Thriving in Transitions: Beyond Survival Tactics

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Transitions

Significant event

Requires change

Inevitably creates a stress reaction

Share with your neighbor:

**What was your most recent transition and how did it feel?**
Successful Transitions: Positive opportunity for growth
Successful Transitions

• Positive perception
• Healthy coping skills – approach rather than avoid
• Social support
• Information and resources
• Personally significant growth as a result
Specific Transitions in College

The first year:

Do I know what it takes to succeed here?

Do I have what it takes?

Do I belong here?
High-Risk Students

Why am I being labeled?

Why do I have to take all these remedial courses?

Do I have what it takes to succeed here?

What difference does effort make?
Sophomores

What happened to all the attention from last year?

What happened to my friends?

Why am I always last in line now?

What am I doing with my life?
Transfer Students

What does it take to succeed here?

Why have my grades taken a nosedive?

How do I get involved here?
Students of Color

Where are all the other people like me?

Why don’t you see me?

Why do you think I can speak for my entire ethnic group?

What if I fulfill everyone’s negative stereotype?

Do I belong here?
Seniors

Is there life after college?

Is there a job for me?

Will I ever find friends like this again?

How do I succeed in life?
Where is our focus?
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE FOCUS ON SURVIVAL?

Failure prevention rather than success promotion

A focus on the demands and challenges, rather than the opportunities for growth

Minimal performance needed, rather than excellence
A Shift in Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>TO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surviving</td>
<td>Thriving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who you are and where you’ve been</td>
<td>Who you can become</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target the weakness and fix it</td>
<td>and where you’re going</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure prevention</td>
<td>Target the talent and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>build on it</td>
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<td>Success promotion</td>
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Psychosocial factors
Motivation

Behavior

• Engagement

Learning
Graduation

Student Success

Attitudes
A New Vision for Student Success

Recently published by the National Resource Center for First-Year Students and Students in Transition

THRIVING in TRANSITIONS
A Research-Based Approach to College Student Success
Why “Thriving”? 

- Implies more than mere survival
- Psychological well-being + academic success
- Active word – vitally engaged, optimally functioning – an ongoing process
- Incorporates more than academic success and persistence to graduation – includes citizenship, relationships, and openness to diversity
Criteria for Including a Construct

- Measurable
- Empirically connected to student success
- Malleable (state vs. trait)
- Interventions make a difference
The Thriving Quotient

- TQ was constructed from theoretical concepts that had a demonstrated empirical connection to student success.
- 26-item instrument with responses ranging on a 6-point Likert-type scale of 1 = strongly agree to 6 = strongly disagree.
- Coefficient alpha = .91.
- Confirmatory factor analysis indicated excellent fit.
The Thriving Quotient

Engaged Learning

Academic Determination

Positive Perspective

Diverse Citizenship

Social Connectedness
### Five Factors of Thriving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ACADEMICALLY:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Engaged Learning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meaningful processing, focused attention, active participation in the learning process</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Academic Determination</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Self-regulated learning, effort, coping skills, goal-directedness (hope), applies strengths to academic challenges</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SOCIA ally:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Diverse Citizenship</strong></td>
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<td>• Making a contribution, appreciation of differences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Social Connectedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Positive relationships and access to friendships</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>EMOTIONALLY:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Positive Perspective</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Optimism and subjective well-being</td>
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Implications for Practice

**Individual student level:**

Interventions targeted to specific aspects of thriving

**Institutional level:**

Who is thriving?
In what aspects?
Targeting programs and services
Thriving in Transitions

- Positive Appraisal – “I can handle this”
- Providing Support – “I’m not in this alone”
- Using Effective Strategies – “I know what to do”
Positive Appraisal

Upcoming transition framed as a positive opportunity

Communicate what will happen and how they will benefit

Examples:

• End-of-year advising
• Summer letter to sophomores
• Sophomore Breakfast
Enhancing a Positive Perspective

Describe the challenges

Focus on the coping skills needed

Emphasize applying strengths to the challenge

Encourage a growth mindset
Mindset Matters

Fixed Mindset

Academic ability is something very basic about a person that can’t be changed very much.

Growth Mindset

You can always improve your academic ability.
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<th><strong>Fixed Mindset</strong></th>
<th><strong>Growth Mindset</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Effort</strong></td>
<td>Avoid it—if you have to try, you’re not smart</td>
<td>Plan on it—it’s how you learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Only if I’m good at it</td>
<td>Love the challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributions for failure</td>
<td>“I’m not good at that subject”</td>
<td>“I didn’t invest the right effort”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for success</td>
<td>Defensive, avoid failure at all costs</td>
<td>Mastery-oriented and positive</td>
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Strategies for Encouraging a Growth Mindset

• Teach students about the brain and how it changes with practice – whatever you focus attention on repeatedly changes your brain!

• Share stories and examples of famous accomplished people who invest a lot of effort

• Emphasize the importance of practice and effort as key to the learning process (grit)
The Best of the Best …

• Champion chess players
• World-class cellist Pablo Casals
• MVP basketball players

What do they have in common?
They Practice – A Lot!

- Casals was one of the greatest cellists of all time
- In his eighties he still practiced for hours every day

When asked why he still practiced so much when he was already the best in the world, his reply was: “In order to play better!”
The First Day of Class

How faculty frame the course, their role, and strategies for success (with an emphasis on effort) can make a significant difference in student success.
Students who know how to apply their strengths to academic tasks and challenges are significantly more likely to thrive than those who are unaware of their strengths or do not know how to apply them to academic challenges.
“Individuals gain more when they build on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness.”

Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 112
Strength = 

\[(\text{Talent} + \text{Energy}) \times (\text{Knowledge} + \text{Skill})\]
Investment is a MULTIPLIER of talent!

Investment includes time spent practicing, developing skills, & building knowledge

Louis, 2008
It’s all about strengths development!
• We don’t abandon all the other practices we know work—we simply provide a motivational foundation for adding the necessary skills and knowledge

• *The student becomes a partner in the learning process!*
Thriving in Transitions: Provide Support

Effective support:

• Meets emotional needs
  • Provides assurance
  • Generates positive emotions

• Provides “just-in-time” information

• Connects students to campus resources

• Gives prompt feedback
Examples

Peer leaders, advisors, mentors who have navigated the transition successfully

Cohorts or blocked schedules

“Alpha Groups” at APU

Living-Learning Communities

Service learning
Diverse Citizenship: The Influence of Co-Curricular Learning

- Study abroad
- Service learning
- Living-learning communities

**IF**

- Sustained contact
- Adequate support and safe environment for conflict resolution
- Common goal that requires collaboration
Sense of community is the single largest contributor to thriving for all student groups.

When the community is thriving, the individuals in it tend to be, as well.
# Thriving in Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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<tr>
<td>Symbols, signs, rituals</td>
<td>Opportunities for positive interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not just “welcome” but a full member of the</td>
<td>Subgroups, friendships</td>
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<tr>
<td>community → sense of belonging and validation</td>
<td>Shared emotional connection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partnership</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student voice</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Shared goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mattering to the institution</td>
<td>Student-Faculty Research</td>
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Thriving in Transitions: Utilize Effective Strategies

- The best strategies involve both academic and psychosocial approaches (Robbins et al., 2006)
- What would it look like to apply our best strategies to
  - The First-Year Experience
  - Introductory survey courses
  - The sophomore year
  - Advising
  - Faculty development
Engaged Learning

A positive energy invested in one’s own learning, evidenced by meaningful processing, focused attention on what is happening in the moment, and active participation in learning activities.

Schreiner & Louis, 2011, p. 6
Engaged Learning

• Active participation (involvement)
• Focused attention (mindfulness)
• Meaningful Processing (deep learning)
Closing the Gap

Six-Year Graduation Rates

- Latino
- African American
- Caucasian
- Asian

Source: NCES 2010
Different Pathways to Thriving Among Students of Color

Sense of community is important for all, but what enhances a sense of community differs by ethnicity.

Spirituality is a much more significant contributor to thriving in students of color than for white students.

Faculty involvement contributes to thriving, but to a different degree across ethnicity.

Campus involvement does not always lead to thriving among students of color.
Where do we go from here?

- Recognize student success as more than grades and grads
- Measure thriving during transitions and direct students to specific resources and pathways that match their needs, interests, and strengths
- Encourage partnerships of faculty and student affairs professionals – it takes a village!
- Focus on building a sense of community across campus that values the strengths each member brings – it’s the foundation for thriving
My Vision

That every student who enters college …

• Learns how to develop their strengths and apply them to the challenges of college
Every Student

Engages in the learning process with faculty who encourage deep learning and connect with them in and out of class
Every Student

Experiences a network of caring people committed to their thriving – their academic, social, and emotional well-being
Every Student

Connects with advisors who help them see their potential and envision their future success
Every Student

Becomes part of a community that values them, supports them, and brings out their best
Not only will our students thrive, but so will we!

GET CAUGHT THRIVING
Join us in the Thriving Project!

www.ThrivingInCollege.org