

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT SUPPORT REDEFINED

EQUITABLE. INTEGRATED. COST EFFECTIVE.

Six Success Factors Defined

Through a review of leading studies on effective support practices and interviews with both practitioners and researchers, the RP Group identified “six success factors” that contribute to students’ achievement. We list them below in order of importance according to the students participating in the Student Support (Re)defined study.

Directed: Students have a goal and know how to achieve it

Focused: Students stay on track— keeping their eyes on the prize

Nurtured: Students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

Engaged: Students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

Connected: Students feel like they are part of the college community

Valued: Students’ skills, talents, abilities, and experiences are recognized; they have opportunities to contribute on campus and feel their contributions are appreciated

10 Ways Faculty Can Support Students’ Success:

Helping Students Achieve the “Six Success Factors”

What can faculty do to help students experience the “six success factors”—focused, directed, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued—during their community college enrollment? (See sidebar, Six Success Factors Defined) Find below 10 suggestions the RP Group gleaned from nearly 900 California community college learners participating in our Student Support (Re)defined study.

- 1. Ask students about their educational and career goals (directed)**

By asking students why they are in college and what their major is, you let them know you expect them to have a reason for enrolling in postsecondary education.

- 2. Integrate career and educational goal exploration into course assignments (directed, focused, engaged)**

Students indicated that their teachers could play a unique role in helping them explore careers given the professional experience and content-specific expertise many instructors bring to their courses. Rooting this exploration in the classroom can help students draw connections between their educational and career goals and coursework, and in turn, find greater relevance in course content.

We would work with each other so we would get to know other people in our class, and then we'd get to work on the same problems together. That would make us more engaged, and we can learn from each other [as well as] the professor.

— Focus Group Participant

3. Provide regular and meaningful feedback to students about their performance and progress (focused, engaged)

Students want to know where they stand in their individual classes and whether they are on the right track in meeting their goals. This type of feedback can foster motivation as well as allow students to “course correct” by connecting with additional resources if needed to improve their performance.

4. Regularly ask students if they understand the course material and direct them to available assistance when needed (nurtured, engaged)

Students want faculty to care if they are learning. While it is not possible to provide private instruction to every student in need, help by identifying and referring struggling students to campus resources like tutoring centers for assistance.

5. Learn your students' names and ask them how they are doing (nurtured, connected)

Knowing every student's name can be a challenge, especially in large classes, yet there are techniques such as name tags or plates that can prove useful. Recognizing someone by name is a small gesture that can go a long way in making a student feel like an important and valuable participant in your course. For students who approach you, learn their name, ask them how they are doing, and wait for the answer.

6. Create opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience in your course throughout the term (engaged, valued)

Students said that being asked for their feedback in both formal and informal ways made them want to engage more in their classes because they felt like their input and experience mattered. In addition, being asked for their opinion helped students feel they had something worth offering that could help improve the course, which made them feel valued.

7. Show students that you are proud to work at your institution and that they should be proud to be enrolled at your community college (connected)

Some students don't see their community college as a place of pride. When asked why, participants referenced an absence of strong organizational identity among faculty and staff at their institutions. Other students indicated that there was no value in establishing ties with what they perceived to be “just a two-year college,” reporting plans to make these connections upon transferring to a university. Illustrating with students your own sense of connection to your institution and sharing why you choose to work in a community college environment can invoke a greater sense of place and pride in students.

I like having conversations with my teachers. . . . [I'd like] if I'm having a hard day or something where I could open up [to] them and share my feelings . . . and it not just be about, “Oh sorry, I

didn't complete the homework." . . . That's definitely something I think is very beneficial to have, [to] talk with them and know that they genuinely care about you.

— Focus Group Participant

8. Provide opportunities for and encourage students to connect with and support each other (connected, nurtured, engaged)

Students are a critical and often untapped resource of support for one another. Help students connect with each other by creating study groups, assigning project work, instituting a buddy system, and facilitating peer mentoring opportunities.

9. Incorporate opportunities for students to share their personal and family history and culture in class assignments (valued, engaged)

Many students in the study, especially African American, Latino, and first-generation participants, indicated that they appreciated being provided with opportunities to share their backgrounds and experiences in ways that showed their perspectives and contributions were valued.

10. Connect or provide students with opportunities to help their peers (valued, engaged)

Students felt most valued when they were helping other students. Create opportunities inside the classroom through group and other assignments where students assist each other. Guide students in identifying opportunities outside the classroom where they can volunteer or work in the local community or on campus.

For more information . . .

Find more information and all project resources at: www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support or contact Dr. Darla Cooper, Director of Research and Evaluation, dcooper@rpgroup.org.