

STUDENT SUCCESS and UNIVERSITY QUALITY:
What Really Matters

Prepared for Faculty, Staff, & Administration

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DEFINING *STUDENT “SUCCESS” & UNIVERSITY* *“QUALITY”*: TRADITIONAL ASSUMPTIONS, POPULAR MYTHS, and EMPIRICAL REALITIES

Reevaluating Traditional Assumptions & Reexamining Popular Myths

1. ***Student success*** and university quality are inextricably interrelated: Success in university depends on both *student effort* and *institutional effort*; this involves a reciprocal relationship between what the university *does for* its students and what students do *for themselves*.

2. ***University quality*** or ***institutional excellence*** should not be defined in terms of the type of students that the university *lets in* or *keeps out* (its admissions selectivity), but in terms of what the university actually does *with/for* the students it enrolls (its *educational processes and practices*), and the type of students it turns out (*educational outcomes*).

Empirical Realities:

Outcome Measures of Student Success and University Quality (Intended Outcomes of a Comprehensive First-Year Experience Program)

1. ***Student Retention***: new students remain enrolled during their first term, and re-enroll for subsequent academic terms.

2. ***Academic Achievement***: new students’ achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through and complete their university experience. (e.g., higher first-year GPA, fewer dropped or failed courses, fewer first-year students placed on academic probation, and more first-year students eligible for academic honors).

3. ***Holistic Development***: new students develop as “whole persons” (e.g., more first-year student involvement in co-curricular programs, more first-year students become interested in and eligible for leadership positions, fewer first-year students

experience mental health problems, fewer students engaging in behavior that threatens their physical health and safety).

This *holistic* outcome consists of multiple dimensions, which may be further defined or described as follows:

- *Intellectual* Development: develop skills for acquiring and communicating knowledge, learning how to learn, and how to think deeply.
- *Emotional* Development: develop skills for understanding, controlling, and expressing emotions.
- *Social* Development: enhance the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, leadership skills, and civic engagement.
- *Ethical* Development: formulate a clear value system that guides life choices and demonstrates personal character.
- *Physical* Development: acquire and apply knowledge about the human body to prevent disease, maintain wellness, and promote peak performance.
- *Spiritual* Development: appreciate the search for personal meaning, the purpose of human existence, and questions that transcend the material or physical world.

4. Educational Attainment: new students *persist to completion* of their degree, program, or educational goal. (For example, 2-year university students persist to completion of the associate degree, and 4-year university students persist to completion of the baccalaureate degree).

5. Student Advancement: new students eventually *proceed to and succeed at subsequent* educational or vocational endeavors for which their program or degree was designed to prepare them. (For example, 2-year university students continue their education at a 4-year university, or 4-year university students are accepted at graduate schools or enter gainful careers after completing their baccalaureate degree.)

Immediate & Intermediate (Mediating) Outcomes

Outcomes listed below may be said to precede and serve as mediating pre-conditions for the realization of the terminal outcomes listed above.

- * ***Personal Validation***: new students feel personally *significant*, recognized as *individuals*, and that they *matter* to the university institution (Rendón, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).
- * ***Self-Efficacy***: new students' develop a belief system that their *personal effort* matters and that they can exert significant influence or control over their future success success (Bandura, 1997; Solberg, et al. 1993).
- * ***Personal Meaning***: new students find *meaning or purpose* in their university experience
by seeing and making *relevant connections* between their university experience, their
current life, and their future goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wlodkowski, 1998).
- * ***Active Involvement***: new students become fully *engaged* in university by investing significant amounts of *time* and *energy* in university experience—both *inside* and *outside* the classroom (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1991, 2001; McKeachie et al., 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005)..
- * ***Social Integration***: new students *interact, collaborate*, and form *interpersonal connections* with other members of the university community—peers, faculty, staff, and administrators (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Tinto, 1987, 1993).
- * ***Personal Reflection***: new students think reflectively and deeply about their learning experiences in university, *elaborating* on these experiences and *transforming* them into
a form that relates to what they already know and have previously experienced (Ewell, 1997; Flavell, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978).

* *Self-Awareness (Mindfulness)*: students’ become mindful of their thinking patterns, learning styles, and personal habits via (a) *meta-cognition*—they think about how they think, (b) *self-regulation*—they regulate or accommodate their learning strategies to meet the demands of different learning tasks, and (c) *self-monitoring*—they self-check for understanding or comprehension, and maintain awareness of their behavioral habits (Langer, 1989, 1997; Pintrich, 1995; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991; Weinstein & Underwood, 1985).

The “Cornerstones” of Student Success: Seven Research-Based Principles of Effective *Human Learning, Motivation, & Personal Development*

1.

PERSONAL VALIDATION

Student success is more likely to occur when students feel personally *significant*—i.e., when students feel recognized as *individuals* and that they *matter* to the institution.

1.1 *Personalizing or Individualizing* the University Experience

1.2 Educating the Student as a “*Whole Person*”

2.

SELF-EFFICACY

Student success is more likely to take place when students believe that their *individual effort* matters—when they believe they can exert significant influence or control over their personal success.

2.1 Developing Programs that Combine Effective *Support* and Moderate *Challenge*

2.2 Adopting Pedagogy that Provides Students with “Cognitive Scaffolding”

3.

PERSONAL MEANING

Student success is more probable when students find *meaning or purpose* in their university experience—i.e., when students perceive *relevant connections* between what they’re learning in university and their current life or future goals.

3.1 Increasing students’ opportunities for personal choice with respect to their curricular and co-curricular learning experiences

3.2 Engaging Students in *Reality-Based Learning & Experiential Learning*

4.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Student success increases with the degree or depth of student *engagement* in the learning process, i.e., the amount of *time* and *energy* that students invest in the university experience—both *inside* and *outside* the classroom.

4.1 Promoting Students' Active Involvement *Inside the Classroom*

4.2 Promoting Students' Active Involvement *Outside the Classroom*

5.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Student success is enhanced through *human interaction*, *collaboration*, and formation of *interpersonal connections* between the student and other members of the university community—peers, faculty, staff, and administrators.

5.1 Prompting Student-Student (*Peer*) Integration

5.2 Promoting Student-Faculty/Staff Integration

6.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Student success is strengthened when students engage in reflective thinking about what they're learning and *elaborate* on it, *transforming* it into a form that relates it to what they already know or have previously experienced.

6.1 Engaging Students in Reflective Thinking via Effective *Questioning* Strategies

6.2 Engaging Students in Reflective Thinking via "*Writing-to-Learn*" Exercises

7.

SELF-AWARENESS

Student success is more likely to be realized when students gain greater awareness of their own thinking, learning styles, and learning habits, i.e., when they engage in *meta-cognition*—think about their thinking, *self-monitoring*—check for understanding or comprehension, and *self-regulation*—regulate or accommodate their learning strategies to meet the demands of the learning task

7.1 Engaging Students in Self-Awareness Exercises/Assignments that Promote *Mindfulness*

7.2 Promoting Student Use of *Self-Assessment Inventories/Instruments* to Promote Self-Awareness

The Process of Student-Success Programming: 12 Potent *Properties/Principles* of Effective Program Delivery

1. **MISSION-DRIVEN:** Effective programs are driven by the *university mission* and a well-articulated statement of *program purpose*.
2. **STUDENT-CENTERED:** Effective programs are *grounded in* or and centered on the *needs and welfare of students* (rather than by institutional habit and convenience, or the needs and desires of faculty/staff).
3. **INTENTIONAL (PURPOSEFUL):** Effective programs are *deliberately designed* with the intent of infusing them with *research-based principles* of effective student learning and development, namely:
 - * **Personal Validation:** student success is more likely to occur when students feel personally *significant*—i.e., when students feel recognized as *individuals* and that they *matter* to the institution.
 - * **Self-Efficacy:** student success is more likely to take place when students believe that their *individual effort* matters—when they believe they can exert significant influence or control over their personal success.
 - * **Personal Meaning:** student success is more probable when students find *meaning or purpose* in their university experience—i.e., when students perceive *relevant connections* between what they're learning in university and their current life or future goals.
 - * **Active Involvement:** student success increases with the degree or depth of student *engagement* in the learning process, i.e., the amount of *time* and *energy* that students invest in the university experience—both *inside* and *outside* the classroom.
 - * **Social Integration:** student success is enhanced through *human interaction, collaboration*, and formation of *interpersonal connections* between the student and other members of the university community—peers, faculty, staff, and administrators.

- * **Personal Reflection:** student success is strengthened when students engage in reflective thinking about what they're learning and *elaborate* on it, *transforming* it into a form that relates it to what they already know or have previously experienced.
 - * **Self-Awareness:** student success is more likely to be realized when students gain greater awareness of their own thinking, learning styles, and learning habits, i.e., when they engage in *meta-cognition*—think about their thinking, *self-monitoring*—check for understanding or comprehension, and *self-regulation*—regulate or accommodate their learning strategy to meet the demands of the learning task.
4. **INTRUSIVE:** Effective programs *initiate* supportive action by *reaching out* to students and bringing or delivering programming *to* students (rather than passively waiting and hoping that students will take advantage of it); this serves to increase the likelihood that the program reaches *all (or the vast majority of)* students who should profit from it.
 5. **PROACTIVE:** Effective programs take *early, preventative* action to address students' needs and adjustment issues in an *anticipatory* fashion, i.e., *before* they eventuate in problems that require reactive (after-the-fact) intervention.
 6. **DIVERSIFIED:** Effective programs are *tailored or customized* to meet the *distinctive* needs of different student *subpopulations*.
 7. **COMPREHENSIVE (HOLISTIC):** Effective programs focus on the student as a "*whole person,*" addressing all key dimensions the self that affect student success.
 8. **DEVELOPMENTAL:** Effective programs are delivered in a *timely, longitudinal sequence* to help students meet the educational challenges that emerge at different *stages* of their university experience, and they do so in a way that promotes student self-efficacy by balancing *challenge* with *support*.
 9. **COLLABORATIVE:** Effective programs encourage cooperative *alliances or partnerships* between different organizational units of the university, allowing them to work in a *complementary, interdependent* fashion; this enables different programs to acquire the collective capacity to exert synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success.
 10. **SYSTEMIC:** Effective programs are *centrally* situated within the institution's organizational *system* or structure, which increases their potential for exerting *extensive* and *recursive* influence on the student's university experience, as well as their potential for inducing a reformative and transformative effect on the university itself.
 11. **DURABLE:** Effective programs are *institutionalized* by being "built into" the institution's organizational structure and annual budget, thus ensuring that the

program has *longevity* and is experienced *perennially* by successive cohorts of students.

12. **EMPIRICAL (EVIDENTIARY):** Effective programs are supported and driven by *assessment data* (both quantitative and qualitative) that are used *summatively*—to “sum up” and *prove* the program’s impact or value, and *formatively* to “shape up” and continually *improve* program quality.



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