

Student Success in College

Creating Conditions That Matter

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Clear Pathways to Student Success

AT THE 1994 Student Learning Imperative teleconference at Bowling Green State University, K. Patricia Cross compared college to a jigsaw puzzle (King, 1999). Students, Cross said, start college with a bag in which they put puzzle pieces they collect during the course of their time in college. Into the bag goes a puzzle piece for every activity, starting with fall orientation, advising sessions, classes, cultural events, dorm meetings, and so forth. For many students the jumble of pieces does not create a coherent, sensible picture. That is a problem because students who cannot discern meaning from their college activities often report academic difficulty or social isolation, and are at risk of leaving school. Unlike a jigsaw puzzle that has a picture on the box top, college often comes without directions; many students are unlikely to know they are constructing a picture, nor do they have strategies for making that picture meaningful for the present or useful for identifying future learning opportunities. This is particularly true for students who are the first in their families to attend college. Understanding the importance of coherence in learning to student success, DEEP institutions have created pathways clearly marked to show students what to expect and what success looks and feels like. In short, they create structures and practices that help students bring meaning to their college experiences.

Some schools, such as Fayetteville State, UTEP, UMF, and Winston-Salem, attract large numbers of students who, because of inadequate

academic preparation and lack of knowledge about college, need explicit directions to use institutional resources and support services profitably. To be sure students take advantage of these resources, these colleges require students to take part in activities, such as summer advising, orientation, and fall welcome week, and follow up with advising and other events that mark student progress over the course of the first year. At other schools—Sweet Briar, Wabash, Wheaton, and Wofford—peers and faculty members routinely go out of their way to point students in the right direction. Most use some combination of required activities and social support to guide their students.

Toward this end, DEEP schools do two things very well. First, they teach students what the institution values, what successful students do in their context, and how to take advantage of institutional resources for their learning. We refer to this as acculturation. Second, they make available what students need when they need it, and have responsive systems in place to support teaching, learning, and student success. We call this alignment—making certain that resources match the institution's mission and educational purposes and students' abilities and needs.

According to some faculty members there, CSUMB's required senior capstone is comparable to master's degree-level work. One alumna graphically described it as "your challenge and your nightmare." Another called it her "defining academic experience as an undergraduate." How do undergraduate students get through it? The university begins to prepare students for this culminating activity from the beginning. First-year students learn about the capstone project in the first-year seminar. In the required Junior ProSeminar, librarians work with students to help them develop research questions. One faculty member includes a "capstone light" assignment in her ProSeminar, asking students, "If you were to do your capstone right now, what would it look like?" Then students do something similar in the course on a much smaller scale. The capstone project itself is divided into two semesters of work. Many students use the first semester to brainstorm with their peers and the faculty member directing the project to flesh out the topic and approach. The second semester is dedicated to completing the project. Writing tutors are on hand to help.

ACCULTURATION

DEEP colleges are thick with expectations about college life. They recognize that people rarely exceed their own expectations without being challenged. For this reason, these institutions have high expectations of everyone—students, faculty, administrators, and others. They begin preparing students to meet these expectations long before the students arrive on campus. Students get warm, positive messages of welcome and support from admissions personnel and advisors along with suggestions—or, in some cases, instructions—for how to find resources when they need them. After newcomers arrive on campus, they take part in a host of orientation and other socialization activities, some of which continue through the early weeks and months of the academic year. At some institutions, these events occur throughout the entire first year. To keep students from slipping through the cracks, institutional policies and processes provide both academic and social challenges and support, inside and outside the classroom. And they challenge students to stretch their aspirations and perform beyond their preconceived limits.

"You Don't Go to Wofford, You Join It"

The Wofford admissions view book and catalogue send powerful messages to prospective community members about what "joining" Wofford means, what students can expect of the college, and what the college expects of its students. As soon as newcomers arrive, they are accepted and treated as full members of the Wofford family. And by all accounts, students respond positively, as illustrated by Wofford's 89% first-to-second-year persistence rate. Most students, whether they were fourth-generation Wofford "legacies" or the first in their family to go to college, told us that upon arriving they felt the college was a place where they would fit in and "matter." Indeed, just as the admissions view book promises, students and faculty reported they develop meaningful relationships that extend well beyond the classroom, a "tradition of putting the emphasis on the individual student [that] goes back 150 years." Thus, Wofford demonstrates that using official institutional publications

to welcome students can be effective, as long as what students experience after arriving is consistent with what the institution claims.

Gonzaga: Faith, Service, Ethics, Justice, Leadership

The Gonzaga Experience Live, or GEL, program is a powerful recruitment tool for Gonzaga, as about 70% of the students who participate in GEL enroll at Gonzaga. The GEL weekend, a spring event for prospective students, includes tours of the campus and Spokane, academic sessions, meals, a club and organization fair, evening social activities, and a night in a residence hall with a current student. An admissions staff member told us that GEL is intended to appeal to students with a “social justice bent who want a sense of community.” Discussions during the GEL weekend frequently focus on questions about how to live a moral life—what is good, how one should live. Thus, Gonzaga signals the importance of such questions long before students arrive on campus. The centerpiece of Your Total Self, an attractive publication that targets prospective students, is a series of individual student profiles, including one about a student pursuing medical research and her relationship with her Gonzaga faculty mentor, and a journal entry from another student documenting his semester-long collaboration with peers on a mechanical engineering project. This and other Gonzaga publications express two consistent messages: (1) at GU students have many different opportunities to pursue their academic goals in the context of a Jesuit community, and (2) Gonzaga is a place where students form deep, enduring relationships with their teachers and other students.

Wabash College: “Boys Will Be Boys. Men Go to Wabash”

From their initial contacts with the college, prospective students are told that a Wabash education is difficult but, as the admissions materials say, “It’s worth it.” When asked why he chose to attend Wabash, a senior said, “For me it was the academic tradition. You know, ‘It’s not going to be easy, but it’s worth it.’ I liked the work ethic.” Another said he was attracted by “the camaraderie of going through something tough together.” These expectations seem to prepare students for striving to meet academic challenges. A faculty member commented, “They come

assuming it will be hard.” Another said, “They’re prepared to read and write more than they’ve ever done.” In fact, “students complain when a teacher does not give them enough work.” Looking back on his four years, a senior told us, “You have to invest a lot of energy in a Wabash education, not just tests and scores. You have to work hard to do well in every aspect, but then you feel good.” A classmate commented, “I came here to be challenged. And it’s very gratifying when you’re done.”

WHAT NEW STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

Most DEEP schools have programs that focus on first-year students and attempt to shape first-year experiences in educationally purposeful ways. They use formal orientation activities to make certain their students do not get lost in the shuffle or struggle needlessly. In addition, many informal processes and mechanisms communicate to new students, faculty, and staff what is valued and how things are done. In this section we offer a few examples of how DEEP schools organize their resources to respond to student learning needs and concerns during the critical first year of college. Others are described in Part Three.

Winston-Salem State University has First Year College (FYC), the centerpiece of its effort to cultivate a supportive campus environment. Most FYC offices and programs are housed in one building near the center of campus, thus conveniently locating most sources of academic support for new students under one roof. As described in Chapter Two, all new students and transfer students with fewer than 30 credit hours must enroll in one of three new-student adjustment courses. A twist that distinguishes WSSU’s seminar from those offered at other institutions is that certain sections are designated for students interested in specific majors. Faculty members teaching these sections also serve as students’ academic advisors and “mentors” for the first academic year. Student services professionals teach sections for undecided students. The FYC instructors receive preservice training and meet every other week to discuss how the course is going and to share ideas.

CSUMB introduces new students (including transfers) to academic programs and university life through the Freshman-Year Experience Seminar. Students at CSUMB design an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) to achieve the Seminar's five learning outcomes:

1. Indicated awareness of both personal contributions to the CSUMB Vision and the vision's contribution to one's own academic and personal development
2. Demonstrated college-level oral and written communication skills
3. Demonstrated skills in gathering and assessing information in a multicultural context
4. Applied understanding of CSUMB University Learning Requirements (ULRs) to develop an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP)
5. Demonstrated collaborative learning skills, and understanding of the importance of collective work

Following the first year, students update their ILP to respond to their changing educational and professional goals. The ILP is reviewed in a junior year common learning experience, the major-specific Pro-Seminar 300.

To prepare newcomers for a rigorous academic program and help graduating seniors make meaning of their college experiences, Sewanee features a "bookend experiences model." The First Year Program (FYP) is anchored by a small, intensive seminar course designed to foster communities of learning and introduce new students to college-level work. An innovative "pre-orientation" program called PRE involves over 60% of the entering class in a variety of outdoor programs that help students get to know one another in a setting that requires cooperation and introduces them to the rich opportunities of the Domain. The other bookend—the Senior Year Experience—includes a required capstone project and comprehensive examinations in the major. More will be said about both later in Part Three.

Contributing to Evergreen's road map to success are its "Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate" that set forth what students should

incorporate and strive to attain as part of the individualized academic plan required of all students:

1. Articulate and assume responsibility for your own work
2. Participate collaboratively and responsibly in our diverse society
3. Communicate creatively and effectively
4. Demonstrate integrative, independent, and critical thinking
5. Apply qualitative, quantitative, and creative modes of inquiry appropriately to practical and theoretical problems across disciplines
6. Demonstrate depth, breadth, and synthesis of learning and the ability to reflect on the personal and social significance of that learning (*Advising Handbook*, 2001–2002, p. 10)

The expectations flow from the five foci for teaching and learning noted in Chapter Two (interdisciplinary learning, learning across significant differences, personal engagement with learning, linking theory to practice, and collaborative learning). Along with the five foci, the expectations are posted in highly visible places on campus, including main buildings and outdoor kiosks, so new and seasoned community members keep them in mind.

At Ursinus, all first-year students live in Freshman Centers contiguous to campus, an intentional strategy to create community among first-year students. Another purpose of the first-year housing is to deepen conversations among classmates about ideas encountered in the Common Intellectual Experience, the two-semester interdisciplinary course that introduces students to the intellectual life of the college. The Freshman Centers focus attention on transition issues specific to first-year students. Staff members provide additional structure to out-of-class living environments to support and encourage students to move from dependence to independence, which is a cornerstone of the college's educational philosophy.

Applicants to the University of Michigan receive a compact disc describing university experiences, including opportunities for research with faculty and other kinds of student-faculty interactions. Current

students travel to area high schools to discuss the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. They also describe the "Michigan Way" as an expectation that students will take much of the initiative in contacting faculty members. The importance of student initiative is emphasized again during the three-day first-year orientation that occurs prior to the beginning of fall classes. Students meet with their academic advisors, learn about the University Mentorship Program (described below), and hear presentations by faculty described as particularly interested in working with new students.

AFFIRMING DIVERSITY

Formal programs that support students from groups historically underserved in higher education and affirm institutional commitments to diversity are powerful tools to bring students successfully into the institution. The University of Michigan and Wheaton College sponsor POSSE (Pathways to Student Success and Excellence) programs on their campuses. One of the program's goals is to increase the retention and graduation rates of academically and economically disadvantaged undergraduate students by using approaches that encourage collaboration within the institution. Participants learn about the importance of meeting with their instructors during office hours to be sure they are performing satisfactorily and are given study tips and advice about how to use tutoring services effectively. In addition, each student is assigned a counselor who makes sure the student does not "just feel like a number." Although at Michigan POSSE is viewed as a "transitional program" geared toward first- and second-year students, many participants maintain contact with their POSSE peers and continue to rely heavily on their counselors for advice, friendship, and perspectives even as juniors and seniors. As one Michigan student stated, "POSSE taught me how to survive the University of Michigan." Another commented, "POSSE taught me how to go and talk to professors... how to ask for help... go to the writing center."

Several other DEEP schools offer summer transition programs to support entering students who might need extra assistance adjusting to college. The Bridge Program at Ursinus College brings students to

campus three weeks before the start of the semester to help them "bridge the gap between high school and college." Created with external funding about 14 years ago, the Bridge Program started with about 15 students; in 2002, 44 participated. During the last two weeks of July and the first week of August, Bridge Program students take an intensive sociology or literature course as a way to acclimate to Ursinus's academic demands and campus culture. The four-unit course continues in the fall semester, when Bridge students enroll in three other courses to fill their academic program. The program also aims to help students develop a close working relationship with their faculty advisor, a relationship that also extends into the fall semester. Faculty advisors monitor students' progress in courses and meet with students on a weekly basis. The program seems to be successful by any measure, but particularly noteworthy is that the percentage of Bridge students graduating from Ursinus is comparable to that of other students.

Creating Higher Expectations for Educational Readiness (CHEER) is Fayetteville State's summer transition program, which is intended to help students acquire the academic skills and social confidence they need to succeed in college. CHEER students engage in activities to improve reading, writing, and study skills, and earn three hours of credit for Math 121 (Introduction to Algebra). Participation in the program, which is free, enables students to receive a scholarship of \$220 for tuition and books associated with the mathematics course.

Acculturation experiences at DEEP schools also acknowledge and affirm diverse styles of learning. George Mason, Alverno, and Fayetteville State demonstrate in multiple ways the value of taking different approaches to student learning. As mentioned earlier, Fayetteville State faculty and staff recognize, but do not lament, that their students are not as well prepared for college as they would like. They get on with the task: "We work with the students we have, not those we wish we had." As one administrator explained, "We may be open admission, but we are not open graduation." The point is clear to FSU students long before they arrive on campus: If you choose to join us, be prepared to work harder than ever. Moreover, know this: "Failure is not an option!"

Socializing New Faculty

DEEP colleges also teach new faculty about their new setting and what they can do to help students succeed. University of Maine at Farmington, for example, dedicates considerable time and energy to ensure that the faculty member—institution fit is right and that potential colleagues have a good understanding of the local culture. One such strategy is a two-to three-day campus interview that occasionally includes staying at the home of a UMF faculty member. The provost looks for individuals who seek the rural New England lifestyle, value collegial relationships with colleagues and students, and are committed to the liberal arts. As we said in Chapter Four, recruitment ads draw attention to the black flies endemic to rural Maine, as well as an emphasis on working extensively and intensively with undergraduate students.

Ursinus has about 110 full-time faculty members, 40 of whom were hired between 1998 and 2003. To smooth the transition to Ursinus for each new cohort, the vice president for academic affairs brings together all new faculty members once a week to meet in the “Faculty Colloquium.” Senior faculty members discuss teaching and pedagogical approaches that seem to be effective with Ursinus students. Participants swap teaching tips and approaches. Another goal of the colloquium is for newcomers to better understand the cross-disciplinary culture of Ursinus. This in turn supports the goals of the Common Intellectual Experience (CIE) course taught by faculty from all disciplines.

Longwood values meaningful student-faculty relationships, a point emphasized in new faculty recruitment. As one academic administrator put it: “If the applicant wants a research-based career without undergraduates, this is not the place for them.” A faculty member told us, “In the hiring process we ask about interest in teaching and caring for students. We want the right kind of people coming here.” Noteworthy, too, is the fact that Longwood students have a direct, integral role in new faculty recruitment and hiring processes. Student participation and input are readily acknowledged by administrators and senior faculty as invaluable in assessing an applicant’s commitment to working with students.

California State University at Monterey Bay goes to noteworthy lengths to inform new faculty members of its students’ needs. Student-centeredness is emphasized when faculty members are recruited and again

during the four-day faculty orientation program for which all new full-time and part-time faculty are compensated. During orientation faculty are challenged to answer the question, “What will teaching and advising look like if we are carrying out our vision?” The highlight of the program is a half-day trip to the surrounding community so that faculty can see firsthand where many of their students live and identify potential service learning sites. After the trip faculty members are asked to reflect on what this excursion meant to them and their focus on supporting students. The university’s student-centered ethos is reinforced again on the first day of school at an all-faculty assembly during which every faculty member signs an enlarged copy of the CSUMB Vision Statement as a symbolic rededication to the university’s values.

Because all University of Kansas decision-making committees—including search and screen committees—have 20% student representation, new faculty begin to interact with students and come to know their interests and needs during the recruitment process. In addition, new faculty orientation pairs a senior faculty mentor with a new faculty member to foster understanding of the campus culture, including an emphasis on undergraduate student learning.

Connecting Students to Each Other and Their College

Done well, rituals and traditions can bond students to one another and to the institution. Feelings of belonging help students connect with their peers and the institution, relationships that, in turn, are associated with persistence and satisfaction. Such events also can teach institutional values, including the value placed on academic achievement.

The University of Kansas uses “Hawk Week” to acquaint students with KU traditions. One of the week’s popular events is “Tradition Night,” where more than 3,000 students gather in the football stadium to rehearse the Rock Chalk Chant, listen to stories about the Jayhawk, and learn the “I’m a Jayhawk” school song. Intended to represent the historical struggles of Kansas settlers, the Jayhawk, a mythical bird that serves as the campus mascot, remains a powerful, enduring symbol of impassioned people committed to keeping Kansas a Free State. Other stories and rituals are meant to instill and deepen new students’ commitment to

graduating from KU. Admissions tour guides tell visiting prospective students that KU students do not dare walk through the campanile until they've earned the right to walk through at commencement. Another Traditions Night ritual is to recognize achievement by asking students who are second- and third-generation Jayhawks to stand. In addition, a torch is passed from a senior to a representative of the first-year class (representatives usually are fourth- or fifth-generation Jayhawks).

At Wofford, "there is a right way, there is a wrong way, and there is the Wofford way." The campus chaplain only half in jest described the "Wofford Way" slogan as "a mystical thing": "If the plumbing does not work—it is the Wofford Way, if we beat the Citadel in football—it is the Wofford Way." The "Wofford Way" also describes students hanging out at the Acorn Café, using the Great Oaks Hall for "casual study" and socializing, and going to the library or the Olin Building for "serious study." Wofford orientation leaders present skits that depict these and other Wofford "dos and don'ts" to incoming students. Often featured in the performance are Wofford rituals such as rubbing the misspelled word "benifcence" [sic] on the plaque commissioned by the founder for good luck on tests; faculty-signed Bibles distributed at graduation; and a local neighbor's opening reception and welcome into the neighborhood.

At WSSU, new students are challenged to do what is necessary for academic success during the "Lamb to Ram" pinning ceremony, a formal induction event held during orientation week. This program inspires confidence, builds a sense of membership in the community, and helps new students picture themselves as successful WSSU students. The Ram Ambassadors, and the student government Lamb to Ram program, initiate students into the "Ram family," and communicate what it means to be a member. It is a time, several students further explained, when one becomes an official college student because "you have the pin to prove it." As part of the "Ram family," parents, guardians, and other members of students' families are expected to hold and communicate high expectations for their students' success and be involved in their students' lives at WSSU. In addition to pinning the "Lamb," other highlights of the event include speeches by the chancellor, Miss WSSU, and other college dignitaries, and walking through the Arches for good

luck. The Arches physically symbolize a gateway to institutional loyalty and pride and represent WSSU's "Enter to learn, depart to serve" motto. They are an architectural artifact linking present students to the past, and ushering them into future leadership. According to campus folklore, the more frequently students walk through the Arches, the greater the likelihood they will graduate.

Sewanee emphasizes intellectual challenge in admissions publications and during campus visits. Once students matriculate, these messages are reinforced in the outdoor preorientation activity, new student orientation, and the First Year Program. The First Year Program also helps students learn the numerous Sewanee terms of endearment, such as "the Domain" and "the Mountain," as well as campus rituals. One such ritual is "getting a Sewanee angel": students touch the roof of their vehicle as they leave the gates of the Domain to invite a guardian angel to protect them away from the campus. Angels are "released" by touching the roof again when returning to the Domain. These practices may seem old fashioned, even hokey, at first blush to outsiders. Yet in the context of Sewanee, they reinforce the academic ethos, communicate the core values of the institution, and integrate newcomers into the college's culture.

At Sweet Briar College, we heard repeatedly that only members of the Sweet Briar community can fully appreciate the appeal and value of what might appear to be nonsensical, frivolous activities and pastimes. The explanatory refrain was, "It's a Sweet Briar thing.... You wouldn't understand." Indeed, scores of terms of endearment, traditions, and other cultural properties work together to socialize newcomers and bond Sweet Briar women to the college and to one another. For example, faculty and staff welcome new students with glow sticks during a culminating ceremony on the last evening of orientation. Much of the campus culture and "how we do things at Sweet Briar" is transmitted from the intentional pairing of first-year students with juniors, a practice typical of women's colleges. Juniors help first-year students understand Sweet Briar's events and traditions and even serve as first-year class officers until the new students elect their own representatives in the fall. The two classes remain sister classes throughout students' careers at Sweet Briar.

Fall Founders Day features an organized march to the top of the hill where Daisy Williams—whose mother provided the endowment to found Sweet Briar—and the rest of her family are buried. The procession is led by a bagpiper and seniors, who wear their academic robes for the first time. These robes are decorated with buttons, patches, and secret pockets reflecting generations of Sweet Briar students' experiences; each new owner adds her own adornments and wears the robe during her senior year. Faculty members also wear academic regalia. Senior students and the college chaplain lead a brief ceremony of remembrance at the top of the hill and lay daisies on Daisy's grave. A community picnic on the campus green follows the event.

To communicate expectations for graduation, departing seniors present their decorated academic robes to juniors. At the spring Junior Banquet, juniors receive gold class rings that feature the college seal in a gemstone that is the official color of the students' graduating class. The class color, motto, and symbol identify the various classes (four different sets of mottos, colors, and symbols are constant and rotate every four years). In addition to lending a sense of continuity and perspective, these traditions and others like them bond students to one another and to their alma mater. Moreover, they give students something to look forward to—a sense that they, too, can achieve something of significance as did those who have gone before.

Like its mission, Wabash's code of conduct—the Gentleman's Rule—is unique and simply stated: "The College expects each student to conduct himself, at all times, both on and off the campus, as a gentleman and a responsible citizen." As we noted in Chapter Two, no other rule exists to govern student behavior at Wabash. It is at the core of becoming a "Wabash man." According to the 2002–2003 Wabash Academic Bulletin, "This simple, yet all-encompassing rule allows the Wabash student exceptional personal freedom and requires of him commensurate personal responsibility, which together we believe are essential parts of his education and development." One administrator told us the Gentleman's Rule "is at the center of our culture and deeply embedded in the ethos of the campus." In fact, the Rule is a direct reflection of the core values of the college: "We focus here on values instead of rules. We say to young men, 'we trust you,' and they know we mean it."

Wabash believes its Gentleman's Rule "is the essence of the liberal arts" in that students are expected to critically examine situations and make thoughtful, well-informed decisions. As one administrator told us, "students struggle with the tension between freedom and responsibility and with the absence of clearly defined limits [and] sometimes they screw up." Indeed, the college views students making mistakes as an important part of their learning. The Gentleman's Rule is also a focal point for socializing students to the Wabash culture. New students hear about it long before they matriculate. After they arrive, returning students tell newcomers what is acceptable and what is not. Equally important, students hold each other accountable. Students talked about the Gentleman's Rule with affection and respect. A senior said, "You're constantly asking yourself, 'Are you acting like a gentleman?' It gives you the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them. You're accountable to your peers and you learn to trust each other." An administrator added, "We talk about it all the time, but we have a hard time explaining it. It's a little mysterious." As one student put it, "You can only understand it by being here."

Summary

DEEP institutions communicate preferred ways of doing things and bond students to one another and the institution. They do not leave newcomers alone to discover what it takes to be successful. Even before enrolling, prospective students are provided clear messages about the college's mission, values, and expectations. Bridge programs are available for students who might need extra assistance in adapting to college, but all incoming students participate in structured experiences that welcome them to community membership and provide them with the information they need to be effective students.

ALIGNMENT

Showing new students what they can and must do to succeed in college is necessary but not sufficient to ensure success. Also important is an infrastructure of support, including safety nets, reward systems, and ongoing assessment. At DEEP colleges, resources and structures for student success are aligned with the educational mission, curricular

offerings, and student abilities and aspirations. Specific policies and practices for student success at DEEP schools are performance standards, redesigning of programs to meet student needs, early warning systems, advising, and reward systems.

Performance Standards

DEEP schools set standards for achievement at levels consistent with their students' academic preparation that also stretch them to go beyond what they think they can accomplish. If standards are set too high, beyond the reach of students' current ability to perform, many will struggle, become frustrated, and perform poorly; some will leave school. If standards are too low, students will not perform up to their potential. In both cases, human capital is wasted. Thus, absolute levels of academic, personal, and social challenge vary from one school to the next and even within institutions, depending on student characteristics (for example, precollege preparation, family circumstances, major field) as well as institutional mission and context.

As with other aspects of the academic program, faculty members are key to setting and maintaining performance standards, especially faculty whom students consider to be "tough, demanding, but interesting." Students described one WSSU faculty member as "intimidating." But they also view him as a "great teacher" because he sets high expectations for students: "He wants you to be prepared for life, so he correlates real life to the class material. You have to think." For example, seniors in the Department of Business Administration and Economics at Winston-Salem State University complete a capstone class using real-life case examples.

Along with setting high standards, DEEP institutions use various methods to assess students' academic performance. Some institutions require students to complete rigorous written or oral comprehensive examinations. For example, Wabash students take comprehensive examinations in January of their senior year. A two-day written exam is followed by an hour-long oral exam presented to a committee (faculty in the student's major and minor fields of study and an at-large representative). "Comps" require students to (1) organize and synthesize information to address broad questions relevant to their discipline, and (2) demonstrate

competence in the major area of study. A faculty member asserted, "It's the 50-minute oral that's really scary. They have to talk about their field and put it in a broader context than they've had to in their courses." Another noted, "It's interesting to see how they can pull things together." Comprehensive exams are another example of the competitive Wabash student culture. Other schools require the completion of a major paper, such as a senior thesis, or a portfolio that can be later used when applying for jobs or graduate school. We describe several of these in Chapter Eight.

Another way DEEP schools align student performance with institutional expectations is through feedback. Earlier in this section we described Evergreen's emphasis on providing students feedback on their performance. Recall that Evergreen does not assign letter grades, but student performance is evaluated rigorously through individual conferences between students and faculty and written narratives. At the conclusion of a Program, for example, students submit a self-evaluation in which they are encouraged to reflect on their work and describe significant learning experiences. The student also prepares a written evaluation of the faculty member. The faculty narrative evaluation describes the subject areas studied, details the student's accomplishments, and assigns the number of credits earned. Typically, students and faculty exchange and discuss these evaluations during the end of the program evaluation conference. Chapter Three offers more examples of the important ways that faculty at DEEP schools demonstrate their focus on improving student learning through feedback. Additional tools that schools are using to measure academic performance are discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Redesigning Programs to Meet Student Needs

From surveys such as NSSE, UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), and locally developed instruments, DEEP schools know a lot about their students, who they are, and what they need to perform well. Programs and practices are invented, tweaked, revised, or discarded, depending on what data say about students and their experiences. Additional important information comes from ongoing contracts with students—listening to their needs, learning about their successes, and

understanding how their success occurs. Every DEEP college has a story to tell: first about the importance of systematically coming to know their students and then using that knowledge to foster success.

Information from NSSE and other sources about how students were spending their time prompted Miami University's first-year experience "Choice Matters" initiative, an effort to channel student behavior toward desirable activities. The goal for students is to use their time wisely and reflect systematically on what they learn from their experiences inside and outside the classroom. A variety of linked programs promote the initiative, including (1) Miami Plan Foundation courses taught by full-time faculty, (2) optional first-year seminars, (3) community living options that emphasize leadership and service, and (4) cultural, intellectual, and arts events. Overall, this and other initiatives to positively affect first-year student experience are part of an intentional effort to align Miami's infrastructure and programs with its values, and their impact is subject to systematic evaluation.

Michigan has done six major studies of undergraduates' experiences since the late 1980s. The first, for the Planning Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, established integrated undergraduate education programs, including the First-Year Seminar Program, the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP), and the Sweetland Writing Center. The most recent report was "The Second Chapter of Change: Renewing Undergraduate Education at the University of Michigan," by the President's Commission on the Undergraduate Experience (2002). All of the reports provide candid appraisals of the state of undergraduate education at the university and offer innovative and responsive strategies for improving undergraduates' experiences. Michigan has implemented many of those strategies in one form or another to provide students with guides for navigating the university's bountiful opportunities for learning and for linking classroom and out-of-class experiences.

As described in Chapter Two, many first-generation college students at the University of Maine at Farmington have jobs. Up until several years ago, most UMF students who worked did so off campus; a practice research shows is linked to high rates of attrition. After documenting this behavior and recognizing its negative effects, the university increased

the number of meaningful work-study jobs on campus. The program began in 1998 with an \$86,000 allocation from the UMF president; in 2003, the Student Work Initiative fund had almost doubled to \$168,000. Campus jobs were created with two goals in mind: (1) to provide students with meaningful learning experiences through employment, and (2) to increase persistence and graduation rates. Now about 50 percent of UMF students work on campus; the rate of student persistence to graduation has improved from 51% to 56% and continues to climb.

Early Warning Systems

Several DEEP schools use versions of "early warning systems" to identify and support students at academic risk. George Mason monitors students' performance to ensure they do not slip through the cracks. In the midterm progress report, part of its early warning system, faculty members, who receive reports for their advisees, and the Academic Advising office, which receives grades for undeclared students, contact students with low grades. In addition, the University 100 orientation course uses a series of assessments as student performance indicators. Students can access their assessment records online, as well as faculty evaluations, as they register for class.

Fayetteville State's early-alert system depends on an intricate network of individuals, including faculty, mentors, academic support units, and University College and Career Center staff, to identify and assist students in academic difficulty. Faculty members teaching 100-level courses are paired with University College staff, whereas those teaching courses at the 200-level and above work with colleagues at the Advisement and Career Services Center to intervene when needed. Within the first two weeks of the semester, all faculty teaching freshman-level courses receive a roster indicating the mentor (usually the instructor of the First Year Seminar course) for each first-year student. The faculty use this information to contact the mentor and the University College to alert them about students experiencing difficulty. Mentors, in turn, contact students and determine whether additional referrals are needed. The Advisement and Career Services Center communicates with students about strategies to address their difficulties and offers workshops that coincide with progress letters sent to at-risk students.

At Winston-Salem State University, staff members in the Center for Student Success monitor the academic progress of all first-year and second-year students by reviewing daily class attendance, academic performance after the fourth week of classes, midterm exam grades, and final exam grades. The center sends individual "progress reports" for each student to faculty teaching in the core curriculum. Faculty are asked to comment on the reasons for students' difficulty, choosing from among 16 possible affective and behavioral concerns. These concerns include poor class attendance, apparent loneliness, lack of class participation, poor reading skills, failure to appear for appointments, and disruptive classroom behavior. "When I receive a report back from faculty, it puts my services into play," explained an administrator in the center. Center staff contact students in difficulty by phone and e-mail and encourage them to come to the center for help. An administrator in the center explained, "I also burn a lot of shoe leather" in tracking students down in their residence hall or after class. When the center receives a report on a student, or when a student earns a D or F, the student is placed on a monitoring list. Each semester, anywhere from 400 to 700 students are on the list.

At least a half dozen DEEP schools have federally funded TRIO programs, designed to expand access to higher education and provide early intervention to prepare and assist students from historically under-represented groups. Fayetteville State's Student Support Services (SSS) provides highly structured academic development programs, including personal and group counseling, cocurricular programs, and peer tutors. Involvement in SSS is demanding: students are required to participate in 20 hours of tutoring per week.

Advising

National studies of student satisfaction indicate that advising is the area of their educational experience with which students are the least satisfied (Low, 2000; Noel-Levitz Inc., 2003). DEEP schools organize faculty and staff resources in different ways to address this important aspect of students' academic lives. For example, recall that Longwood assigns a faculty advisor who may work with the student in that role throughout

the student's undergraduate program. Some schools embed the advising function in the first-year experience. Macalester, Wofford, and Sewanee connect students to their advisor via the first-year seminar course in which the faculty member serves as students' academic advisor until students declare their major and are assigned a departmental advisor. Wheaton created an advising team composed of the faculty member, peer mentor, librarian, and administrator assigned to instruct in the first-year seminar.

Miami University emphasizes the importance of advising by assigning new students to first-year residence halls with a live-in academic advisor. The first-year advisor serves as the academic advisor and as the residence hall director to students living in the first-year residence hall (ranging in size from 75 to 360 students), although in a few academic programs (Schools of Fine Arts and Engineering and Applied Science, Teacher Education) another advisor is assigned to first-year students. After classes begin, 90% of first-year students invited to schedule an appointment with their first-year advisor show up for this 30-minute conference. Faculty members serve as advisors to all upper division students in their majors, a practice that has disappeared at many large institutions. This advising model ensures that new students have access to a specialist in the advising needs and issues of first-year students, who gets to know them personally through other interactions in the residence hall. The advisor also connects students to faculty in their academic department for advising to ensure that students come into contact with an individual faculty member on a regular basis.

Kansas established the Freshman-Sophomore Advising Center (FSAC) in response to lower-than-desired levels of student satisfaction with academic advising. Its "Graduate in Four" advising notebook, distributed at orientation, is designed to provide students with information about how to make the most of their undergraduate years and what they need to do to complete their degree program in a timely manner. In the welcome letter at the front of the notebook, the university encourages students to "plan out-of-classroom activities such as organizations and internships that develop your skills and experiences, broaden you as a person, and enhance your opportunities for employment or graduate or professional school." The notebook then

includes a section for each of the four undergraduate years along with a “checklist” that students can use to help determine whether they are making appropriate choices. The notebooks also help students monitor whether they are, in fact, making progress toward the completion of their degree. Although students seem to use the information in the notebooks for reference, they had not yet adopted the intended practice of bringing their notebooks with them to advising appointments. KU is working to determine the different ways to encourage greater use of the notebooks such as extending their application to other departments, including career services.

Reward Systems

Effective programs and practices cannot be sustained unless the contributions of the people who implement them are recognized. One reason DEEP schools seem to work well is the presence of reward systems congruent with their enacted missions and priorities. At all colleges and universities, tensions about rewards—who is rewarded for what and how—are inevitable; DEEP schools are not immune from such tensions. Yet when conflicts over rewards arise, DEEP colleges handle them as they handle other institutional dilemmas: in the context of institutional mission, values, and resources. This is especially challenging at large, complex institutions with multiple missions that emphasize research along with teaching and service.

Some DEEP schools recognize faculty commitment to teaching undergraduates with financial awards. At KU, each year, 50 to 60 faculty members selected by their students are honored at the Teacher Appreciation Banquet sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). The university sponsors several teaching awards that carry campuswide respect and prestige, and some carry substantial monetary awards. KU’s CTE also supports faculty affiliated with learning communities by providing the faculty members with \$500 to fund in-class projects and cocurricular enrichment activities.

George Mason honors teaching by identifying and recruiting outstanding senior faculty members. Twenty years ago GMU established the Robinson Scholars program to attract from other institutions distinguished professors in the liberal arts and sciences who are committed

to undergraduate education. Currently, GMU employs 11 Robinson scholars from a wide range of disciplines who teach everything from 100-level and freshman seminar courses through advanced courses.

As part of its systematic efforts to focus on and improve undergraduate education (described more fully in Chapter Six), the University of Michigan established a series of named professorships, the Thurman Professors, to honor faculty with extraordinary achievements in undergraduate education.

WHAT’S NOTEWORTHY ABOUT CREATING CLEAR PATHWAYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

- DEEP colleges clearly mark routes to student success. Some guideposts, such as required first-year seminars, advising sessions, periodically updating programs of study, and capstone courses, are tied directly to the academic program. Others take the form of convocations that celebrate educational attainment, passing along gowns that represent continuity of experience, or walking through arches to heighten one’s commitment to graduating.
- Institutional publications accurately describe what students say they experience.
- Most DEEP schools do not prescribe overly restrictive pathways to success. At the same time, each institution is unmistakably intentional about telling students about the resources and services available to help them succeed. Some institutions are more intrusive than others in this regard; some require specific activities of some or all of their students, others have few, if any, such requirements.
- DEEP schools tailor their efforts to meet the needs of their students. Each institution sets standards according to what is reasonable for its students’ experiences and aspirations and provides the support—remedial, supplemental, or enrichment—students need to meet these standards.