Institutional Strategies for Increasing Postsecondary Student Success

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Mission of the Coordinating Board

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's mission is to work with the Legislature, Governor, governing boards, higher education institutions, and other entities to help Texas meet the goals of the state's higher education plan, *Closing the Gaps by 2015,* and thereby provide the people of Texas the widest access to higher education of the highest quality in the most efficient manner.

Philosophy of the Coordinating Board

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will promote access to quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access is unacceptable. The Board will be open, ethical, responsive, and committed to public service. The Board will approach its work with a sense of purpose and responsibility to the people of Texas, and it is committed to the best use of public monies. The Board will engage in actions that add value to Texas and to higher education. The agency will avoid efforts that do not add value or that are duplicated by other entities.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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Introduction

The success of students in higher education largely depends on students' engagement with their college or university. Students who persist in higher education typically feel connected to their institution, are invested in their education, and believe their institution is equally committed to their success. Students who are engaged and invested also are more likely to earn a credential. Student engagement is proportional to an institution's engagement with and commitment to its students. This fundamental principle lies at the heart of all student success initiatives, which in turn are based in attitudes and practices exhibited throughout the institution.

Research on programs serving students at institutions of higher education indicates that successful programs are remarkably similar in certain aspects. Regardless of the type of program—be it developmental education, a student success program, or an honors program—there are certain characteristics that help ensure these programs meet their intended purpose. Although terminology may vary, five components seem to remain constant. Successful programs:

- Receive strong institution-wide support, from campus leadership down;
- Assess the needs of students and rely on data-driven, research based practices;
- Engage faculty and staff in program development and support;
- Provide comprehensive advising and support; and
- Provide both content and skill development.

Institutions of higher education that may be appropriately termed institutions of excellence, insofar as they fulfill their mission to support their students through to earning a credential, have a common operational and organizational structure that embodies the elements listed above as illustrated in Figure 1. This document focuses on policies, practices, and programs designed to increase undergraduate student success as measured by increased persistence and completion rates. All relevant efforts contain the components of successful programming indicated above. In the following sections, each of the components will be described and detailed, and examples of policies, programs, and practices that meet the needs of students will be provided. Examples are drawn from two- and four-year institutions across the state and the nation.

Figure 1
Operational and
Organizational Structure
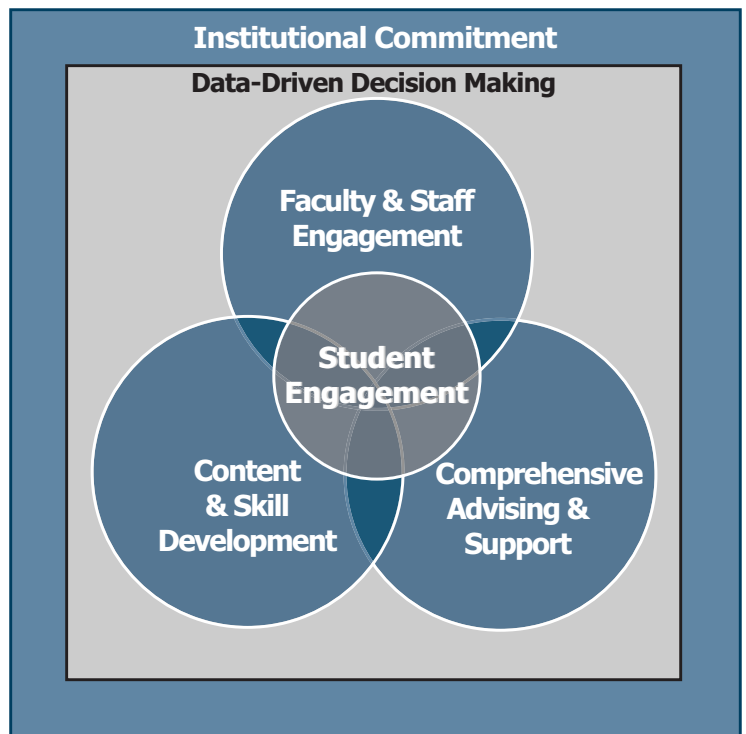
Institutional Commitment to Student Success

When considering ways to increase student success, policy-makers and practitioners often turn immediately to specific programs. However, for programs to be effective, they must be implemented through coordinated and integrated policies and practices institution-wide. This section describes the characteristics of institutional culture and practice that are typically in evidence at the colleges and universities most effective at promoting student success. When reviewing the specific strategies designed to improve student success provided throughout the document, it is important to keep in mind the broader elements described below. Making student success a priority is central to achieving the goal of increasing student persistence and completion rates. Such priority setting must come from the institution's leadership and permeate the campus hierarchy and its way of doing business.

Student Success as a Core Value

Researchers note that high-performing colleges and universities share an institutional "culture of student success" *(Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Muraskin et al, 2004; American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2005; Carey, 2005a: Carey, 2005b; Kuh et al, 2005; O'Brien & Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Bradley & Blanco, 2010; Lynch & Engle, 2010a; Lynch & Engle, 2010b).* Student success is a core value for these colleges and universities and is frequently cited as being at the center of the institution's

> Northwest Missouri State University reinforces student success as a core value through its Covenant for Learning — an agreement between the university and students to share responsibility for learning.

mission. Institutional leaders and key campus stakeholders embrace student success as a priority and effectively communicate this priority throughout the institution. Beyond setting the tone, administrative leadership explicitly direct institutional goals and their implementation so that strategic planning and resource allocation are always undertaken with an eye to supporting student success.

A key element of this culture of student success is the belief that all students can and will be successful. Campus leadership, faculty, and staff communicate that expectation to students throughout their college careers—on campus, in the classroom, and in one-on-one interactions. These colleges also publicly celebrate student successes, reinforcing the value of education and the importance of committing to overcoming challenges *(AASCU, 2005; Kuh et al, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010; Lynch & Engle, 2010a; Lynch & Engle, 2010b).*

Comprehensive Strategies for Student Success

Because student success is so central to their institutional mission, colleges and universities that outperform their peers in this area tend to have comprehensive, integrated, and highly intentional strategies for their student success work *(AASCU, 2005; Kuh et al, 2005; Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Bradley & Blanco, 2010; Lynch & Engle, 2010a).* Students leave college for a wide range of reasons. They may have academic difficulties or feel out of place on campus; they may have trouble paying for college or struggle to balance school and work. High-performing institutions know their students and the challenges they face and have in place a range of policies and programs designed to help students overcome those challenges. These policies and programs work together to support success for all students, not just those most at risk of dropping out, and are an integral part of the overall institutional culture.

Data-Driven Decisions

To promote student success, colleges and universities must use institutional data to inform decision-making, as well as rely on research-based practices such as those found in this document. Basing institutional planning on data and research helps ensure that student success initiatives take approaches that have shown evidence of effectiveness, that the initiatives are designed to meet the needs of the institution's students, and that they are regularly evaluated.

Collecting and Using Student Data

To accurately identify student needs, make effective decisions, and appropriately allocate resources, it is necessary to collect and use high-quality data. Data analysis can help an institution know who its students are and how they fare, how programs and policies affect particular student populations, and where there may be gaps in service or support. Program and policy evaluation can be used then to drive effective practices that target the students most in need of support, rather than taking a more scattershot approach to promoting student success *(AASCU, 2005; Carey, 2005a; Carey, 2005b; Kuh et al, 2005; Santiago, 2008; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Lynch & Engle, 2010a; Lynch & Engle, 2010b)*. Additionally, if institutions collect data on students who are not retained, they can take advantage of opportunities to reach out to them and encourage them to re-enroll. Some colleges and universities have identified relatively minor barriers, such as registration holds caused by library or parking fines, that were preventing students from re-enrolling *(Carey, 2005a; Carey, 2005b)*.

> The Texas Pathways Project has a dual emphasis on both the role of data in improving college and career readiness and the collaboration between local school districts and postsecondary institutions.

Institutionalizing Collaboration

While collecting and using data on students is an important practice, sharing that data with campus stakeholders is also essential. All too often, separate divisions at colleges and universities, like those in any bureaucracy, become isolated from one another. Information crucial to student success is not shared with everyone who needs it, and decisions are made without sufficient consideration of the impact on other parts of the campus community. This problem can be particularly difficult at large institutions, where both academic and student affairs have many staff members, all of whom have responsibility for different aspects of the student experience. Institutionalizing collaboration among different parts of a postsecondary institution is an effective practice for promoting student success *(AASCU, 2005;*

Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Bradley & Blanco, 2010). To mitigate the effects of "siloing," some institutions create a formal retention council or student success task force, led by senior academic affairs and student affairs officials, which brings together representatives from across the campus to share information, plan joint projects, and ensure that student success is considered in all aspects of institutional decision-making *(AASCU, 2005; Myers, 2003; O'Brien & Engle, 2007; Bradley & Blanco, 2010)*. Information is then pushed back out to influence practice and policy at the institutional, departmental, and faculty levels.

Faculty and Staff Involvement

High-performing colleges and universities show a pattern of setting institutional priorities based on student needs *(AASCU, 2005; Carey, 2005b; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009)*. As Tinto (1993) puts it, "They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals." Undergraduate education and student success is at the center of the mission of these colleges and universities, and this mission is frequently cited by institutional representatives. At these institutionsžresponsibility for student success is shared among everyone on campus, from the top institutional leadership to the faculty to the many staff members who work with students on a daily basis *(AASCU, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Carey, 2005b; Kuh et al, 2005; O'Brien & Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Lynch & Engle, 2010b)*. Essentially, student success becomes an important part of the job description for all members of the campus community

(Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Bradley & Blanco, 2010). These institutions also consider a commitment to student success as a key factor when hiring new faculty and staff and encourage that commitment in current faculty and staff by recognizing and rewarding active engagement in student success work (AASCU, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Carey, 2005a; Kuh et al, 2005; Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008).

Faculty and staff engagement in student success takes many forms. Examples include involvement in the big-picture work of data review and student success task-forces as well as in the more localized work of effective instruction and supplemental programming. Most importantly, faculty and staff engage with their students in activities that promote their success/presidents walk their campuses and faculty participate in new student orientation.

Prioritizing Undergraduate Education

A focus on undergraduate education does not preclude an emphasis on research and graduate education; indeed some institutions are able to do both (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al, 2005). It is important that research does not overwhelm undergraduate education in public discussions of institutional mission. Mission also must be actualized. This means that faculty require both support and incentive to prioritize undergraduate education, especially under the constant threat of "publish or perish" that typically defines their opportunities for career advancement. Just as new students benefit from early intervention and increased support, institutions and academic departments also fill a crucial role in providing such guidance to new faculty (Carey, 2005b). New faculty orientations and mentoring programs that emphasize teaching, pedagogical innovation, and student engagement, along with the more typical guidance regarding publication and tenure requirements, reinforce the undergraduate mission and help faculty live that mission. Institutions that effectively promote student

> Excellence and innovation in teaching is the core mission of The University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning *and Teaching* designed to establish undergraduate education as a priority.

success also recognize and reward faculty who excel as undergraduate educators, either through teaching or student engagement awards or through their tenure process. St. Olaf's College, for example, ranks effective teaching as its first priority in the consideration of faculty for tenure. As stated in its faculty handbook: St. Olaf's "gives primary emphasis to effective undergraduate instruction. It holds that high quality teaching is inseparable from scholarly and creative effort, and it expects that members of its faculty will ground their teaching in research, scholarship, and creative activity."

Professional Development

If responsibility for student success is part of the job description for everyone on campus, it is important to provide professional development so that faculty and staff members understand student needs and how to address them (Brock et al, 2007; Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation [TG], 2008). Professional development in promoting student success is of particular importance for faculty members who are experts in the content of their disciplines but may never have received training in pedagogy and may not themselves have experienced academic difficulties in college (Tinto, 1993; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2007; Santiago, 2008). Many students respond well to innovative pedagogical approaches, and faculty members can benefit from learning about why these approaches work and how to apply them in their classrooms (Kuh et al, 2005; Cuseo, 2008; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Even initially reluctant faculty who participate in professional development find that it reengages them with teaching and with their students, as discovered on campuses in Texas that have offered training in AVID strategies. Learning new teaching strategies and reflecting on their own pedagogy and their students' skills often has the effect of inspiring and reinvigorating faculty to engage with students more substantively and consistently.

A focus on student success and innovative pedagogy can also be fostered through less explicit forms of professional development. In Texas, higher education

faculty who partner with their K-12 colleagues in P-16 work engage in defacto professional learning communities and become more aware of pedagogical and secondary-postsecondary alignment issues *(see: the Texas Pathways Project, Collecting and Using Student Data).* Participating faculty report that what they have learned from this work has motivated them to adjust their instruction to reinforce key college readiness skills and engage with different types of learners.

Connecting with Students

All too often, especially at large universities, students have few individual interactions with faculty or staff members. Vulnerable students may feel uncomfortable approaching faculty or staff members to ask for help with academic or other problems, but such interactions are an important factor in preventing students from dropping out. Increased interaction with faculty members, in particular, is strongly correlated with student success, including persistence and degree completion *(Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Kuh et al, 2005).* Institutions that are effective in promoting student success go out of their way to create opportunities for students to connect with individual faculty and staff members. They may, for example, require faculty and staff members to participate in events such as orientation. This practice has a two-fold effect: not only does it ensure that faculty and staff members are aware of the services available for students, it also sends a message to students that faculty and staff members are available to them. Research on student-centered institutions also finds that faculty and staff members at these institutions play an active role in identifying and reaching out to vulnerable students, creating and supporting student groups, and ensuring that they come across to students as approachable and caring. This sort of informal mentoring is important to student success and can be fostered by an institutional

> Faculty and staff at Elizabeth City State University consider it part of their job to watch for students who seem to be struggling and intervene as necessary to assist them.

culture that puts students first *(Purnell et al, 2004; AASCU, 2005; Kuh et al, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).*

Comprehensive Advising and Support

Because students drop out of college for many reasons, institutions that effectively promote student success must offer a range of support services that draw on research-based practices and are targeted to student needs identified by institutional data analysis as described above. Research shows that areas of particular importance for student success include academic advising, helping students make the transition to a new college or university, and overcoming external barriers such as financial problems or work and family issues. These forms of advising and support assist students in substantive ways by reducing real barriers to persistence but also more generally foster student engagement with the institution by ensuring that students feel that they have someone to turn to if they are having problems.

Clear Academic Pathways and Advising

One barrier for many students is a lack of clarity about appropriate academic pathways *(Purnell et al, 2004; Tinto, 2004).* While still in high school, students need to be made aware of what constitutes college-level work and what kinds of classes will prepare them appropriately, as well as what sort of study and time management practices will enable them to succeed academically. Once enrolled in college, students need guidance about what courses to take to satisfy general education and major prerequisite requirements. Students who transfer to a different institution or

who change their academic goals may not have adequate information about how their existing credits will apply to a new degree program. To avoid these problems, institutions must provide clear and easy-to-understand information about course and major expectations and about the academic pathways students should follow to obtain specific credentials. To make sure that students are on track to graduate, institutions should require students to connect regularly with academic advisors who can monitor their progress.

Communicating Postsecondary Expectations

Students are best served if they first receive information about college academics while they are still in high school. Early information can help students make more informed choices about high school courses so that they have the necessary academic preparation to be admitted to the institution and program of their choice and to succeed in college classes. While high school counselors and teachers often communicate this information to their students, they typically do not have the most updated or institution-specific information. Multifaceted partnerships between institutions of higher education and school districts or individual high schools are important and useful vehicles for sharing academic expectations and enrollment information. These partnerships also engage faculty and staff from both sectors of education in developing more explicit alignment between secondary and postsecondary curricula and thereby communicating to students more effectively and seamlessly the expectations of college-level work.

Pre-college programming can also help students perceive themselves as college-bound and contribute to a sense of engagement even before students arrive on campus for their first year in college *(Tinto, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Kuh et al, 2005; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008).*

Mandatory Academic Advising

Once in college, students need to be guided in choosing the appropriate courses for their interests and background. Research consistently shows a positive connection between academic advising and student success *(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; TG, 2008).* However, advising services, which students often feel are inadequate *(Kuh et al, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008),* have not always been a priority for institutions and have suffered from a lack of staff and resources *(Brock et al, 2007; Brock, 2010).* Still, even minimal advising is correlated with increased rates of student success *(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).* Most important is that all students are advised and cannot opt out, thereby ensuring all students have some degree of information about and engagement with the institution.

Institutions that are successful in retaining students typically require entering students to see an academic advisor and, in many cases, take placement exams in order to clearly identify the students' skills in key academic areas *(Tinto, 1993; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Purnell et al, 2004).* Some institutions have found it valuable to create a centralized advising center, where students can seek advice and assistance in addition to receiving advising from their major department *(Tinto, 1993; Kuh et al, 2005; TG, 2008; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).* Other institutions take a case management approach to advising, in which underprepared or academically struggling students are paired with an advisor who works with them on a regular basis throughout the semester. Case management advising has the advantage of creating a closer relationship between the student and the advisor, who may be able to determine if factors other than academics are affecting the student's performance. Connecting academic advising to career exploration and counseling has also been identified as an effective practice. Indeed, connecting advising to other segments of the institution and coordinating it with complementary programs is becoming more common at institutions that aim for comprehensive strategies to improve student success *(see also "Mandatory Orientation for New Students").* At George Mason University, for instance, advising staff collaborate with various offices and programs,

> Students at Western Kentucky University are required to contact an academic advisor prior to registration each semester if they have fewer than 90 credit hours.

from departmental faculty to career services and new student orientation programs.

Early Alert and Response Systems

Even with excellent advising, students may find themselves struggling academically in college. Research indicates that intervening to assist students with academic difficulties can improve student success. Such programs work best when they are proactive and do not rely on students seeking academic assistance on their own, since the most vulnerable students typically will not seek such assistance *(Tinto, 1993; AASCU, 2005)*. One strategy identified as particularly effective is a system that quickly identifies struggling students and designates responsibility for reaching out to them. Students may be identified by faculty members because of poor grades or excessive absences or through institution-wide tracking of student progress and are contacted with information about the availability of academic assistance *(Tinto, 1993; Purnell et al, 2004; AASCU, 2005; Kuh et al, 2005; Brock et al, 2007; O'Brien & Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; TG, 2008; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Bradley & Blanco, 2010; Lynch & Engle, 2010a; Lynch & Engle, 2010b)*.

Transfer and Reverse Transfer of Credit

Transfer students have a particular need for assistance in identifying appropriate curricular pathways and in negotiating the complexities of higher education. While many students enter two-year institutions intending to transfer,

they are not always aware of the complexity of that process. Potential transfer students need guidance in selecting courses that will be applicable to their intended major at the institution to which they plan to transfer. Community colleges that are particularly successful in promoting transfer have found it beneficial to encourage all students to pursue curricular paths that can eventually lead to transfer *(Purnell et al, 2004; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009)*. Articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions are also an important means of ensuring that the credits earned by students at their two-year schools will transfer to their four-year schools and apply to their chosen degree programs. Without such agreements, together with solid advising, transfer students may find themselves required to take additional credits in order to complete a bachelor's degree and may become discouraged or be unable to afford to continue in college *(Tinto, 1993; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009)*.

Because contemporary college students typically take courses at multiple institutions, reverse transfer of credit has become an important practice for improving student success rates. A student who transfers from a community college to a university without completing an associate's degree and then drops out of the university before completing a bachelor's degree may have enough credits to earn an associate's degree if those credits can be transferred back to the community college. To make this transfer possible, universities and community colleges must work closely together to facilitate the reverse transfer of credit and reach out to students who might benefit from it. Project Win-Win, funded by Lumina Foundation for Education and coordinated by the Institute for Higher Education Policy and the State Higher Education Executive Officers, is working with colleges and universities in six states to identify students who have qualified for an associate's degree but are no longer enrolled at any college or university to ensure they receive the degree. The nine institutions in the initial pilot project awarded nearly 600 associate's degrees in less than a year, despite significant challenges in identifying and locating eligible students.

Many more degrees are expected to be awarded as the project continues for another year.

Orienting Students to College

Helping students engage with campus life is especially important when students are new to the institution, particularly given that student attrition is most pronounced during and immediately after the first year. The strategies described below can help smooth student transitions into college and facilitate personal connections with members of the university community *(Tinto, 1993)*. Like the advising strategies discussed above, these programs work best when they are required, since the students who are most in need of support may be unlikely to participate voluntarily *(O'Brien & Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008)*.

Summer Bridge Programs

Summer bridge programs are designed to assist students to make the transition from high school to college *(Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Myers, 2003; Engle & Tinto, 2008)*. Such programs typically last several weeks, perhaps even long enough for students to complete a college-level course, and help students learn to navigate the college-going process and build an initial cohort of friends. Program elements typically include academic instructionŽinformation sessions on-campus servicesŽand fun activities designed to help students bond with others in the cohort *(Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Muraskin et al, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)*. Programs often require students to live on campus, thus giving them a closer connection to and greater familiarity with the institution even if they will live at home during the regular semester *(Myers, 2003)*. Bridge

programs have been shown to produce positive outcomes for students, including increased persistence *(Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Muraskin et al, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)*, but are often limited to the most vulnerable students because of cost.

Summer Bridge Programs funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board target high school juniors, seniors, and recent graduates, with the goal of reducing the need for developmental education and improving student success. Early evaluation results indicate that effective programs must include the following components, which coincide with the general criteria for effective programming put forward in this document:

- the support and cooperation of institutional leadership;
- a curriculum designed by program faculty to meet the needs of the specific population served;
- a deep involvement by all program staff and faculty, from the planning and design through the implementation and evaluation stages of the program;
- a focus on differentiated instruction;
- the integration of learning and study skills development across the curriculum;

> Students participating in Texas A&M International University's Developmental Education Summer Bridge Program have demonstrated improvement in math and in study skills and attitudes.

- comprehensive academic advising and peer mentoring;
- mandatory student participation in tutoring services and other academic/college readiness support services.

Mandatory Orientation for New Students

Research suggests that a mandatory orientation session for all new students is a crucial part of smoothing the transition into college *(Myers, 2003)*. Even students who enter college well prepared for the experience can benefit from an orientation that teaches them to navigate both the physical campus and the complex institutional bureaucracy of any postsecondary institution. Orientations also provide opportunities for students to meet other students and begin to establish friendships and, most importantly, help them

gain a sense of identity and engagement as a student of that particular college or university *(Tinto, 1993)*. Transfer students also need assistance in becoming integrated into their new school and can greatly benefit from a mandatory orientation featuring content specific to their needs *(Tinto, 1993)*. Effective orientation programs typically include a session with an advisor and the opportunity to register for classes as well as presentations and workshops on topics related to academic success, personal well-being, and the logistics of college life. They also offer a variety of activities focused on building engagement, which might include a pep rally, a convocation ceremony and/or a shared intellectual experience, such as discussing a required reading in a small group led by a faculty member *(Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Kuh et al, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010)*.

In recent years, new student orientations have been expanded and organized to segue more intentionally into first-year experience programming, thus helping to provide a more seamless and comprehensive support and orientation network for entering students. Wheaton College's First Year Seminars are staffed by a faculty member, an administrative mentor, a librarian, and two preceptors who are upper-division students. The well-trained mentors and preceptors meet multiple times with their students, both individually or in their advising groups, during the week of orientation, continuing the relationship throughout the first year, or until the student selects a major *(Kuh et al, 2005)*.

Western Michigan University has moved under one roof all its first year programming, which was previously handled by disparate offices, making it easier to effectively sequence and build on orientation and support services. Complementary services and programming can be integrated in rather subtle ways. Temple College offers an online version of its new student orientation, which builds in introductions to careers and majors through websites developed by Texas Workforce Solutions as a step in the advising process *(see: http://www.templejc.edu/admission#Orientation/index.htm)*.

Overcoming External Barriers to Student Success

Much of the research on student success focuses on institutional factors that help keep students enrolled at a college or university. There are, however, also external barriers that can prevent a student from successfully completing a college degree. While institutions cannot control such factors, they can put into place policies and programs that help reduce the impact on students.

Financial Aid

A lack of adequate funding can be a major barrier to college completion. Both prior to and during college, institutions that work with students to ensure that they are getting appropriate financial support are more likely to keep them enrolled *(Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003)*. Many colleges and universities are also finding that it is valuable to teach financial literacy. Helping students create and maintain a budget, find ways to handle expenses not covered by financial aid, and understand the implications of choosing to borrow can be good strategies for overcoming financial barriers to persistence *(Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; TG, 2008)*.

Even when a student's financial aid package fully covers college costs, students sometimes experience financial crises that can potentially lead them to leave college. A health problem, a lack of child care, or even car trouble can be the last straw for a student who is barely making ends meet. Some colleges and universities find that offering emergency aid, typically in the form of a small grant, can be enough to overcome these barriers and keep students in school *(Tinto, 1993)*.

On-Campus Employment and Peer Mentoring

Research shows that working off campus is associated with lower persistence and the reduced likelihood of completing a college degree *(Tinto, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)*. Part-time work on campus, on the other hand, is linked with increased likelihood of degree completion, perhaps because of increased connections with the campus community *(Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)*. This pattern suggests that work-study financial aid and other forms of on-campus employment may be of particular benefit to students *(Tinto, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Muraskin et al, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)*. Colleges and universities have taken advantage of this approach to student financial support by employing students not only in traditional campus jobs such as library or office assistants but also in supportive roles such as peer mentors, which allows the institution to increase engagement for both the employed student and the students who benefit from the peer program's services.

Peer mentoring programs most often pair an upper-division student with one or more entering students. The peer mentor can offer advice and support to mentees, help them find their way around the university and take advantage of available services, and generally serve as a point of connection to the campus community. Some peer mentoring programs require that mentors and mentees meet a certain number of times during the semester, and some offer group activities for all students involved in the program. Research suggests that the most effective peer mentoring programs are those that both require ongoing participation and offer mentors training and support in working with their mentees *(Tinto, 1993; Myers, 2003; Muraskin et al, 2004; Kuh et al, 2005; O'Brien & Engle, 2007)*.

Student-Centered Support Services

All colleges and universities offer support services for students, but research finds that students don't always make good use of such services. They may be unaware of them or fear that they will be stigmatized by using them. In the case of non-traditional and commuter students, on the other hand, they may find it difficult to gain access to them *(Kazis & Liebowitz, 2003; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Muraskin et al, 2004; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009)*. While many institutions, especially community colleges, offer courses at a variety of times, students who come to campus primarily on evenings and weekends may find that student services are not available at those times. Offering extended hours for key services such as financial aid, advising, and academic support can greatly help such students, as can ensuring that student services offices are located near each other to make it easier for students to accomplish errands quickly. Some institutions also make use of technology to offer services such as advising online *(Tinto, 1993; Purnell et al, 2004; AASCU, 2005; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009)*.

Content and Skill Development

Content and skill development is at the heart of the academic enterprise and is fundamental to student success in college. Because many students are not fully prepared for college when they first enroll, student-centered institutions must find ways to help them gain the content knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in college-level courses. Ongoing support for learning throughout college is also essential to academic success for all students, regardless of prior academic preparation, and can be provided through innovative curricular and instructional approaches as well as through support services for academically struggling students.

Preparing Students for College-Level Work

Many students enter college unprepared for the rigors of college-level academic work. One-fifth of freshman who begin at four-year institutions need at least one developmental class, and that percentage increases dramatically for students entering two-year institutions *(Carey, 2005b; Brock, 2010)*. These students need targeted interventions to strengthen their skills and content knowledge so that they can proceed to and be successful in entry-level college

courses. However, these interventions also need to be as efficient as possible, so as not to prolong time to degree and strain student finances. In addition, even students who are ready for college-level coursework may not have the study and time-management skills needed to handle the demanding and self-paced workloads expected of college students and need assistance in acquiring those skills.

Developmental Education Research shows that enrollment in developmental coursework is often linked to lower rates of student retention and degree completion. In an effort to reduce the negative impact of developmental course-work, colleges and universities have begun to experiment with alternative approaches that show promise in moving students more effectively and efficiently through remedial coursework. These innovations include:

- breaking semester-long courses into shorter modules so that students only have to enroll in ˙a odules they need;
- accelerating developmental coursework by offering material previously covered in multiple classes in one class with more contact hours;
- expanding computer-assisted and self-paced instruction;
- designing learning communities in which a cohort of students take all their developmental classes together, often in combination with a class on study skills;
- allowing students to enroll in certain courses for credit while still taking developmental courses so that they see more progress towards a degree; and
- integrating developmental education into academic programs rather than offering separate courses *(Kazis & Liebowitz, 2003; Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007; Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Brock, 2010).*

In college success courses, new or struggling students learn about study skills, time management, learning styles, career planning, and other topics valuable to college success *(Tinto, 1993; Myers, 2003; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Kuh et al, 2005; Brock et al, 2007; Swaner & Brownell, 2008).* These courses also offer a ready-made opportunity for students to be exposed to the services offered at the university, through visits from or field-trips to the library, the tutoring center, the financial aid office, and elsewhere, a practice that helps students develop personal connections with the people who provide these services *(Tinto, 1993; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).* In fact, research suggests that college success courses are particularly effective when integrated with advising, so that students receive substantial contact with their advisor throughout the semester *(Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Kuh et al, 2005).*

Supporting Student Learning

As access to higher education has increased, college faculty members have begun to explore new pedagogies that reach a wide range of learning styles. This shift from a teacher-focused form of instruction to a learner-focused approach that emphasizes the active role of the student has proven to be an effective strategy for increasing academic success *(Tinto, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Muraskin et al, 2004; Kuh et al, 2005; Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008).* While these pedagogies can be used in any course, student-centered colleges and universities have developed curricular initiatives that emphasize innovative instruction. Such initiatives, together with more traditional forms of academic assistance such as tutoring, are a valuable approach to supporting student learning and academic success.

Learning Communities

Research suggests that learning communities, programs in which cohorts of students enroll in the same set of classes, are an effective way to enhance student learning and retention *(Myers, 2003; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Muraskin et al,*

2004; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Price, 2005; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Swaner & Brownell, 2008). While some learning communities simply co-enroll a group of students in a set of otherwise unconnected classes, others take a more integrated approach. In these learning communities, the classes are thematically related, and perhaps even co-taught by program faculty, and students attend a seminar designed to integrate the learning experience, participate in planned co-curricular activities, and perhaps even live in the same residence *(Tinto, 1993; Myers, 2003; Kuh et al, 2005; Price, 2005; Brock et al, 2007; Swaner & Brownell, 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008)*. The key to either approach is that students interact with a cohort of peers on a regular basis throughout the semester. Research shows that connections with peers are an essential element of student engagement in college life, and students in learning communities have the opportunity to both make friends and support one another academically *(Taylor-Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009; Bradley & Blanco, 2010)*. The practice of bringing community into the classroom is of particular importance at commuter campuses where students do not live with other students and may have fewer opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities *(Muraskin et al, 2004; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2007)*.

Course Redesign

At many colleges and universities, lower-division general education courses function as gateways, and sometimes barriers, to progress towards a degree. These gateway courses often enroll many students in a single section and may be challenging even for academically well-prepared students. Colleges and universities are experimenting with ways to restructure gateway courses so that they do not impede student progress, in many cases using information technology to produce better learning outcomes as well as reduce costs*(Twigg, 2005)*. This approach uses institutional data analysis to identify courses with high failure rates and finds ways to provide in- and out-of-class support for struggling students. One specific approach to redesigning

gateway courses that has been identified as effective in research is supplemental instruction *(Tinto, 1993; Myers, 2003; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Brock et al, 2007; Bronstein, 2008; Brock, 2010; Bradley & Blanco, 2010)*. In this model, the instructor of a large, introductory course is supported by a group of students who previously did well in the class. These peer instructors serve as role models, facilitate small group activities in class, coordinate review sessions, and also provide informal tutoring and assistance with study skills outside of class.

Learning Centers and Tutoring

Some students may need academic help beyond what can be offered in their classes. Many colleges and universities

have learning centers for reading, writing, or math skills that offer free or low-cost tutoring. Peer tutoring, in particular, is an important means of supplying academic support at many institutions. Some institutions use peer tutors in their learning skills centers, while others use advisors to connect tutors with students who need academic help in a particular area. Peer tutoring provides students academic assistance in a relatively low-cost way and has the advantage of offering on-campus work for students who tutor, thus multiplying the student engagement factor.

Promising Practices:
Putting Theory to Work for Students
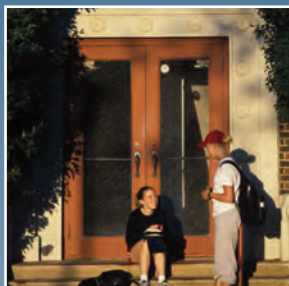
Comprehensive Strategies for Student Success

Inver Hills Community College's Finish What You Start initiative was designed to promote an institutional expectation that students will reach their educational goals. The initiative focuses on identifying and changing perceptions and practices that impede student success and on expanding the use of best practices through professional development for staff and instructors. Over several years, the initiative has supported a number of specific retention and completion strategies, including developing a first-year experience course, collecting better data on student goals, and encouraging faculty use of an early alert system for struggling students. Most importantly, the college has worked to embed the "Finish What You Start" theme into college culture with a coordinated campaign: the theme is used at campus events, on t-shirts and wrist bands given to staff and students, and in communications from the president (2009 LICC Innovation of the Year).

Contact: Inver Hills Community College (http://www.inverhills.edu)

The Cougar Success Initiatives program at the University of Houston-Main Campus takes a comprehensive approach to student success. To facilitate communication across campus, the university created the Ombuds Network, a group of 68 faculty and staff members who work together to quickly resolve student problems. Faculty members are also invited to join Profs with Pride, which provides them with weekly emails about campus resources and events that they can share with students. This group, which now includes 161 faculty members, also provides faculty representatives to present at new student orientations.

Other aspects of the program are aimed at students. A pilot project offers prospective students the chance to communicate with an on-campus buddy, a student who can answer questions about topics such as housing and financial aid. The Personal Access Liaisons (PALs) program provides first-time students with a volunteer mentor, most of whom are faculty members. PALs email students at key points in the semester and respond to any questions the students may have. An online resource site provides information that the PALs can use to assist their students. In Fall 2010, the PALs program was expanded to target struggling students identified through an early alert system that monitors grades and class attendance. These students are assigned a "SuperPAL" who will meet with them and intervene as needed.

In order to encourage students to make use of campus resources, the university created Cougar trading cards featuring prominent members of the university community. Students could collect cards by attending advising and tutoring sessions, workshops, campus events, or student group meetings and then turn them in to receive prizes. In the semester this program was initiated, the university saw a 16% increase in attendance at resume writing and career fair workshops and a 9% increase at a job interview workshop.

Contact: University of Houston-A UJb (http://www.uh.edu)

Student Success as a Core Value

The core values of Northwest Missouri State University, listed in the university catalogue, include a focus on students and a belief that all aspects of student life should be oriented around the goal of academic excellence. The university makes clear its expectations for student success through its Covenant for Learning, an agreement between the university and its students to share responsibility for learning. Areas of emphasis in the covenant include high quality learning experiences both in and out of class, faculty and staff support for learning, and well-rounded student development. During a mandatory freshman seminar, first-year students learn about the covenant and create a plan for succeeding in college that remains in their student files and is revisited throughout their undergraduate experience *(AASCU, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010)*.

Contact: Northwest Missouri State University (http://www.nwmissouri.edu)

Collecting and Using Student Data

The Texas Pathways project began in San Antonio, lead by the efforts of the Alamo Community College District (ACCD) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The Pathways project is a local partnership between school districts and postsecondary institutions that is designed to improve curriculum alignment between high schools and postsecondary institutions, as a means to increase college readiness and ease P-16 student transitions. With assistance from the Coordinating Board, partnering higher education institutions and school districts collect, share, and analyze student-level data (including grades) to determine performance and achievement patterns from 8th grade through participation in four-year higher education institutions. The data are analyzed by teams of district personnel, high school faculty, and higher education faculty to inform and evaluate interventions in policy, curriculum, and faculty development to improve students' transitions from secondary to postsecondary education. Since its inception, Texas Pathways has expanded to include regional sites in El Paso, Houston, and the Rio Grande Valley.

Contact: Pathways Project (https://share.thecb.state.tx.us/sites/Pathways/default.aspx)

Institutionalizing Collaboration

In 2003-04, the Undergraduate Studies Office at Texas Woman's University, with support from the chancellor and top administrators, formed a broad-based Task Force on Academic Success to examine the university's student population, identify risk factors, and determine appropriate strategies to improve student success. The taskforce included faculty and staff members and was charged with analyzing graduation and persistence data, reviewing policies and practices, and identifying what services needed to be developed or changed. A key recommendation that came out of this process was the need to institute an Academic Success Council through which faculty and staff advisors, directors of tutoring centers, and others involved in student success work could share information and best practices. The taskforce also pointed to a need for better institutional data. It recommended that the university systematically track retention data and distribute this information to academic programs and that it develop a tracking system for course pass rates so that courses with low pass rates could be identified and redesigned.

Interventions recommended by the taskforce were directed at the university, college, and departmental level. Based on taskforce recommendations and best practices already in place, the university expanded participation in learning communities, established a math success center as a way to support the many students who required remediation in math, and began plans to implement an automated degree audit system to help students keep track of graduation requirements. The university also worked to strengthen its early alert program, which identifies struggling students early in the semester. By 2008 almost half of all faculty were participating in the program. These efforts have begun to show some success. Retention rates for first-year students increased from 68.1% in 2006 to 71.4% in 2008. Six-year graduation rates for all students improved from 39.5% in 2006 to 43.6% in 2008. Six-year graduation rates for full-time transfer students, an important measure for an institution where 80% of undergraduates are transfer students, increased from 60.8% in 2006 to 67.5% in 2008.

Contact: Texas Woman's University (http://www.twu.edu)

Prioritizing Undergraduate Education

Having established undergraduate education as a priority, The University of Michigan has in place multiple supports and incentives for faculty that seek to improve teaching and learning across the university (Kuh et al, 2005). Both the Office of the Provost and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), founded in 1962 as the nation's first teaching center, support faculty, graduate student instructors, and academic administrators to enrich learning and teaching in all 19 schools and colleges at the university. The CRLT's mission to promote excellence and innovation in teaching guides a variety of opportunities for teaching evaluation, curricular consultation, faculty mentoring, and recognition for excellence in undergraduate education. The CRLT also offers individual teaching consultation, grant competitions, and instructional technology support. Among its many innovations is an interactive theatre program that assists faculty in addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in the classroom. In addition to performances, the director of the theatre program consults with faculty and conducts workshops on theatre-related topics such as role playing, stage fright, and voice projection.

Among junior faculty mentoring and orientation programs conducted by the departments in coordination with the Provost's office's campus-wide new faculty orientation, faculty mentoring in the School of Dentistry is especially focused on supporting effective instruction. The school also has an educational resource specialist on staff to assist in the development of pedagogical skills, assists in identifying appropriate teaching workshops, and expects that all instructional faculty develop a teaching dossier.

Alongside grant competitions offered through the CRLT, the Provost's office annually awards the Arthur F. Thurnau Professorship to several tenured faculty in recognition of their contributions to undergraduate education, providing a $20,000 award to each recognized faculty member to further activities that enhance teaching and learning. Nomination and selection criteria include:

    A strong commitment to students and to teaching and learning

    Excellence in teaching

    Innovations in teaching and learning

    A strong commitment to working effectively with a diverse student body

    A demonstrable impact on students' intellectual and/or artistic development and on their lives,

    including advising and mentoring.

Contact: The University of Michigan, Office of the Provost (http://www.provost.umich.edu/)
    Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (http://www.crlt.umich.edu/)

Professional Development

Montclair State University's Research Academy for University Learning (RAUL) takes a scholarly approach to creating an environment that supports student success, bringing faculty members from a variety of disciplines together to explore the literature on teaching and learning. RAUL activities support faculty members in improving their teaching through classroom observation and feedback, promote discussion of teaching and learning on campus through workshops and lectures, and encourage a research-based approach to teaching by conducting literature reviews and providing proposal-development and assessment support for educational initiatives. The RAUL website hosts an extensive collection of resources on teaching and learning, and faculty and staff members can apply to participate in a year-long fellowship program, which includes seminars, mentoring, and a multi-day retreat *(AASCU, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010)*.

Contact: Research Academy for University Learning (http://www.montclair.edu/academy/)

The University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB) has partnered with Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) to reduce barriers that traditionally limit the academic achievement of underprepared college students. The AVID Postsecondary Project provides academic training and college success skills to underprepared students through freshman seminars, supplemental instruction by tutors, and additional support services. A crucial component of the Project is substantive professional development of faculty and staff in AVID strategies and pedagogies. Most faculty at the UTPB campus have participated in AVID workshops. High participation rates have led to increased faculty engagement and pedagogical innovation throughout the curriculum, as well as to a complete renovation of the freshman seminar curriculum. The AVID Postsecondary Project is a comprehensive student success model, showing promise at UTPB, due in part to the strong backing of its president and the increased faculty participation and buy-in.

Contact: The University of Texas of the Permian Basin (http://www.utpb.edu)
AVID Postsecondary (http://www.avid.org/abo_postsecondary.html)

Connecting with Students

At Elizabeth City State University, student success and a student-centered environment are central to the university's mission and are embraced by the campus community as a whole. Faculty and staff members consider it part of their job to watch for students who seem to be struggling and intervene as necessary to assist them. Class size is kept small, class attendance is mandatory, and students learn that professors will follow up with them if they miss a class. The university website even features a "Student Retention Suggestion Box," through which any member of the university community can provide feedback on ways to improve student success *(AASCU, 2005; Carey, 2005b; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).*

Contact: Elizabeth City State University (http://www.ecsu.edu)

Promising Practices: Comprehensive Advising and Support

Communicating Postsecondary Expectations

Austin Community College's College Connection program brings advisors into local high schools to assist students in applying to college. Seniors at 57 high schools in 25 school districts are required to participate in pre-college advising, take college placement tests, and apply to ACC. Students are also offered assistance in completing financial aid forms. At graduation, they receive an admissions letter to ACC with their diploma. College enrollments directly from affiliated high schools are up 21% since the program began in 2003. College Connection participants who enroll at ACC also persist at higher rates than other ACC students (2006 Star Award; 2006 Examples of Excelencia semi-finalist; 2007 CCFA Bellwether Award; 2009 LICC Innovation of the Year).

Contact: College Connection (http://www.austincc.edu/collegeconnection/)

Mandatory Academic Advising

At Western Kentucky University, students with fewer than 90 credit hours are required to contact an academic advisor prior to registration each semester. The Academic Advising and Retention Center (AARC) is centrally located on campus, offers online appointment scheduling, and has extended hours on weekday evenings and Sundays. The AARC also supports faculty advisors through workshops and webinars and a Master Advisor Certificate program that helps faculty members improve their advising skills *(Bradley & Blanco, 2010).*

Contact: Academic Advising and Retention Center (http://www.wku.edu/advising/)

Early Alert and Response Systems

South Texas College's Beacon Program assigns mentors to lower-level and developmental math courses with high failure rates. Beacon Mentors make several in-class presentations throughout the semester highlighting the availability of support services. Mentors also work with faculty members to identify students who may be struggling in class and offer them assistance. Students in classes with a mentor were found to be more likely to use the Centers for Learning Excellence and to be less likely to drop the class. Part-time students, in particular, seemed to benefit from the program *(2010 MDRC evaluation report)*.

South Texas College also uses a case-management advising approach. Each new student attends a mandatory orientation and is assigned a mentor—a faculty or staff member who has undergone training on how to advise students on academic and other issues—providing a single point of contact at the college to whom students can turn for help with a range of questions. Research conducted during the first year of the program, during which not all students were matched with a mentor, found that students who did participate had higher grades, higher rates of course completion and higher fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention than did a group of similar students who did not participate (2007 Examples of Excelencia semi-finalist).

Contact: Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management
(http://studentservices.southtexascollege.edu)

Transfer and Reverse Transfer of Credit

The Graduates and Completers project at Houston Community College (HCC) uses a reverse transfer of credit policy, together with other strategies, to increase the number of students who receive a college credential. HCC identifies students who have completed the core curriculum or earned 55 or more credits but have not applied for graduation. Degree audits are conducted for these students to see if they have already met all graduation requirements and advise them on what they need to do to earn a degree. Students are also notified if they have met the requirements for a certificate. Students who leave HCC without a degree or certificate are allowed to transfer back courses taken within three years of leaving so that they can receive a degree.

Other efforts to encourage credential completion include degree audits for all workforce students taking capstone courses, a process for quickly resolving problems with incomplete graduation applications, and twice-yearly Degree Completion Fairs offering advising, degree audits, and assistance in filing graduation applications. HCC estimates that the project has led to the awarding of at least 2,000 additional degrees and certificates each year since the program began.

Contact: Houston Community College (http://www.hccs.edu)

Promising Practices: Orienting Students to College

Summer Bridge Programs

Texas A&M International University's Developmental Education Summer Bridge Program has demonstrated promise. With an emphasis in mathematics, the program offers three hours of differentiated instruction, four days a week, for five weeks. Students are provided with class tutors, individual mentors, and comprehensive academic advising and are given instruction in financial aid awareness, study skills, and time management. The program has the strong support and cooperation of the university leadership and faculty. Preliminary outcomes of the program show improvement in math and in study skills and attitudes, as indicated by the significant increases in student scores on post-program assessments.

Contact: Office of Special Programs (http://tamiu.edu/contedu/main.htm)

Mandatory Orientation for New Students

Clarion University's Transitions Program helps smooth students' entry into college. The program begins with a mandatory one-day orientation session that provides beginning students and their parents with practical information about life at the university. Students use this time to register for classes, obtain an i.d. card, and learn about campus culture. The program continues with Discovery, three days of required programming for new students the weekend before classes begin, including events such as a Clarion Spirit Rally and Academic Convocation. Finally, students can choose to participate in Exploration, a full-year, one-credit series of co-curricular workshops that help students develop study skills, get involved on campus, and make use of university services *(AASCU, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).*

Contact: Clarion Transitions (http://www.clarion.edu/1016/)

Promising Practices: Overcoming External Barriers to Student Success

Financial Aid

The University of North Texas in 2005 created its Student Money Management Center to address financial barriers to college success. Professional and peer counselors are available to assist students with budgeting, managing credit, repaying student loans, tax preparation, and similar issues, and students are given an online account to use as they plan their personal finances. The center also provides educational outreach efforts to thousands of UNT students through workshops, orientation programs, and a newsletter. Short-term emergency loans are available to help students with unanticipated expenses that might prevent them from remaining enrolled (2007 Star Award; 2008 Examples of Excelencia honorable mention).

Contact: Student Money Management Center (http://moneymanagement.unt.edu)

On-Campus Employment and Peer Mentoring

The Student Employment Initiative at The University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) provides around 80 full-time students with on-campus employment opportunities each semester. Participating students are employed for a maximum of 20 hours per week in a job related to their major and are paid at a rate above the minimum wage. Jobs available to students must meet the program's expectations for student learning and include positions such as peer mentors, tutors, lab coordinators, instructional assistants, and research assistants. Many of the positions filled by students in the program are designed to support other students, increasing retention for both program participants and the students with whom they work. Program participants have higher grades and complete more semester hours than do students with similar course loads (2008 Star Award).

Peer mentoring is an especially important success strategy used in the programs that provide on-campus jobs for UTB/TSC students. The STING Success Peer Mentor Program is required for entering students who must take one or more developmental courses. Students enroll in a weekly college success lab section with an instructor, a tutor, and a peer mentor. Tutors and mentors are also available to assist students outside of the lab. A second program—the Leadership and Mentoring Program—hires successful students to serve as peer mentors to five first-year students as well as participating in developing workshops for the associated leadership program. Peer mentors are paid employees selected through a rigorous application process and attend a two-day training to help them prepare for their mentoring role.

Contact: Division of Student Affairs (http://www.sa.utb.edu)

Student-Centered Support Services

To help students more easily navigate the university bureaucracy, Central Ohio Technical College has created The Gateway, a one-stop center for admissions, academic advising, registration, and student records. The Gateway is located at the center of the campus, next to the financial aid and payment offices and near both the cafeteria and the bookstore. Weekday office hours begin at 7:30 AM and run until 6 PM, and staff members cross-train so that students can get answers to all their questions from a single person. The Gateway also provides an online portal linked to the institutional home-page that offers information about admissions, registration, financial aid, and other topics (2008 LICC Innovation of the Year).

Contact: The Gateway (http://www.cotc.edu/prospective-students/Pages/index.aspx)

Promising Practices: Content and Skill Development

Developmental Education

At the Community College of Denver, students who need remedial coursework can sign up for FastStart@CCD, a program that allows them to take two levels of developmental math or reading/English as an integrated, one-semester course with a single instructor. These accelerated developmental courses use active and collaborative learning methods to promote student engage-ment. In addition to the developmental course, each cohort of students takes a one-credit college success course and partici-pates in a weekly study group with the developmental course instructor. Students who participate in the program are more likely to complete developmental coursework, pass gateway college-level courses, and persist in college (2004 MetLife Foundation CC Excellence Award; 2007 LICC Innovation of the Year).

Contact: Center for Educational Advancement
(http://www.ccd.edu/ccd.nsf/deptHome?open&dept=webb87uaa8)

SureStart is a learning community for under-prepared, first-time-in-college students at Tarrant County College's Southeast Campus. Through the program, students who require remediation in at least two areas, including reading, receive counseling, monitoring of academic progress, and course-embedded advising. Students also take three classes together, allowing them to bond and support each other. The college's administration, faculty, and student services work together to provide integrated support targeted to individual student needs. As a result, SureStart stu-dents are more successful in college. On average, they complete more semester hours and earn higher grades than do similar students not in the program (2006 Star Award; 2005-06 National Council of Instructional Administrators Exemplary Initiative Award).

Contact: Tarrant County College Southeast Campus
(http://www.tccd.edu/Campuses_and_Centers/Southeast_Campus.html)

Since 2002, the Pretesting Retesting Educational Program at El Paso Community College has worked to improve the suc-cess rates of academically underprepared students at the college. The program uses computer-aided instruction to help entering students prepare to take, and in some cases retake, placement exams. The intervention reduces the number of developmental education courses most participating students must take. Students who participate in the program also have higher grades and are more likely to persist than are other EPCC students (2008 LICC Innovation of the Year; 2007 Star Award).

Contact: Pretesting Retesting Educational Program (http://dnn.epcc.edu/Default.aspx?alias=dnn.epcc.edu/prep)

College Success Courses

In 2004, The University of Texas-Pan American developed UNIV 1301 Learning Framework, a course designed to introduce students to the psychology of learning and how they can use that knowledge to enhance their educational experience. The course was initially required of all students and had to be taken before the student had completed 30 credit hours. However, while students who passed the UNIV1301 course were found to be almost eight times more likely to persist than those who did not pass it, not all students were able to take the course during the first year. As a result, the university opted to change its strategy to target the students most in need of academic support (Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008).

Under the new policy, which began in Fall 2008, around two-thirds of entering students are required to take the UNIV1301 course, based on ACT scores and class rank. Students who are initially exempted from the course are required to enroll in a subsequent semester if they do not meet minimum standards for GPA and credits accumulated during their first year. This strategy of targeting students who are academically vulnerable has proven successful. Among students who were initially required to take the UNIV1301 course in Fall 2008, 95% were able to enroll in the course and 72% of those persisted to the second year (compared to only 35% of those who were required to take the course but did not enroll in it). Overall, fall-to-fall retention for freshmen also improved from 71.5% in the year before the new strategy was implemented to 74.3% in 2008-09.

Contact: Undergraduate Studies Office (http://www.utpa.edu/ugs/index.cfm)

San Antonio College's Strategies for Success is an eight-week, one-credit course intended to help academically struggling students improve their skills in time management, critical thinking, test-taking, and other areas. Over 1,000 students take the course each year, many of whom are required to enroll because of poor academic standing. Students who have taken the course report that it was helpful to them, and evidence shows that these students have higher GPAs after completing the course. Retention rates for students with poor academic standing have increased from 45% to 60% since the Strategies for Success program was implemented (2003 Star Award; 2006 Examples of Excelencia semi-finalist).

Contact: Department of Counseling and Student Development (http://www.alamo.edu/sac/csd/)

Promising Practices: Supporting Student Learning

Learning Communities

At Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, all full-time first-year students are required to participate in the First-Year Learning Communities Program. Groups of students enroll in two small courses—a First-Year Seminar and a writing class—each limited to 25 students as well as one or two large lecture courses related to the students' prospective majors. By taking these courses as a cohort, students have the opportunity to make social and academic connections with their peers. Faculty members for the courses in each learning community also work together to connect content and assignments across their courses.

The one-hour First-Year Seminar is at the core of the learning community. These seminars are designed to help students develop key learning skills such as discussion, collaboration, critical thinking, and information literacy. Seminar instructors, many of whom are graduate students, serve as teaching assistants in the large lecture courses taken by their seminar students and use seminar class time to make connections across the material taught in the learning community courses. The TIDE peer mentor program also places a student advocate in each first-year seminar to help entering student make the transition to campus life (2001 Star Award; 2002 Institution of Excellence in the First College Year).

Contact: University Core Curriculum Programs (http://uccp.tamucc.edu/)

Course Redesign

Using grant funding from the National Center for Academic Transformation, Tallahassee Community College redesigned its College Composition course. Rather using class time to teach basic skills, students are given diagnostic assessments and individual learning plans and then complete online tutorials to improve their writing and research skills. During class time, instructors emphasize the writing process through small group or individual work. The redesign led to improved success rates in the course, as well as improved retention *(Twigg, 2005)*.

Contact: Division of Academic Support

    (http://www.tcc.fl.edu/about_tcc/academic_affairs/division_of_academic_support/)

Texas Tech University offers Supplemental Instruction (SI) for historically difficult gateway classes, primarily in the sciences. Students in these classes can attend review sessions, offered two or three times each week, that are led by student tutors recommended by the course instructor. Review sessions focus on activities and worksheets that help students approach course content in different ways. Research has shown that students who attend SI sessions regularly earn higher course grades than their peers.

Contact: Office of Support Operations for Academic Retention (http://www.depts.ttu.edu/passcntr/)

Learning Centers and Tutoring

Florence-Darlington Technical College found that 70% of first-year students needed remediation in math. In response, the college created the Mathematics and Technology Hub. At the Math Hub, students can use computer workstations for self-paced instruction using MyMathLab software or get individual help from tutors. The Hub is open until 8:30 PM on weekday nights and on Sunday afternoons. The college has found that use of the Math Hub contributes to improved student success in math courses (2010 MetLife Foundation CC Excellence Award finalist).

Contact: Mathematics Department (http://math.fdtc.edu)

Additional Resouces

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Lumina Foundation for Education http://www.luminafoundation.org/our_work/student_success/student_success.html

Achieving the Dream http://www.achievingthedream.org

League for Innovation in the Community College http://www.league.org

DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

College Results Online http://www.collegeresults.org/

Texas Higher Education Accountability System http://www.txhighereddata.org/Interactive/Accountability/

FACULTY AND STAFF INVOLVEMENT

The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
    http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/gallery_of_tl/ilp.html

The University of Texas at Austin Center for Teaching and Learning http://www.utexas.edu/academic/ctl/

TG. Engaging faculty and staff: an imperative for fostering retention, advising, and smart borrowing
    http://www.tgslc.org/pdf/EngagingFaculty.pdf

CLEAR ACADEMIC PATHWAYS AND ADVISING

Pathways to College Network College Readiness for All Toolbox http://toolbox.pathwaystocollege.net/

National Academic Advising Association Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources
    http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/index.htm

Education Commission of the States. Transfer and Articulation. The Progress of Education Reform 10 (5)
    http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/82/06/8206.pdf

Institute for Higher Education Policy Project Win-Win http://www.ihep.org/projectwin-win.cfm

ORIENTING STUDENTS TO COLLEGE

American College Personnel Association Admissions, Orientation, and First Year Experience Resources
    http://www.myacpa.org/comm/aofye/resources.cfm

National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition http://www.sc.edu/fye/index.html

OVERCOMING EXTERNAL BARRIERS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

College Board. Rethinking the effectiveness of student aid policies: what the research tells us
    http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/rethinking-stu-aid-effectiveness-of-stu-aid-policies.pdf

National Endowment for Financial Education Clearinghouse http://www.nefe.org/tabid/89/Default.aspx

National Association of Peer Program Professionals http://www.peerprogramprofessionals.org

MDRC. Support success: services that may help low-income students succeed in community colleges
    http://www.mdrc.org/publications/399/full.pdf

CONTENT AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

National Center for Developmental Education http://www.ncde.appstate.edu/

Windows on Learning: Resources for Basic Skills Education
    http://www.cfkeep.org/html/stitch.php?s=2814408673732&id=94404660812025

On Course Student Success Strategies http://www.oncourseworkshop.com/Student%20Success%20Strategies.htm

SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING

National Learning Communities Project http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/project.asp?pid=73

The National Center for Academic Transformation http://www.thencat.org

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Course Redesign Project
    http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?ObjectID=13ABB072-E2BC-CB37-6F66D82A6A528BED

The International Center for Supplemental Instruction http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si/

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