Examining What Works: Student Success at Weber State University

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Current Context in U.S. Higher Education

- Global Competitiveness in Degree Attainment
- Greater pressure to reduce persistence and graduation rate gaps
- Questionable evidence of student learning
- Challenging fiscal environment
- Increased employer demands and needs in 21st century economy

Increasing Completion Rates in the U.S

Lumina Foundation’s Big Goal: Increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by 2025.

What % of Utah working adults (25-64 years) hold at least a 2-year degree?

- a). 25%  
- b). 31%  
- c). 40%  
- d). 52%

http://www.luminafoundation.org/state_data/Policy_Brief-Oregon.pdf

c). 40% (higher than national avg. of 38%)

Current Concerns about Student Success in College

- College-going stakes higher today than at any point in history
- 45% students in 2yr-colleges depart during their first year, & 1 of 4 leave from 4-yr schools
- Enrollment & persistence rates of historically underserved students lagging
- 51% of high school grads have reading skills necessary for college; 25% of students in 4-yr colleges need 1 yr of remedial coursework

Weber State’s Student Success Concerns

- Higher persistence rates to the second year
- Increased graduation rates
- Shorter time to degree
- Enhanced quality of learning
- What else?

'Academically Adrift'

January 18, 2011, Inside Higher Education

“If the purpose of a college education is for students to learn, academe is failing, according to Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses.”

Academically Adrift: A Perfect Moment?

• If book is right: Under what circumstances do student learn? And what do we know about this? What are the conditions that promote learning and success?
• Concern about student learning outcomes demands that we examine educational practices.
• Draws renewed attention to the learning environment.
• What can we do to address the finding that students aren’t learning?

We know a lot about What Matters to Student Learning & Success

The challenge is using what we know. Aligning resources, removing impediments, to optimize success for all students.

Student Behaviors & Activities Associated with Student Persistence & Success

• Faculty-Student Contact (important for first-gen, racial-ethnically diverse students)
• Peer Interactions (meaningful connections, peer teaching, tutoring)
• Experiences with Diversity (transforming for students)
• Co-curricular Activities (really important for persistence)
• Student Satisfaction (influences sense of belonging)

What We Know About Student Learning and Success

Educators must be concerned with the learning environment – in and outside the classroom, socio-cultural aspects and physical settings – in which students interact with peers, the content, educators and others, and the implementation of strategies that help guide the student toward the intended outcomes.

Think About Weber State’s Learning Environment

...How Prominent are the Key Features of Educationally Effective Environments?

1. Learning-centered practice
2. Engaging, experiential learning
3. Enriched environments
4. Shared responsibility
5. Student agency
6. Learning outcomes & assessment
1. Learning-Centered Practice

- Promotion of seamless learning – student learning has the potential to result from virtually all student experiences
- Shared mission and learning goals between student & academic affairs
- *Learning Reconsidered* (2004) calls for greater integration of resources to educate and prepare the whole student and raise the quality of learning

2. Engaging, Experiential Learning

- Philosophy of learning with characteristic pedagogies/activities
- Demands students invest high levels of time & effort
- Blends in & outside classroom experiences
- Ample opportunities to apply learning to real-world contexts
- Emphasizes reflection and integration

3. Enriched Environments

- Physical environment used to maximum educational advantage – to encourage peer, faculty, staff interaction, showcase student learning & leadership...
- Connect to the local community in mutually beneficial, educationally purposeful ways
- Emphasize “high-impact” practices – service-learning, undergraduate research, first-year seminars – and ensure all students take part

4. Shared Responsibility

- Robust partnership between academic & student affairs
- Everyone is an educator

5. Student Agency

- Emphasis on student empowerment, initiative
- Policies and structures facilitate student ownership
6. Learning Outcomes & Assessment

• Learning outcomes - *What students accomplish by participating in your program* - are explicit
• Should be able to answer: “*What is the educative value of this program or policy?*”
• Assessment data used to improve quality and effectiveness

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Educationally Effective Learning Environments

1. To what extent are the features of effective learning environments present at Weber State? In your sphere of influence?
2. What does this emphasis demand your practice?

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Resources

• National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – results from first-year students & seniors at 1,400 institutions
• *Student Success in College* (2005, 2010) – documents what 20 high-performing institutions do to promote student success
• AAC&U and Kuh’s (2008) *High-Impact Educational Practices*

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What We Know About Student Success:

• Student engagement in intentionally designed educationally purposeful activities is necessary to achieve desirable learning outcomes.
• Institutions must deploy resources appropriately and provide students explicit messages about success-oriented behaviors.
• Institutions need information about how well they’re doing & to use this information.

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What is Student Engagement?

**Student engagement is the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities – practices shown to be related to desired educational outcomes**

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OK, but what *is* Engagement?

• Challenging academic work
  – High expectations
  – Deep approaches to learning
• Quality involvement with faculty
• Enriching activities and high-impact practices
  – Active and collaborative learning
  – Powerful educational experiences
• Supportive peers, faculty, staff, campus
Engagement Matters

Engagement benefits all students (GPA, persistence, learning, success)

Engagement is positively related to grades, retention for all students, but some students – those entering with low ACT scores and historically underrepresented students – appear to benefit more than others from the same educational programs or practices.

Engaged learning is a gateway to the desired outcomes of college.
Students who engage more frequently in educationally purposeful activities both in & outside the classroom get better grades, are more satisfied, and are more likely to persist and graduate.

Engaged Learning
- Demands students invest high levels of time and effort
- Ample opportunities to apply learning to real-world contexts
- Emphasizes reflection and integration

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

Findings from NSSE and AAC&U: Some Educational Activities are Unusually Effective

Growing evidence that “high-impact practices” provide substantial educational benefits to students

**HiPs Resources**

- **Five High-Impact Practices**
  (Brownell & Swaner, 2010) monograph examines body of research on five high-impact practices: first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research & capstones.
  - Outcomes;
  - Outcomes for traditionally underserved populations;
  - Conditions under which positive outcomes are more likely to be found;
  - Strengths and weaknesses of outcomes literature.

www.aacu.org

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**High-Impact Pedagogical Practices in the First Year**

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class on assignments
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project as part of course
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with faculty outside class
- Received prompt feedback on your work or participation
- Worked with faculty on activities outside coursework (committees, student life, etc.)
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with others
- Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity and those who differ from you - religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values

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**Why is Prompt Feedback important to student learning and success?**

- Most useful feedback is timely, apt - provides opportunity for students to use information to improve their performance
- First-year (FY) students need immediate feedback to understand what is expected
- FY need feedback in **first 3 weeks** to modify their behaviors accordingly
- Pre-university study habits, and those developed in first couple months amazingly persistent

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**Student Persistence and Quality Relationships**

**Frequency & quality of contact** with faculty, staff, and other students is an important independent predictor of student persistence.

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**“Get in Students’ Way”**

Students report that some of their most meaningful college experiences involve those teachers and administrators who actively "get in their way" by offering advice, opportunities, and challenges.

- Richard Light, Making the Most of College
High Impact Pedagogical Practices
• Students who engage in these practices at high levels are more likely to persist and do well.

–To what extent have Weber State first-year students had these experiences?

Check-in: High Impact Activities
★ How many of these activities exist for your students?
★ Do most students take advantage of these practices?

High Impact Activities
★ First-Year Seminars and Experiences
★ Common Intellectual Experiences
★ Learning Communities
★ Writing-Intensive Courses
★ Collaborative Assignments and Projects
★ Undergraduate Research
★ Diversity/Global Learning
★ Service Learning,
Community-Based Learning
★ Internships
★ Capstone Courses/

Lessons from NSSE about Structural HIPS
• Learning Communities – programs that integrate material across courses associated with higher student engagement & learning
• Study Abroad - length of time did not make a difference; first-gen students less likely to go
• Undergraduate Research - associated with higher levels of student-faculty interaction and support
• Service-Learning - community-based project as part of a regular course

Do All Students Experience High-Impact Practices?
• Nope. High Impact Practices Only Reach A Fraction of Students

OVERALL NSSE Participation Levels:
First Year Students:
• Learning Communities 17%
• Service Learning 36%
Seniors:
• Research With Faculty 19%
• Internship 53%
• Study Abroad 18%

First-generation, racial-ethnic, major differences too

NSSE results, see "Annual Results"

What to Do?
Make it possible for every student to participate in at least two high impact activities

➢ One in First Year
• FY seminars
• Learning communities
• Service learning

➢ One Later in Major
• Study abroad
• Student-faculty research
• Field placement or internship
• Capstone project
Educationally Effective Institutions and High Impact Practices

- Weave experiences into courses, and require
- Introduce HIPs to students early – pre-school and orientation - and reinforce in advising
- Craft short term study abroad, “mini-HIPs”
- Emphasize HIPs relevant to the educational environment – i.e., Urban institutions emphasize internships
- Encourage pilots & support faculty development
- Bridge curriculum and co-curriculum

Effective Practices For Weber State’s Consideration

- Focus on the first year experience
- Structure sophomore experience
- Make work a high impact practice
- Knit-in high impact practices
- Expand opportunities for students to work on class projects, assignments outside of class
- Reinforce curricular connections

First Year Focus - University of Akron

- Participated in Foundations of Excellence self-study with goal to create a more vibrant first year experience
- Used data to identify what worked and what needed improving in the first year.
- Structured process to study and implement reforms: FYE Task Force and Student Success & Retention Committee (faculty-administrative committee)

Saint Joseph College (CT)

Improve FY academic & co-curricular experiences

- In 2004, revamped First Year Seminar part of Gen Ed; peer mentors co-teach with faculty
- Peer faculty & mentors specially selected and trained to teach in program
- Resulted in greater communication between faculty, peer mentors and student affairs... “referrals aimed at addressing student issues happen more quickly.”

Sophomore Structured Experience

Pace University (NY)

- Sophomore Year Experience – enhanced Sophomore Advising; Career Exploration Course; Sophomore Kick-Off Day; Lambda Sigma Honor Society
- Advising improvements - Additional advisors; new first year advising model
- Developed “One-stop” initiative for student services

University of Iowa Student Employment Pilot Project

- Student Health Service, Housing, Iowa Memorial Union
- Supervisors received 1 hour of training on:
  - Outcomes of student employment
  - Results from the previous year’s Division of Student Services Student Employment Survey
  - Background on the role supervisors can play in helping students make connections between work and academics
- Expectations for Pilot Project
University of Iowa Student Employment Pilot Project

- Supervisors had 2 structured conversations with every student employee during spring term and coded conversations into the following categories:
  - How the job and academics complement each other (“How is your job fitting in with your academics?”)
  - Transfer between work and academics (“What are you learning here at work that is helping you in school?”)
  - Transfer between work and future career (“Give me a couple of examples of things that you are learning here at work that you will be using in your future profession?”)

Wright State University Support Student Success

- Committee to “eliminate unintentional barriers to student success”
  - Releasing class schedules earlier so students could meet with advisors before registering, coordination between student service offices to prevent student run-around, etc.
- Major initiatives: Establish Student Transfer Center; major renovations to a remote parking/shuttle area
- Students informed of changes through: “You Asked, We Listened” poster campaign
- Initiated Pathways program to connect first year African American students and their parents to Wright State Community

Inventory and Promote HIPs University of Wisconsin Madison

- In the first year:
  - FIGS (First-Year Interest Groups)
  - RLCs (Residential Learning Communities)
  - URS (Undergraduate Research Scholars)
- Available Throughout College:
  - Study Abroad
  - Service Learning/Community-based Research
  - Undergrad Research
  - Student Leadership (in class, such as Peer Mentoring, and out of class, through student organizations)
- Some aspects of Gen Ed requirements: (Comm A & B, QR-A & B; options for Ethnic Studies Requirement; Honors courses)
- In the final year(s):
  - Capstones
  - Internships
  - Senior Thesis

University of Louisville

Expand effective educational practices to enhance student engagement and success

- Goal: Retain more students; Address their unique needs with intentional programming at each stage of their educational career
- Identified existing “high-impact practices” & assessed their efficacy for revision and/or possible expansion
- Created Office of Civic Engagement, Leadership and Service - the hub for leadership development, service-learning, and civic engagement activities

Promote HIPs University of Wisconsin Madison

- Intentional promotion of HIPs in Summer Orientation, Advising and Registration (SOAR)
- Ensured that Advisors asked students about their interest and intentions about HIPs
- Saw increase in number of students making inquiries into study abroad, undergraduate research

Structured, Early Exposure to HIPs

Eastern Oregon: Ensure FYs (60% first-gen) exposed to HIPs early.
- 2 quarter, linked FY seminars;
- Undergrad Research in HUM 101
Structured HIPs: University College at IUPUI

- RISE to the IUPUI Challenge
- Personal Development Plans
- First Year Seminars
- Themed Learning Communities

RISE to the IUPUI Challenge

- Research
- International Study Abroad
- Service Learning
- Experiential Learning

The challenge: Every student earning a bachelor’s degree will complete at least two of the four types of educational experiences which qualify for appearing on the student’s transcript.

Themed Learning Communities and Service Learning

- 3 or more linked courses including an integrative first-year seminar connected through an interdisciplinary theme.
  - 33% Include Service Learning
  - 24% Include One Time Service Projects
    - 2 Engineering TLCs
    - 2 Liberal Arts TLCs
    - 2 Psychology TLCs
    - 2 University College TLCs
    - 1 Liberal Arts TLC

Environments Adapted for Educational Enrichment

- Maximize opportunities for “place conscious pedagogy”
- Connected to the local community in mutually beneficial, educationally purposeful ways
- Buildings, classrooms, and other physical structures are adapted to “human scale.”
- Psychological size fosters engagement with peers, faculty and staff.

Educationally Effective Institutions Consider the Environment

- Space—whether physical or virtual—has an impact on learning. It can bring people together; encourage exploration, collaboration, and discussion. Or, space can carry an unspoken message of silence and disconnectedness.
- Institutions ask: What does our space facilitate? Inhibit? How can we use environment to maximize learning?

Reconceptualize learning spaces to facilitate active, social, and experiential learning

University of Kansas invested in technology (video cameras, clickers) and staff (undergrad TAs to run cameras) and enhanced pedagogy (group learning, “interactive lecturing”) in large lecture-hall courses.
**Socially Catalytic Space**

Arrange physical space to increase accessibility to faculty and promote student-faculty interaction

- Wofford College surrounded language lab with faculty offices and placed comfortable couches & chairs to increase the time students spend close to faculty.

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**Connect students in multiple ways to resources for learning**

- Connect students to academic support resources by requiring use of writing center, peer tutors, study groups, supplemental instruction in high D,F, W courses
- KU has a “mobile” writing center with locations in high traffic areas on campus

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**Co-Curricular Involvement**

- Value of co-curricular involvement:
  - Positively associated with retention and graduation
  - Instills sense of connection to campus during college and beyond
  - Powerful site for learning, particularly getting to know student different from self, working effectively with others
  - Opportunities to develop leadership skills
- **Beneficial involvement: 1-5 hours per week**
- How might this be increased at Weber State?

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**Six Shared Conditions of Educationally Effective Institutions**

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
Keys to Sustaining the Student Success Agenda

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

b. Data-informed Action. Measure and act on what matters to student success

c. Stay “positively restless” – pay attention to data and align resources

Be Intentional about Exposing Students to Educationally Effective Practice

To ponder: Transformational learning & student success

1. What one thing can you do differently in your work around student success?.

2. Describe two best practices that can be adapted to your work with students.

3. Identify at least one student success initiative on which you would like to work with another area

Discussion and Comments

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