**Academic Affairs Committee**
ASCSU
**White Paper on Student Success**

What is "student success?" The term is widely employed by administrators, faculty, educational consultants, legislators, and funding organizations. It has even been attached as a title to some of the fees charged to students. It has, in fact, become a catch-all term and even a marketing phrase to "sell" policies and programs in the CSU system, and to the CSU system. The definition of "student success" most often assumes that the value of the student experience can be easily measured. In the CSU system few campuses have well-articulated definitions of student success (see Appendix 4). Most recently, for instance, it has virtually become synonymous with time to degree, especially with a degree achieved in four years. A degree achieved in four years is a measure of something and perhaps even of something valuable, but it is not necessarily a measure of student success.

In this white paper we argue for a particular understanding of student success that has been suppressed in the flood of other characteristics that have been so opportunistically attached to the term. We believe the phrase "student success" should govern most importantly the student's learning experience with faculty and other students, whether or not that experience is easily measurable. In what follows we list some of the current commonly accepted indicators of student success, some of which are measurable, and some of which are part of the student's learning experience not easily measured. We then argue that the component of the learning experience that happens between students and faculty every day in our classrooms is what needs to be reborn in our understanding of student success, so that this experience can play a substantial role in our policy decisions and our resource allocations.

Commonly accepted indicators of student success include:

- Emotional development
- Breadth of knowledge
- Ability to work with people different from yourself
- Critical thinking skills
- Creative thinking skills
- Commitment to community engagement and service
- Ethical grounding
- Self-discipline
- Initiative
- Organizational ability
- Persistence in a task
- Mastery of skills
- Engaged citizenship
- Economic success or sustainability
- Careers success or admission to further degree programs
- Degree completion
- Grades and Grade Point Average (GPA)

As we noted, some of these indicators are easily measured and others are not measurable at all, or are not easily measured. Some of the abilities and skills in this list, indeed, are really surrogates for an unmeasurable but vital indicator of student success: the joy of learning and growth mindset (Dwek, 2007). That indicator is evident in our classrooms and studios and labs, but is never measured. What does the joy of learning lead to? It leads to persistence in a task, to mastery of skills, to ethical grounding, to a willingness to work with others who are different from us, to critical and creative thinking, and to the engagement with learning that matters most to students and to faculty. Moreover, it is this kind of student experience that leads to retention, and thus to better graduation rates. However, it is important to emphasize that using graduation rates as the goal of our efforts at student success gets the equation wrong. Rather than graduation rates being a sign of student success, student success, in the form of a successful student learning experience, should be a strategy for improved graduation rates.

A principle element of the successful student experience we are talking about is personal attention to students. The kind of experience we hope this paper returns us to is one in which students and faculty are in close contact with one another, and in which we work together to nurture the learning experience. This element—personal attention to students—is one which shows up in much of the research conducted about student success, both inside and outside the classroom. We do have some reliable data on student success. In 2007, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) published the well-regarded report, *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations* (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). In that volume, student success was defined as being derived from indicators of "academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies, persistence, and attainment of educational objectives" (p. vii). It summarized sociological, organizational, psychological, cultural, and economic perspectives on student success and then reviewed and synthesized the research into three areas: (1) student background and academic preparation; (2) engagement in educational activities; (3) and institutional factors that contribute to student success. From these three areas, seven propositions and recommendations emerged (see Appendix 1). What is most common to the recommendations is the need for real human contact with students by all segments of the educational institution (see Appendix 1).

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the profile of incoming college students has changed, particularly in the CSU. The typical student may not come to college straight from high school, and they may work, take care of children or other dependents while pursuing their degrees, or be the first in their families to seek higher education. We understand that the kind of student experience we are highlighting in this white paper depends also on various extracurricular supports such as counseling and psychological services, financial aid counseling, and cohort-building activities outside the classroom. These are necessary forms of support for the successful classroom experience, particularly for underrepresented students. We also have some reliable information on success for underrepresented students (see Appendix 2). It's worth noting that, to the extent that these students persist and graduate at a level equal to or exceeding other students, many observers and experts note that their success is due to the intimate and extensive interaction they have with faculty of color (see Appendix 3). It is also worth noting that this interaction is commonly named "invisible labor," the kind of work done by faculty that

has everything to do with the learning experience and nothing to do with resources provided for "student success." What is important to note is that the same common factor for promoting these students' success turns out to be personal knowledge of the students and attention to their needs. What these studies show is that students thrive and learn when they are known and noticed and attended to by faculty, staff, administrators and peers. When they know we care about them personally and when we can help them learn because we know them personally, they can, as the recent CSU Stanislaus definition of student success says, "pursue the best version of themselves."

This consistent theme of personal contact with students and attending to them as learners should remind us, again, that we need a definition of student success that makes primary the work that faculty do with their students in the daily teaching and learning experience. As faculty we see student success every day in our classrooms and offices. One of the problems with the standard criteria of student success is that they necessarily homogenize the students, categorizing their experiences in lump-sum form. Do all degree completions indicate the same value of "student success?" Do all GPAs? All career successes? We all know students whose 2.7 GPA is a far greater indication of their successful academic career than the 3.2 GPA of a student whose potential was never realized, who did not "pursue the best version of themselves." When, for instance, a student has struggled with a threshold concept in a discipline or with a foundational academic skill, and then "gets it," has a moment, clears a hurdle in their intellectual lives, that real student success does not get recorded, except by the student who remembers the clear pleasure they took in the strength of their own mind, and by the faculty member who was there to share the pleasure and the moment.

Much of what faculty understand intuitively to be student success happens informally and daily in our teaching, and it happens with different students in different and varying experiences of intellectual, ethical, and emotional achievement. This is what is meant by the phrase "meeting the students where they are." The challenge for faculty is to begin to make visible this experience to those outside our classrooms, and to encourage the institution to understand its vital place in the university experience. The challenge for administrators is to support this most important aspect of student success even if it is not easily quantifiable, by redefining the term "student success" to include and in fact to make primary the learning experience, and to support faculty in cultivating it.

Redefined in this way, student success should first of all be tied to:
- Class sizes that allow faculty to know and attend to every individual in the class;
- The reduction or elimination of pedagogically unsound practices;
- Time to prepare and meet with students;
- Structurally supported interdisciplinary team teaching;
- Professional development for faculty in best practices in teaching their discipline;
- Appropriate resources to support new faculty with mentoring to strengthen and reinforce their teaching; and
- A culture that values successful, innovative teaching and pedagogical research/publishing.

Often educational and governmental entities measure things because they are easily measurable, not necessarily because they reveal important information about the educational program or about the students. Certainly students need to develop a clear path to their educational goals; this provides clarity for them, as well as for the government and for the tax-paying general public. Degree completion is a certain kind of measure; likewise, earning a higher first semester GPA is a certain kind of measure. Both are valuable to use in our planning. However, perseverance and fulfillment, for instance, can be very difficult to measure, and the joy of intellectual achievement even more so. Higher education is how our students develop intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically, physically, socially and ethically. We want students to be reflective citizens as much as we want them to have a high GPA. We must recognize that "student success" is not an abstract measurement that matches the needs of others, but an individual description of the most valuable kind of individual student experience. University success, or institution-wide success, should not become our defining vision of student success. While we should certainly use meaningful student success metrics and indicators in our planning and policies, we need to understand that the definition of student success, and the policies and resources that flow from that definition, must be attached primarily to the classroom experience between faculty and students.

Resources

Bensimon, E. M. (2005). Closing the achievement gap: An organizational learning perspective. *New Directions for Higher Education, 131,* 99-11.

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Jones, L., Castellanos, J., & Cole, D. (2002). Examining the ethnic minority student experience at predominantly white institutions: A Case Study. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 1(1), 19-39.

Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C., (2007). Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations. *ASHE Higher Education Report: 32* (5). Wiley: San Francisco, CA.

Ojeda, L., Castillo, L. G., Meza, R. R., & Pina-Watson, B. (2014). Mexican Americans in higher education: Cultural adaptation and marginalization as predictors of college persistence intentions and life satisfaction. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 13 (1), 3-14.

Perez, D., & Saenz, V. B., (2017). Thriving Latino males in selective predominantly White institutions. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 16(2), 162–186.

Webber, K., Bauer Krylow, R., & Zhang, Q. (November/December, 2013). Does involvement really matter? Indicators of college student success and satisfaction. *Journal of College Student Development 54* (6), 591-611.

Umbach, P., & Wawrynski, M. (2005). Faculty do matter: The role of college faculty in student learning and engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 46*, 153-184.

Xiong, S., & Lam, S. K.Y. (2013). Factors affecting the success of Hmong college students in America." *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 41 (2), 132-144.*

**Appendix 1**

**Propositions and Recommendations of the 2007 ASHE Report**
*Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations*

1.  Student background and trajectory are determined pre-college.  Students need to have rigorous elementary and secondary preparation based upon college performance expectations taught by teachers who are student-centered, asset-based and have the philosophy that student success is developmental.
2.  Family and community expectations and support are critical to preparing for, aspiring to, persisting, and succeeding in college. Families need support in being informed about costs, expectations, and preparation for college. Post-secondary mentoring, readiness, and transition programs need to be available to support students.
3.  Cost matters. Students without enough money or with too much debt fail to persist.
4.  Premature departure is likely in the first year for underrepresented minority, first-generation underprepared students of lower socio-economic status attending predominantly white institutions. They struggle academically and socially and need support and intervention.  They also need early warning systems to be in place to catch them in safety net programs.
5.  Students who connect to affinity groups will more likely participate in educationally purposeful activities and become more committed to studying and persisting. Faculty need to develop communities in their classrooms and assist students who are not in dorms or who commute in spending time with other students.
6.  Institutions need to be student-centered. Institutions that have high persistence rates are characterized by a culture of supportive faculty-student interactions. They hire faculty with learner-centered teaching philosophies who set high standards for performance, support undergraduate research, and teach using best-practices.  They offer expert advising, counseling, and peer mentoring along with summer bridge programs.
7.  Assessment and accountability are important but have to focus on what matters to student success. Surveys should be conducted on student experiences in and out of their classes, and institutions must have the resources to systematically and reliably collect, analyze, and use data for improvement while being provided the right incentives for reporting the information on student experiences to improve teaching and learning.

**Appendix 2**

**Research on Success for Underrepresented Students**

- Ojeda, Castillo, Meza, and Pina-Watson (2014) conducted a study in a Hispanic-serving institution to measure persistence rates and life satisfaction of Mexican American students in relation to individual acculturation and enculturation levels in order to explain the low percentage rates of Mexican American college students who have completed college. After data was gathered from Mexican American students on the basis of cultural adaptation, marginalization, college persistence and life satisfaction, it was determined that graduation was affected by students' acculturation to White American culture as well as enculturation to their culture of heritage. Enculturation was also connected to a higher feeling of life satisfaction. When Mexican American students persist in higher education they experience greater life satisfaction. Both acculturation of American beliefs and values, and enculturation of the Mexican American heritage positively influence higher graduation rates.

- Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) use data from the U.S. Census Bureau to support the actuality of demographic change towards minority youth becoming the majority of the population, all the while ethnic minorities continue to remain underrepresented in four-year institutions. A qualitative study was conducted to determine the experiences that minority students have at predominately White four-year research institutions. Based on the responses from African American, Asian-Pacific American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American minority students, it was concluded that these groups did not feel that their unique needs, identity, and culture were supported or celebrated on campus. This study highlights the inequitable college experiences that ethnic minority students have, and the authors point at what seems to be a lack of commitment that four-year institutions have exhibited towards the successful degree completion and graduation of non-White students.

- Perez & Saenz (2017) studied Latino males who experienced success at predominantly White institutions of higher education. Twenty-one Latino male undergraduates from two selective, 4-year, residential campuses in the United States participated in this venture to uncover the factors that led to their success at the collegiate level. Academic success was attained when college was viewed as having educational value and was a

means towards personal, educational, and professional goals. Academic success was also impacted positively when learning took place outside of the classroom through peer encouragement. Prosperous intrapersonal and interpersonal accomplishment were affected by constructive relationships with family, peers, and communities- all of which strongly played a role in the success of Latino males.

- Children of refugee families face many obstacles. Xiong and Lam (2013) tried to determine what can help this demographic to be successful in higher education. Five Hmong students were identified as having parents who were refugees and displayed success in higher education though attendance in graduate school. The identified barriers and success factors to collegiate excellence consisted of academic, cultural, and financial hardships. Barriers were identified as difficulty with navigation of the higher education system, lack of knowledge in utilization of academic counselors, challenges with educational skills required, balance between cultural and scholastic obligations, gender disparities, lack of future planning skills, and inadequate available funds. Student success was impacted by academic support via school staff and faculty, peers and family members. When students experienced emotional and tangible support from their families, this positively affected school outcomes. All students stated that financial aid was imperative for attendance and completion of higher education.

- How does labelling students "at-risk" affect their academic success? Endo (2017) conducted a study using narrative inquiry to look at four Hmong American males at two different schools who were labelled "at-risk" and identified as such by school personnel. It was concluded that after being given the "at-risk" distinction, Hmong American adolescent males were placed into non-college preparatory classes which were often connected to alternative, remedial, special education, and to one student this label led him to youth incarceration. When two White female teachers were observed and interviewed, it was found that despite their teaching experience, they had a general misunderstanding of the Hmong culture and the populations in which they taught. The teachers' limited knowledge led to the labelling of students, which in turn affected Hmong American adolescent males beyond K-12 education and into adulthood, where they often perceived themselves as failures and unintelligent.

- Bensimon (2005) advocated for the use of cognitive frames to identify organizational needs in order to improve the achievement gap. Diversity-Minded, Deficit-Minded, and Equity-Minded cognitive frames were explained. Moving stake-holders toward a more Equity-minded frame allows for more progress toward positive institutional change.

- Webber, Bauer, and Zhang (2013) looked at the data from the 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement at one university and found that the more students participated in a variety of curricular and co-curricular activities, their GPAs and perception were positively impacted. In particular, females and full-time students who reported more time spent preparing for class and working on academic tasks earned higher GPAs and reported being more satisfied with their academic experience at the university. Pace's theory of quality of effort and Astin's theory of involvement were cited. The idea is that the time and effort put into academics and college activities leads to positive outcomes.

Astin's work (1993) pointed at time studying and found it was positively related to indicators such as retention, high GPA, future goals to attend graduate school, and self-reported gains in cognitive and affective skills.

- Umback and Wawrzynski (2005) noted that students respond positively to faculty efforts to use best-practices in teaching, to offer rigorous (and supported) academic assignments, and to use collaborative learning models.   Faculty attitudes and their teaching practices/behaviors are critical factors in student performance and engagement: "Faculty members may play the single most important role in student learning" (p. 176).

**Appendix 3**

**Commentary on the Invisible Labor of Faculty of Color**


The following recent articles detail the work, time and energy devoted by faculty of color to mentoring and advising underrepresented students in an effort to help them be successful in their academic careers.


https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Invisible-Labor-of/234098

https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/what-is-faculty-diversity-worth-to-a-university/508334/

https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2018/02/15/aiming-to-bridge-resource-gap-for-students-of-color-minority-faculty-shoulder-unofficial-advising-roles/

**Appendix 4**

**Chancellor's Office and Campus Student Success Definitions,
Whitepapers, or General Information about Student Success**

Chancellor's Office
https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success

Bakersfield
No information available

Channel Islands
https://www.csuci.edu/president/presidentscouncil/ci15-strat-plan-1520.pdf

Chico
http://www.csuchico.edu/vpaa/_assets/documents/strategic_plan_2016.pdf

Dominguez Hills
No information available

East Bay
No information available

Fresno
https://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/studentsuccess/

Fullerton
http://www.fullerton.edu/ssc/success_programs/student_success_teams.php

Humboldt
https://grad2025.humboldt.edu/

Long Beach
http://web.csulb.edu/president/ate/ssuccess-notes.html

http://www.csulb.edu/data-fellows/data-fellows/data-fellows-home/form/open-forums-student-success

http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/provost/strategic_plan/documents/2016_strat_priorities_goals.pdf

http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/grad_undergrad/senate/documents/highvaluedegreeinitiativereport.ppt

Los Angeles
http://www.calstatela.edu/undergraduatestudies/student-success-collaborative-ssc

Monterey Bay

CSUMB defines student success to encompass the whole student experience from entry to exit and has continued to invest in improving retention, progression, and graduation outcomes since its last self-study. Success is defined in CSUMB's "Otter Promise," the campus response to the California State University (CSU) system's Graduation Initiative 2025 as: "Students develop identity as self-directed learners in an interdependent community, cultivate the habits of mind to allow them to succeed in their academic, personal, professional and civic life. Graduates are able to apply knowledge, theories, methods, and practices in a chosen field of study to address real-world challenges and opportunities"

Maritime

https://www.csum.edu/web/student-success/

**"Student Success and Achievement**

Student achievement and student success are often defined in many different ways: at Cal Maritime, *achievement* is the accomplishment of one's goals. *Success* is the fulfillment of certain conditions necessary to reach those goals. Thus, achievement is arrived at by a string of successes. Simply put, a student achieves academic success by performing well in courses, completing all coursework in the proscribed length of time, and attaining fulfilling employment after graduation.

We use multiple instruments and methods to measure and analyze how well our students perform, both in and out of the classroom, as well as how prepared they are for the workforce. The links on the left lead to different aspects and dimensions of student success.

Student success, and the measures of effectiveness of success, are explicitly linked to Cal Maritime's Strategic Goals, all of which are focused on **academic excellence, student learning, global maritime profession, organizational excellence, partnerships, and campus community."**

Northridge

No information available

Pomona

"CPP defines student success through an integrated model that embraces a holistic view of student learning, engagement and growth — a paradigm that recognizes that the student experience and opportunities for learning occur both in and out of the classroom. Students' cumulative experiences are intentionally designed to engage in a lifecycle that begins before matriculation and continues throughout degree pursuit and beyond graduation and career. CPP is refocusing its campus structures and culture around student learning and success. This essay details the wide range of methods used to facilitate student success and close equity gaps, which is informed by our examination of graduation rates and practices. These methods touch academic preparation; student learning and academic success; and student engagement and holistic support. Throughout our work, we employ a broad definition of student success that

encompasses student well-being, learning, retention, timely graduation, and career engagement"


Sacramento

No information available

San Bernardino

https://www.csusb.edu/strategic-plan/goal-1-student-success

San Diego

https://go.sdsu.edu/strategicplan/images/finalstrategicplanbooklet.pdf
And specific plans regarding diversity:
http://go.sdsu.edu/strategicplan/files/01521-diversityfinal.pdf

San Francisco

http://studentsuccess.sfsu.edu ("Student Success at San Francisco State University means holding our students to high expectations and offering them the support they need to reach them. As a campus with a social justice mission at our core, we hold excellence and equity to be fundamental and interlinking values: We want to see our students graduate with degrees that represent learning experiences of the highest possible quality, inclusive of all of our students.")

San Jose - No information available

San Marcos – No information available

San Luis Obispo

http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1840&context=senatere solutions

Sonoma

http://web.sonoma.edu/senate/useful/another%20analysis%20of%20student%20succe ss%20discussion.pdf

https://www.sonoma.edu/sites/www/files/strategic_plan_draft_for_website_18.04.16_ 2.pdf

Stanislaus

*"Stanislaus State Definition of Student Success*
*7/AS/18/SEC*

*Stanislaus State recognizes that student success occurs when our students are engaged and supported in their quest for knowledge and understanding. Student success is realized when our students are equipped and empowered to positively transform their*

*lives, to inform the practice of their chosen profession, and to exercise civic rights and responsibilities to transform their communities.*

*At Stanislaus State,*

- *We use the power of education, community, and civic engagement to transform lives.*
- *Student success occurs when we engage and support our students in a quest for knowledge and understanding that encourages and empowers them to identify their personal goals and professional aspirations. Successful students strive to make their own unique contributions to our diverse world.*
- *We support our students by expanding opportunities and enriching experiences that broaden their awareness of others' perspectives and develop their intellectual capacity and ethical character.*
- *Student success is achieved when our students can imagine a better world and are empowered to make it a reality within the Central Valley region and beyond.*

# Appendix 5

## Correlations ($R^2$) Between Campus Graduation Rates, Tenure Density and Student-Faculty Ratios

| Campus | 6 Year Grad Rate* | 4 Year Grad Rate* | SFR** | Tenure Density*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maritime | 55.9 | 45.3 | 16.1 | 65.3 |
| Channel Islands | 52.5 | 23.6 | 20.5 | 39.8 |
| Stanislaus | 44.5 | 15.6 | 20.8 | 60.7 |
| Humboldt | 36.3 | 14.7 | 21.0 | 57.2 |
| SLO | 75.3 | 47.2 | 21.6 | 64.6 |
| San Francisco | 43.4 | 18 | 21.7 | 62.9 |
| Pomona | 52.9 | 18.3 | 22.4 | 57.7 |
| Chico | 60.2 | 25.7 | 23.1 | 60.7 |
| Fullerton | 48.8 | 17.6 | 23.5 | 54.8 |
| Sonoma | 55.7 | 27.8 | 23.9 | 60.2 |
| Fresno | 41.4 | 16.3 | 24.0 | 56.3 |
| Northridge | 36.4 | 10.4 | 24.2 | 55.2 |
| Los Angeles | 28.7 | 6.3 | 24.4 | 47.2 |
| Long Beach | 51.6 | 15 | 24.7 | 52.9 |
| DH | 27.2 | 5.1 | 25.5 | 44.2 |
| San Marcos | 40.8 | 13.6 | 26.0 | 50.9 |
| San José | 44.2 | 11.2 | 26.1 | 54.8 |
| Sacramento | 32.9 | 9.1 | 26.3 | 57.5 |
| Bakersfield | 34.7 | 14.6 | 26.1 | 55.4 |
| East Bay | 36.9 | 14.1 | 27.0 | 57.1 |
| San Diego | 64.6 | 33.6 | 27.2 | 61.6 |
| San Bernardino | 41.6 | 14.4 | 28.1 | 58.2 |
| Monterey | 48.2 | 23.1 | 28.9 | 44.2 |

**Grad Rate v SFR**

R² = 0.1207

R² = 0.2829

Grad Rate (%)

Student to Faculty Ratio

- 6 Year Grad Rate*
- 4 Year Grad Rate*
- Linear (6 Year Grad Rate*)
- Linear (4 Year Grad Rate*)

**Grad Rate v TD**

R² = 0.1936

R² = 0.2491

- ◆ 6 Year Grad Rate*
- ■ 4 Year Grad Rate*
- —— Linear (6 Year Grad Rate*)
- —— Linear (4 Year Grad Rate*)

Grad Rate (%)

Tenure Density (%)