Fostering Student Success: What is the value of student engagement?

Jillian Kinzie
NSSE Institute & IU Center for Postsecondary Research

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Current Concerns: Access, Affordability, Quality, Accountability
(Secretary Spellings’ National Commission on the Future of Higher Education)

- Global competitive pressure
- Greater access to postsecondary education
- Control costs, simplify financial aid
- Measure and report student learning outcomes
- Public concern that we need to know much more about whether students at colleges and universities are actually learning

Concerns about Quality in Higher Education

- “Colleges and universities, for all the benefits they bring, accomplish far less for their students than they should.”
- “Has the quality of teaching improved? More important, are students learning more than they did in 1950?....The honest answer to these questions is that we do not know.”
- “The moment has surely come for America’s colleges to take a more candid look at their weaknesses and think more boldly about setting higher educational standards for themselves.”


21st Century Students and the College Experience

- College-going stakes higher today than at any point in history
- Need to provide high-quality postsecondary education to more than three-quarters of the adult population
- 45% students in 2yr-colleges depart during their first year, & 1 of 4 leave from 4-yr schools
- Enrollment & persistence rates of historically underserved students lagging
- 51% of high school grads have reading skills necessary for college; 25% of students in 4-yr colleges need 1 yr of remedial coursework

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

Student Success in College

Student success - defined in a broad, all-encompassing manner includes: academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives including graduation, and post-college performance.

Overview

• Current Context in HE
• What do we know about student success and student engagement?
  – NSSE, BCSSE, Connecting the Dots, DEEP, NPEC What Matters to Student Success
• NSSE and Enrollment Management
  – Recruitment, Retention, Planning and Institutional Improvement
• Discussion

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

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

What Really Matters in College: Student Engagement

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

Pascarella & Terenzini, How College Affects Students, 2005, p. 602

Student Success: Lessons From the Research

• What matters most is what students do, not who they are
• A key factor is the quality of effort students expend
• Educationally effective institutions channel student energy toward the right activities
National Survey of Student Engagement (pronounced "nessie")

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (pronounced "cessie")

Undergraduate student surveys that assess the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development

NSSE Project Scope
- One million+ students from 1,100 different schools
- Random sample of First-year and Seniors surveyed spring term
- 50 states, Puerto Rico, Canada
- 70+ consortia

Related Initiatives:
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
- Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) full launch 2007

NSSE Survey

- Student Behaviors
- Institutional Actions & Requirements
- Reactions to People & Environment
- Student Background Information

Taking a look at NSSE:
- Based on effective educational practices
- Designed and tested for high validity and reliability
- Relatively stable over time
- High credibility of self-reported data
- Students will participate
- Actionable data
- Psychometric properties document on website

NSSE’s Five Clusters of Effective Educational Practice

- Supportive Campus Environment
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active & Collaborative Learning
- Student Faculty Interaction

What have we learned about student engagement?
**NSSE and Institutions**

- Yes, size matters. Smaller is generally better.

- Student engagement varies more **within** than between institutions.

**NSSE Disappointing Findings**

- Three of ten first-year students reported working just hard enough to get by.

- Between 40% and 50% of first-year students never used career planning, financial advising, or academic tutoring services.

- Almost half of all students (43% first-years, 48% seniors) spend no time on cocurricular activities.

**What have we learned from NSSE so far?**

- The single best predictor of student satisfaction with college is the degree to which they perceive the college environment to be supportive of their academic and social needs.

- Effective educational practices measured by NSSE are independent of institutional selectivity.

- At institutions where faculty members use effective educational practices more frequently in their classes, students are more engaged overall and gain more from college.

**Student Engagement Quiz**

What percent of full-time seniors study, on average, more than 20 hours per week?

(a) 14%  
(b) 23%  
(c) 32%  
(d) 41%  
(e) 50%

**answer: 23%**
What We Know About the Undergraduate Experience

1. Full-time students spend an average of 13 hrs per week studying (Hrs. recommended by faculty = 20-25)
2. 45% of all college seniors took at least one course at another institution prior to enrolling at their current school – “swirling”
3. 45% first-years and 30% seniors never discussed ideas with faculty outside class
4. Faculty spend 42% of class time lecturing (FSSE)

What matters to grades?
- Pre-college achievement +
- Female +
- African American +
- Part-time enrolled -
- 21+ hrs work off campus -
- 21+ hrs socializing -
- 6+ hrs co-curricular -
- Engagement +

What matters to persistence?
- Female +
- Pre-college achievement +
- Part-time enrolled -
- Merit grant +
- Transfer status -
- Work off campus 0
- 6+ hrs co-curricular +
- College grades +
- Engagement +

NSSE & Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Clusters of Effective Educational Practice</th>
<th>First-year students*</th>
<th>Seniors*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Challenge</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active &amp; Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching Educational Experiences</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus Environment</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All correlations are significant at p<.01

Compensatory Effect of Engagement

Impact of Educationally Purposeful Activities on First Academic Year GPA by Pre-College Achievement Level

ACT 20
ACT 24
ACT 28

Educationally Purposeful Activities (standardized)
Connecting the Dots Findings:

1. **Student engagement positively related to FY and senior student grades and to persistence between the first and second year of college at the same institution.** Positive effects of engagement persist even with controls such as pre-college achievement, financial aid, family income, enrollment status, living on campus, working off campus, and so forth. Equally important, the effects of engagement are generally in the same positive direction for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

2. **Engagement has compensatory effect on FY grades and persistence to the second year of college.** That is, although exposure to effective educational practices generally benefits all students, the salutary effects are greater for lower ability students as well as students of color compared with White students.

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**Beginning College Student Survey of Engagement (BCSSE)**

- **BCSSE measures:**
  - HS experiences; Importance of college activities
  - Baseline self-assessment of knowledge and skills
  - Demographics
  - Use to examine gap between expectations and engagement
  - Study effect of students’ background on NSSE scores

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**Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)**

**High School Experiences:**
- 58% took at least one advanced placement class in high school
- 62% felt their high school was academically challenging
- 89% reported grades of B or better with 44% reporting either A and A-
- 98% took four or more years of English, 79% had four years of math, 62% science, 60% history or social studies, and 31% foreign language
- 51% participated on an athletic team; 35% in band, choir, or theater; 34% in academic clubs; and 19% in student government.

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**Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)**

**College Expectations:**
- 14% are uncertain as to whether they will graduate from their current institution and 3% are certain they will not
- 32% do not have any close friends attending college with them
- 92% expect grades of B or better
- 72% expect to spend 15 hours or less per week relaxing and socializing
- Only 17% expect to spend more than 25 hours per week studying.

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**Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)**

**Expectations and Realities or More of What’s the Same and What’s Different**
- Although 60% of entering students expected to spend more than 15 per week preparing for class, only 40% studied that much during their first year of college
- The majority of entering students expected to participate in co-curricular activities, yet nearly one-third (32%) spent no time in these activities during their first year.
- Entering students expectations about leisure time was close to the actual hours they spent relaxing and socializing – 23% expected to relax and socialize for more than 15 hours per weeks and 27% were actually doing so.
Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)

Differences between High School and College Classrooms:

- 82% of entering students frequently asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions in their senior year of high school – only 61% did so in the first-year college courses.
- 65% worked with other students on project in their senior year of high school but only 41% did so in their first year of college.

What does an educationally effective college look like at the turn of the 21st century?

Six Shared Conditions

1. “Living” Mission and “Lived” Educational Philosophy
2. Unshakeable Focus on Student Learning
3. Environments Adapted for Educational Enrichment
4. Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success
5. Improvement-Oriented Ethos
6. Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality

Lessons

4. Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success

- Make plain to students the resources and services available to help them succeed.
- Some guideposts tied directly to the academic program; others related to student and campus culture.
- Institutional publications accurately describe what students experience.

Lessons

4. Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success

- Efforts tailored to student needs.
- Mutually reinforcing student expectations and behavior, institutional expectations, and institutional reward systems.
- Redundant early warning systems and safety nets

Anticipatory socialization to involvement opportunities

At Longwood, the “New Student Leadership Program” brings 80 first-year students to campus prior to the beginning of the fall semester to explore leadership skills, build support networks for leadership development, and provide opportunities for faculty and staff to identify potential student leaders.
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.

Socialization to Academic Expectations

Wheaton new students read a common book and essays by faculty that respond to the reading. Assigned readings, faculty responses, and the website combine to introduce incoming students to preferred ways to grapple with intellectual issues.

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, listen to stories about the Jayhawk, learn the “I’m a Jayhawk” school song, and hear stories intended to instill students’ commitment to graduation.

Connect Students to Campus in Meaningful Ways

University of Maine at Farmington’s Student Work Initiative employs students* in meaningful work in student services, laboratories, and field-research. Such experiences provide students opportunities to apply what they are learning to practical, real-life situations.

*50% of UMF’s students work on campus

Mentoring

Michigan’s University Mentorship Program matches up groups of four first-year students with an older student and a faculty or staff member who all share the same academic interests. The goal is to provide students with mentoring relationships, networking opportunities, yearlong guidance and support, and in general to help ease the transition to college.

Redundant early warning systems

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

- Evergreen State’s “Upside Down Degree” program inverts the traditional model of undergraduate education for students with technical degrees – gen ed the last 2 years
- Half of incoming class at GMU are transfers. Designated University 300 orientation course for transfers. University 200 is a course for students enrolled at community colleges so they can learn more about GMU.

Reflecting on Your Campus:

- What do prospective students learn about what they can expect and what is expected of them?
- How do new students (first years and transfers) learn what it takes to succeed?
- What rituals or traditions signal student success?
- What signature programs exist for assuring student success?
- What warning systems or safety nets are in place for intervention?
- How do you know???

Assessing Conditions to Enhance Educational Effectiveness

4. Clear Pathways to Student Success

Acculturation

Teaching Students How to Succeed

- What messages do we send to prospective students about:
  - expectations for their performance and outcomes,
  - expectations that students assume a fair share of responsibility for their learning?
- Do we communicate high expectations to all students – stretching them beyond their perceived limits?

Anticipatory socialization to involvement opportunities

At Wheaton, admissions staff add personal, hand-written messages to students’ letters of admission, encouraging them to continue their high school involvement in college, and providing suggestions about how to do so. In addition, postcards sent to admitted students invite them to volunteer as “Freshman Ambassadors.”

4. Clear Pathways to Student Success

Building Community

- Do all students feel a sense of ‘specialness’ about the institution? Or are feelings of ‘specialness’ limited to certain groups of students?
- What traditions and events introduce students to the values of the institution? To what extent are those traditions consistent and/or inconsistent with the espoused institutional values? What acculturation experiences should be added?

Connect Students in Meaningful Ways

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, connect with the local community, and make connections with ideals and meaning larger than themselves.
Intentional acculturation

At Longwood, peer mentors -- “students helping other students” -- are catalysts to promote student achievement and learning and introduce students’ to volunteer and other educational opportunities through the Longwood Seminar, residence halls leadership roles, and the strong co-curricular program.

4. Clear Pathways to Student Success

Alignment

Mark the Pathways to Student Success

• To what extent are resources, structures, programs, policies, and practices consistent with the institution’s mission and students’ characteristics?
• Are forms of challenge and support consistent with the needs of students and with the institution’s educational priorities? Do students who need extra support receive it?

Front-loading Resources

• To what extent are resources ‘front-loaded’ to foster academic and social success? Are these efforts integrated with, or tangential to, the curriculum? How might they be more effective?
• Can students find resources when they need them?
• What programs assist students who need additional skill preparation to succeed in college? Who uses them? Are they effective? How do you know?

Early Warning Systems & Safety Nets

• What policies and practices identify students at risk? To what extent are they used, in what ways, and by whom? Are they effective?
• Are safety nets (programs, policies, practices) for students in difficulty available and used? Who uses them? Who does not?
• To what extent are these resources, programs, policies, practices, and structures effective, and for whom?

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.

Integration of Initiatives

• Are our resources, programs, policies, practices and structures for student success redundant and responsive?
• In what ways do students’ out-of-class lives facilitate or inhibit their learning and success?
• Who collects and disseminates information about students and their experiences?
• Who brings together various pictures of students and their experiences to create a holistic understanding of the quality of undergraduate programs?
Recommendations
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, consider requiring it**
g. **Focus on underengaged students**

NSSE and Recruitment

**• Assertion:** The smart college consumer knows about specific student behaviors and institutional conditions associated with student success at the colleges in their consideration set

• All colleges and universities are not alike. Some are more effective in engaging their students in activities that promote student success

• Many institutions have this information, especially those that use NSSE

Sharing the NSSE Pocket Guide with Parents and Students

- Pocket Guide helps prospective students ask the “right” questions
- Good questions to ask of all schools, not just those that participate in NSSE
- School counselors can request up to 1000 free pocket guides per year. Colleges and non-profit education organizations can request up to 300 copies free per year.*

*Request via the NSSE Web site

Institutional Example: NSSE and Enrollment Management

- The enrollment management area at Meredith has used NSSE results to help guide the enrollment marketing strategies. They look closely at trends and make adjustments to programs and campus visitation days to ensure that students are more cognizant of student involvement and engagement opportunities.
- An academic dean reports using NSSE information when speaking to parents at an admissions event. “Parents seemed impressed that there was data to support the points that I was making about what we say about the student/faculty relationships and educational opportunities at Meredith.”

Institutional Example: Hanover College

- A detailed summary of NSSE is sent to the faculty as well as the Admission and Student Life staffs to ensure the results, both good and bad, are understood by key folks on campus. Last year, Admission requested an additional presentation and discussion of findings to help them better understand the strengths of the Hanover experience and how that impacts student fit.
NSSE and Retention

**NSSE and Retention Goals:**

- **NSSE** is a stimulus for reflection on what the institution does well, and areas for improvement.
- **Ultimate goal of retention initiative** is improved educational experiences (not just retention).
- **Identifies what distinguishes institution**, where student experience matches espoused mission, & where it falls short.
- **NSSE results** can be connected to institutional data to build retention models.

NSSE and Tinto’s Model of Student Persistence

- **Students’ engagement** in effective educational practices as indication of level of academic & social integration (1 a-v; 6a-f; 9a-g etc.)
- **Institutional emphasis** items suggest institutions’ level of commitment to student success (10 a-g)
- **Student intentions** to engage in educational activities before graduating (7 a-h)

NSSE and Retention at Elon University: Correlated Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Retention</th>
<th>Prismatic-Correlation</th>
<th>Og (E-Meth)</th>
<th>How would you rate the educational activity?</th>
<th>Quality: Your interaction with other students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>223</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>222</td>
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**NSSE and Retention: Humboldt State University**

**Analyzed Difference at NSSE item level**

Withdrawn students had substantially lower engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Withdrawals</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never made a class presentation</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never worked with classmates on class assignments</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often received prompt feedback from faculty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never participated in a community-based project</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read five or more assigned books</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to have an internship or field experience</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend more time participating in cocurricular activities</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to understanding other races</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to solving real-world problems</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to developing critical skills</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to your contributing to the community</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
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</table>

**Conditions that Support Student Retention**

- **Involve students** as valued members of the institution. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and other students is an important independent predictor of student persistence.
- **Foster learning.** Learning has always been the key to student retention. Students who learn are students who stay. Again, involvement seems to be the key. Students who are involved in learning, **that is who spend more time on task, especially with others, are more likely to learn and, in turn, more likely to stay.**

(Tinto, 2002)
To Ponder:

- If you have NSSE data, how are you using it to inform enrollment management activities?
- What is your campus doing that is not represented among the policies and practices at educationally effective institutions and do you have evidence to justify continuing to do it?
- What are you not doing that perhaps you should?

Student Success Resources:

NPEC 2006
National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success
- Research papers, forum
(http://nces.ed.gov/npec/symposium.asp)

Last Word on Student Success....

“We don’t want students to go through school, but for school to go through them.”

Faculty member, Fayetteville State University

Discussion and Comments

For more information:
Jillian Kinzie
NSSE Institute
Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research
1900 East Tenth Street
Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419
Bloomington, IN 47406-7512
Ph: 812-856-5824
Fax: 812-856-5150
www.nsse.iub.edu