Beyond Grades and Graduation: Thriving as a Retention Strategy

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How does your college or university define student success?
Definitions of Student Success

Graduation

Academic Performance (GPA)

Learning Gains
- Critical thinking
- Analytical reasoning
- Writing skills

Engagement in “educationally purposeful activities”

The Achievement Gap

Six-Year Graduation Rates

- Latino
- African American
- Caucasian
- Asian

Source: NCES 2015
The disparity in college-completion rates between rich and poor students has grown by about 50 percent since the 1980s.

An Increase in Diverse Learners

80% of the growth in new student enrollments in the next decade will come from low-income students and students of color.

Carnevale & Fry, 2010

We need some new strategies for success!
Thriving -- More than just surviving!

- Psychosocial
- Motivation
- Attitudes
- Engagement
- Learning
- Graduation
- Student Success
A Shift in Perspective

FROM:
Surviving
What is not very changeable about people
Who you are and where you've been
Target the weakness and fix it
Failure prevention

TO:
Thriving
What can be changed
Who you can become and where you're going
Target the talent and build on it
Success promotion

Thriving: Fully engaged, energized, and making the most of the college experience
The Thriving Quotient (TQ)

Based on existing malleable constructs predictive of student persistence and GPA

24-item instrument

Coefficient alpha = .89

Confirmatory factor analysis: five-factor model with a higher-order construct of thriving

Demographic Characteristics
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Household Income

Campus Experiences
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- High-Impact Practices

Success Outcomes
- Graduation
- GPA
- Learning Gains

Astin, 1991
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THRIVING
Engaged Learning

Meaningful Processing
- Connections
- Energy
- Relevance and application

Learning That Lasts!
Academic Determination

**WORK HARD**

**Motivated**

**SELF-REGULATED LEARNER**

Manage time well

Know how to apply strengths to academic tasks

Diverse Citizenship

- Value differences in others
- Want to make a difference
- Think I can make a difference
- Act to make a difference
Social Connectedness

Feeling supported by others, having close friends, not feeling lonely

Positive Perspective

Realistic Optimism – long-term confidence in the future
“Failure” is reframed as a temporary setback

Thriving is malleable!

We can intervene to make a difference in students’ thriving levels -- and in their ultimate success.
Pathways to Thriving

- Campus Involvement
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Spirituality
- Strengths Development
- Sense of Community

Different Pathways to Thriving

Ethnic minority students had fewer “pathways” to thriving than majority students—and those pathways differed across ethnic groups.
Pathway #1: Campus Involvement

- **INVITE** input, participation, and leadership of campus events and activities
- **CONNECT** campus involvement to future goals
- **ENCOURAGE** peer leadership and mentoring
- **PAY ATTENTION** to time and availability for commuters and working students

Pathway #2: High Quality Student-Faculty Interaction

- Conversations about careers; “painting a picture of the future”
- Engaging dialogue around academic issues
- Growth mindset
- Research partnerships
- Validation – “you deserve to be here”
Spirituality was a major pathway to thriving for students of color – twice as important as for dominant culture students

#1 Pathway for Black students

Pathway #3: Spirituality

- Advising that focuses on meaning and purpose
- Mentoring
- Faculty and staff willing to engage in dialogue
- Partnerships with faith-based organizations
- Sacred space on campus
- Weaving interfaith observances into diversity celebrations and training
Introduce yourself to your other neighbor—and describe what energizes you most about your work! (What part of your work would you do for free?)
Clues to “Strengths”

Activities that you do well and that energize you are clues to your strengths
Your most fulfilling experiences likely have occurred when you were “playing to your strengths”

• Seemed to flow naturally and effortlessly
• Productive
• “I was born to do this!”
• You want to do more of this
• You invest time and energy to do it

The Dominant Paradigm: Deficit Remediation

• There are certain skills required to be successful here
• At entrance, we need to measure students’ abilities in these key areas
• Students need to spend most of their time in their areas of weakness, in order to achieve
The Problem?

Spending most of your time in your area of weakness—while it will improve your skills, perhaps to a level of “average”—will NOT produce excellence

• This approach does NOT tap into student motivation or lead to student engagement
• The biggest challenge facing us as educators: how to engage students in the learning process

Becoming The Best Version of Yourself

Rather than sending the message that there is one path to success, a strengths-based approach encourages us to become the “best version of ourselves” in order to succeed in academics and in life.
Strengths Development

Individual Thriving

Strengths of Competence

Strengths of Character

Strength =

(Talent + Energy) x (Knowledge + Skill)
Start with Talent

... a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.

--Clifton & Harter, 2003

Ways of processing information

Ways of interacting with people

Ways of seeing the world

Habits, behaviors, or beliefs that lead to greater effectiveness

How does a talent become a strength?

Talent \times Investment = \text{Strength}

Investment is a MULTIPLIER of talent!

Louis, 2008
It’s all about strengths \textit{development}!

“Look for what each student brings to the learning environment and communicate appreciation, respect, and trust that students are capable of learning.”

Bain, K. (2004). \textit{What the Best College Teachers Do}
How would you describe a thriving campus?
Psychological sense of community is the strongest contributor to thriving for all students.

Sense of Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols, signs, rituals</td>
<td>Opportunities for positive interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not just “welcome” but a full member of the community → sense of belonging and validation</td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student voice</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Shared goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattering to the institution</td>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A key contributor to sense of community for all students – but especially underrepresented students!

-- faculty and staff “walk the talk”
-- expectations are met
-- campus is accurately portrayed during admissions
Strategies for Thriving as a Campus

• Create an environment that brings out the best
  • Identify strengths and assets at entrance
  • Strengths development as a philosophical approach in advising, residence life education, leadership programs, pedagogy, Human Resources

• Put learning at the center
  • Decision-making lens
  • Embodied mission: Faculty-student life partnerships

• Strengthen the sense of community on campus
Thriving Students Are Equipped to Flourish for a Lifetime

- Engaged in lifelong learning
- Meeting their goals
- Connected to others in healthy ways
- Optimistic about their future
- Contributing to their community and society

Join us for the 2016-17 Thriving Project!

www.ThrivingInCollege.org
References


