



Enacted Values Stimulate Student Success

The AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

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Retention at State Colleges and Universities: Critical Problem, Long History

- Thirty-Year History of Concern and Examination
- The Mission Imperative: “Educate the Students You Have”
- Changing Student Populations
- Growing Experience with Benchmarking





Background to the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

- The “Politics” of Graduation Rates (and its Negative Impact on AASCU-type Institutions)
- Availability of Comparative Graduation Rate Statistics from the Education Trust
- Opportunity to Look More Deeply into What is Happening at Successful Campuses





Conduct of the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

- Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education
- Involved Multi-Day Site Visits by 8-Member Study Teams to 12 State Colleges and Universities in March 2005
- Protocols Based on Lessons Learned in Similar Projects (e.g. NSSE/DEEP Project)
- Results of Visits Documented in Written Site Visit Reports





The Study Institutions

- CSU Stanislaus
- Clemson University
- CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- Elizabeth City State University
- Louisiana Technical University
- Montclair State University





The Study Institutions (continued)

- Murray State University
- Northwest Missouri State University
- Truman State University
- University of Northern Iowa
- University of Wisconsin, La Crosse
- Virginia State University





An Initial Irony

- Study Campuses were Remarkably Diverse, though All Were High Performers with Respect to Graduation Rates
- Many Study Campuses were Unaware of the Fact that they were Unusual with Respect to Graduation Rate Performance
- So What Did they Think They Were Doing?





The Major Drivers of Success

- Focus on Student Success and Student Learning, not “Improving Graduation Rates”
- A Particular Shared Culture About Student Success
- A Particular Approach to [Academic] Leadership
- Diverse Programming Driven by a Few Core Features and Values





Unpacking Culture

- A Culture of High Expectations
- A Culture of “Belonging”
- A Culture that Emphasizes Purpose and Place





High Expectations

- For Students and Student Performance
- Scaffolding and Support to Ensure that High Expectations Can be Met
- High Expectations for the Institution Itself and a Continuous Drive to Improve





“Belonging”

- Values and Rituals of “Family”
- The Importance of Continuity (in leaders, in faculty, in staff, in traditions...)
- The Importance of Deliberate Recruitment (faculty and staff as cultural “assets”)





Purpose and Place

- The “Mission” is Less a Document but a Belief System (Enacted in language, in behaviors...)
- Reinforced through Recruitment and Socialization of Key Faculty and Staff
- Reinforced by Resource Allocations that Follow and Support Core Values





Unpacking Leadership

- Debunking the “Heroic Myth” of Presidential Leadership
- Leadership is Shared and Pervasive
- Leadership is Empowering
- Leadership is Modeling Core Values





Organizational Leadership: “No Silos”

- Structures as Much Lateral as Hierarchical (Work Teams and Cross-Functional Working Styles)
- Strong and Regular Cooperation between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs
- Talented and Empowered Groups of “Middle Managers”
- All of the Above Demand Unusual Levels of Trust and Willingness to Take Risks





The Key Role of Faculty

- Contributing to Student Success is “Part of My Job Description”
- Ready Identification with Students’ Individual Backgrounds, Challenges, and Problems
- Proactive Contact with Students Both In and Outside the Classroom
- Key Role of Faculty as Modelers and Mentors





Presidents and Chief Academic Officers

- Empowerment and Joint Ownership of Processes and Implementation
- But...No Doubts Whatever About Where We are Going
- Resource Allocation Visibly Follows Core Values and Priorities
- Leaders Themselves Visibly “Walk the Talk”





Typical Programs and Practices

- First-Year Experience Programs
- “Intentional” [Intrusive] Advising
- Integrated Services (e.g. “One-Stop Shopping”)
- Curricular Features





Common Program Characteristics

- Intentional
- Integrated
- Collaborative
- Academic





Some Lessons for Institutions

- The First Big Choice: *Maintain the Mission*
- Recognize the Preeminent Importance of a Student-Centered Culture
- Simply Putting “Best Practice” Programming into Place is Unlikely to Work
- While Cultures Appear Timeless and Seamless, They Can be *Built*





What Institutional Leaders Can Do

- Articulate a Common Vision
- Take Stock of Current Conditions
- Act Strategically to Integrate Programming and Reinforce the Culture
- Invest in the Culture
- “Walk the Talk”





Some Questions to Ponder

- **Are We Sending a Consistent Message About Student Success?**
- **Are Resources Directed Visibly and Effectively Toward Student Success?**
- **How are We Using Faculty/Staff Recruitment Processes to Reinforce a Student-Centered Culture?**
- **Are We Investing in Appropriate Academic Management Information?**
- **What am I Doing Every Day that Can Further this Vision?**





The Bottom Line...

There is No “Magic Bullet” to Improve Graduation Rates. Success is Instead a Product of Many ***Little Things***, Done ***Consistently*** by Diverse Individuals, Who Share a Common ***Vision*** of Student Success and a Constantly Reinforced ***Commitment*** to Make it Happen...

