	4	13
	Occasionally	32	36
	Often	38	29
	Very often	26	22
Have serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours	Never	7	16
	Occasionally	35	35
	Often	33	26
	Very often	24	22
Have serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours	Never	10	23
	Occasionally	39	36
	Often	32	23
	Very often	20	18
Have serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background is very different from yours	Never	5	20
	Occasionally	34	36
	Often	36	23
	Very often	24	20

Note: The items listed are from the CSXQ; CSEQ items differ slightly. CSEQ items are worded in the past tense to reflect activities in which students engaged over the course of the academic year.

^aCSEQ items begin, "Became acquainted with. . ."

that quickly fades into memory). This is evident in almost every category of activity represented on the CSXQ and CSEQ and especially in the "enriching educational experiences" cluster of items on the NSSE, where larger proportions of first-year students than seniors indicate they plan to do them (for example, study abroad, study foreign language, do community service). This pattern also is evident in the responses to the "extracurricular organizational involvement" items where substantial proportions of students say they will "occasionally" do almost everything. It turns out that most do not do any of these.

In addition, students at the beginning of college expect the campus environment to be friendlier and more supportive than they experience by the end of the first year. The largest drop in favorable perceptions is with the college administration, where 76 percent of students starting college expect administrators to be responsive and helpful; by the end of the first year, only 54 percent see it that way. This is to be expected, perhaps, as the more experience one has with an organization, the more likely one will encounter some difficulty with the bureaucracy.

At the same time, students' expectations for academic and intellectual activities do not seem highly inflated or unrealistic. In fact, they are generally consistent with what faculty members assert is a reasonable level of academic effort in terms of amount of reading and writing. What is troubling, then, is that student experiences in most of these areas fall well short of what they and their teachers say they expect. Recall that while students apparently think they will need to study more in college than they did in high school, the majority still does not expect to come close to the ratio of two hours of preparation for each class hour. In addition, a significant fraction frequently comes to class unprepared. Even so, most earn B or better grades. This level of academic commitment does not comport with a definition of student success that will serve either students or the nation well in the long term. All this suggests a troubling mismatch between what students do and what they need to do to benefit from college.

CONSIDERATIONS IN CLOSING THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENT EXPECTATIONS-EXPERIENCE GAP

Colleges and universities have two primary obligations to first-year students. The first is to establish appropriately high performance expectations, inside and outside the classroom, that are appropriate to students' abilities and aspirations. The second obligation is to consistently use throughout the institution what the research shows to be educationally effective policies, programs, and practices:

- Get to students early. Students who have a more realistic understanding of what college life is like are more likely to make wise college enrollment decisions (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1998), devote higher levels of effort to educationally

purposeful activities (Kuh et al., 1991; Olsen et al., 1998; Pace, 1990), be satisfied (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), and earn a baccalaureate degree (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). This suggests we need to tell students early and often about what it takes to succeed. Although parents, siblings, and friends have considerable influence on the expectations and behavior patterns that students bring with them to college, the institution can make a difference by sending clear, consistent messages about what they can expect academically and socially (Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Teaching newcomers what is expected and how to behave is everyone's responsibility and must be well planned and conscientiously coordinated and implemented. Converting expectations into behavior must begin long before students arrive on campus. Indeed, the months prior to matriculation and the first six to eight weeks of the first semester are critical because it is during this period that students form impressions about the university environment and whether they "belong" in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

With this in mind, staff members in the Indiana University Bloomington Offices of Admissions and Student Financial Assistance undertook a systematic review of their activities and the messages they were sending to prospective and matriculating students about academic and social norms, expectations for campus life, and the behaviors associated with academic success. To increase student-institution fit, special efforts were made to communicate to students and their families the institution's values and expectations, especially the importance of balancing the time and energy students devote to in-class and out-of-class activities.

Concomitantly, orientation program staff redesigned their print materials and programs in order to reinforce the academic messages the admissions office was sending to new students. Currently enrolled students created a video for matriculating students that focused on what to expect in the first year. Incoming students and their family members were strongly encouraged to watch it together. About two-thirds of those who saw it viewed it together as a family, and about three-quarters found it helpful in preparing for the transition to the university.

Some campuses (Miami University, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, University of Washington) use common readings to help set academic expectations prior to and immediately after students arrive on campus. One particularly creative twist, now institutionalized at Appalachian State University, is to have the book's author come to campus to meet with students and faculty members. Among the books recently used are *Who Wrote the Bible* by Richard Friedman (Augustana College in Illinois) and *Henry Ford* by Italo Calvino (Rider University) (Fidler, 1997). (For more information about summer and orientation readings, contact the National Resource Center for The First-Year Student Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina.)

Fall welcome week sets the tone and must reinforce the messages sent by admissions personnel and others. My university completely redesigned its welcome week to focus on inculcating academic values. The campus increased the

amount of academic and intellectual content in programs and events, and reduced by half (from six to nine days to four on average) the amount of time students would be on campus prior to the first day of classes. The shorter, more compact schedule substantially cut into the amount of unstructured free time students had and resulted in record attendance (more than seven thousand) at the annual freshman induction ceremony and the president's picnic (more than five thousand). Residence life staff report that first-year student participation in campus cultural events is on the rise.

Faculty members must reinforce these same messages when meeting their classes in the early weeks of the semester, and design assignments that challenge and engage students for longer periods of time consistent with the learning goals of the course. They must hold students accountable for the quality of their academic efforts and perhaps even occasionally cajole them to go beyond what they think they can do academically (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; *Faculty Inventory: Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, 1989). New students typically rely on previously learned ways of coping when they encounter novel circumstances, including preparing for class. A substantial fraction may not fully understand and appreciate their role as learners. To address these possibilities, faculty members and student affairs professionals must clearly and consistently communicate to students what is expected and provide periodic feedback as to the quality of students' performance. To paraphrase English professor Richard Turner (1998, p. 4), student success in college may require that professors explain more things to students today that were once taken 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."

- Be smart in building programs and services that encourage student engagement in their own education. Interventions for promoting student success must be aligned with the institution's educational mission, students' characteristics, and effective educational practices. The NSSE assesses effective educational practices in five clusters of student and institutional performance: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2001, 2003).

At big, organizationally complex campuses, it is not possible to immediately adopt and use good practices on a large scale. Thus, the scope and focus of improvement efforts must be manageable. It is wise to design an intervention that addresses a student behavior that can make an immediate difference in performance. Recall that far fewer students use campus learning and support services than expect to. At my campus, institutional research shows that students in high-risk courses were almost twice as likely to seek tutoring when it was available in their own residence hall as when the same service was provided in other campus locations. Student use of academic skills centers jumped when the centers were moved closer to where students lived, thereby increasing access. Now, three such centers have been placed in residence halls in different parts of the campus. Students who use these skill centers for mathematics and writing skill improvement are much more likely to persist to the second year

and get higher grades than peers who do not, even though they are similar in most background characteristics, including academic ability (Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001).

- Do not assume first-year students will use the programs and services offered to encourage their involvement. In the movie *Field of Dreams*, hordes of baseball aficionados trekked to see the manicured baseball diamond in the middle of a cornfield. But simply having performing arts centers or libraries on a college campus does not guarantee that students will use them. Success-oriented colleges and universities find ways to get students to participate in activities and use venues that add educational value. If an institution espouses the importance of its students' cultivating aesthetic qualities, then students must be exposed to the cultural arts. Some institutions, such as Berea College, know that their students—because of their backgrounds—are not likely to attend cultural and performing arts events on their own, so they require them to take part in a certain number each semester. These experiences are more likely to have the desired impact if they are linked in a meaningful way to one or more classes the student is taking, such as tying trips to the theater to humanities or social science class assignments and asking students to connect what they observed to readings (Kuh, 1996). If we believe something is important, the curriculum should feature it and we should require students to experience it.

For example, faculty members can promote higher levels of student engagement by asking students to write papers that require synthesizing information from different fields, using e-mail to discuss course topics, and discussing feedback on assignments. Faculty members can influence the degree to which students contribute to class discussions or apply class material to other areas of their lives. The latter can be encouraged by designing assignments that feature and assign weight to the activity, such as placing materials on reserve in the library so students become familiar with the venue. Other powerful institution-driven learning experiences are consistent with the approach outlined here, such as service-learning courses and faculty-student research projects. Of course, all this depends on whether faculty members see these as valuable pedagogical techniques. In some instances, such as using electronic technology, the evidence is promising but not yet conclusive.

- Adapt services and programs to first-year students' backgrounds and characteristics. John N. Gardner reminds us that we are obliged always, without exception, to the students we have, not those we wish came to our college. Many colleges have responsibly responded to the call to educate a larger fraction of society. Too few have redesigned their learning environments to embrace these additional new students and promote their success.

Among the more successful efforts to prepare students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to meet the academic challenge they will face is the summer bridge program. Variable in name and format, some of these are geared to talented students, others to students who need academic enrichment, and others are open to anyone who is interested in getting a head start on college.

Programs with a strong residential component are among the more effective, allowing students to become familiar with the physical environment of the campus where they will matriculate, such as the Intensive Freshman Seminar and Groups Program at Indiana University Bloomington (Barovick, 2001). It is imperative that students in these special summer programs also fully participate in regular fall orientation activities alongside the rest of their classmates. Otherwise some unintended negative consequences might accrue, such as peers' perceiving certain groups of students as "special," a status that is difficult to shed and can have debilitating consequences for self-worth and academic achievement.

Early-warning systems and early feedback can be critical to student success. It is too late to wait until midterm exam time to give students an idea of how well they are performing. At large institutions, the system simply cannot respond quickly enough to help students salvage a poor semester if they need to wait until well beyond the midpoint of the semester before someone contacts them to formally suggest they need immediate attention to their academic work. Here, advisers and academic support program personnel can do some of their most important work. Some institutions, such as Truman State, are using the CSEQ to help students see how their in-class and out-of-class activities compare with those of their peers in terms of study time, talking with faculty members about various matters, and participation in cocurricular activities, to name a few.

Finally, institutions should fashion a success-oriented campus culture. Policy and programmatic interventions are necessary but insufficient to shift a campus to a student success paradigm. The cultural aspects of college life must also be addressed head-on in order to teach newcomers what the institution values and to imbue in them a sense of ownership and belonging. Toward this end, success-oriented colleges use rituals and traditions to introduce newcomers to the academic ethos and institutional norms, with a special sensitivity to welcoming and affirming members of historically underrepresented groups (Kuh, 1993; Magolda, 2001; Young, 1999).

Elon University has developed a powerful induction ceremony where students are introduced to the institution's values and its expectations for student performance are made plain. Under a stand of tall oak trees during the opening fall convocation, the Elon president personally hands each incoming student an acorn. He describes what the acorn represents, a seed such as themselves, that when placed in a nurturing environment can grow to be a tall, sturdy oak. Elon's spring commencement takes place in this same setting. Thus, four years later, the circle is completed when the president reminds them of the acorn they received during orientation their first year. Then each graduating senior receives an oak sapling, symbolizing his or her growth during the previous four years at Elon. Seniors are charged with planting their sapling in a place where they can nurture it to grow into a tall, mature oak, implying that intellectual and personal development does not end with college graduation but continues long after.

An equally powerful and compelling example is Amherst College, where faculty in full academic regalia lead students into the chapel to start the new

academic year. Similar events occur at Macalester College and elsewhere around the country. Macalester goes one step further to demonstrate its value and commitment to community service by having all new students do some form of community work within the first few weeks of class as part of a first-year seminar course.

Some large universities such as Texas A&M and Western Washington University (Carey & Fabiano, 1997) stage first-year student induction ceremonies that can be powerful unifying events. At Indiana University Bloomington, parents are invited to participate to symbolize the breaking away from the family of origin to the academic community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If an institution is serious about student engagement in the first college year, it should:

- Structure ways for first-year students to spend time in the company of peers. The best way to do this is to require students to live on campus. Students who live on campus are more engaged and gain more from their college experience. They are more likely to use the cultural and artistic venues the institution provides as well as have access to faculty and serious-minded peers. They also have more experiences with diversity.

Not all students can live on campus, of course. Because peers are so influential to student learning and values development, institutions must create ways to harness this influence in the context of educationally purposeful activities. One such approach with considerable appeal is some form of learning community where students take two or more courses together (Matthews, 1994; Tinto, 1996, Tinto, Goodsell Love, & Russo, 1993b).

- Limit who is allowed to come to campus before welcome week begins. Some institutions, in the spirit of being flexible and accommodating, allow new students to move into campus housing days, and in some instances more than a week, before formal welcome week activities commence. Of course, some students must be on campus before fall orientation or welcome week activities begin for auditions, athletics, and the like. Generally, these students will be kept busy enough in productive activities and not have large amounts of discretionary time to develop undesirable habits. However, other students can acquire anti-intellectual habits during this period without the institution's being able to counter with more appropriate socialization experiences. It is essential that to the extent possible, students' time be structured with meaningful, educationally sound, and socially cohesive activities that are consistent with the academic ethos from the moment they arrive on campus. We abdicate our responsibilities as educators if we leave students to their own devices to create alternative socialization patterns. Institutions must take a hard, firm line and allow few, if any, exceptions, for such exceptions serve no one's best interests.