

# 2014 BRIEFS ON ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## FOREWORD

As members of the Commission for Academic Support in Higher Education, we have seen a steady increase in the number of Convention presentations related to support services. With no direct career paths for professionals to follow, the field of academic support can be tricky to navigate. Those in the field represent a collection of dedicated people who work to not only help students who may otherwise fall through the academic cracks, but also to help those students who want to achieve at a higher level.

According to a 2014 report by the Institute of Education Sciences, post-secondary enrollment rose by 45% from 1997-2011 and is expected to increase another 14% by 2022. With the push by the Obama Administration to increase the number of college graduates by 2020 and the shrinking budgets of many institutions, student recruitment and retention to graduation are important. Academic support initiatives are being viewed as critical resources by many senior level academic administrators. The concept of the traditional, 18-22 year old college student is no longer the norm across all institutions. This presents new challenges and opportunities for college educators and administrators. Today's institutions are working with students of all ages, races and orientations. Support services such as TRIO programs, academic advising and tutoring programs are only a few examples of programs that can help a diverse student population achieve success and progress toward graduation.

This monograph contains a small collection of articles that touch on specific student populations, program assessment and academic advising. While we were not able to capture every program or conversation related to student support services during Convention, we hope this monograph provides a flavor of the issues faced by college educators on a day-to-day basis.

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# WHY FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT INITIATIVES MATTER

KALEIGH MROWKA, ANDREA ZIEGER, JOHANNA GRUENEWALD

*First-generation students are considered at-risk for academic success in institutions of higher education due to lower levels of academic preparedness, cultural capital, and familial support. This chapter assists participants in applying the latest research on first-generation students to initiatives and programs designed to target at-risk students on their college campuses. The chapter includes discussion of educational initiatives, best practices, and strategies for mapping the environment of first-generation students on a college campus.*

First-generation students are defined either as those “for whom neither parent attended college” or “for whom neither parent attained a baccalaureate degree.” These students have been identified as an at-risk population in institutions of higher education. As a general demographic, first-generation students often lack the cultural capital, prior knowledge, and familial support and understanding that continuing-generation students have when entering the college environment (Ward, Seigel, & Davenport, 2012). First-generation students often work more hours per week, are more likely to have dependents in their home, and are known to be less academically prepared compared with their continuing-generation counterparts (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). There is a great degree of intersectionality between first-generation students and students of other marginalized identities, including female students, students of color, and students from low-income households (Choy, 2001).

The goal of this chapter is to critically explore the role of first-generation academic support systems in college and university settings, which include, but are not limited to, special tutoring programs, mentoring programs, and orientations. In the rapidly changing field of higher education, it is imperative that university administrators and practitioners

combine a growing theoretical knowledge base with institution-specific characteristics to develop and improve initiatives that support first-year, first-generation students. We have outlined a process for such application, citing the First Billiken’s Mentoring Program at Saint Louis University as a case study.

## FIRST GENERATION SERVICES REVIEW

While federally funded outreach initiatives such as the TRiO programs seek to address some of the needs of first-generation students, many institutions are looking for additional ways to expand support for these students through mentoring initiatives, orientations, and specific tutoring programs (Ward, Seigel, & Davenport, 2012). The effectiveness of these programs, however, depends largely on the ability of the institution to adapt the intervention to unique campus environments and to student characteristics. For example, Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that first-generation students are less likely to persist at both private and smaller institutions and that the effect of involvement on campus for first-generation students may depend on certain personal characteristics of the student population.



The transition and persistence issues faced by first-generation students are multifaceted. Key factors believed to be highly influential in first-generation students include (1) demographic factors, such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender; (2) personal factors, such as psycho-attitudinal traits and extent of parental engagement and support; (3) college preparedness, which encompasses degree of high school rigor, high school grades, and institutional selection; (4) financial preparedness, which refers to type and extent of financial aid and any accumulated debt; and (5) college experience, which considers institutional structure and environment and co-curricular involvement, among other things (Ishitani, 2006; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

One of the most consistent themes that emerge from the variables affecting first-generation student persistence is the degree of cultural capital to which students have access. Students whose parents earned degrees have presumably been exposed - regardless of parental intent - to knowledge, language, environments, expectations, and behaviors that are unique to the college experience. For first-generation students who lack this cultural capital, “postsecondary education offers both opportunity and risk, since it represents a departure from family traditions” (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

The school system through which students matriculate prior to college entrance also has the potential to reinforce the messages students receive at home about higher education. Demographic factors and financial resources affect the extent to which students are likely to acquire college-related cultural capital. The extent of

institutional support available once they enroll in college affects their ability to compensate for any lack thereof (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Perhaps the most significant detriment of insufficient institutional support for first-generation students is the preservation of an inequitable postsecondary educational system. In the absence of intervention, first-generation students are more likely to delay postsecondary enrollment, to experience discontinuous enrollment, to take an extended period of time to complete their degree program, or to never complete their degree program at all (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport 2012). Ultimately, the lack of adequate support services for this population perpetuates disproportionately low rates of educational attainment, thereby impeding the potential for upward mobility (Brown, 2009).

## **MAPPING THE ENVIRONMENT**

In recent years, the field of higher education has begun shifting toward an evidence-based method of service provision, resulting in increased attention to the establishment of best practices (Ewell, 2009). According to themes identified in the literature, effective retention initiatives are: (1) population-specific, with deliberate strategy based in research; (2) student-centered, with caring and concerned faculty, staff, and administrators who are focused on both academic and social needs; (3) early and intensive, with explicit identification and intervention processes; and (4) systemic, with an integrated structure of adequate technical supports (Myers, 2003, Noel-Levitz, 2008).

In *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus*



*on the Student Experience*, Susan Borrego (2006) discusses mapping the campus learning environment as a process that assists with the identification of opportunities to enhance and deepen student learning and success. Borrego suggests that taking a campus-wide approach focused on learning outcomes is necessary to support student learning at an institutional level. When approaching the question: “how can colleges and universities better support the academic success of first-generation students?,” the authors argue that it is critical to take a similar approach to addressing the learning needs of this specific population on a university campus. As a result, many of the guidelines outlined by Borrego were used to develop a framework for assessing the need for population-specific initiatives on a college campus.

In seeking to assess and improve support for first-generation students on campus, student affairs practitioners must identify initiatives across their university that may directly or indirectly impact first-generation students, evaluate the experiences and needs of first-generation students on their campuses, and explore campus dialogue surrounding first-generation students as a population. In other words, mapping the campus learning environment to look for gaps in the support resources for this unique population of students is vital for success. Following this initial evaluation, student affairs administrators can then identify potential partnerships, resources, and initiatives that can be used to fill any gaps in support for first-generation students. In starting the process of mapping the learning environment on a campus, it is important to remember that specific institutional data and stories can be just as important

as national research and benchmarking.

The first step towards creating better academic support systems for first-generation students is to identify existing resources on campus that may intentionally or unintentionally be available to support first-generation students. While some of these resources may be obvious, such as TRiO support programs, others may be resources available to all students that could potentially meet specific needs of first-generation students. In starting this process at Saint Louis University, it was critical to acknowledge the role of our TRiO programs that supported some, but not all, of the first-generation student population. Additional support services, such as the academic coaching program, were already filling some of the acknowledged needs of first-generation students. However, many first-generation students did not know about the availability of the academic coaching program, thus creating a gap in support.

Another important step in supporting first-generation students is to evaluate the experience and needs of first-generation students. The social and academic atmosphere of the institution can greatly impact a student’s college identity. For first-generation, low-income, and minority students, this may mean finding “confidence and skills to negotiate college without sacrificing one’s own identity and connections with one’s home community” (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton & Morrell, 2002). At Saint Louis University, evaluating the student experience meant holding focus groups with current first-generation students to gather information about their experience. Students were asked to share anxieties they felt on campus as a first-generation student, to describe their



perception of campus climate, and to express ways they felt they were already receiving support while outlining areas they felt they needed more support. An overwhelming theme emerged from the feedback provided. Students felt supported by offices and departments across campus, but perceived a lack of personal connections and sense of belonging within the institution.

The last step towards evaluating support for first-generation students is exploring the existing campus dialogue surrounding first-generation students among students, faculty, and staff. As our starting point, faculty and staff interested in first-generation student issues at Saint Louis University were identified. Once attention was brought to this population, support for first-generation students became evident. Faculty and staff, much like the findings from our first-generation student interviews, expressed confidence in the TRiO programs and other academic support offices across campus while asking what more could be done to specifically target and improve the experience of first-generation students on campus.

Throughout the process of conducting the evaluation of need at Saint Louis University, many faculty,

staff, and student partners were identified to assist in the creation of the First Billikens Mentor Program. In the end, a year's worth of exploration and evaluation resulted in a program that filled the specific gaps in our first-generation support services that were identified by providing an opportunity build personal relationships with the university and with faculty and staff who share relatable experiences as first-generation students. It is important to view academic support in the context of individual student needs and populations at a particular campus.

There is limited existing research regarding first-generation students that specifically addresses best practices in program development (Helping, n.d.). While benchmarking provides an effective means to learn about initiatives supporting first-generation students at other campuses, the term "best practices" may be deceiving when looking at this unique population. To successfully create and implement effective support initiatives for first-generation students, the process of mapping the learning environment for first-generation students may in fact be more important than the resulting program or initiative.



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# BALANCING IDENTITIES: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT, ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

TRACY POON TAMBASCIA, JONATHAN WANG, BREANNE TCHENG, VIET T. BUI

*The experiences of undocumented immigrant, Asian American students often go unreported and are overshadowed by other populations of undocumented students. With over one million undocumented immigrants, this 2013-14 qualitative study of 11 participants focuses on their narratives and how the Model Minority Myth weaves itself into their experiences. The chapter concludes with recommendations on how college student educators and faculty can provide academic support for this unique population of students.*

Undocumented immigrants are individuals who do not have a valid visa, permanent resident status, or U.S. citizenship, and thus are not authorized residents of the United States (Gildersleeve, 2010). The debate on immigration policy in the last several years has brought attention to the significant number of undocumented students enrolled in universities. Without legal authorization, undocumented individuals cannot obtain a driver's license or identity card in most states and they are unable to borrow money for college or receive federally funded scholarships.

Determining the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. is difficult. It requires the application of various approaches using multiple points of data from both government and non-government sources (Pastor & Marcelli, 2013). Official estimates from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics places the total number of undocumented immigrants at 11.5 million (Hoefler, Rytina & Baker, 2012). California has the largest population of undocumented

immigrants with approximately 25% of the total population. While the majority of the undocumented immigrant population is from Mexico (59%), the total from Asian countries makes up approximately 10% or 1.3 million people (Hoefler, Rytina & Baker, 2012; Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Relatively little is known about undocumented immigrants who pursue higher education (Garcia & Tierney, 2011) and there is a lack of comprehensive data on undocumented immigrant, Asian American students. In California, Asian American undergraduates are the second largest population of undocumented students in the University of California system, comprising more than 40% of all undocumented students (Choi, Ocampo, & Park, 2010). Undocumented immigrant students typically lack the financial and social capital that other students possess (Garcia & Tierney, 2011). While their struggles are similar to other immigrant and low-income college students, their challenges are greater as a result of their undocumented status (Choi, Ocampo, & Park, 2010; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010).



## PROGRAMS AND DEFERRED ACTION

The state of California passed Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) in 2001, which allowed undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition. AB 540 allows a student to qualify for in-state tuition if they graduated from a California high school, enrolled in an accredited higher education institute, and are actively seeking a means of legalizing their immigration status. These conditions are focused on academic merit and the legalization requirement implies a hope for some future legitimization of the status of undocumented immigrant students (Abrego, 2008). It is important to note that the provisions of AB 540 did not permit institutions to offer financial aid to undocumented students. Doing so would be in violation of federal law and has thus limited such laws to addressing the issue of in-state tuition (Annand, 2007; Connolly, 2005). The provisions of AB 540 have constructed new requirements to qualify for in-state tuition that included undocumented immigrant students.

The DREAM Act has been an ongoing effort at the federal level to address the status of undocumented students and provide a limited path toward legal residency and citizenship. Specifically, it would allow states to determine their own residency requirements without resorting to “side-stepping” federal law, and also allow eligible undocumented students to become conditional permanent residents for six years. After six years, the student can have the conditional status removed through a number of means, including completion of their degree program (Connolly,

2005; Annand, 2007). However, due to the politicized nature of the issue, the federal DREAM Act has yet to have been signed into law.

On June 15, 2012, the Obama Administration announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. Under a directive from the Department of Homeland Security, eligible undocumented youth are granted temporary permission to stay in the United States. Eligibility is determined by age, continuous residence, education, and criminal history related requirements (National Immigration Law Center, 2013). DACA does not provide a pathway to citizenship (Adams, 2012), but it does allow for deferment of deportation in two-year increments, allowing recipients to apply for work authorization, social security numbers, and depending on the state in which they live, a driver’s license (Fradomen & Bell, 2012).

While many undocumented students view the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals as life-changing, its direct and positive impact on higher education is limited. This group of students are not awarded legal status; therefore, they remain ineligible for federal financial aid. Additionally, they do not qualify for in-state tuition, unless they live in one of the fifteen states with laws permitting “undocumented students...to pay the same tuition as their classmates at public institutions of higher education” (National Conference of State Legislation, 2013). Though DACA could open the door to economic benefits, some students remain fearful that their family members could be deported at any time. The application and processing fees (about \$500) may also be cost prohibitive.



## ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Asian Americans constitute 5.6% of the US population (Pew Research, 2012) and 6% of the college student population (NCES, n.d.). Asian Americans are attending institutions of higher education at increasing rates across all levels of ethnicity, institution types, and degrees. Though not underrepresented, Asian American students face unique challenges including a chilly campus climate (Hurtado, Milem, Pedersen & Walter, 1998) and high expectations for academic achievement stemming from the model minority myth (Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007).

Looking beyond the monolithic label of Asian American, the need for disaggregated data underscores the complexity of the Asian American population, specifically the diversity in ethnicities, immigration patterns, and language (Libby, Nguyen, & Teranishi, 2013). Broad terms like “Asian American” hide the fact that not all ethnic groups within this category are gaining access to education and well-paying jobs.

## MODEL MINORITY MYTH

The model minority myth posits the view that Asian Americans are uniformly successful, achieving both financial and academic success (Ho, 2003; Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007). The myth of universal success creates unrealistic expectations of academic achievement, financial success, and other markers of success.

When first coined, “model minority,” it was used to describe specific groups of Asian Americans as success stories (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Suzuki, 1977). In colleges and universities, the model minority myth persists both

inside and outside of the classroom. Asian American students report that professors and peers may unfairly hold a higher level of expectation for them than for other groups (Kao, 1995; Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007; Suzuki, 2002).

## DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

This study worked closely with Asian American community organizations, student organizations at university campuses and advocacy groups to recruit participants. Though we anticipated it would be difficult to gain access to student participants, limitations on use of email due to its potential as an “identifier” made communication more difficult. When individuals did contact us with an interest in participating, we administered a brief pre-survey to assess qualifications then conducted 30-60 minute interviews. Participants were also asked to complete a web-based, post-interview questionnaire after the initial meeting. Our research team interviewed 11 participants, eight of who were female and three male. The participants were enrolled at two year and four year colleges in the Southern California area. Eight identified as Korean American, and nearly all were the first in their family to attend college.

## FINDINGS

Many of the participants faced barriers and limitations due to their undocumented immigrant status. None of the participants in the study knew their status until they were completing high school and planning for college. This was the case for one participant, who spoke about feeling isolated once she discovered her undocumented immigrant status. She sought support

from a few other undocumented immigrant students at her high school, but generally felt she had to “manage things on her own.”

What moved the research team the most is the expression of loneliness that nearly all of the participants voiced. All participants reported they rarely discussed their undocumented immigrant status with anyone. This caused many of our participants to isolate themselves from peer groups. One participant shared:

I did tell one of my friends, we got in an argument, and she threatened me and she was going to report my family... so after that I got traumatized... after that I stopped telling people.

The fear exhibited in this quote illustrates the sense of distrust that many of our participants felt. They often did not share their status with anyone outside of their immediate family. This secret, for many, was a barrier to forming meaningful relationships.

Lack of access to legal or stable employment and the financial implications of having to work “under the table” also served as a barrier for our participants.

Well, actually, I didn’t have money for six months, but I starved really bad for two months. I would get a dollar hamburger from the Carl’s Jr.... I would eat one burger across three days, taking a bite one in the morning, one at night... During that time, my dad threw me some money, and saved me from basically dying. I lost about 32 pounds in those two months.

For this student in particular, the lack of stable employment had an effect on his mental and physical well-being. He often took breaks in his education to

save up enough money to pay tuition, which extended his undergraduate career to nine years.

Several participants could not find a comfortable peer group, noting that they did not “fit in” once they were in college.

When you’re in college, everyone is moving forward while you’re just staying in one place...I only hang out with friends that know my frustration and it’s kind of hard to be open to new people.

## **FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS**

Participants were asked about the role of family and whether parents or siblings played a role in encouraging them to attend college. Families often served as a support system, especially when students were discouraged from discussing their undocumented immigrant status with others. Several participants’ parents made it a point to limit relationships with people outside of their family. As such, the family also played a role in social isolationism and expressed “distrust of anyone who wasn’t in the family.”

Without a stable source of income or the ability to apply for financial aid, some families play a financial role for the student. One participant, Julia, had little support and felt she struggled more because her parents were under-employed: “When I got accepted to (omitted) university, the only question they asked me was how much it will cost.” Generational and cultural issues within families exacerbated challenges the students already faced with their undocumented status. One participant said: “...there are some challenges regarding trying to get my points across... I’m not as fluent in Korean as I would like to, while my parents are



not fluent in English. So basically trying to get my point across can be really difficult.”

In contrast, Jennifer had strong support from her parents, who not only encouraged her to attend college, but paid for college tuition. Though Jennifer struggled with the limitations resulting from her undocumented immigrant status, she was committed to earning a college degree because that was the reason why her parents stayed in the country on an expired tourist visa. The status had unintended consequences on her family as well. Jennifer’s father became more reclusive and reluctant to leave the house, except for work. After 5 years of living with undocumented immigrant status in the US, Jennifer’s parents and brother returned to their home country and are reportedly much happier.

But parents and families also posed challenges for our participants. Some parents did not encourage students to attend college, were not able to help pay for tuition, or were so challenged by their own problems that the students were left on their own – literally.

At least three participants talked about marriage as a solution to their undocumented immigrant status and felt pressured to find a suitable partner, sometimes at a young age, so they can establish legal residency through their spouse. One participant said “I think I would have married him eventually but not at the age of twenty.”

Participants expressed that success in higher education was an internal pressure, but shaped from external sources, such as their families. There was a consensus among the participants that attending college would provide opportunities for better jobs, financial stability, and a better way of life that would not be

available to them otherwise.

Some participants expressed the pressure to succeed was primarily self-motivated. These participants did not attribute their pressures as coming from their families. Mary remarked that her pressure to succeed “[being] based on my own circumstances and also my own self-determination,” and that her parents never pressured her to pursue a certain career path. These participants demonstrated both an understanding of their circumstances and a motivation to succeed regardless of them. However, one participant spoke about the external pressure he felt:

I guess I feel like I give myself a hard time to do better in college, or basically life, because I got this opportunity to attend college through my hard work. So now I should use this opportunity since I am in such a good, four-year college to do better and to not basically be the stereotype of being a bum--an undocumented bum that people are telling me about.

## MODEL MINORITY MYTH

The last section of the interview addressed the model minority myth. Participants noted that the model minority myth was perpetuated predominately by two groups – non-Asian Americans and close Asian American family members and friends.

Responses ranged from acceptance of the myth in a positive light to active rejection of the concept. Amy spoke positively about the stereotype and noted that success in the Asian American culture was linked to high educational achievement, mentioning that she “think[s] definitely [that] the Asian culture, especially the Koreans, ...



are really big on education. I sometimes do think that I am smarter than others.” To the contrary, Mary said that the myth “perpetuates the mentality that we are striving for success, we are successful and we don’t need help...” When asked, participant answers ranged from short and succinct, like Annie’s answer, “I don’t think it’s true,” to longer answers that actively rejected such stereotyping.

## INTERSECTIONS

The intersection between the model minority myth and their identity of being undocumented immigrants was a defining theme. Amy compared both of her identities as barriers to her success, reflecting that “you got to start somewhere and it’s hard when you don’t even [have] a status in America where you’re not recognized. It’s hard for you to start at a place. In order for you to become successful, you need to start somewhere.”

Julia further stated,

being AB540 was just kind of a limitation itself and then there are other like stereotypes that follow being Asian or other minorities. I think it kind of puts you on like I don’t know like a little bit of a disadvantage than competing with non-AB540 who is more competent in many areas of driving or employment and then also the majority group and that at all, so...When I got to college and after I have become aware of the fact that I was undocumented I felt inadequate and like I said I was ashamed to tell anyone that I was undocumented. I think yeah, I think it might have had a lot to do with... the model minority myth plus the fact that I was undocumented.

## IMPLICATIONS

The data from this study suggest that there are specific and immediate steps that college educators can take to address the needs of Asian American, undocumented immigrant students.

### 1) Increase recognition.

Campuses can bring Asian American, undocumented immigrant students from the shadows by simply naming this population and recognizing that undocumented immigrant students come from a number of ethnicities and countries of origin. Asian American, undocumented immigrant students can learn to “pass” as documented students, which can further marginalize their existence. Asian American students seek support and help at lower rates (Suzuki, 2002), which means that these students may not seek help at the same levels as other student populations.

### 2) Educate faculty and staff.

Training for faculty and college student educators increases awareness of the needs of Asian American, undocumented immigrant students. Academic support personnel and transfer advisors would benefit from understanding the barriers and limitations to student success, including basic challenges like transportation, financial need, and lack of social connections.

### 3) Create a program or space.

Designate a place, center or person for undocumented immigrant students. Having an established program increases advocacy and awareness for all students on campus and creates a broader and more inclusive dialogue about the needs of this student population. Programming may have the added benefit of helping to dispel myths and stereotyping that further alienate Asian American, undocumented immigrant



students, allowing students to share experiences and find solutions without the sense of shame or fear.

#### **4) Utilize federal, state and local programs for assistance.**

Undocumented immigrant students can research and apply for federal and state assistance programs available to them. While each program has its own criteria, a student may be able to benefit from DACA, AB540 in California, undocumented immigrant driver's license laws, and the Dream Act. Through our

conversations, utilizing community-based organizations to apply for and understand these programs has helped several of our participants improve their success at their universities. Several community-based organizations also provided language-based support for families as well as citizenship workshops. Designating university faculty and staff that are knowledgeable in how to access these programs can greatly support undocumented immigrant students.

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# WELCOME TO CAMPUS: STRATEGIES TO INCREASE CONNECTEDNESS FOR LGBT STUDENTS

JASON L. MERIWETHER, AARON J. HART

*Climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, (LGBT) students is uniquely experienced on every campus. This interactive discussion is designed to empower administrators to engage and challenge factors that create resistance for embracing LGBT students as a part of campus life. By discussing trends in research and identifying methods and strategies rooted in best practices and experience, this chapter focuses on making connectedness a strategic priority.*

While many people outside of higher education simply view college as an opportunity to earn a degree and find a rewarding job, academicians and practitioners understand and acknowledge that success in the classroom is only part of the college experience. Colleges and universities prepare students to not only be successful in their coursework, but also to be successful participants in a diverse and ever changing society. Just as students learn from faculty, there is an educational process that takes place through the interaction with one's peers.

Researchers regard contact and relationships with peers as one of the most important components of students' success and retention. Astin (1999) concluded that interpersonal relationships have the most influential effect on student development. Tinto (1993) cited a direct relationship between peer relationships and social integration into the campus environment. Astin's (1999) and Tinto's (1993) studies are two examples of research which cite the importance and necessity of student-and peer-interaction as it relates to positive student development.

The basis of these findings can be applied to all student groups regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Based on prominent research, it is self-

evident that LGBT students can have an adverse college experience without positive social interactions and peer relationships. In addition to building strong peer relationships, LGBT students must feel connected to the campus culture and supported by university administrators. Unfortunately, many colleges and universities are missing the mark when it comes to creating a safe and welcoming environment for this peer group.

## EXPERIENCE OF LGBT STUDENTS

Whereas many student groups overcome the myriad of challenges related to the collegiate acclimation process, LGBT students often spend their college years feeling ostracized due to an unreceptive and antagonistic university environment (Inkelas, Johnson, Lee, & Longerbeam, 2007). Their experiences are often void of support and filled with bigotry. "Acts of anti-LGBT intolerance were evident, and their prevalence, along with the fear of experiencing intolerance, can function to silence LGBT voices on campus (Rankin, 2003, p. 13)." These factors not only have a negative impact on LGBT student experience but their academic success as well (Rankin,



2003). Administrators must focus on providing opportunities for positive peer interactions and creating a welcoming environment throughout the campus.

## **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CONNECTEDNESS**

There are several factors that can influence a student's connectedness to a university and the campus culture. Many of these factors can be traced back to the institution's strategic plan, policies and recruitment practices. If a campus truly values diversity and providing a safe, welcoming environment, then institutional policies should demonstrate the support of LGBT students. "Policies that explicitly welcome LGBT employees and students powerfully express the commitment of a college or university to building a diverse and pluralistic community (Rankin, 2003, p. 43)." Recruitment strategies and priorities play a major role in a student's connectedness. By actively and aggressively recruiting LGBT high school and transfer students, universities can create a more inclusive campus environment. Cegler (2012) acknowledges that a small number of colleges and universities are participating in outreach efforts to bring more non-heterosexual students to their campuses.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Role of Senior Student Affairs Officers***

To establish a sense of connection or belonging for LGBT students, it is important that Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) have a leading role in shaping the campus environment. Roper (2005) reminds us that the senior student affairs officer's role "is to develop, articulate, and lead by a philosophy that supports

the education, well-being, and success of LGBT students. In this regard the SSAO must be able to communicate how his leadership and organization's functioning contribute to the quality of life and educational experience of LGBT students and staff (p. 83)." Sandeen (2003) also discusses the harmful effects that student affairs officers who engage in labeling can have within the context of relationship building and student engagement.

In order to position themselves and their organizational units to have meaningfully positive impact and avoid any harmful actions, it is important that SSAOs contribute to the positive experience for LGBT students with sincere intention, and deliberate messaging. Elements of these contributions should lead to students having "the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17)." By establishing centers of consistent support, articulating expectations for service units, and actively participating in an engaging experience for LGBT students, SSAOs can influence stakeholders who are responsible for shaping student experience.

### ***Faculty Engagement***

Faculty play a major role in setting the tone and creating the culture of every college campus. Any effort to create a welcoming, inclusive environment for LGBT students must involve the support of the faculty. If academicians are to help the LGBT student population, colleges and universities must first support and invest in LGBT faculty members. Rankin (2003) suggests that many universities are not providing adequate teaching or research opportunities for LGBT faculty



or related curriculum. Futile efforts to hire and advance LGBT faculty and advance research related to LGBT student development have resulted in a dearth of knowledge on how to better support this student population. Dugan and Yurman (2011) suggest that institutions of higher education are ill-equipped to support the needs and address the challenges of LGBT students due to limited research related to their experiences and development.

## **ORGANIZED SUPPORT OF LGBT STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Tinto (1993) states that for all students “the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college system, the greater will be the commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion leading to persistence (p. 28).” Strayhorn (2012) further notes that “to excel, students must feel a sense of belonging in school (or college), and therefore educators must work to create conditions that foster belongingness among students (p. 9).” Some studies (Holmes & Cahill, 2004 and Harper & Gasmen, 2008) note that many institutions lack opportunities for faculty, students, and staff to participate in sensitivity training that could reduce feelings of violence and isolation among LGBT students. In order to effectively combat institutional roadblocks that may be unintentional, or in some cases overt, it is important to establish resources that are consistent and visibly supported by campus leadership.

Prior to establishing new resources, it is first necessary to evaluate current service structures, fiscal support, and strategic focus given to benefit LGBT students. Woodford, Kolb, Durocher-

Radeka, & Gabe (2014) conducted a study to examine elements of ally training and impact on campus climate, noting that “as universities and colleges throughout the country work to improve campus climate for LGBT students, staff, and faculty, it is worthwhile for current programs to stop and assess their efforts... (p. 321).” There are a myriad of options available to campuses to assess LGBT student satisfaction and connectedness. Collecting data from current students or existing organizations and resource centers is helpful to identify resource restraints, develop new services, and increase support for existing programs.

Although budgetary considerations are important when evaluating resources, LGBT services cannot be impactful with fiscal investment alone. Walters & Hayes (1998) discuss development of support systems for LGBT students such as organizations or establishing centers that can help to mitigate institutional homophobia. Kirby (2011) delineates the value of LGBT resource centers or centers for research, noting that they

...have the ability to enhance the campus environment for the entire university community. The centers offer a number of benefits such as educating the entire university community on issues of importance to the LGBT community; advocating for LGBT-inclusive university policies; developing an atmosphere of safety for experiences that build camaraderie among the LGBT community on campus; and sending out valuable information about future employment and educational options.

Such organizations and centers can



address broad topics that impact the LGBT experience nationally as well as issues and concerns that are specific to an individual campus or university system.

## DEVELOPING STUDENT ADVOCACY

Worthen (2014) discusses a myriad of opportunities for ally training as a part of study aimed to better understand attitudes toward LGBT students among Greeks and Athletes. This study found that “male athletes and fraternity men may harbor less supportive LGBT attitudes (p. 190)” than their female counterparts. Worthen (2014) suggests developing LGBT ally programs specifically for athletes and members of Greek Letter Organizations.

### *Student Athletes*

Windover (2014) discusses experiences of college athletes faced with discriminatory practices who are “prohibited from participating in the educational benefits of intercollegiate sports (p. 2).” Windover (2014) also notes that “athletes who wish to come out are often told to be silent so they can “protect” the program’s image (p. 2).” These challenges led Barbour (2014) to propose a qualitative study to examine LGBT athlete experiences based on elements of identity development theory to empower college administrators with more significant understanding of LGBT student athletes.

Worthen (2014) discusses the viability of practical approaches such as training and ally programs that specifically focus on male athletes and address locker-room behavior. Worthen notes that “if athletes are given tools that allow them to feel comfortable to step in and speak

out about homophobia in the culture of male athleticism, supportive LGBT attitudes can be encouraged (p. 189).” The You Can Play Project (<http://youcanplayproject.org/>) supports an inclusive culture within athletics designed to eliminate bias because of their sexual orientation. This type of messaging, along with the programs described above, can lead to environments where LGBT student athletes can thrive instead of attempting to manage academic rigor and demands, compounded by the internalized struggle of hiding their true identity.

### *Greek Letter Organizations*

Worthen (2014) suggests programs and trainings that address issues of bias specifically within fraternities by utilizing models that utilize an experiential focus. Workshops that draw attention to the context of stereotypes and assumptions made about Greek Life and the LGBT community could be useful in addressing these issues (Worthen, 2014). With respect to implementing ally training, Woodford, Kolb, Durocher-Radeka, & Gabe, J. (2014) caution that “preparing individuals to become allies cannot realistically occur within a four-hour training session (p. 320).” Further, Woodford et al. (2014) discuss the need for clear articulation of desirable outcomes, and consideration of course designs and content, as well as evaluation, and allocation of time for such training. Developing a series of ally trainings for Greek Organizations can address both broad elements of ally training as well as capturing nuances of a specific campus.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter was designed to provoke discussion and provide strategy for



implementing initiatives to impact the campus environment regarding issues of inclusion, connectedness, and sense of belonging for LGBT students. Anderson (1997) states “in every school, there is a group of forgotten children, a hidden minority of boys and girls whose needs have been ignored, whose existence has been whispered about, and whose pain is just beginning to surface. These are our gay, lesbian, and bisexual students (p. 65).” Impacting the persistence of LGBT students is expansive and far-reaching. This reach must give voice to LGBT students who are seeking a college or university that embraces their identity to make learning an easy process.

The effectiveness of each recommendation to combat negative

experiences for LGBT students reflects a combination of individualized engagement and campus-wide policy levers. Mitigating factors that lead to attrition of LGBT students requires consistent engagement, and resource provision to help students overcome a plethora of factors that are retrograde to focusing on a successful academic experience. A campus climate that adequately supports LGBT students must offer honest dialogue, ongoing training, programming, and engagement of student leaders, faculty, and administration, including student affairs professionals. This type of climate will produce a university community where LGBT students feel connected and thrive based on talent and merit without respect to sexual orientation.

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# INCORPORATING CRITICAL CONSTITUENTS: INTEGRATING STUDENTS INTO ASSESSMENT PLANNING AND ANALYSIS

JAMES D. BRESLIN, KAITLIN VOIGTS

*Students are capable of remarkable contributions to student affairs programming. Beginning with this assertion, with a genuine value of student voice, this chapter explores how students can be actively engaged in the assessment cycle, including planning, collection, analysis, and continuous improvement, to reinvent how assessment can impact student experiences. Our goal is to aid fellow practitioners in developing specific, creative strategies to engage student leaders in these processes. The chapter includes examples from a professional and a student who have overhauled assessment practices by integrating students.*

Assessment is increasingly called upon to aid in decision-making as higher education faces mounting pressures and trying economic times. In support of student learning and because of how cost-effective such models can be, student affairs and academic support programming continues to emphasize the role of students helping students (Falchikov, 2001). These roles take many forms, including Resident Advisors, Peer Tutors, Peer Mentors and Peer Advisors. While these implementations of student leadership roles certainly align with best practices, they also typically conduct programmatic assessment that conspicuously excludes students. This article explores how students can play central, meaningful roles in conducting and analyzing assessment, as well as in implementing effective continuous improvement. The authors, one a college student educator and one an undergraduate student who has taken an active role in the assessment process, use examples from their work in an academic support unit to illustrate the impact that the creativity and critical analysis that undergraduate students can have on the assessment process.

## CONTEXT

The current landscape for those who provide support for students is treacherous. Affordability has rightly become a contentious issue for higher education (e.g., Andriotis, 2012; Jaschik, 2012), and such concerns are coupled with claims that student learning in college is insufficient (Arum & Roksa, 2011) and does not prepare students adequately for the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2010; Rose, 2010). Using examples from an academic support context, we begin with an acknowledgement that utilizing undergraduate students aligns with key student development theories (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Chickering, 1969; Perry, 1981; Wilson, 1999) and with best practices in the field.

While these practices result in many benefits both for the students served (Beasley, 1997; Ender & Newton, 2000; Fantuzzo, Riggio, Connelly, & Dimeff, 1989; Magin & Churches, 1995; Mazur, 1997; Moust & Schmidt, 1995) and for the student leaders themselves (Schleyer, Langdon, & James, 2005;



Topping, 1996), we hold that student leaders are too often excluded from the assessment process. In the sections that follow we aim to demonstrate how students can quickly and seamlessly become a part of assessment planning, data collection and generation, analysis, and the implementation of continuous improvement measures.

## ASSESSMENT PLANNING

Our department, Academic Enhancement (AE), has long maintained a cyclical assessment plan. The intent has always been for this to be a living, organic document that is regularly updated to reflect changes in programming, assessed student need, outcomes, and institutional mission and strategic goals. Even given the best intentions, there have certainly been times when these lofty goals have been sidelined by more urgent issues, crises of the moment, or simply attempting to support the burgeoning student population on our campus.

In an effort to be both more inclusive and more responsive, AE began to include additional constituent groups in the assessment planning process. Academic Enhancement strives to include as many groups of individuals as possible when gathering data, to gather the data regularly, and to attend to incoming data. For the department, seeking to understand where our assessment planning had been lacking previously is what helped to generate creative ideas and inform the process for becoming more inclusive. Specifically, AE utilized a Student Program Coordinator (undergraduate student-staff who each supervise a group of Peer Tutors) who was interested in assessment to aid in departmental efforts.

With this additional perspective, changes were made to the data generating methods and opportunities for data collection. Previously, feedback was collected primarily just from students who accessed tutoring and done so about once per semester or year via a standardized survey. Although this information remains an important piece to our department's assessment, there was clearly much room for improvement. This led to the inclusion of our Student Program Coordinators, Peer Tutors, and the students who access our services in our assessment measures, with each group bringing a new perspective to the overall experience. The immediate result of including the student perspective in this stage of the process was that AE began to generate new data using new methods. We highlight below Peer Tutor Reports, High-Five Surveys, and End-of-Shift Surveys.

A Peer Tutor Report is an online instrument that Peer Tutors complete at the end of each week, with questions that change each week. Every Peer Tutor completes a report once a week, and the three questions are structured to reflect appropriate issues for that time in the semester. For example, the questions for the week after Peer Tutor training include opportunities for feedback about the training, suggestions for improvement, and early issues the Peer Tutors may be encountering with students as the academic year gets underway. During midterm week, questions are asked about the students who are coming in and seeking tutoring to help understand the most prevalent issues and how our department can best address them. This method of collecting information from our student-staff has the benefit of providing weekly checkpoints, and programmatic modifications, however



slight, as a result of Peer Tutor answers demonstrate that staff are attentive to and value Peer Tutor perspectives.

A High-Five Survey is another method we have recently implemented for gathering data. A High-Five Survey is actually a micro-survey, only one question, and is administered to every student as they log out after a tutoring session at our Peer Tutoring Program. Students have the option of rating their Peer Tutoring Program experience for that specific visit on a five-point Likert scale. If a student rates a visit a one or a two, an automatic email is sent to the student, with a link to a survey to understand the student's rating of their visit.

Finally, Academic Enhancement has implemented End-of-Shift Surveys for our Peer Tutors. At the end of every shift, as they log out, our Peer Tutors are asked to rate their shift on a five-point Likert scale. If a Peer Tutor rates a shift a one or a two, the Peer Tutor's supervisor, a Student Program Coordinator, is notified so that the Student Program Coordinator can reach out to the Peer Tutor to understand why the shift was rated low, and what could be done to address any perceived issues.

Overall, the addition of the student perspective to the assessment planning process has yielded creative, realistic, concrete ideas for collecting information more frequently and responding to it more promptly.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND GENERATION**

Traditional data collection and generation was and continues to be conducted on a regular schedule. However, past methods of data collection and generation were based on

a series of assumptions about logistical availability of resources, including staff time. The result was an assessment plan that certainly was valuable, rigorous, and comprehensive, but that was not capable of aiding staff in responding to and addressing students' need with adequate speed.

With a change in Academic Enhancement's assessment planning came a substantial and significant change in data collection. New collection opportunities, such as the Peer Tutor Reports or the High-Five Surveys described in the previous section, have different collection timelines than previous assessment methods. These new surveys and questions were created as a daily or weekly collection of data, rather than each semester or annually. With the Peer Tutor Report and the High-Five Survey, the department now has a near-constant stream of incoming data. During operational hours, there is almost always data that is being recorded for further analysis.

This constant stream of information has brought about several improvements to our programs. First, the data is "real-time." This means that the incoming data is a very clear and accurate representation of what is occurring within our Peer Tutoring Program. If the program is running smoothly, this data tells us that via high ratings on the End-of-Shift Surveys and in the High-Five Surveys. To complement that, the tutors have an open forum in the Peer Tutor Reports to tell us what exactly is going well. Alternately, these sources also show when there may be issues or problems occurring in the Peer Tutoring Program. This had led to a culture of awareness, action, and positive change departmentally. Information about the program, the students, and interactions



taking place “on the tutoring floor” is communicated to appropriate staff members. In the past, data was not collected nearly as frequently, and as a result there was less consistent communication aimed at improving the student experience.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Similar to data collection and generation, data analysis had been conducted intermittently in the previous assessment model. While full-time leadership staff in AE have worked to create a genuine culture of assessment, and while such activities are central to each staff member’s responsibilities, data could still only be analyzed on a periodic schedule that was measured in months or semesters. Moreover, only the college student educators who are responsible for the operation of AE’s academic support programs and services analyzed the data. While these professionals are well trained and quite capable of such work, we recognized that a glaring gap existed in this part of the process. As a unit that has long prided itself on valuing students, student voice, and the student experience, we realized that we had (consciously or not) excluded from assessment data analysis the very constituents we work so diligently to support.

New data-gathering methods have resulted in substantial increases in the volume of data to manage and analyze. Academic Enhancement has implemented new ways to analyze this influx of data by including the Student Program Coordinators in the process. By placing the Student Program Coordinators in a position to receive pieces of data, not only is the data being reviewed earlier, but the problems,

questions, and concerns brought forth by our Peer Tutors and our students via online assessment instruments are addressed more rapidly. This ability to manage assessment data both effectively and promptly is a new benefit of including our student-staff in the process. While information processing is occurring faster and more frequently, including these student leaders in the analysis brings a new perspective to the process. Before, full-time or graduate staff members were assigned the task of processing and analyzing the data. While these staff members are still included in the analysis of the data, our Student Program Coordinators now have that opportunity as well.

Each week, one of the Student Program Coordinators analyzes the patterns of student access to peer tutoring for the week. They take the number of student visits in each subject offered and the hours of tutoring provided in each subject and compare these values to the same week during the year before. These numbers allow a week-to-week comparison of each semester, as well as semester-to-semester comparisons. The result is the ability to change resource allocations, in terms of both fiscal and human resources, on a daily or weekly level to best address student need.

The Student Program Coordinators also analyze and evaluate the Peer Tutor Reports each week. By reading these reports each week, the Student Program Coordinators have the opportunity to discuss trends and to take note of any ideas or suggestions made by the Peer Tutors. If there is anything of note, positive or negative, the Student Program Coordinators have the opportunity to reach out to appropriate staff. They can pass along an issue, ask a Peer Tutor a



question from their response, or praise a Peer Tutor for exemplary work.

Finally, the Student Program Coordinators are the staff members who receive the notification email if a Peer Tutor has rated a shift a one or two in the End-of-Shift Survey. Upon receiving this email, the Student Program Coordinator then sends a message to the Peer Tutor to better understand why the Peer Tutor had a negative experience at work that day.

The inclusion of the Student Program Coordinators in data analysis has ensured that data being collected from these new streams is reviewed regularly, rather than sitting in an online repository waiting until the end of the semester. Accordingly, data is being used more responsibly, trends and patterns are observed and addressed rapidly, and response time for mitigating negative experiences is significantly reduced.

Enhanced response time in particular has had a significant positive impact on our operations. When a Student Program Coordinator responds to a Peer Tutor or a student to ask about a negative experience, the Student Program Coordinator is demonstrating that student voice is heard in the assessment process. Some students have reported that when they complete surveys or offer feedback and do not receive any follow-up, it becomes easier to believe that their responses “don’t matter.” With a staff member from Academic Enhancement personally responding, a student can then feel like their responses, feedback, and opinions matter to the department and are making a difference. We have found that this makes it more likely for a student to return and access critical support services.

## IMPLEMENTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Academic Enhancement staff come from a variety of academic backgrounds and all have robust experience in serving as college student educators. Further, the department is fortunate to have expertise that is both broad and deep in areas of academic support, best practices, student development, and personal epistemology, among others. Our department also has a history of embracing intentional, meaningful change openly and quickly in response to assessment data trends and analysis. However, as a group of scholar-practitioners, we realized that our assessment practices also excluded our primary constituent group from the improvement process. We were implementing and evaluating programmatic changes, but doing so without direct student input into the process. Drawing on notions of participatory action research (Freire, 1982; Lewin, 1946), we chose to include students in this process as well, encouraging them to make sense of the available data through their own experiences, perspectives, and conceptual lenses.

Copious amounts of data is being collected, processed, and analyzed more frequently than ever before, leading to an increased pace in the rate of change. When multiple sources of data collection allow for data triangulation, and when various staff have the opportunity to make sense of the data, meaningful changes can be adopted and communicated very rapidly and effectively. Many such improvements are generated by the Student Program Coordinators, who bring a creative and



innovative approach to problems and issues in the Peer Tutoring Program.

For example, in a recent semester students were accessing tutoring for calculus and Peer Tutors reported clear patterns of students struggling with Taylor series problems. Because our tutors had taken the calculus course several semesters prior, their curriculum had not covered this material, which frustrated both the students and Peer Tutors. Upon hearing multiple instances of this kind of frustration in the weekly Peer Tutor Reports, and seeing corroborating data from the End-of-Shift and High-Five Surveys, the Student Program Coordinators organized a specialized training session for the calculus tutors to cover the Taylor series. Simultaneously, full-time staff worked with mathematics faculty on campus to understand and communicate the pedagogical process they were using in the calculus course so that the tutoring experience could reinforce and reflect the classroom experience. By acknowledging what may seem like a small issue, albeit one that impacts many hundreds of students enrolled in calculus each semester, our department was able to leverage connections with colleagues across campus to implement a professional development opportunity for Peer Tutors, all within a week's time. This type of rapid-response has further engendered a sense of community and ownership of the tutoring program among all involved.

Another change that was made departmentally as a result of the High-Five Survey was the move to a staff uniform (T-shirt). Previously, the Peer Tutors could wear clothing of their choosing, while wearing a nametag on a lanyard. On particularly busy nights, when 200 or more students

were receiving Peer Tutoring at a time, tutors became difficult to recognize because their lanyard was not sufficient to make them stand out from the students. Accordingly, students became very frustrated because they did not know who to ask for help. Particularly for students still transitioning from high school to college, accessing support services such as tutoring can be stigmatized from other educational experiences and we were not willing to accept that some students would have the courage to come to access peer tutoring only to leave frustrated because they could not easily identify the tutors. We received feedback from students in High-Five Surveys and in focus groups we conducted that expressed a clear pattern of concern in this area. To combat this, Academic Enhancement implemented a uniform policy that requires each of our tutors to wear a lime green shirt or sweatshirt with the word "staff" displayed prominently. After making this change, there was a clear and immediate shift in responses to the High-Five Survey. Students actually thanked the department for making this change, and for taking their concerns seriously.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Relatively minor adjustments to the assessment process have led to dramatic improvements and substantial positive changes. The seemingly simple incorporation and inclusion of the student perspective in the process has further fostered growth of student access to AE services, enriched the experiences of students who come, and demonstrated the extent to which our academic support department



values and respects students' ability to take ownership of their experiences in college.

In terms of the mechanics of the assessment process, our department is able to collect more kinds of

information, process and analyze them more quickly, and respond or implement improvements rapidly. These are all results of the enthusiastic and engaged participation of student leaders in the assessment process.

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# LIFELONG DEVELOPMENT: UNDERGRADUATE ADULT LEARNERS, ADVISEMENT, AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP

ROCIO D. HERNANDEZ, TRACY POON TAMBASCIA

*This chapter discusses key findings from a study of adult learners in college and how advisors may help these students develop skills related to self-authorship. Adult learners returning to college face challenges in adjusting to social and academic learning environments. Support services need to improve in order to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population. This chapter also discusses how Baxter Magolda's (2008) theory of self-authorship can improve academic support for adult learners in their college experience.*

This chapter discusses a study on the experiences of adult students enrolled in an adult degree focused program. The study examined the experiences of undergraduate adult learners and how advising aided self-authorship and personal development. College student educators know that undergraduate adult learners have different needs for support services; however, we know little about their experiences within adult degree programs and how a student's developmental level may influence those experiences.

## DEFINING ADULT LEARNERS

Adult learners are non-traditional students who are 25 years or older and are often balancing several competing responsibilities such as work, family, community, and student commitments (Kasworm, 2003). Adult learners usually attend classes part-time while they are working full-time jobs (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011, p. 34). The adult learners are generally financially independent and have dependents other than a spouse, or they are single parents (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011, p. 34). Adult learners return to college with specific goals in mind and for reasons that may differ from traditional students

(Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Hardin, 2008).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011), the number of students age 25 and older is growing. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of adult learners in post-secondary education increased by 42%, while the population of those below 25 years of age increased by 34%. Projections indicate that this trend in enrollment will continue. It is expected that the adult learner population will increase an additional 20% by 2020 (NCES, 2011). This is in contrast to a growth of 11% for the traditional, younger postsecondary student population during the same period.

Colleges and universities have been slow to respond to these demographic changes and are still focused on the traditional student population through daytime course schedules, campus activities and limited housing options. In recent years, many colleges and universities have opened their doors to the undergraduate adult learner population by developing adult degree programs (Kasworm, 2008). Adult degree programs create an adult friendly environment by providing specialized instruction, advisement and support services (Kasworm, 2008).



## NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND ASSETS

The adult learner population faces many challenges to success in college. They are less likely to complete their degree than traditional students, and often leave college before completing their first year (Compton, Cox, & Santos Laanan, 2006; Hardin, 2008). Research has found that adult learners who enroll in adult learner programs that offer specialized support and advising are more likely to succeed as typical barriers are removed (Hardin, 2008).

Upon returning to college, working adults often experience identity conflict between their professional lives and their new “intellectual world” (Askham, 2008, p. 89). This leads many adult learners to feel anxiety about their return to college. Askham (2008) summarized the adult experience well in his research by stating that there are “contradictions flowing from being an adult and a student at the same time...the adult identity is autonomous, responsible and mature whereas that of the student identity is incomplete, dependent and in deficit” (p. 90). For working adult learners, the worker identity is often prioritized over their identity as students (Compton et al., 2006). However, adult learners also bring assets to university classrooms. These students tend to be self-motivated and have extensive work and life experience to add to the classroom environment (Bailey, 2007).

### SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Self-authorship is defined by Baxter Magolda as the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Student development theory for adult

students is largely absent in the literature. Baxter Magolda’s (2001) theory of self-authorship has particular relevance for undergraduate adult learners because her longitudinal research examined the role of self-authorship of college students into their 30s, when they are well into adulthood (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Baxter-Magolda identified four phases in this journey, moving from external to internal self-definition: (1) Following formulas, (2) Crossroads, (3) Becoming the author of one’s life, and (4) Internal foundation (Evans et al., 2010). “Development of self-authorship is not a linear process, and can follow many different paths influenced by personal characteristics of individuals, contexts in which they find themselves, and the challenges and support they find along the way” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 187). Self-authorship enhances students’ interactions and their relationships with others (Evans et al., 2010). The more confident that individuals becomes, the better able they are in their ability to relate to others (Evans et al., 2010).

### DATA COLLECTION

This qualitative study took place at a four year, religiously affiliated, liberal arts, private, not-for-profit, college located in the Western United States. This institution offers Associate of Arts degrees, Bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees, and a Doctorate in professional practice. The total undergraduate enrollment for both full time and part time students is less than 2,500. The adult degree focused program at the college is designed for working adults. Classes take place over the course of 18 weekends, with six intensive weekends per semester. Approximately 80% of the



students enrolled are female, 20% male students.

Nine participants were interviewed for this study. All participants were female and ranged in age from 25 to 57 and were graduating seniors. The interviews were 30-60 minutes in length and took place at or near the college.

## FINDINGS

Data from the student's shared experiences related to personal growth and development, and experiences with academic advising. Whatever the reason for their return or continuation with their education, students' in-depth descriptions unveil their student development and guides their status within Baxter Magolda's theory. Seven of the nine participants reached the Internal Foundation phase, one reached Becoming the Author of One's Life and one remained in the Following Formulas phase. Eight of the nine participants had experienced a moment of realization while enrolled in the program. One participant had an epiphany when she realized she was becoming a better person, both personally and professionally. She shared the following:

...my junior year something happened...I was at work. And I was asked to take part in a committee...a management committee. And I went in, the only female, and I found myself taking it, ... And it just made me realize that though I came to the school to learn, you know, to get a degree and it was academics, there's so many other tools that I picked up...It was like a rebirth of something. I don't know. It's crazy. It was like you know how they say that a light bulb goes on and but it was just the

direction in my life had changed. And at that moment I realized it...I was like where did this, where did this person come from, who am I. It was like everything came full circle with me coming back to school.

The data gathered from interviews revealed that participants experienced a shift in their approach to constructing meaning. Kasworm (2008) noted that adults enter into their new learning experiences with differing cognitive beliefs and emotional frameworks. The in-depth descriptions from the participants confirm Kasworm's (2008) research. All of the participants entered their educational experience at this college with different beliefs.

Despite the struggles of balancing work, family and schoolwork, each participant spoke of her commitment to completing the degree. Six participants in the study had children or parents to care for, but persisted in the adult degree program at this small college in the belief that completing a four year degree would better the lives of their children and family. One participant shared her experience with trying to motivate her high school aged daughter to go straight to college.

She's seen my struggles and I told her see you're going to struggle like me because I was hard headed. I didn't listen and so this is the result of it and if you want to do what I'm doing, then fine. You know? But I should have been enjoying the time with you, as opposed to going to school, and interfering in your special time. So she realizes that... and she takes it with a grain of salt.

Being in school impacted the decisions this participant was able to make within



her family. It was a learning experience for her and she gained knowledge she hoped she was successfully passing on to her daughter.

Lastly, it was clear that the services and structure of the adult learner program made returning to college both comfortable and feasible for these students. Though academic advising itself did not play a significant role in self authorship for these participants, other student support services and the attentive nature of the faculty did make a difference in the lives of the adult learners. One of the participants pointed out that her professors really understood the students as working adults. She stated, “and more importantly is like they really value your insight and they love listening to different stories and different experiences.” The participant felt that her identity as a working adult and single mother was understood in this program.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

### ***Learn about self-authorship.***

An understanding of Baxter Magolda’s (2001) theory of self-authorship can improve academic support for undergraduate adult learners. The findings of this study indicate that issues of personal development and self-authorship influenced the experiences of the participants. College student educators may benefit from workshops and training on how student development theories apply to adult learners.

### ***Improve orientation and support services.***

Academic advisors need to understand that many adult learners have limited experience at four-year universities.

Although these participants are adults, many of them have not experienced navigating a four year university campus and are unaware of the resources available to them as working adults. Comprehensive orientation programs, detailed websites and support services with evening or weekend hours would help fill the information gap for many of these students.

### ***Recognize adult learner needs and priorities.***

Adult learners balance many demands. Though they are at a different place in life, the needs of adult learners are as important as those of traditional students (Kasworm, 2003). The decision of these students to stay enrolled within the adult degree program was influenced by the positive experiences they had in the classroom, with program staff, and classmates. One participant said her current professors were much more understanding of her being a working adult when compared to her previous experience at a traditional university campus.

In summary, college student educators can improve adult learners’ chances of success in college by creating informed and supportive environments that recognize the unique needs and challenges faced by this student population. Self-authorship is a process of development that is meaningful to adult learners, and faculty and staff play a role in supporting these students in their journey of personal growth.



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## REINVENTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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*Providing students with strategies and tools for academic success is an increasingly important component of forging partnerships between student affairs and academic divisions. When students experience academic adjustments and challenges, mentoring and coaching strategies can enhance retention and assist them to refocus their energies. This chapter describes three intervention models for structured program intervention designed to support and retain low-performing students, exploration of effective paths toward academic success and achievement of degree completion. The models included are: CoachLink, Academic Success Program, and Madison Advising Peers.*

Persistence to degree completion has become increasingly important to student affairs and academic affairs educators at all types of institutions. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), approximately 59% of first-time students enrolled full-time at four-year institutions in fall 2005 finished bachelor's degrees at that institution within six years. Many students lack knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make academic and career decisions, practice poor time management, and are less inclined to engage in educationally purposeful activities. (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Reid & Moore, 2008). Consequently, students often exhibit poor academic performance and do not persist to degree completion. Current research concludes that focused support systems can make a difference in retention and persistence to degree (Kuh et al., 2007; Tinto, 2012). If academic communities are to respond effectively to issues of student persistence and degree completion, student and academic affairs need to collaborate in order to develop the conditions and programs (e.g., focus on study skills, academic support, advising, peer support, coaching, and mentoring) that create successful learning environments and

reduce attrition. (Kuh, et al., 2006; Tinto & Pusser, 2006; Bettinger & Baker, 2011). Understanding important factors supporting academic success assists college student educators in designing such interventions.

A variety of factors influence student persistence. While some reasons for attrition can be attributed to external causes, institutions can impact students' decisions to stay or leave. Tinto's (1975) early model of student integration postulates that students' academic and social integration as well their individual commitments to institutions and to the goal of college completion influence persistence (Cabrera et al., 1993; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Tinto's (2012) more recent model of institutional action for student success identifies the following conditions promoting student success and helping to address academic and social integration: expectations, support, feedback, involvement or engagement. Kuh et al. (2007) researched the impact of student engagement on persistence and found that engagement both inside and outside of the classroom during the first year of college impacted student persistence. Effective programs that integrate this research and have an impact on student persistence include student success courses (Kuh et al., 2006; Petrie



& Helmcamp, 1998; McGrath & Burd, 2012), academic advising programs and networks (Drake, 2011; Kuh et al., 2005), peer support (Kuh et al., 2005), coaching, and mentoring (Bettinger & Baker, 2011).

Applying principles from current research about student academic performance and retention, we have developed three models of intervention for supporting students with low academic performance: CoachLink, Academic Success Program and Madison Advising Peers.

## COACHLINK

In 2009, when Mr. Bibb Frazier prepared to write the obituary for his son, Austin, he made a conscious and deliberate decision to inform the community that his son died by suicide. This decision was accompanied with the hope that honesty about suicide (and mental illness) would prevent such tragedy from occurring in other families, raise awareness of mental illness, and lower the social stigma. In addition, he established the Austin Frazier Memorial Fund to promote awareness about mental illness among college students. It is this fund and Mr. Frazier's personal contribution that launched the creation and implementation of the CoachLink program at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in 2010.

### ***CoachLink Program***

The original design of CoachLink was to connect coaches (second year graduate students in the Master of Arts in Counseling program) with students struggling with mental health issues such as such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and bipolar disorder. In an informal

setting, students received on-on-one personalized coaching to help manage mental health issues, connect to college resources, develop healthy life skills, and enhance relationships. Participation in CoachLink was designed to be voluntary and student-initiated. Now in its fourth year, the program has expanded to not only serve students struggling with mental health issues, but also to serve students who are at-risk of being dismissed from the university for academic reasons. In collaboration with the Undergraduate Academic Division, students on academic probation are connected to CoachLink and expected to work with a coach throughout the semester. In addition, the CoachLink program is integrated into a spring semester success strategies course taken by first-year students whose fall semester grade point averages are below 1.50.

Coaches meet weekly with students to help them understand academic and personal issues that hinder their success in college and in life. Coaches provide support, accountability, guidance, comfort, and safety. They teach study skills and help students explore their learning styles. They connect students to campus resources. Coaches serve as mentors and advocates. Coaches are not mental health counselors, although most coaches have counselor training. As a result, they are able to identify and assess mental health concerns and make referrals to the university's counseling center.

### ***CoachLink Outcomes***

Since its inception, CoachLink has served approximately 170 students. Students have consistently evaluated their connection to CoachLink with high regard: nearly 100% agreed that CoachLink helped them to be more



successful in college and helped them to have a better sense of well-being. The Counseling Center directs the CoachLink program. Currently there are five coaches: one full time, two part time and two interns from the Master of Arts in counseling program. All are under the supervision of a licensed professional counselor, meeting weekly for individual supervision and weekly for group supervision.

## **ACADEMIC SUCCESS PROGRAM**

Coordinated by Academic Student Services, the Academic Success Program is an intervention program developed to assist James Madison University students who are on academic probation or suspension, achieve academic success and earn a cumulative GPA of 2.00 or higher.

### ***Program Structure***

In the fall of each year, the Academic Success Program-I is offered for reentry/readmit students who seek academic success. This student population is mandated to attend the program by their respective dean's office or by an academic review committee. Comprised of 12-20, upper-class students per class and taught by a peer-instructor, the students are given a number of conditions they must achieve, including a specific semester GPA goal. The program meets on a weekly basis for eight weeks. Each session includes one hour of classroom lecture and activities. The class sessions are focused on the following topics: time management, learning styles, effective writing and reading skills, test taking skills, note taking, and stress management. During the 2013 fall semester, 125 students were required to

join the Academic Success Program, 89 of which completed the pre-screening process. At the end of the semester, 80 students fulfilled the Academic Success Program requirement.

In the spring of each year, Academic Success Program - II is provided for reentry/readmit students. This population is generally mandated to attend the program by an academic review committee. Like the fall semester group, students are generally upper-class and given a number of conditions they must achieve, including a specific semester GPA. Instead of weekly classroom sessions, students meet one-on-one with Academic Success Program coordinators on a regular basis throughout the semester.

### ***Program Outcomes***

The expectation is that students who participate in Academic Success Program will increase their grade point averages, improve their academic status, and progress toward graduation. In order to ascertain whether ASP expectations are being met, GPA, academic status and graduation information is collected and tracked for all students assigned to the program. Historical data from 1997-2013 indicates that of the 1792 students in the Academic Success Program, 1021 students (56.9%) fulfilled the Academic Success Program requirements. From 1997-2010 the average increase in semester GPA for students who successfully completed the program was 0.895 and they had a graduate rate of 49%. In contrast, those who failed to complete the program had a 0.363 increase in semester GPAs and 29% graduation rate.

The Academic Success Program budget is approximately \$13,000 per year, which includes a graduate assistant



(\$7550), peer instructors (\$5000), training/workshops (\$150) and supplies (\$300).

## **MADISON ADVISING PEERS**

The 2009 James Madison University creation of the Madison Advising Peers was a collaborative effort between the Student Government Association and University Advising. There are 10 undergraduate advising peers and one graduate assistant to assist with program supervision. Madison Advising Peers (MAPs) are students who are committed to helping other students achieve college goals. MAPs work in conjunction with faculty advisers and provides supplemental academic advising information and assist other JMU undergraduate students who may have general advising questions, but don't know where to go. A MAP can be a supportive and friendly resource for students who feel overwhelmed and confused.

### ***Advising Topics Covered by MAPs***

Peer advisors assist with topics that are common to all students. They include, but are not limited to: general education and BA / BS degree requirements, degree progress reports, course registration and overrides, requirements for major and minor programs, declaration of major/minor, graduation applications, four-year mappings of academic plans, and information about academic support services. The MAPs are accessible via walk-in hours at several campus locations, including the offices of: University Advising, College of Business, and Pre-Professional Health Programs.

## ***Hiring, Selection and Training***

Recruitment and selection of new advising peers occurs during the spring semester. Students apply by submitting a resume, cover letter, and personal statement stating why they wish to be part of the Madison Advising Program. Applicants must have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00. Those selected attend training sessions in August and then work ten hours per week at a rate of \$8.00 during the business day during the academic year. Bi-weekly staff meetings occur throughout the academic year to discuss topics that have come up during the week or provide additional training. The total program budget is approximately \$32,000 per year, which includes student wages of \$29,000 plus training expenses, printing, and promotional items.

## **CONCLUSION**

While every campus experiences unique opportunities and challenges, we share a common goal – the successful academic achievement of the students. This chapter discussed three models currently in use – CoachLink, the Academic Success Program and the Madison Advising Peers program. To assist our colleagues in the development of similar programs on their home campuses, we have included guides for the four phases of the developmental process: assessing need, developing a proposal, implementation, and evaluation at the end of this chapter.



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## ASSESSING NEED

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Conducting a thorough needs assessment on your campus is a critical first step in the program development process. You must have a clear idea of the scope of the problem or issue on your campus, its critical elements, and good data that supports the need for a new intervention or program. Essential components of assessing need are:

1. developing a clear and accurate statement of the problem or issue;
2. gathering evidence; and
3. analyzing your data and refining the problem or issue.

---

### *Defining the Problem/Issue*

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- Describe the problem or issue to be addressed and the desired outcome(s).
- Review any related research, institutional reports, assessment data, conference proceedings, or other documents that speak to the problem identified or a related problem.
- Determine if there are other efforts on campus to address the same problem or a similar problem and meet with the appropriate individuals to learn about what is being done.
- Are there opportunities for collaboration with individuals and/or programs with similar interests?
- Based upon your findings, refine the problem or issue to be addressed and the desired outcome(s).
- Determine what data you need in support of your proposal to implement a new program.

---

### *Gathering Evidence*

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#### *Existing Evidence*

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- Gather any existing information that speaks to the problem or issues to be addressed. Examples include:
    - Institutional research reports
    - Assessment studies
    - Student surveys
    - User statistics
    - Focus group findings
    - Qualitative research
  - Based upon existing information, do you need additional data? If so, what additional data do you need?
- 



---

## *New Evidence*

---

If there is insufficient evidence in support of a new program, you may need to collect additional data.

- Determine what additional evidence/information you need to help define the scope and characteristics of the problem or issue (quantitative and qualitative data that might be needed).
- Determine if your data collection involves other offices/individuals and solicit their help.
- Decide upon the best method of data collection (i.e. surveys, focus groups, formalized assessment, user statistics, etc.).
- Design your data collection instrument and data collection process and solicit any expert help as needed.
- Determine any financial costs including faculty/staff time related to collecting and interpreting the data and request funding if needed.
- Collect your data.

---

## *Analyzing Data and Refining the Problem*

---

- Analyze your data and identify any themes and/or conclusions that can be drawn from the data.
  - Does the new data support or refute the desired program? Is the data inconclusive?
  - Does the new data identify a different issue or concern?
  - Use the data to refine the problem or issue if necessary.
  - If the data supports the problem/issue, you are ready to move on to the proposal development stage.
  - If the data refutes the perceived problem, is inconclusive, and/or the data suggests a new problem or issue, revisit the process for assessing need and determine how you want to proceed.
- 



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## DEVELOPING A PROPOSAL

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After you have completed your needs assessment, you may decide to develop a proposal for a program or intervention. Important components to consider in the process include:

1. political/organization dynamic issues;
2. institutional process;
3. drafting a carefully constructed document; and
4. making the presentation.

---

### ***Brief Description of Program***

---

- Name of the program
- Name of Proposer(s)
- Administrative Unit
- Describe genesis and concept of your proposal
- Explain program content
- Define target population

---

### ***Summary of Needs Assessment***

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- Define problem to be addressed
- Provide data/info to support program, including sources

---

### ***Justification***

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- How does this proposal address your division's mission?
- How does this proposal address your institution's mission?
- How does it relate to strategic plans or priorities?
- Why does your institution need this program at this time?
- Detail needs being met

---

### ***Goals/Outcome***

---

- List the goals of the program
- List learning outcomes for student participants
- Identify outcomes that may add value for staff or faculty
- Identify efficiencies that may occur as a result of program implementation

---

### ***Program Details***

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- Explain organizational structure
  - Provide implementation timeline
  - Describe recruitment, identification, selection of participants; include estimate of number of students being served
  - Provide number of sessions
  - Outline the content covered in each session; may be done as appendix
  - Describe mode of delivery
  - List names or position titles of individuals who will be delivering content
  - Mention collaborative support
- 



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***Assessment/Evaluation***

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- Describe methods used to evaluate success of program
- Describe plans for assessment of student learning outcome

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***Resource Implications***

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- Realistic estimate of needs
  - List personnel
  - Explain space needed
  - Describe materials necessary for implementation
  - Explain use of existing resources
  - Define new resources needed
- 



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## IMPLEMENTATION

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Congratulations!! Your program proposal has been approved, and now it's time to make your plans a reality. Three key components of implementing your program are:

1. staff recruitment and selection,
2. staff training, and
3. screening of student participants.

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### ***Staff Recruitment and Selection***

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#### *Staff Recruitment*

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- Identify position(s) to be filled
- Develop selection criteria
  - Program purpose, goals, and objectives should guide establishment of criteria
- Develop recruitment strategy and material, as well as application materials
  - Selection criteria should guide recruitment strategy
  - Choose/develop appropriate application materials. Application form and/or resume? Letters of recommendation? Supplementary material, such as essays?
- Develop screening material/rubric

---

#### *Staff Selection*

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- Develop interview agenda and questions
- Review/screen applicants – using the screening rubric
- Interview candidates
- Review interview notes and screening rubric(s) for each candidate, and, choose best-suited candidate(s)
- Inform candidates of your decision(s)
  - Offer position(s) to chosen candidate(s)
  - Notify unsuccessful candidates

---

### ***Staff Training***

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#### *Pre-Training*

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- Develop training goals and objectives
- Develop training agenda and materials
  - Training should be as hands-on/interactive as possible

---

#### *Training*

---

- Areas to cover during initial training session:
    - Program mission, goals, and objectives
    - Program policies, procedures, and schedule(s)
    - Goals and expectations of position(s)
    - Confidentiality
    - Effective communication and problem solving
    - Relationships – expectations and boundaries
    - Characteristics of the program's student population
    - Specific program related topics/areas
- 



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### *Post-Training*

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- Assess/evaluate training
    - Assessment results should be used to guide development of future training
- 

### *Ongoing Meetings/Trainings*

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- Conduct (regularly scheduled) training sessions/meetings throughout the semester/year
    - Sessions/meetings could include expanded exploration of program-related, communication, and problem solving topics, self- exploration, etc.
- 

## ***Screening of Student Participants***

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### *Prior to Screening*

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- Identify purpose of screening and information to be gathered
  - Determine whether to use an existing instrument or if a new instrument will need to be developed
  - Establish delivery method
    - Web-based, paper, telephone, Skype, in-person
  - Determine screening schedule
    - Pre-screening only? Pre- and post-screening? Mid-point screening, in addition to pre-and post-screening?
- 

### *Screening*

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- Implement screening, guided by screening schedule
- 

### *Post-Screening*

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- Analyze screening data
  - Disseminate screening results to interested parties
- 

Some additional components of implementation:

1. Securing of office space, meeting rooms, classroom space
2. Purchase of equipment and supplies



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## EVALUATION / ASSESSMENT / EFFECTIVENESS

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*"Is what we're doing having any effect, is that effect the intended one, and how do we know?"*

*-Patrick T. Terenzini and M. Lee Upcraft*

Guiding Questions:

1. As a result of your program, what are the desired outcomes?
2. What resources will you use to measure your desired outcomes?
3. How will you know if the program is achieving the desired outcomes?
4. How will you use the results of your assessment?

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### Assessment Tasks and Considerations

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#### Goals & Objectives

---

1. Identify program goals.
2. Create measurable objectives that support the program goals

---

#### Assessment Design & Methodology

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3. Determine how objectives will be measured.
  - Quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both methods? Quantitative methods such as surveys and assessment instruments are useful when seeking information from a large amount of people. Qualitative methods such as interview and focus groups are useful for gathering information from a smaller, representative group of people.
  - Will an existing survey (national or institutional) provide the necessary data or does a new survey need to be created?

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#### Data: Collect & Analyze

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4. Determine when objectives will be measured.
  - Pre/Post-tests?
5. Establish delivery method of survey/assessment instrument.
  - Web-based? Paper? Telephone? In-person?
  - Ensure the assessment conditions are the same for all students completing the survey.
6. Decide who will conduct focus groups and interviews.
7. Consider student incentive in data collection participation.
8. Seek assistance from institutional assessment professionals with data analysis.

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#### Results & Action

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9. Create a plan for disseminating your data results.
  - With whom do you share your results?
  - How do you share your results? Written report? Public presentation?
10. Determine the impact of your results.
  - How do your results impact your program goals and objectives? Program structure? Assessment process?

---

Further suggestions:

1. Map out an assessment timeline on a calendar.
2. Utilize support and services from your institutional assessment professionals



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# INTERVENTION! TRANSFORMING STUDENT INTERACTIONS TO INCREASE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

VICKY DEAN, DANIEL ROSNER, JAMIE MATTHEWS

*With retention as a primary issue in higher education, college student educators are further called to incorporate student learning into daily student interactions. These interactions give student affairs staff a captive audience for discussing individual academic performance - a key element of retention. Academic success stems not only from academic preparedness, but also includes factors impacting their overall well-being such as life skills, social connections, family, and finances. This chapter discusses specific academic interventions strategies including Intrusive Advising, Motivational Interviewing, and Appreciative Inquiry.*

The emphasis on retention in higher education increases the pressure on student affairs professionals across functional areas. Improving programmatic and individual academic intervention strategies to help students overcome challenges is imperative for contributing to this call for greater accountability to students. A quick search of articles on the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reveals the focus on retention. Articles abound with keywords such as “results”, “student success”, “improve retention”, and “support.” Many of these articles examine large scale inquiries into graduation rates, particularly among specific student populations; however, very few provide a construct for how staff across an institution can contribute to the success of individual students.

This chapter bridges this gap through discussing specific academic intervention strategies that stem from Intrusive Advising, Motivational Interviewing, and Appreciative Inquiry, along with programmatic implementation and assessment considerations. These approaches provide several ways of viewing student interactions and mechanisms professionals can utilize for

individual interactions. Staff regardless of functional area can utilize these flexible approaches in ways meaningful to their specific work with student. Not every strategy will work for every professional or situation, nor are they necessarily meant to work together in a cohesive manner. The offerings herein exemplify how to integrate cross-disciplinary concepts and theories in order to design a well-rounded and intentional set of student success-centered practices.

For illustrative purposes, the below scenario is integrated throughout each approach to show a potential application of each. Sam is the president of an organization a student affairs staff member advises. Sam recently stopped regularly attending classes and mentions plans to transfer. The following sections provide an overview of each method and demonstrate 1) an Intrusive Advising approach to identify some of the issues at hand, 2) Motivational Interviewing techniques to help Sam recognize the need for change, and 3) Appreciative Inquiry as a method to design a change plan.



## INTRUSIVE ADVISING

Intrusive Advising is an academic advising style built upon two previous advising styles: prescriptive and developmental. Although typically used in an academic advising setting, intrusive advising offers several techniques transferable to a wide variety of student interactions. Intrusive Advising, also called Proactive Advising, is a time-intensive strategy first developed by Robert Glennen when he began to mix advising and counseling into one discipline. In the most simplistic definition, Intrusive Advising is an academic advising technique that places staff in a position to care about all affairs of the student (Varney, 2007). Staff members make continued, intentional contact with student to develop a caring and beneficial relationship. Earl (1987) states, “Intrusive Advising is about getting to the heart of what is causing difficulty for a student and recommending appropriate intervention” (as cited in Varney, 2007). One of the many key actions of intrusive advising is to approach students before situations develop (Varney, 2012). Today’s technology and tools available to staff across departments that could help identify potential stressors include MAP-Works, mid-term grades, unpaid tuition bills, and other early alert systems. Staff members with any kind of student interaction can use a specific information gathering worksheet to enhance the depth of conversation . If staff members take time to check these resources before a student enters the office, the conversation can be more pointed. This pre-work also helps staff look for answers of potential questions students may ask but might be directly related to the initial topic of the meeting,

such as housing sign-up dates or financial policies and payment dates. To assist with this process, a template has been included at the end of this chapter - *Academic and Retention Notes*.

During the conversations, the questions and topics brought up by students should be addressed in an action-oriented way with the student completing the plan rather than the staff member. After the appointment, staff should follow-up with the student to see if the action plan completed and or if there are additional concerns. Regular emails should be sent out to the caseload of students that the staff member regularly sees (the building roster for a hall director or a literal case load for an academic advisor). Upon realization that Sam intends to transfer, staff members could look up past grades and inquire about financial hardships and Sam’s support systems. Based on how the conversation goes, the staff member may follow up by sending resources tailored to Sam’s situation. Sam may respond well to the staff member’s approach; however, some students may feel invaded and others may not want the perceived extra help. When implemented correctly, Intrusive Advising leaves students feeling more connected to the institution and more likely to ask for help as challenges arise.

## MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is another individual technique to assist students with academic performance. Originally created by William R. Miller in 1983 to treat problem drinkers, MI evolved overtime to be applied in a wider variety of scenarios (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). A more recent definition states



MI is “...a collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change” (Miller & Rollnick, 2009, p. 137). Taking one of the concepts from MI, staff partner with students to develop intrinsic motivation and promote behavior changes that aligned with individuals’ values and goals.

Collaboration, evocation, and autonomy are three guiding principles of MI. Collaboration directs staff to avoid an authoritarian approach and rather view their work with students as a partnership. Working with students is a chance to explore ideas and possibilities rather than to give directions and direct advice. Evocation emphasizes that the interaction is for finding motivation, goals, and answers within the student and drawing those out, rather than imparting one’s own wisdom, ambition, or reality. Autonomy places the responsibility for change on the student. This includes that the student must be the one who presents arguments for change. In Sam’s case, rather than telling Sam reasons not to transfer, Sam needs to identify the positive and negative factors associated with transferring.

These guiding characteristics set the stage for MI’s OARS Technique, specific guidelines for conversations. OARS stands for Open-Ended Questions, Affirmations, Reflective Learning, and Summarize (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Open-Ended Questions require more than a yes or no response while encouraging students to do most of the talking. Phrases such as “tell me about” or “describe” help keep the student’s voice at the forefront. Affirmations provide staff a chance to validate what a student is experiencing and sharing. In Sam’s case, staff could use language such as, “I appreciate your honesty” and

“Sounds like you have a lot on your plate.” Reflective Listening is necessary in order to ensure an accurate understanding of the student and that no conclusions are assumed. For example, Sam shares details about a recent family move. As a reflective listener, when Sam revealed the family move, the staff member could sense the anxiety in Sam and ask further questions to explore the impact. This leads to Summarize, the last step in the OARS technique, which reinforces what has been said while providing a chance to offer direction subtly for developing change plans. Further descriptions and examples of OARS Strategies are included at the end of this chapter - *Strategies of Motivational Interviewing – OARS*

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry, originally developed by Organizational Behavior faculty and students, stems from the assumption that there is great potential and beauty in every organization (Hammond, 1998). Conversely, a problem solving approach looks backwards to identify what is wrong and needing to be fixed within an individual or situation, assuming there are inadequacies in everyone. An appreciative approach, rather, looks forward and aims to realize the possibility for the future and identify what is working. Some basic assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry include that development is generative process with no end, individuals have more confidence to carry to the future if they bring with them positive parts about their past, and reality is constructed based on individuals’ surroundings and conversations (Hammond, 1998).

The 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry outlines an easy to remember



process for professionals to utilize: Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This is particularly helpful when students lack self-esteem and struggle to see what future possibilities exist. Focusing on what a student is doing right and what they aspire to do can be key factors in developing resiliency and adjusting behaviors impacting academic performance. The starting point of the 4-D model is selecting a positive topic. Discover examines the 'best of what is' in any given situation. This helps avoid focusing on the negative traits of a situation. The next phase, Dream, asks individuals to consider what might be within the topic. Design now takes the products from the Discover and Dream phase and utilizes dialogue to construct an inclusive, yet realistic vision and the plan that achieve that vision. The final phase, Destiny, is the enacting of the plan with a continual eye on the future. This allows room for revision to any phase of the cycle and room to start the process over with a new topic. In conversation with Sam, Sam indicated not being accepted into the nursing program as another reason for considering a transfer. Following the 4-D model, the resulting conversation with Sam could address what other interests and skills of Sam (Discover) and if there are other ways those skills can be realized (Dream). This model would continue with examining if ways to explore these interests on campus by using the career center or job shadowing (Design). Destiny includes following through with plans to learn more and re-evaluating Sam's major.

## LARGE-SCALE INTERVENTIONS

Not only can Intrusive Advising, Motivational Interviewing, and Appreciative Inquiry be used within individual academic interventions, they can serve as the foundation for institution or department-wide academic intervention programs. To begin thinking about implementing programmatic academic interventions, start with the inquiry stage and think broadly. What do students need? Which units across campus are already meeting these needs? This first inquiry part may require many conversations and investigation to generate familiarity with what campus offers. Are there insufficiencies in what is currently provided in terms of resources, alerts systems, communication mechanisms? Are these seamless or do they create a silo effect leaving students out of the loop and/or receiving mixed messages? Take time to write down current knowledge of these campus factors. Map-out what communication students receive from the institution that impacts their success. For example, how are course drop dates communicated to students and to other campus units? How are students educated on what it means to be on academic probation? Is this information relayed consistently and correctly? Are there non-traditional ways to reinforce such important information and how can specific student affairs units be a part of this communication?

Institutional context is critical. Which units have liaison relationships? Which leaders do not work well together? Is



there an annual workshop series or large scale event that can be adapted to convey important information? Are there opportunities to educate campus colleagues about key information through employee orientation, staff training or ongoing professional development opportunities? Understanding the formal and informal relationships and lines of communication significantly impacts the growth or stymying of a potential collaboration.

Throughout all efforts, assessment is vital at both the individual interaction and programmatic level. Angelo and Cross (1993) present several assessment examples in *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. These can be modified to assess individual interactions such as Minute Papers, Muddiest Point, One Sentence Summaries, and Concept Maps. There are also several ways to approach large scale assessment- many of which may already be in place throughout an institution. Tracking persistence rates, mid-term grades and drop-out reasons, or cancelling housing contracts mid-semester are great ways to gather data

that can inform opportunities for improvement.

As pressure grows to retain our students, being proactive makes us better suited to impact overall retention and academic performance. Intrusive Advising, Motivational Interviewing, and Appreciative Inquiry are complex theoretical approaches. Many resources complement the examples provided throughout this paper and outline other practical applications in specific settings such as academic advising, student conduct meetings, behavior intervention, and leadership development. These approaches should serve as the catalyst for more research and dialogues during staff meetings. As a starting point, consider just one adjustment or addition to make within a future student meeting. Look for opportunities to collaborate and connect with colleagues across campus. Ultimately the goal is to help students in their time of need as they transition into and through college. Student affairs staff should be ready, skilled and invested in helping them move through these challenges.



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACADEMIC AND RETENTION NOTES

---

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Room #: \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown: \_\_\_\_\_

Job(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Hours/week: \_\_\_\_\_

Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Minor: \_\_\_\_\_

Cumulative GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ Academic Standing: \_\_\_\_\_

Involvement on Campus: \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you decide to attend college? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your goals after graduation (dream job, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS	5TH WEEK MARKS	NOTES (PLAN TO PASS) & ACTION PLAN

Is the student a part of a special retention program (STEPS, BEP, etc.)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**MAP-Works Information**

*(Please list yellow or red markers and summarize discussion):*

<b>Academic:</b>	<b>Behaviors &amp; Activities</b>
<b>Socio-Emotional:</b>	<b>Financial Means:</b>
<b>Performance &amp; Expectations:</b>	<b>Special Topics/Comments:</b>

Financial Concerns: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Concerns (Judicial, Roommate, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What support systems do you have access to (Family, Friends, RA, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Referral Section:**

Speak with Professor for Class(es): \_\_\_\_\_  Tutoring Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Registrar (Potter Hall 216)
- Financial Aid (Potter 317)
- Counseling Services (Potter 4th floor)
- Health Services (Potter 4th floor)
- Student Disability Services (DSU A230)

**Action Plan:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# STRATEGIES OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING – OARS

DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<b>Strategy: Open-Ended Questions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elicits descriptive information</li> <li>• Requires more of a response than a simple yes or no</li> <li>• Encourages student to do most of the talking</li> <li>• Helps us avoid premature judgments</li> <li>• Keeps communication moving forward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often start with words like “how” or “what” or “tell me about” or “describe.”</li> <li>• What are you enjoying about college?</li> <li>• What challenges you as a student?</li> <li>• How would you like things to be different?</li> <li>• What have you tried before to make a change?</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy: Affirmations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be done sincerely</li> <li>• Supports and promote self-efficacy</li> <li>• Acknowledges the difficulties the student has experienced</li> <li>• Validates the student’s experience and feelings</li> <li>• Emphasizes past experiences that demonstrate strength and success to prevent discouragement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I appreciate how hard it must have been for you to decide to come here. You took a big step.</li> <li>• I appreciate your honesty.</li> <li>• You handled yourself really well in that situation.</li> <li>• That’s a good suggestion.</li> <li>• You are very courageous to be so revealing about this.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy: Reflective Listening</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A way of checking rather than assuming that you know what is meant</li> <li>• Shows that you have an interest in and respect for what the student has to say</li> <li>• Demonstrates that you have accurately heard and understood the student</li> <li>• Encourages further exploration of problems and feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It sounds like you...</li> <li>• You’re wondering if...</li> <li>• So you feel...</li> <li>• Please say more...</li> <li>• Reflections are statements. Statements ending with downward inflection (as opposed to questions) tend to work better because students find it helpful to have some words to start a response. Statements are less likely than questions to evoke resistance.</li> <li>• Avoid “Do you mean...” and “What I hear you saying is that you...” (can appear patronizing).</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy: Summarize</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforces what has been said</li> <li>• Shows that you have been listening carefully</li> <li>• Prepares the student for transition</li> <li>• Allows you to be strategic in what to include to reinforce talk that is in the direction of change</li> <li>• Can underscore feelings of ambivalence and promote perception of discrepancy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, let me see if I got this right...</li> <li>• So, you’ve been saying... is that correct?</li> <li>• Let me see if I understand so far...</li> <li>• Here’s what I’ve heard. Tell me if I’ve missed anything.</li> <li>• Let me make sure I understand exactly what you’ve been trying to tell me...</li> <li>• What you said is important. I value what you say. Here are the salient points.</li> <li>• We covered that well. Let’s talk about...</li> </ul>



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