Promoting Student Success in the First Year of College

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29th Annual Conference on The First Year Experience
Denver CO
February 13, 2010
Context

- Global Competitiveness in Degree Attainment
- The New Majority and Demographic Gaps
- Questionable Levels of Student Performance
“That’s nice. What else have we learned at school?”
“It’s the Learning, Stupid”
Context

- Global Competitiveness in Degree Attainment
- The New Majority and Demographic Gaps
- Questionable Levels of Student Performance
- In a Most Challenging Fiscal Environment …

→ We Need Higher Levels of Student Attainment at an Affordable Cost
What If…

- If we imagined what our work would be like using what we know about how students learn…?
- And if we created optimum learning conditions for all students…?
- Then, how would we re-design our first-year programs and practices?
- What kinds of teaching and assessment approaches would we use?
Overview

- What the world needs now
- Why engagement in the first year matters
- High-impact practices
- A five step agenda
College Learning
for the New Global Century

A Report from
The National Leadership Council for
Liberal Education & America’s Promise

Association of American Colleges and Universities
Narrow Learning is Not Enough: The Essential Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical & Natural World
- Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- “Deep” Integrative Learning
Deep, Integrative Learning

- Attend to the underlying meaning of information as well as content
- Integrate and synthesize different ideas, sources of information
- Discern patterns in evidence or phenomena
- Apply knowledge in different situations
- View issues from multiple perspectives
Raising The Bar

*Employers’ Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn*

Key findings from survey among 302 employers
Conducted October 27 – November 17, 2009
for

Association of American Colleges and Universities
Employer expectations of employees have increased

% who agree with each statement

Our company is asking employees to **take on more responsibilities** and to **use a broader set of skills** than in the past

- 91%

Employees are expected to **work harder to coordinate with other departments** than in the past

- 90%

The **challenges** employees face within our company are **more complex today** than they were in the past

- 88%

To succeed in our company, employees need **higher levels of learning and knowledge** today than they did in the past

- 88%
Employers’ Top Priorities for Student Learning In College

% saying two- and four-year colleges should place MORE emphasis on helping students develop these skills, qualities, capabilities, knowledge

- Effective oral/written communication: 89%
- Critical thinking/analytical reasoning: 81%
- Knowledge/skills applied to real world settings: 79%
- Analyze/solve complex problems: 75%
- Connect choices and actions to ethical decisions: 75%
- Teamwork skills/ability to collaborate: 71%
- Ability to innovate and be creative: 70%
- Developments in science/technology: 70%
Other Areas Of Learning Needing More Emphasis

% saying two- and four-year colleges should emphasize MORE helping students develop in these areas

- Locate/organize/evaluate information: 68%
- Understand global context: 67%
- Global issues' implications for future: 65%
- Understand & work with statistics: 63%
- Understand role of U.S. in the world: 57%
- Knowledge of cultural diversity in US/world: 57%
- Civic knowledge, community engagement: 52%
- Foreign language proficiency: 45%
- Understand, apply democratic values: 40%
What Matters to Student Success


Commissioned papers at: http://nces.ed.gov/npec/papers.asp
Pre-college Characteristics Associated with Student Success

✓ Academic preparation

3. Find x.

\[
x = \sqrt{4^2 + 3^2} = \sqrt{16 + 9} = \sqrt{25} = 5\text{ cm}
\]
3. Find $x$. 

Here it is.
Pre-college Characteristics Associated with Student Success

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

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

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

Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 602
Foundations of Student Engagement

Time on task (Tyler, 1930s)

Quality of effort (Pace, 1960-70s)

Student involvement (Astin, 1984)

Social, academic integration (Tinto, 1987, 1993)

Good practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)

College impact (Pascarella, 1985)

Student Engagement Trifecta

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

- Student-faculty contact
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- Time on task
- High expectations
- Respect for diverse learning styles
- Cooperation among students
National Survey of Student Engagement
(pronounced “nessie”)

Community College Survey of Student Engagement
(pronounced “cessie”)

College student surveys that assess the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development
REMEMBER, AS BAD AS THIS IS, IT'S BETTER THAN THE ESSAY QUESTION.
Grades, persistence, student satisfaction, gains across a range of desired outcomes, and engagement go hand in hand
Both the NSSE benchmark and deep learning scales are significantly and positively linked to ... effective reasoning and problem solving, well being, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, and moral character... These associations persisted even after introducing controls for important confounding influences.

Pascarella et al., 2009 reporting on the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE)
It’s more complicated than this…

- Many of the effects of college are “conditional”
- Some are compensatory
- Some have unusually positive effects
Who’s (on average) more engaged?

- Women
- Full-time students
- Students who live on campus
- Students with diversity experiences
- Students who start and stay at same school
## CCSSE: Who Is More Engaged?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Engaged</th>
<th>Less Engaged</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time students</td>
<td>Part-time students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontraditional-age students (those over age 24)</td>
<td>Traditional-age students (those 24 and younger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seeking credentials</td>
<td>Students not seeking credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who have completed 30 or more credits</td>
<td>Students who have not completed 30 or more credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female students</td>
<td>Male students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black students</td>
<td>Students who are not black</td>
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<tr>
<td>International students</td>
<td>U.S. students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who work fewer than 30 hours per week</td>
<td>Students who work more than 30 hours per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who have taken developmental courses</td>
<td>Students who have not taken developmental courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who have taken study skill courses</td>
<td>Students who have not taken study skill courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who have participated in orientation</td>
<td>Students who have not participated in orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who have participated in learning communities</td>
<td>Students who have not participated in learning communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of Educationally Purposeful Activities on First Academic Year GPA by Pre-College Achievement Level

Educationally Purposeful Activities (standardized)

First-year GPA

ACT 20
ACT 24
ACT 28
Impact of Educationally Purposeful Activities on the Probability of Returning for the Second Year of College by Race

- African American
- White/Caucasian

Probability of Returning vs. Educationally Purposeful Activities (standardized)
Who’s more engaged?

- Women
- Full-time students
- Students who live on campus
- Students with diversity experiences
- Students who start and stay at same school
- Students who have done “high-impact” practices
High-Impact Activities

- First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- “Science as Science Is Done”; Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects
Essential Learning Outcome:
NSSE Deep/Integrative Learning

- Integrating ideas or information from various sources
- Included diverse perspectives in class discussions/writing
- Put together ideas from different courses
- Discussed ideas with faculty members outside of class
- Discussed ideas with others outside of class
- Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
- Synthesizing & organizing ideas, info., or experiences
- Making judgments about the value of information
- Applying theories to practical problems or in new situations
- Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views
- Tried to better understand someone else's views
- Learned something that changed how you understand an issue
# Effects of Participating in High-Impact Activities on Deep/Integrative Learning and Gains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deep Learning</th>
<th>Gains General</th>
<th>Gains Personal</th>
<th>Gains Practical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Communities</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Senior</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Research</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culminating Experience</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
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</tbody>
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+p < .001, ++ p < .001 & Unstd B > .10, +++ p < .001 & Unstd B > .30
# Effects of Participating in High-Impact Activities on Student Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level of Academic Challenge</th>
<th>Active and Collab. Learning</th>
<th>Student-Faculty Interaction</th>
<th>Supportive Campus Env.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Communities</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+++</td>
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<td>++</td>
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<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
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High-Impact Activities
Increase Odds Students Will:

✓ Invest time and effort
✓ Interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters
✓ Experience diversity
✓ Get more frequent feedback
✓ Reflect & integrate learning
✓ Discover relevance of learning through real-world applications
High-Impact Practices and the Disparities Within…

Frosh: Service Learning and LCs

- Parity among racial/ethnic groups
- Fewer 1st gen students
- Fewer part-time students
- Fewer transfer students
- Fewer older students
## Assessing Student Engagement in High-Impact Practices

To what extent does your institution provide these experiences?  
[√ = have on campus; √ = required; estimate the % of various student populations in these activities]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learning Community</th>
<th>First Year Seminars</th>
<th>Service Learning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Our Campus</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Required for all</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Students involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>% First Generation</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Transfer Students</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Latino Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Asian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>% other</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% Adult Students</td>
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Ponder This

“If all you ever do is all you’ve ever done, then all you’ll ever get is all you ever got”

Texan quoted in T. Friedman, *Hot, Flat and Crowded* (2008, p. 6)
Five Step Agenda

1. Make the classroom the locus of community building
2. Use engaging pedagogies campuswide
Engaging Pedagogies and Practices

1. Classroom organization
2. Early and continuing assignments requiring reflection and integration coupled with feedback
3. Use of peer preceptors/mentors
4. One minute papers (variations)
5. Case studies
6. Debates
7. Simulations
8. Small group problem sets
9. Others…
3. Put money where it will make a difference to student success

“...in professional baseball it still matters less how much you have than how well you spend it”
3. Put money where it will make a difference to student success

a. *It’s not how much you spend but where* (DEEP study, Delta Cost Project)

b. Sunset redundant and ineffective programs

c. *Invest in “high-impact” and other activities that contribute to student success*

d. *If it works, maybe require it?*
Targets of Opportunity

- Require advising and orientation
- Use valid placement tests
- Reduce D/W/F rates
- Deploy early warning systems
- Organize residences around educational themes
- Communicate with at-risk student family members
4. Ensure programs are of high quality

What kind of evidence will signal effectiveness?
5. Cultivate a campus culture that fosters student success

- unshakeable focus on student learning ("teach the students we have, not the students we wish we had")
- “get the right people on the bus”
- high performance expectations for all
- human-scale settings
- improvement-oriented ethic
- inclusive language and traditions
To discover, document, and describe what high performing institutions do to achieve their notable level of effectiveness.
High performance is not guaranteed to last

It’s not complacency but over-reaching that better explains how the once invincible self-destruct.
Five years later, DEEP schools followed one of two approaches

a. Advancing the student success agenda
   – Pervasive
   – Targeted

b. Drifting off course
Keys to Sustaining the Student Success Agenda

a. Student success becomes an institutional priority when everyone—especially campus leaders—make it so.

b. Measure and act on what matters to student success

c. Stay positively restless
Questions & Discussion
Don't EVER give up!
Remember

No Matter How Hard You Work
No Matter How Right You Are

Sometimes the Dragon Wins