Creating Clear Pathways for Student Success: Insights from DEEP

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Students in Transition Conference, November 2005

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Inquiring Minds Want to Know:
- What do strong-performing colleges and universities do to promote student success?
- What campus features -- policies, programs, and practices -- are related to higher-than-predicted graduation rates and student engagement?

Project DEEP
To discover, document and describe what high performing institutions do and how they achieved this level of effectiveness

DEEP partners: Lumina Foundation for Education; Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College; AAHE; and NSSE

DEEP Research Questions:
- What do high-performing colleges and universities do to promote student success?
- What campus features -- policies, programs, and practices -- contribute to high levels of engagement and better than predicted graduation rates?

DEEP Selection Criteria
Controlling for student and institutional characteristics (i.e., selectivity, diversity, institutional type), DEEP schools have:
- Higher-than-predicted graduation rates
- Higher-than-predicted levels of student engagement

Region and institutional type, special mission

What Really Matters in College: Student Engagement
Because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of 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
The Student Engagement Trinity

- 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

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

Research Approach

- Case study method
  - Team of 24 researchers review institutional documents and conduct multiple-day site visits, 2 visits to each school
  - Observe individuals, classes, events, offices, public space
  - Individual and group meetings
    - 2,700+ people, 60 classes, 30 events,
  - Discover and describe effective practices and programs, campus culture
  - Interim report, debriefings, final report

DEEP Institutions*

Doctoral Extensives
- University of Kansas
- University of Michigan

Doctoral Intensives
- George Mason University
- Miami University (Ohio)
- University of Texas at El Paso

Master’s Granting
- Fayetteville State University
- Gonzaga University
- Longwood University

Liberal Arts
- California State, Monterey Bay
- Macalester College
- Sweet Briar College
- The Evergreen State College
- Sewanee: University of the South
- Ursinus College
- Wabash College
- Wheaton College (MA)
- Wofford College

Baccalaureate General
- Alverno College
- University of Maine at Farmington
- Winston-Salem State University

* Higher-than-predicted graduation rates and levels of student engagement

Findings from Project DEEP

- Many roads to becoming an educationally engaging institution
- No blueprint for success
- Institutions created own way, experimenting with home-grown ideas and adapting promising practices discovered at other institutions
- Complementary, interactive and synergistic conditions promote student learning
- Sustained at many levels, no “unsupported mandates”

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

### To ponder...

DEEP schools, and many other institutions have programs geared for student success including first-year seminars, learning communities etc.

Think about programs at your school:

- How well do our programs work?
- How many students does our program reach in meaningful ways and how do we know?
- To what degree are our programs and practices complementary and synergistic, thereby having an overall greater impact than the sum of each individual initiative?
- What are we doing that is not represented among the policies and practices described later and do we have evidence to justify continuing to do it?
- What are we not doing that perhaps we should?

### 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.”

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

**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.

**Miami (Ohio)** created the First Year Experience (FYE) Committee to explore ways to enhance the holistic FYE. Means to achieve their goals include (1) Miami Plan Foundation courses taught by full-time faculty; (2) optional first-year seminars; (3) community living options that emphasize leadership and service; and (4) cultural, intellectual, and arts events.

### Intentional acculturation

At Miami (Ohio), the program is designed to help students transition to college life. This includes:  

1. **First Year Experience (FYE)**
   - Foundation courses taught by full-time faculty.
   - Optional first-year seminars.
   - Community living options that emphasize leadership and service.
   - Cultural, intellectual, and arts events.

2. **Freshman Ambassadors**
   - Invited incoming students to volunteer as “Freshman Ambassadors.”

3. **Anticipatory socialization**
   - Personal messages in letters of admission.
   - Postcards inviting students to volunteer.

4. **Leadership Program**
   - Brings 80 first-year students to campus prior to the fall semester.

**Conclusion**

Anticipatory socialization and intentional acculturation are key components in helping students transition successfully to college. These strategies are implemented with a focus on involving students early, providing support, and setting them up for success.
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.

Co-curriculum reinforces academic engagement
Undergraduate residence hall assistants at Longwood University are selected in part based on their understanding of the University’s educational mission & are trained to help advise students. Student affairs staff are key contributors to summer orientation and to the first-year Longwood seminar.

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.

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.

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: “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.
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.

Focus Attention on Student Success

Community celebrations of scholarship

UMF hosts “Spring Symposium” a day when no classes are held and all students, faculty, and administrators are given the opportunity to present research, artistic, intellectual, & other creative projects, and learn from others.

Michigan and Wabash conduct spring research presentations where first-year share their work with the campus.

Required Enriching Experiences for Upper Division Students

All Ursinus students complete an Independent Learning Experience (ILE), such as an independent research or creative project, internship, study abroad, student teaching, or summer fellow program or comparable summer research program.

Tailored Support Services

- Career Services at George Mason University reaches out to transfers to inform them of internship opportunities, career advising
- Retention committee at GMU examines transfer data carefully to ensure provision of service

Culminating Senior Experiences

- Culminating experiences that encourage application, integration and reflection
  - CSUMB Capstone Project focuses students attention on “what are you going to DO given all that you’ve learned?”
  - Wabash and Sewanee comprehensive exams part of student culture – “comping” is a long anticipated rite of passage

Insights from Project DEEP for Students in Transition

- Intentional socialization to academic values of institution
- High expectations balanced by support
- Shared responsibility for educational quality
- Focus on transitions
- Purposeful infusion of diversity
- Focus on improvement-oriented assessment
Using NSSE Data to Improve

Intentional improvement at DEEP schools:

- Sewanee created an innovative new First Year Program with an emphasis on active and collaborative learning to improve its scores on that benchmark.
- University of Texas at El Paso uses learning communities, course-based service learning, and volunteerism to actively engage its mostly commuter, first-generation students.

Reflecting on Your Campus:

- 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???

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

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?

Taking Stock of What Matters to Student Success

- Assessing Conditions to Enhance Educational Effectiveness: The Inventory for Student Engagement & Success (ISES) (Jossey Bass, October 2005)
  - BCSSE – NSSE administration
    Measure entering students’ high school academic & extra-curricular involvement, and importance students place on their future participation in educationally purposeful activities in college; combine BCSSE 2005 data with spring NSSE 2006 data to explore value added of first year experience.

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?
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

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.

4. Clear Pathways to Student Success

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?
“It’s All About the Culture”

Institutional Cultures
- What is distinctive about this institution: To students? To staff?
- How do these distinctive aspects of the institution affect the campus climate? Student success?
- In what ways do the institutional culture and dominant subcultures promote, or inhibit, student learning and success?

“It’s All About the Culture”

Student Cultures
- How do students describe what they learn, how they learn, and from whom? In what ways are students’ experiences consistent and inconsistent with those desired and/or claimed by the institution?
- How do the student culture and/or dominant student subcultures promote or inhibit student learning and success?
- What opportunities exist to celebrate students and their learning? Institutional values? Campus community?

How might you use ISES?
- Campus self-study: Assemble a team to assess the conditions for student success institution-wide.
- Focused study: Identify a NSSE cluster or DEEP condition in which your campus is under-performing and conduct a focused ISES probe around this topic.
- Unit or function study: Tailor study around a topic such as admissions and student recruitment, curriculum review, student affairs, campus planning and faculty development.

Discussion and Comments

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