

***What Works?***  
***Research-Based, High-Impact  
Practices for Promoting Student  
Success***

*Joe Cuseo*  
Professor Emeritus, Psychology; Educational Consultant, AVID  
jcuseo@earthlink.net

**Seven Universal Principles of Student Success**  
**&**  
**High-Impact Practices for Implementing Them**

## 1.

**PERSONAL VALIDATION**

Student success is fostered when students feel personally *significant*—i.e., when they feel recognized as *individuals*, that they *matter* to the institution, and that the institution *cares* about them as whole persons (Rendón, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

High-Impact Practices:

\* Creating a *Welcoming (& Validating) First Impression of the College*

\* *Knowing Our Students:*

a) Their names (knowing who they are)

b) Their personal talents, interests, aspirations, etc. (knowing about them)

\* Treating & Educating the Student as a “*Whole Person*”

## 2.

**SELF-EFFICACY**

Students are more likely to strive for and achieve success when they believe that their *personal effort* matters—when they think they can exert significant *influence or control* over the outcomes of their life and their future success (Bandura, 1997; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Elias, & Loomis, 2002; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Solberg, et al., 1993).

High-Impact Practices:

\* Balancing *Challenge & Support* for Optimal Growth: “Scaffolding”

\* Providing Effective Performance-Enhancing *Feedback*

\* Exposing Students to *Successful Role Models* (With Whom They Can Identify)

**3. PERSONAL MEANING**

Success is more likely to take place when students find *meaning or purpose* in their college experience—i.e., when they perceive *relevant connections* between what they’re learning in college, their current life, and their future goals (Ausubel, 1978; Fink, 2002; Mezirow, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wlodkowski, 1998).

High-Impact Practices:

\* Helping Students Discover Meaning, Purpose, & Value of *College Learning*

\* Helping Students Make *Connections*:

a) Between *Courses and Disciplines* in the Curriculum

b) Between *Academic Learning* (Curriculum) and *Experiential Learning* (Co-Curriculum)

c) Between Their *College Experience*, Their *Current Life* & Their *Future Goals*

#### **4. ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT**

Success increases commensurately with the degree or depth of student *engagement* in the learning process—i.e., the amount of *time* and *energy* that students invest in the college experience—both *inside* and *outside* the classroom (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Kuh, et al., 2005; McKeachie, et al., 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

High-Impact Practices:

\* Using *Engaging Pedagogy* Inside the Classroom

\* Engaging Students in Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom

a) Creating *Course Assignments that Promote Active Learning*

b) Actively Involving Students in *Campus Life* (Student Support/Development Programs)

#### **5. SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

Student success is promoted by *human interaction, collaboration*, and the formation of *interpersonal relationships* between the student and other members of the college community—peers, faculty, staff, and administrators (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Slavin, 1996; Tinto, 1993).

High-Impact Practices:

- \* Promoting Student-*Faculty* Interaction Outside the Classroom
- \* Promoting Student-*Staff* Interaction in Campus Offices & Support Services
- \* Promoting Student-*Student* Interaction Inside & Outside the Classroom

### **6. PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Success is more likely to be experienced by students who engage in reflective thinking about their learning experiences, *elaborate* on them and *transform* them into a form that connects with what they already know or have previously experienced (Bruner, 1990; Ewell, 1997; Flavell, 1985; Svinicki, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978).

High-Impact Practices:

- \* Having Students Reflect on *Academic Learning*: Periodic Pauses for Thinking
- \* Having Students Reflect on *Experiential Learning*:
  - a) Reflection (Reaction) *Papers*
  - b) Learning *Portfolio*

### **7. SELF-AWARENESS**

Success is more likely to be experienced if students become *aware* of themselves and remain *mindful* of their learning strategies, learning habits, and ways of thinking (Brooks, 2009; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Langer, 1989, 1997; Pintrich, 1995; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991; Weinstein & Underwood, 1985).

High-Impact Practices that Promote Self-Awareness Encourage Students to Engage in:

- \* *Self-Monitoring*: periodically stopping to monitor whether they're truly comprehending what they're attempting to learn—i.e., whether they're engaging in “deep learning” vs. “shallow learning” (surface memorization).
  
- \* *Meta-Cognition*—thinking about how they are thinking—i.e., the nature of their thought process.
  
- \* *Self-Regulation*—adjusting or modifying their learning strategies to meet the distinctive demands of different academic disciplines, learning tasks, and testing formats.
  
- \* *Self-Assessment*—gaining awareness and self-insight into their learning styles, learning habits, personal interests, aptitudes (talents) and values; and using this self-knowledge to make meaningful, realistic life choices and decisions (e.g., decisions about their educational and career goals).



#### References

- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ausubel, D. (1978). The facilitation of meaningful verbal learning in the classroom. *Educational Psychologist*, 12, 251-257.

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman & Co.
- Brooks, K. (2009). *You majored in what? Mapping your path from chaos to career*. New York: Viking.
- Buckingham, M., & Clifton, C. (2001). *Now, discover your strengths*. New York: Free Press.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1993). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chemers, M. M., Hu, L. & Garcia, B. F. (2001). Academic self-efficacy and first year college student performance and adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 55-64
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Elias, S. M. & Loomis, R. J. (2002). Utilizing need for cognition and perceived self-efficacy to predict academic performance. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32, 1687-1702.
- Ewell, P. T. (1997). Organizing for learning: A new imperative. *AAHE Bulletin*, 50 (4), pp. 3-6.
- Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Flavell, J. H. (1985). *Cognitive development* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Smith, K. (1998). Cooperative learning returns to college: What evidence is there that it works? *Change*, 30, 26-35.
- Kuh, G. D. (2001). Assessing what really matters to student learning: Inside the National Survey of Student Engagement. *Change*, 33(3), pp. 10-17, 66.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Langer, E. J. (1989). *Mindfulness*. New York: Perseus Books.
- Langer, E. J. (1997). *The learning power of mindfulness*. New York: Perseus Books.
- McKeachie, W. J., Pintrich, P., Lin, Y., & Smith, D. (1986). *Teaching and learning in the college classroom: A review of the research literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, NCRIPTAL.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow, & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Multon, K. D., Brown, S. D. & Lent, R. W. (1991). Relation of self-efficacy beliefs to academic outcomes: A meta-analytic investigation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 38, 30-38.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students, Volume 2: A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pintrich, P. R. (Ed.) (1995). *Understanding self-regulated learning*. New Directions for Teaching

- and Learning, no. 63. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rendón L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education*, 19(1), 23-32.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.
- Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering (1989). Improving higher education environments for adults: *Responsive programs and services from entry to departure*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Slavin, R. (1996). Research for the future: Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21, 43-69.
- Solberg, V. S., O'Brien, K., Villareal, P., Kennel, R., & Davis, B. (1993). Self-efficacy and Hispanic college students: Validation of the college self-efficacy instrument. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 15 (1), 80-95.
- Svinicki, M. D. (2004). *Learning and motivation in the postsecondary classroom*. Bolton, Mass.: Anker.
- Terenzini, P. T., Rendón, L. I., Millar, S. B., Upcraft, M. L., Gregg, P. L., Jalomo, R., Jr., & Allison, K. W. (1996). Making the transition to college. In R. J. Menges, M. Weimer, & Associates, *Teaching on solid ground: Using scholarship to improve Practice* (pp. 43-74). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Internalization of higher cognitive functions. In M Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds. & Trans.), *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes* (pp. 52-57). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Weinstein, C. F., & Meyer, D. K. (1991). Cognitive learning strategies. In R. J. Menges & M. D. Svinicki (Eds.), *College teaching: From theory to practice* (pp. 15-26). New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 45. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weinstein, C. E., & Underwood, V. L. (1985). Learning strategies: The how of learning. In J. W. Segal, S. F. Chapman, & R. Glaser (Eds.), *Thinking and learning skills* (pp. 241-258). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wlodkowski, R. J. (1998). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## Appendix

# **Key Properties/Principles of Effective Educational Interventions and Student-Success Support Programs**

1. **INTENTIONAL (PURPOSEFUL):** They are *deliberately* designed and delivered with *research-based principles* of student success in mind, namely:
  - \* Personal Validation.
  - \* Self-Efficacy,
  - \* Active Involvement (Engagement),
  - \* Personal Meaning,
  - \* Social Integration,
  - \* Personal Reflection, and
  - \* Self-Awareness.
2. **STUDENT-CENTERED:** They are centered on and driven by the *educational needs and personal welfare* of students, rather than by institutional habit or convenience, or by the self-serving needs and preferences of faculty, administrators, or staff.
3. **MISSION-DRIVEN:** They are grounded in and guided by a well-articulated *program mission* that is consistent with the *college or university mission*.
4. **INTRUSIVE:** They are not offered passively on a come-find-and-use basis, i.e., waiting and hoping that students will discover and capitalize on them (“passive programming”); instead, supportive action is *initiated* by the institution by *actively reaching out* to students and bringing its services *to* them, thereby ensuring that support reaches students who are unlikely to seek it out on their own.
5. **PROACTIVE:** They take *early, preventative* action that address students’ learning needs and developmental adjustments in an *anticipatory* fashion—*before* they eventuate in problems that require reactive (after-the-fact) intervention.
6. **DIVERSIFIED:** They are *tailored or customized* to meet the *distinctive* needs of different student *subpopulations* (first-year students, underrepresented students, transfer students, etc.)
7. **COMPREHENSIVE (HOLISTIC):** They focus on the student as a “*whole person*,” addressing the multiple dimensions of self that affect student success (social, emotional, physical, etc.).
8. **DEVELOPMENTAL:** They are delivered in a *timely, stage-sensitive sequence* that helps students accommodate challenges as they emerge at successive phases or stages of their college experience, and in so doing, promote student growth by providing a “scaffold” that balances *challenge* with just-in-time *support*.
9. **COLLABORATIVE:** They involve cooperative *alliances or partnerships* between different organizational units of the college/university, which work together in a *complementary* and *interdependent* manner, harnessing their collective power to exert synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success.
10. **SYSTEMIC:** They occupy a *central* (rather than a peripheral or marginal) place on campus, which positions them to produce a *pervasive* effect on the student body and the potential to exert *transformative* effects on the institution itself.
11. **DURABLE:** They are *institutionalized*—i.e., they’re built or weaved into the fabric of the institution (e.g. its table of organization and annual budget process), thus ensuring the program’s *longevity* and its capacity to exert *perennial* impact on successive cohorts of students across an extended period of time.
12. **EMPIRICAL (EVIDENTIARY):** They are supported by *assessment data* (both quantitative and qualitative), which are used for *summative* evaluation—to “sum up” and *prove* the program’s overall impact or value, and *formative* evaluation—to “shape up” and continually *improve* program quality.



