

# Thriving in College: A New Future for Higher Education



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# Session Outcomes

- Develop an understanding of student thriving, how to measure it, and how to promote it on campus
- Learn strategies for nurturing aspects of student thriving that most influence students' future lives as citizens, employees, partners, spouses, and parents
- Be able to identify the campus experiences that most help or hinder student success and thriving
- Link the research findings with creative solutions for programming on your own campus



How do you know if a student is  
“succeeding” in college?

# Approaches to Student Success



- Behaviors that lead to learning outcomes
- Institutional supports for engagement
- Programs and services
- Entering student characteristics predictive of success
- Individual motivation and psychological processes that lead to engagement behaviors



# Positive Psychology

The Fulfilled Individual  
The Thriving Community

# A Shift in Perspective



**FROM**

**TO**

**Surviving**

————→ **Thriving**

**What is not very  
changeable about people**

————→ **What can be changed**

**Who you are and where  
you've been**

————→ **Who you can become and  
where you're going**

**Target the weakness and  
fix it**

————→ **Target the talent and build  
on it**

**Failure prevention**

————→ **Success promotion**

# Conceptual Framework

*Flourishing*

=

Emotional Vitality

+

Positive Functioning

(Keyes, 2002, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003)

# Definition of Flourishing

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Rising to meet life's challenges

Involved in healthy relationships

Engaged and productive

Looking beyond oneself to the greater good of others

(Keyes & Haidt, 2003)



# Flourishing College Students



- Flourishing is independent of gender, parent educational attainment, or academic achievement.
- Measures of student engagement are predictive of flourishing.
  - Academic challenge
  - Active/collaborative learning
  - Enriching educational experiences
  - Supportive campus environment

(Ambler, 2006)

# Bean & Eaton's (2000) Model of Student Persistence

- Psychological processes that promote academic and social integration and contribute to student persistence:
  - Attitudes → behavior
  - Coping mechanisms (approach-avoidance)
  - Self-efficacy
  - Locus of control/attributions
- **Students who persist are those who are most able to interact effectively within the campus environment in ways that strengthen their self-efficacy and control**

# Why “Thriving”?



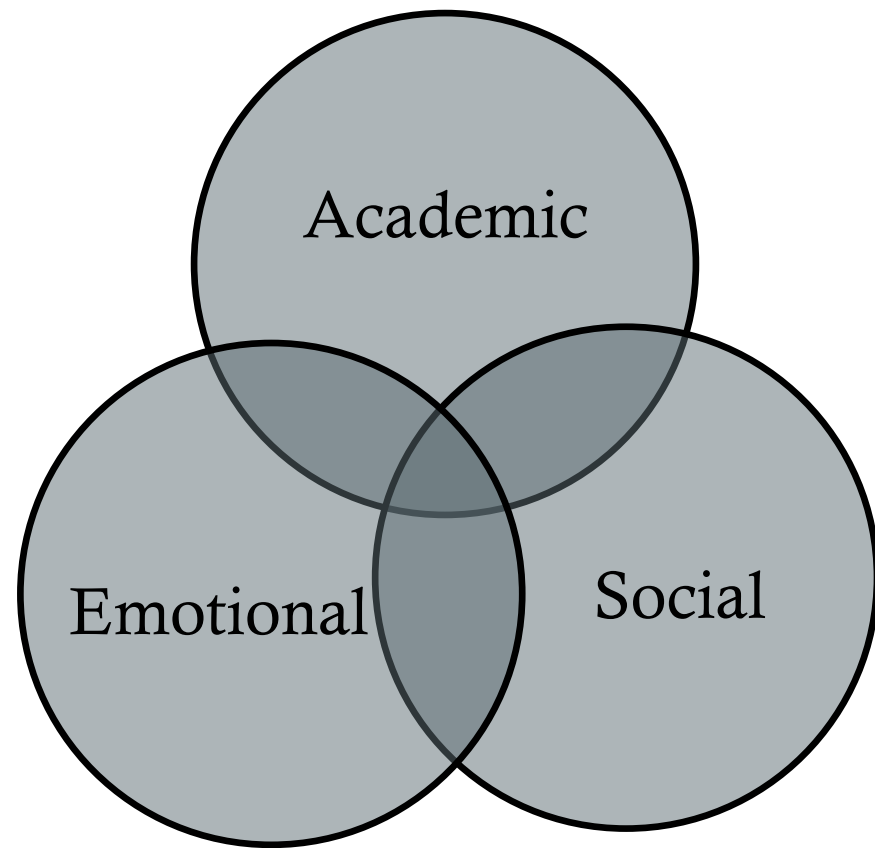
Goes beyond psychological well-being  
inherent in flourishing

More holistic construct that adds

- Engaged learning and academic success
- Citizenship and openness to diversity



# THRIVING



# Criteria for Including a Construct

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Measurable

Empirically connected to student  
success

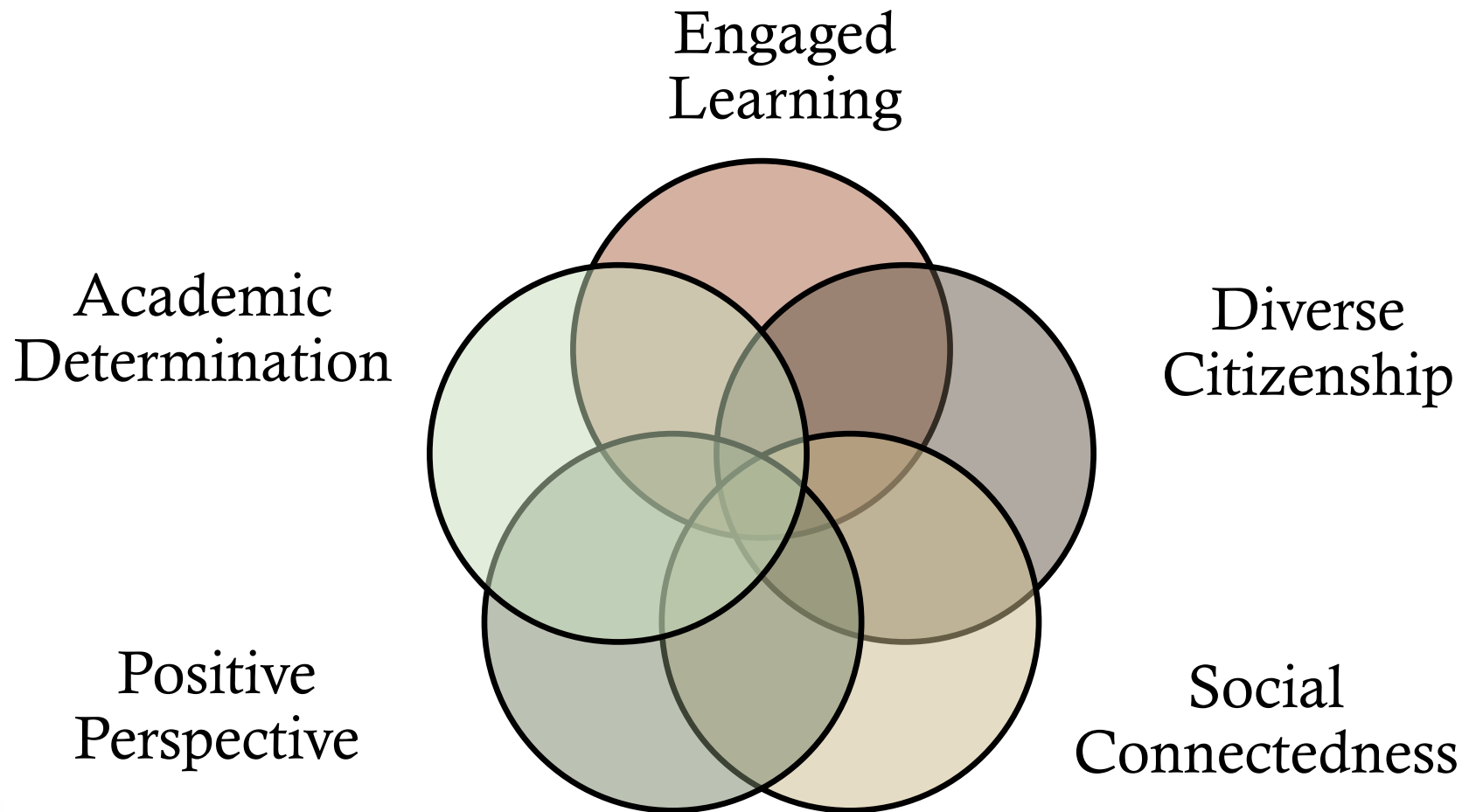
Malleable (state vs. trait)

Interventions make a difference

# The Thriving Quotient (TQ)

- Based on concepts that have been linked to student success outcomes – GPA, learning, graduation, fit
- 25-item instrument with responses ranging on a 6-point Likert-type scale of *1=strongly agree* to *6 = strongly disagree*
- Coefficient alpha = .89
- Confirmatory factor analysis: five-factor model with a higher-order latent construct of thriving

# The Thriving Quotient



# Five Factors of Thriving

## ACADEMICALLY:

- **Engaged Learning**
  - Meaningful processing and focused attention in the learning process
- **Academic Determination**
  - Self-regulated learning, effort, time management, goal-directedness (hope)

## SOCIALLY:

- **Diverse Citizenship**
  - Making a contribution, appreciation of differences
- **Social Connectedness**
  - Positive relationships and access to friendships

## EMOTIONALLY:

- **Positive Perspective**
  - Optimism and subjective well-being



# Goal of the Study

To identify  
what campus  
experiences  
contribute to  
student thriving  
over time





## What's Your Prediction?

*What are the campus experiences you think contribute most to student thriving?*

# Five Factors of Thriving

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# Methods

- Two four-year universities (one private and one public) administered the Thriving Quotient online
  - First-year students: Sept—Nov—March
  - Honors students (SO/JR/SR): Sept—Nov
- Final sample consisted of 851 participants with complete data
  - 76.6% female
  - 16.5% first-generation
  - 71.8% Caucasian
- Asked students to comment on thriving levels

# Hierarchical Multiple Regression: Predicting Thriving in November

Block 1: Demographic Variables

Block 2: Level of thriving in September

Block 3: Spirituality

Block 4: Peer satisfaction and living satisfaction

Block 5: Learning satisfaction

Block 6: Faculty interaction

Block 7: Campus involvement

Block 8: Psychological sense of community

- The model accounted for 65% of the variation in first-year thriving and 81% of the variation in sophomore/junior/senior honor students' thriving
- Largest contributor: levels of thriving at the beginning of the term
- Campus experiences added significantly, but to a lesser degree
- Thriving tended to drop over the course of the term, decreasing in 46% of first-year students and 30% of upper-level students
- 20% of students increased in thriving – no difference between first-years and upper level students

# Hierarchical Multiple Regression: Predicting Thriving in November

Block 1: Demographic Variables

Block 2: **Level of thriving in September**

Block 3: **Spirituality**

Block 4: **Peer satisfaction and living satisfaction—for first-year students only**

Block 5: **Learning satisfaction**

Block 6: Faculty interaction

Block 7: Campus involvement (**community service** only)

Block 8: **Psychological sense of community**

# Spirituality

Source of strength in difficult times

Foundation of my approach to life

Gain spiritual strength by trusting in a Higher Power

Leads to a **positive perspective** that enables students to reframe negative events

**“I have grown so much spiritually this year – and it has impacted every aspect of my life and has made this year the most rewarding so far.”**





# Peer Satisfaction

Contributes to Social Connectedness  
in all students

Contributes to first-year thriving,  
and especially their Diverse  
Citizenship and Positive Perspective  
scores

Contributes to engaged learning  
beyond the first year

**Living situation** affects first-year  
students' Academic Determination  
scores (time management, goal-  
setting, self-regulation) and Social  
Connectedness

**“I have made deep friendships that I  
know will last a long time.”**



# Learning Satisfaction

Contributes to a positive perspective in the first year

Contributes to engaged learning beyond the first year

**Faculty interaction** contributes to engaged learning in the first year and to Social Connectedness in later years

**“I am learning so much more than I ever imagined I would at school.”**



# Campus Involvement

Involvement in community service was the only significant predictor

Students often spoke highly of their desire to get involved and their satisfaction when they were involved – but if they had a few close friends, the involvement did not add anything to their thriving

**“I found a place to volunteer once or twice a week...”**



## Sense of Community

Largest contributor to thriving in all students

Contributes to Diverse Citizenship, Positive Perspective, and Social Connectedness as well



**“This is the kind of community that makes it feel like home instead of making me feel like a stranger.”**

Membership	Relationship
Ownership	Partnership

# High v. Low First-Year Thrivers

## LOW THRIVERS

- Difficulty adjusting to demands of college life
- Loneliness, lack of friends, lack of sense of community
- Lack of fit with campus
- Lack of physical/emotional health

## HIGH THRIVERS

- Strong sense of community and social connections
- Engaged in learning and succeeding academically
- Good fit with campus ethos
- Positive perspective on adjustment issues

# After the First Year

## LOW THRIVERS

- Stress of balancing school, work, and life
- Lack of community and social connections
- Declining grades, difficult classes
- Lack of physical/emotional health

## HIGH THRIVERS

- Strong sense of community and social connections with friends and faculty
- Engaged in learning, succeeding academically
- Busy and stressed, but energized

# When They Don't Thrive

- “No amigos”
- “Feeling less passionate about what I love when I don't succeed.”
- “I don't feel like I fit in”
- “The people in my classes are fun but I don't ever see them outside of class. And because of this lack of friendship I have this terrible sense of loneliness and it's making me wonder if I was supposed to come here or maybe I should have considered another school.”

- “I can't get into the necessary classes for next semester, and I'm trying to figure out how on earth I'm going to pay for college.”
- “I am living paycheck to paycheck and assignment to assignment. Basically, I am tired.”
- “Being a commuter and a rather introverted student the only area I would consider myself as not thriving in would be socially because I have not made too many strong relationships yet...it's probably not hard for others who are outgoing to make friends, though.”



# Continuing to Thrive

- “I had an outside meeting with a teacher and it changed my life”
- “Becoming a part of the ethnic org LASA has helped me thrive a lot. I am becoming a more conscious and selfless person because of my involvement.”
- “I have taken time to find the best in all situations, in every class, relationship, even when they are not ideal. In this sense, I'm getting the most out of everything, even rough situations.”

- “Becoming more aware of my natural gifts that intertwine with my education, and with time realizing in what atmosphere I can best be useful and happy”
- “I have noticed that my mind is always returning to things I learn in class ...and I find that the application of these lessons makes my life thrive.”
- “I have learned more than I ever thought I could and have seen things in different ways that I never thought of”
- “I finally figured out what I’m going to do with my life!”

## **How Does Your Campus Contribute to Student Thriving?**



## **What do you do intentionally to:**

- **Foster students' spirituality?**
- **Connect them to their peers or create living situations conducive to thriving?**
- **Engage them in learning in and out of the classroom and foster interaction with faculty?**
- **Encourage campus involvement and especially service?**



## Implications for Practice

# Spirituality

Recognition of the role spirituality plays in students' lives – and that it is a major pathway to thriving in students of color, in particular

Activities that foster meaning and purpose

“Sacred space” on campus

Respect for diverse religious traditions and beliefs

Faculty and staff willing to engage in dialogue

Activity fairs that include faith-based organizations

Balance of challenge and support



# Peer Satisfaction and Living Satisfaction

Admissions strategies

Social media connections

Early intentional activities

Living-learning communities

Peer mentoring

Examine on-campus housing  
and roommate policies





In the classroom: active learning

Learning goals for the co-curricular

Know how faculty and departments  
are already interacting with students  
– and let others know about that

Know what motivates faculty and  
how to partner with them

Partnerships between student life  
and faculty

Research partnerships

Faculty mentors, organization  
sponsors

# Learning Satisfaction and Faculty Interaction



# Campus Involvement

Purposeful connection to low  
thrivers

Early assessment before arriving  
on campus – connect TQ to  
social media

Selective involvement – reduce  
busyness, increase purpose

Service-learning





# Sense of Community as a Lens for Thriving

Questions to ask ourselves about each program/activity:

- Will students feel they matter?
- Have students contributed and had opportunity for input?
- Have we reached all types of students with an opportunity that meets their needs?
- Have we created partnerships toward bigger goals?

# The Future of Thriving

## Individual student level:

Interventions targeted to specific aspects of thriving—not only in college, but in life

## Institutional level:

Who is thriving?

In what aspects?

Targeting programs and services



# Thriving Students Become Flourishing Adults

Engaged in lifelong learning

Meeting their goals

Contributing to their community  
and society

Connected to others in healthy  
ways

Optimistic about their future





# **Join us for the 2012 Thriving Project!**

**[www.ThrivingInCollege.org](http://www.ThrivingInCollege.org)**