**Collaborative Dialogue: Conditions that Foster Student Success at WSU**

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**A Challenge in Higher Education Today**

“Helping our extraordinarily diverse students reap the full benefits – economic, civic and personal – of their studies in college”  
-- Carol Geary Schneider, President AAC&U

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**Attention from Washington...**  
U.S. Under Secretary of Education Martha Kanter

“Today’s students need directive [intentional] support.”

“The key to college’s effectiveness is not whether it adopts particular practices, but how well it aligns and manages all of its programs and services to support student success.”  
NASPA Leadership Exchange, Spring 2010

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**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?

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**Weber State Student Success Fast Facts**

- What is WSU 1 year (FY-SP) retention rate?  
  73%  
- What is WSU 6 year graduation rate?  
  45%  
- Current WSU Retention and Persistence Initiatives:  
  – Technology enhanced redesign of Mathematics  
  – Managing new student experience Admissions through First Semester  
  – Student Stop-Outs... Prevention and facilitating their return  
  – On-campus student employment  
  – Dream Weber assessment  
  – NADE certification  
  – Facilitate student engagement

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**Considering Student Success at WSU...**

1. What are the most important elements for student success at WSU?  
2. What does your unit do well around student success?
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.

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.

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

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.

Student Engagement Trifecta

- 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

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): Key Aims

- Enrich the discourse about college quality
  - Shift the focus to teaching & learning
  - Proven effective educational practices
- Provide diagnostic information to support the improvement of undergraduate education
  - Actionable information based on valid & reliable measures
  - Meaningful comparisons
NSSE’s Big Idea

• Ask students about their experience
• Focus on behavior: empirically confirmed effective practices

NSSE at WSU

• Weber State University
• Response Rate about 23-25%; consistent results every administration
• Comparison Schools:

Pedagogical Practices That Matter 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 academic performance
• Worked harder than you thought
• 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

What do WSU students do?

1. True or False. First-year students at WSU frequently (“very often” + “often”) ask questions or contributed to class discussions more than at comparison schools?

   TRUE. 68% WSU FY
   (HIGHER than comparison schools = 56%)
   WSU Seniors = 81% vs. Comparison SRs = 65%
What do WSU students do?
2. True or False. First-year students at WSU frequently (“very often” + “often”) worked peers outside of class to prepare assignments more than at comparison schools?
FALSE. Only about a quarter of WSU FYs (comparison schools about 40%)
WSU Seniors = 48% vs. Comparison SRs = 58%

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

What do WSU students do?
3. True or False. WSU seniors report they frequently (“often or very often”) received prompt feedback on their academic performance more than WSU first year students, and also more than comparison schools.
TRUE.
SENORS = 70% HIGHER than First Year students (51%)
And Comparisons at 58%

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

What do WSU students do?
4. True or False. The proportion of first-year students at WSU who study, on average, 15 hours+ per week is less than at comparison schools.
TRUE. About a third WSU FY
Compared to about 40% at comparison schools
Seniors are about the same, again less than comparison schools

Worrisome Gap?
Time spent studying
(FSSE cohort averages)
• First-year students average hrs. per week studying
• Entering students EXPECT to study more than they actually do!
• Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) data indicate faculty expect students to spend twice this amount preparing (24-30 hrs. a week for FT)
• Weber State students also have low perceptions that the campus emphasizes studying, but seniors feel academic support
What do WSU students do?

5. True or False. The majority of WSU first-year students spend no time participating in co-curricular activities?

**TRUE.** 71% report 0 hours (comparison school FY = 49%)

WSU Seniors = 69% vs. 54% comparison SRs
Both SIGNIFICANTLY More than
Comparison schools – YES, your students are working more hours, caring for dependents

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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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WSU and Student Engagement

- Consistent results over time. Slight increase 2001-09 in SR Supportive Campus Environment.
- WSU students do more active learning (ask questions, class presentations); less collaborative learning (work with peers in/out of class).
- WSU FY students doing service at high levels; SR have quality interactions with faculty.
- WSU students limited co-curricular involvement, participation in events, activities; work more.
- What more can WSU do to optimize educationally effective experiences for all students?

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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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WSU Students and Quality of Advising

6. True or False.

Most WSU seniors report the quality of advising as “good” or “excellent”.

**TRUE.**

Higher than Comparison schools FY are comparable

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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
Importance of Advising

To improve student persistence and graduation, advising must...

- Teach students how to make decisions effectively
- Teach students how to investigate and make decisions on careers and majors
- Teach students how to maneuver higher education channels and to identify and utilize support services

Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience.

Richard Light
Making the Most of College (2001)

What influences students to meet with their advisor?

- My advisor keeps me informed of support options such as tutoring
- My advisor shows me where to get information on different educational options
- My advisor assists me when I have academic difficulties
- My advisor is interested in my plans for the future

Implications for Advising

- Advisor must provide accurate information about courses & academic policies
- Require at least 2 meetings with advisor
- Advisors must provide information on academic support & educational options
- Students know if you are interested in them personally... show you care, are invested in their success
- Good academic advising can promote student engagement and higher learning outcomes

Be Intentional about Exposing Students to Educationally Effective Practice

Checklists

- No matter how expert you may be, well-designed checklists can improve outcomes.
- We know the patterns. Why not try a checklist?

Checklist for:
- Advising
- Meeting with a student on probation
- First week of class
- Exploring student persistence
- Building a student success oriented learning environment

Boeing 777 Normal Procedures Checklist

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Where Might Checklists Make a Difference?
✓ Academic advising
✓ Service learning courses
✓ Internships, field placements
✓ Independent student inquiries
✓ Academic skills centers
✓ Residence hall & student group advisors
✓ Study abroad coordinators
✓ Faculty designing assignments to connect work with course learning (look to work colleges...)
✓ Others?

Project DEEP:
A study of High-Performing Institutions
What do educationally effective institutions do to foster student engagement and success?

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

Discussion and Comments
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