STUDENT *SUCCESS*, **COLLEGE** *QUALITY*, & *THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE*:
What Really Matters

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DEFINING STUDENT "SUCCESS" & COLLEGE "QUALITY": QUESTIONABLE ASSUMPTIONS, POPULAR MYTHS, & EMPIRICAL REALITIES

1. Student success and college quality are inextricably interrelated: Success in college depends on both _student_ effort and _institutional_ effort that involves a reciprocal relationship between what the college _does for_ its students and what students do _for themselves_.

2. College quality or university excellence is often defined in terms of the type of students that the institution lets in or keeps out _(student selectivity)_, but _should_ be defined in terms of:
   (a) what the college actually does _with/for_ the students it enrolls (effective educational _processes/practices_), and
   (b) the type of students it turns out (_positive student outcomes_).

TERMINAL OUTCOME MEASURES (INDICATORS) of Student Success & College Quality

1. Student _Retention_ (_Persistence_): Do entering students _remain, re-enroll,_ and _continue_ to make progress toward degree completion?

2. Educational _Attainment_: Do students _persist to completion_ of their degree, program, or educational goal?

3. _Academic Achievement_: How much student _learning_ and _cognitive development_ takes place during the college experience?

4. _Personal_ Development: How much _holistic_ (affective and psychosocial) development takes place among students during their college experience (e.g., leadership, character, civic responsibility, social and emotional intelligence, diversity tolerance/appreciation, etc.)

5. Student _Advancement_: Do students _proceed_ to and _succeed_ at _subsequent_

educational or vocational endeavors for which their program or degree was designed to prepare them?

<u>Process</u> Outcomes:
Research-Based Processes/Principles that Mediate Positive Terminal Outcomes by Promoting *Transformative Learning—*
Deep, *Durable*, *Transferable* Learning

1. Meaningfulness (Personal Meaning): deep and long-lasting learning is more probable when students find *meaning or purpose* in their learning experience—i.e., when they perceive *relevant connections* between what they are learning and their current life or future goals (Ausubel, 1978; Fink, 2002; Mezirow, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wlodkowski, 1998).

2. Self-Efficacy: students are more likely to be successful when they believe that their personal *effort* matters—i.e., if they think they can exert significant influence or control over their personal success (Bandura, 1997; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Elias, & Loomis (2002); Multon, Brown, & Lent, (1991); Solberg, et al., 1993).

3. Active Involvement: depth of learning is proportional to the level of student *engagement* in the learning process, i.e., the amount of *time* and *energy* that students invest in the learning experience—both *inside* and *outside* the classroom (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Kuh, et al., 2005; McKeachie et al., 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

4. Social Integration: learning and persistence are enhanced through *human interaction, collaboration,* and the formation of *interpersonal relationships* between students and other members of the college community (peers, faculty, and support staff) (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Slavin, 1996).

5. Personal Reflection: learning is deepened when students reflect on what they are learning and *elaborate* on it—i.e., *transform* it into a form that relates it to what they already know or have previously experienced (Bruner, 1990; Ewell, 1997; Flavell, 1985; Svinicki, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978).

6. Self-Awareness: learning is strengthened when students gain greater awareness of their own learning styles, learning habits, and thinking patterns, i.e., when students engage in:
(a) *meta-cognition*—think about how they are thinking;
(b) *self-monitoring*—periodically check to assess whether are learning and learning deeply (vs. superficially); and
(c) *self-regulation*—regulate or accommodate their learning strategies to meet the distinctive demands of the subject matter they are attempting to learn (Langer, 1989, 1997; Pintrich, 1995; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991; Weinstein & Underwood, 1985).

7. Personal Validation: college success is more likely to be experienced when students feel personally *significant*—i.e., when they are recognized as *individuals* and believe that they *matter* to the institution (Rendón, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

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Successful Student-Support Programming:
12 Potent *Properties/Principles* of Effective Program *Delivery*

1. INTENTIONAL (PURPOSEFUL): Effective programs are *designed* intentionally the idea of implementing them with *research-based principles* of effective student learning and development, for example:
* self-efficacy
* personal meaning
* active involvement
* social integration
* personal reflection
* self-awareness.
* personal validation.

2. MISSION-DRIVEN: Effective programs connect with the *college mission* and are driven by a well-articulated statement *program mission.*

3. STUDENT-CENTERED: Effective programs are *grounded in* and center on the *needs and welfare of students*--rather than driven by institutional habit and convenience, or the needs and preferences of faculty, staff, or administrators).

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, which increases 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—*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* that helps students meet the educational challenges that emerge at different *stages* of their college experience, and they do so in a way that promotes students' sense of self-efficacy by balancing *challenge* with *support*.

9. COLLABORATIVE: Effective programs encourage cooperative *alliances or partnerships* among different organizational units of the college, allowing them to work in a *complementary, interdependent* fashion, and in so doing, 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 college experience, as well as their potential for producing a reformative and transformative effect on the college 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 overall impact or value, and *formatively* to "shape up" and continually *improve* program quality.

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