

Student Success

Numbers

“Only slightly more than 50 percent of American students who enter college leave with a bachelor’s degree” (Selingo).

“Over half of all undergraduates live at home to make their degrees more affordable, and a shocking 40 percent of students work at least 30 hours a week” ([Mellow](#)).

“According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, students who work more than 25 hours per week struggle to pass their classes . . .” ([EAB](#)).

“While roughly a third of students transfer schools, 40% of transfer students don’t get credit for completed courses” ([EAB](#)).

“Forty-six percent of respondents with just one or two significant faculty or staff relationships rated college as ‘very rewarding,’ as compared to just 22 percent of those with no such relationships. Similarly, 48 percent of respondents with one or two significant peer relationships rated college as ‘very rewarding,’ as compared to 25 percent who lacked those types of connections” ([Lambert, Husser, and Felten](#)).

Insights

“Reorienting an institution toward students is a leadership challenge, and campuses known for reform tend to have a president who prioritizes student success over rankings or research” (Lipka).

“. . . there is growing evidence that—when done well—some programs and activities appear to engage participants at levels that elevate their performance across multiple engagement and desired-outcomes measures such as persistence. [High-Impact Practices] “include first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, study abroad, and other experiences with diversity, internships, and capstone courses and projects” ([Kuh](#)).

Introduction

Students must be the primary focus of our work as a university, as they have been for my work as a professor, chair, dean, and chief academic officer over my 22 years in academia.

Educating students successfully requires a highly intentional approach comprising not only excellent teaching, but also carefully crafted support services. Many of the students who enroll in our universities face their own personal challenges, which frequently threaten their ability to complete a college education in four years or at all. The reasons are complex, as I have come to see as both an administrator and an English professor on the front lines: academic struggles, yes, but a host of personal and financial difficulties that underlie the problems in the classroom. Thanks to IU Kokomo’s partnership with Inside Track, a coaching service that collected data on our struggling students, as well as my own study of this subject, I have come to appreciate the role of work, family, culture, finances, mental and physical health, mindset, grit, and “belonging” illuminated by Carol Dweck, Angela Duckworth, Robert Putnam, Vincent Tinto, David Yeager, and others.

I cannot say that I would bring any simple solutions for student success. I wish I could. What I can bring is a deep understanding of these underlying problems, as well as a broad knowledge of interventions such as the ones summarized below.

Initiatives and Strategies

Re-Imagining the First Year: IU Kokomo was a leading participant in this three-year project, sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Our campus initiatives included a Student Success Academy, growth-mindset education, an Academic Progress Hold, a Student Intake Survey, and microgrants. Our work has been featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Change*.

KEY: IU Kokomo’s signature experiential-learning initiative promotes both retention (through community-building) and academic success writ large, as the authentic, active learning experiences and contact with professionals enhance students’ knowledge and skills.

REAL: IU Kokomo’s Record of Experiential and Applied Learning (REAL), an official supplement to the IU transcript, allows students to showcase their participation in KEY experiences and other forms of transformative learning.

Resource Navigator: Recognizing that many of the challenges threaten college success are not academic, but personal, IU Kokomo has hired a “Resource Navigator.” A social worker by training, she helps connect students with food or housing insecurity, illness, anxiety, etc. with appropriate resources on and off campus.

"High levels of graduates' purpose in work are strongly and significantly related to four key college experiences": "Having an applied internship or job"; "Having someone who encourages students' goals and dreams"; "Being given realistic expectations for post-graduation employment prospects"; "Participating in a class/program that helps students think about pursuing meaning in work" ([Bates College and Gallup](#)).

"Regardless of the subject an instructor teaches, he or she should convey more than information. A teacher should offer students a glimpse of what is admirable in life, a sense of what is worth striving for, some insight into our better selves" ([Nesteruk](#)).

"Studies at four-year institutions have also found a positive relationship between instructor participation in faculty development and student outcomes" (Brown and Kurzweil).

". . . students who showed gains in intellectual commitment, certainty of career choice, and satisfaction with academic and nonacademic experiences during their college years reported more contact with faculty, particularly outside of class" (Sorcinelli).

"The new analysis found that 'mind-set'—a student's sense of social belonging or grit, for example—is a stronger predictor of whether a student is likely to graduate than previously believed. So powerful, in fact, that it counts even more than external factors like standardized test scores, income levels and whether the student's parents are college graduates" ([Barton](#)).

"The best college and university teachers create what we might call a natural critical learning environment in which they embed the skills and information they wish to teach in assignments (questions and tasks) students will find fascinating—authentic tasks that will arouse curiosity, challenging students to rethink their assignments and examine their mental modes of reality" (Bain).

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Faculty Development: Recognizing that faculty are powerful agents for promoting student success, IU Kokomo has provided numerous opportunities for instructors to study growth mindset, experiential learning, transparent teaching, and more through our Student Success Academy, Experiential Learning Academy, annual retreats, guest lectures, and faculty learning communities.

Summer Programs: NevadaFIT, a summer-bridge program, features "Pre-semester, for-credit week-long math intensive course with semester-long corollary," "8 boot camps operated by individual colleges," and "College-level, graded assignments and exams with in-depth faculty feedback." Figures from 2016 show that first-generation participants showed retention rates 5 percent higher than those of peers ([Bevevino](#)).

Peer Mentors: Statistics point to the effectiveness of peer mentors in promoting student success. EAB reports, "Students in classes with course assistants have higher semester GPAs and lower DFW rates," and Metropolitan State University of Denver reports huge retention benefits associated with peers working as an "Extension of advising" ([Bevevino](#)).

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