

STUDENT SUCCESS *in* COLLEGE

Promoting Student Success

What the Media and the General Public Need to Know

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Occasional Paper #2

Six Conditions that Matter to Student Success

- I. "Living" Mission and "Lived" Educational Philosophy
- II. Unshakeable Focus on Student Learning
- III. Environments Adapted for Educational Enrichment
- IV. Clear Pathways to Student Success
- V. Improvement-Oriented Ethos
- VI. Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality and Student Success



After several years of intense public focus on the need to improve K-12 education, more attention has turned recently to what happens when high-school graduates move on to college. Students, parents, and lawmakers are asking whether undergraduates are getting adequate value for their investments of time and money, particularly as college and university tuition keeps rising.

Employers are expressing concern about whether some graduates are adequately prepared for the world of work. Demographic pressures in some states also mean that institutions have to find places for more students, even though state appropriations to many public institutions have been cut or are barely increasing. In addition, legislators and policy experts are pressing institutions to make it possible for students to complete degree requirements in a reasonable period of time and worry that significant drop-out rates at some colleges and universities may reflect a waste of public resources spent on those students.



National Survey
of Student Engagement

To aid members of the news media in looking at the issues of quality in postsecondary education, the authors of the recently published *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* distill some useful factors for the media and the general public to use in assessing the quality of education at four-year colleges and universities. The book is based on the Documenting Effective Educational Practice project.* Analyzing whether an institution is effective and determining what makes for student success is *not* as simple as turning to lists of “top” colleges.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN INSTITUTIONS TO PRODUCE STUDENT SUCCESS

Practices Focused on Entering Students

- *Effective institutions feature student success in their visions of what they hope to accomplish.* Is student success actually included and described in the institution’s mission statement? Do senior leaders of the institution frequently discuss high expectations for students—for example, in state-of-the-campus reports, governing board meetings, convocations, and other settings? In short, does the institution show that it cares about student achievement?
- *Establishing high expectations for all students is necessary.* Does the institution assess its students’ individual needs, learning styles, and academic skills in areas where they may need help through such means as placement exams, short questionnaires during orientation, or online vehicles that discuss interests and out-of-class activities? How is this information then used? How does the institution prod students to perform at high levels? How often, and in what form, do faculty members provide helpful, constructive

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feedback?

- *Institutions need to draw a map for student success, particularly in the first weeks and months of college.* Does the institution clearly explain what will be expected in terms of academic achievement, how to contact faculty members, where to find academic advisors, mentors, and tutors? Are learning centers, mentoring programs, and other such resources centrally located or otherwise easily accessed?
- *New students need to be systematically introduced and acclimated to campus mores.* What steps are undertaken during summer orientation and registration to help students feel that they are part of campus traditions? Does the institution create a sense among

students that they are part of something “special,” for example through rituals and other activities that involve students in discovering what they need to do to succeed and prosper as members of the academic community?

Practices Focused on Retaining and Engaging Students

- *High performing institutions emphasize student participation in enriching educational experiences.* Does the institution encourage, or even require, such things as study abroad, service learning, internships, or participation in out-of-classroom activities that bring students into contact with students and faculty members from diverse backgrounds and academic fields? Can institutions identify which students may not be engaged in such activities?
- *Student-faculty contacts can pay large dividends for student development.* How often, and in what form, do faculty members provide helpful, constructive feedback? Are

faculty members available, at least occasionally, to discuss grades, assignments, and career plans? Do faculty members keep regular office hours and/or respond to student emails in a timely fashion? Are opportunities available for students to participate in faculty research? Are there opportunities to work with faculty members outside of class on committees or projects?

- *Faculty members use a variety of instructional approaches to address students' diverse learning styles.* Are faculty members encouraged to try different teaching techniques, particularly active and collaborative approaches such as team projects, interactive lectures emphasizing case studies, and small seminars to complement large lecture classes? Are students encouraged to use different forms of electronic media in working on class assignments and to communicate with instructors?
- *Academic challenge needs to be balanced with adequate support.* What kind of “early warning systems” does an institution have in place to identify students who are having trouble meeting academic and social challenges? Are low grades flagged for intervention by institutional officials? Are adequate learner-centered resources available, such as tutors, special labs for improvement of writing or mathematics, learning centers, and academic advising? Are study groups and learning communities encouraged to give students a “home” outside of the classroom?

Institutional Frameworks

- *Institutions committed to student success constantly evaluate their efforts.* Has the institution recently assessed its efforts to improve teaching and student performance? How does it use the data gathered in internal or external studies to modify its practices or eliminate programs and activities that do not

seem to benefit substantial numbers of students? Has the campus invested in a teaching and learning center?

- *One administrator or group should have clear responsibility for improving student success.* What officials or units are monitoring, prodding, and supporting those working on the front lines?
- *An institution's reward system should value student success.* How does the institution reward faculty and staff members committed to student development—through salary increases, public ceremonies that recognize excellence in teaching and service, in annual performance reviews? Does the institution overtly seek to recruit faculty interested in undergraduate education?
- *Academic affairs and student affairs offices should not operate as separate “silos.”* Do academic and student affairs offices work together to plan and offer programs and activities so that the responsibility for student achievement does not fall through the cracks? Are student affairs staff devoted to the institution's academic mission and not relegated only to supervising extracurricular and personal counseling activities. Do they team-teach courses with faculty members, for example, and manage peer tutoring and mentoring programs, first-year seminars, and learning communities?
- *Institutions with exemplary records of student achievement use a variety of formal and informal processes to recruit new faculty and staff members whose values, educational philosophies, and pedagogical skills match students' needs, learning styles, and the institution's mission.* Does the college aggressively seek faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, including those from historically underrepresented groups, to diversify the faculty, serve as role models for an increasingly diverse student body, and

ensure that a broad variety of perspectives are offered in the curriculum?

- *The institution’s board of trustees must be committed to student learning for it to be a true institutional priority.* Does the board have a standing committee dedicated to student learning and campus life? What types of data do the board use to make decisions affecting student performance and to determine the resources to be devoted to student learning and success?

This list may seem to present an overwhelming number of indicators, but as *Student Success in College* concludes, “to have a demonstrable impact on the nature and quality of student learning, it is necessary to do many different things *better* and more *frequently* so that one or more initiatives touch *substantial numbers* of students in meaningful ways, rather than invest vast amounts of resources, time, and energy in one large, complicated initiative.”

** More information about the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project is reported in G. D. Kuh, J. Kinzie, J. H. Schuh, E. J. Whitt & Associates (2005). Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. The Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research partnered with the American Association for Higher Education to discover what 20 diverse, educationally effective colleges and universities do to promote student success. The project was supported with generous grants from Lumina Foundation for Education and the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College.*

The institutions selected had higher graduation rates and higher scores on five key benchmarks of effective educational practice than similar peer institutions. The benchmarks were drawn from the National Survey of Student Engagement, an annual survey of students at more than 500 institutions designed to determine how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. The survey has highlighted good educational practices that lead to the desired outcomes of college. For more information, contact George D. Kuh, Director of the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University Bloomington, 812-856-5824 or kuh@indiana.edu.

Sources:

Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., & Whitt, E.J. (in press). *Assessing conditions to enhance educational effectiveness: The Inventory for Student Engagement and Success.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J. & Associates (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Project DEEP Colleges and Universities	
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The Evergreen State College (WA)	University of Maine at Farmington (ME)
Fayetteville State University (NC)	University of Michigan (MI)
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