Student Support (Re)defined

Using Student Voices to Redefine Student Support

Darla Cooper, EdD
Director, Research and Evaluation
Agenda

- What is Student Support (Re)defined?
- What have we found so far?
- What does all this mean?
- How can you use this research?
Session outcomes

Participants will:

- Learn about six factors that support students’ success
- Hear what students say is most important to their progress and achievement
- Use this research to identify how it can further advance their students’ success
OVERVIEW OF STUDY PURPOSE, DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

What is Student Support (Re)defined?
Motivation for the study

- Constrained budget environment
  - Requires efforts that are effective, scalable and affordable

- Low student success rates
  - Call attention to ensuring equitable outcomes for all students

- Statewide focus on student support
  - Provide critical perspective on reform initiatives
General research question

In an environment of extreme scarcity, which student support activities can be delivered inside and outside of the classroom to improve success for all students, paying special attention to African-American and Latino learners?
College selection

- Selection criteria:
  - Significant proportion of African-American or Latino students OR high transfer rates among African-American and/or Latino students
  - Region (northern, southern, central)
  - Area density (urban, suburban, rural)
  - Institution size (small, medium, large)

- 15 invited, 13 participating
Participating colleges
Study participants

- Survey: 785 students (12 CCCs)
  - 36% current students, 32% completers, 32% leavers
  - 30% first generation
  - 32% white, 31% Latino, 25% African American, 12% other

- Focus groups: 102 students (4 CCCs)
Reflection

1. Thinking back, what would you say was most important to your success as a college student?

2. What do you think is most important to community college students’ success today?
Six success factors

- **Directed**: Students have a goal and know how to achieve it
- **Focused**: Students stay on track—keeping their eyes on the prize
- **Nurtured**: Students feel somebody wants them to succeed as a student and helps them succeed
Six success factors (cont.)

- **Connected**: Students feel they are part of the college community

- **Engaged**: Students actively listen and participate in class and are involved in extracurricular activities

- **Valued**: Students’ skills, talents, abilities and experiences are recognized; they have opportunities to contribute on campus and feel their contributions are appreciated
SUMMARY OF STUDENT PERSPECTIVES RESEARCH

What have we found so far?
Directed:
Student Voices

I came here for liberal arts and then I got offered to take several human resources and business classes. I was doing well in these classes and just going along and the professor asked me, “What are you here for? What are you doing?” I said, “Just having fun and stuff.” He said, “You really need to focus on something.” So it was the instructor that helped me choose a direction.
Directed: Key Findings

Having direction…

- Identified by students as an important driver of achievement
  - Most frequently rated by focus group participants as top success factor
  - 79% of survey participants thought seeing a connection between their success in college and their life goals was important to their progress

- Impacted significantly by counselors and faculty who help with goal selection, ed plan development and monitoring progress
Directed: Students’ Suggestions for Action

- Provide career exploration and discipline-specific advising (faculty)
- Connect students to existing academic support programs and services (faculty, counselors & support staff)
- Provide additional resources and tools for goal selection and monitoring of progress (administrators)
- Direct more intrusive outreach to first-generation and undecided students (administrators)
Focused: Student Voices

On my college website, they have a “degree works” system where I can go and check all the classes I’ve taken. And I keep looking at it when I’m a little down. I think, “Oh, I’m almost there.” So, it’s kind of a big motivator. I see my grades and what I’ve accomplished and it lifts my spirits.
Focused: Key Findings

Being focused...

- Prioritized by *survey respondents* as most important to their success

- Defined as...
  - Having self-motivation
  - Doing the work required
  - Managing time effectively and efficiently

- For *African Americans and Latinos*, significantly influenced by access to *financial aid* and the ability to register for classes
Focused: Students’ Suggestions for Action

- Provide regular feedback on students’ performance and progress (faculty)
- Have high expectations for students (faculty)
- Connect students with special programs (e.g., DSPS, EOPS, Puente, Umoja, etc.) that provide intensive support (counselors & support staff, faculty)
- Develop resources that enable students to track their own progress towards meeting their educational goals (administrators)
Nurtured: Student Voices

The first day I came to campus to register, I was lost and didn’t know where to go. I unintentionally ended up in DSPS office and there’s a lady that sits in front. . . . She was very helpful to me. She actually told me exactly what I have to do. . . . She even sat down with me on the computer to help me finish my registration. And she has been very helpful since then. I really feel that . . . when somebody cares about you, it makes you more responsible. Because she's been taking care of me, I think that I have to do my best. Whenever she talks about me she says, "This is the student that I helped and he’s so successful."
Nurtured: Key Findings

Feeling nurtured…

- Prioritized by survey respondents as a top success factor (after focused)
- Cited as a critical motivator of academic progress
- Often linked to other factors of success
- Fostered in a range of ways—both small gestures and more comprehensive approaches
- Particularly important to African-American students (others wanting them to succeed)
Nurtured: Students’ Suggestions for Action

- Offer direct and tangible academic support (faculty)
- Ensure students understand course material (faculty)
- Know students’ names (faculty)
- Communicate and demonstrate to students that you care about their success (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)
Discussion Question

How does your college help students find direction, stay focused and/or feel nurtured?
Engaged: Student Voices

For me [engagement] happens in the classroom, outside of the classroom and in activities. . . . For me it’s important to do all three. That’s just the type of learner I am because I’m not just here to . . . be in the classroom and engage in the classroom and then leave and not engage. I have to because otherwise I’ll forget what I just learned or it’s a waste of time for me to be here.
Engaged: Key Findings

Being engaged…

- Happens inside **and** outside of classroom
- Significantly **influenced by teachers**
- Is not always recognized as important by students (and needs to be)
- For **African-American and Latino** students, engagement is notably **impacted by the presence or absence of academic support**
Engaged: Students’ Suggestions for Action

- Encourage students to utilize academic supports and ensure adequate access to these resources (faculty, administrators)
- Offer challenging classes with hands-on, real world applications (faculty)
- Allow students to provide feedback in both formal and informal ways (faculty)
- Highlight the advantages of and encourage participation in extracurricular activities (faculty, counselors, administrators)
I think . . . making the student feel more connected, it sort of lies a bit within the professors as well. Because there’s been some classes where the professor has one or two tests a semester and doesn’t lecture and it’s all based on the book. And you don’t feel very connected to that class. Whereas you can have a professor that fully engages you in lectures. There’s classwork spread throughout the whole semester and you can see he really cares. You’re more motivated to go to that class to be at the school.
Connected: Key Findings

Feeling connected...

- Goes **hand-in-hand with being engaged**
- Most often **facilitated by faculty**
- Is more **important to younger students**
- May be an **area of focus for African-American students** who say they learn best when working with others but are often alone on campus
- Potentially **limited by community college setting**
Connected: Students’ Suggestions for Action

- Provide both formal and informal opportunities for peer-to-peer connections both inside and outside of class (faculty, administrators)
- Find ways to link students to available support resources and programs (faculty, counselors, administrators)
- Promote your community college as a place of pride and worth in students’ postsecondary experience (administrators, faculty, staff, counselors)
- Show students what makes you feel connected to the college (faculty)
I worked in a particular field so I bring my professional experience to the classroom and I feel that's valued. I've been told I bring an enormous professional background, specifically in debates and in answering questions about my professional experience and organization... . .I'm able to make arguments about why you don't do certain things... So, yeah, in that sense, I feel very valued.
Valued: Key Findings

Feeling valued…

- Happens in a range of ways
  - Performing community service
  - Providing feedback to instructors, college
  - Sharing family history, culture and traditions
  - Mentoring other students
  - Taking leadership roles

- Prioritized by African-American, Latino, EOPS and first-generation students as important to their success
Valued: Students’ Suggestions for Action

- Provide community service and leadership opportunities (administrators)
- Create opportunities for and encourage students to provide feedback (faculty, administrators)
- Offer venues where students can share their family history, culture and traditions (faculty, administrators)
- Recognize students’ potential and encourage them to use their skills, abilities and experience to help others (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)
Discussion Question

How does your college help students become engaged, feel connected and/or feel valued?
IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

What does all this mean?
Key Themes

1. Colleges need to foster students' motivation.
2. Colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment.
3. Colleges need to structure support to ensure all "six success factors" are addressed.
4. Colleges need to provide comprehensive support to historically underserved students to prevent the equity gap from growing.
5. Everyone has a role to play in supporting student achievement, but faculty must take the lead.
UTILIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

How can you use this research?
How to Use This Research

- Widely disseminate research brief, report and webinar
- Use discussion questions within each of these resources to hold conversations about improving support
- Include people who interact with students at all points in their college journey
- Consider linking to existing efforts on your campus to advance student success
- Involve students in these conversations to ensure that their experience is truly represented
Next steps

Phase 2

• Sharing these findings among a variety of constituent groups

• Facilitating dialogue about the findings (convenings)

• Developing an action guide that helps facilitate the improvement of student support

• Identifying related practices that can be sustained and scaled in a cost-effective manner
Action Guide

Outlines a step-by-step process that includes resources and activities designed to help colleges…

• Prepare to engage a cross-functional team in the effort
• Reflect upon current support practices in light of study findings
• Identify what more could be done
• Prioritize a plan of action
For more information on Student Support (Re)defined

http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support

Dr. Darla Cooper, Project Director
dcooper@rpgroup.org
Thank you!