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
Surviving
What is not very changeable about people
Who you are and where you’ve been
Target the weakness and fix it
Failure prevention

TO
Thriving
What can be changed
Who you can become and where you’re going
Target the talent and build on it
Success promotion
<table>
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<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
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<td><strong>Flourishing</strong></td>
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<td>Emotional Vitality</td>
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<td>Positive Functioning</td>
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Definition of Flourishing

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/attribution

- 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
Academic

Emotional

Social

THRIVING
Criteria for Including a Construct

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

Engaged Learning

Academic Determination

Positive Perspective

Diverse Citizenship

Social Connectedness
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

**ACADEMICALLY:**
- **Engaged Learning**
  - Meaningful processing and focused attention in the learning process
- **Academic Determination**
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**SOCIALLY:**
- **Diverse Citizenship**
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**EMOTIONALLY:**
- **Positive Perspective**
  - Optimism and subjective well-being
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.”

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<th>Relationship</th>
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## High v. Low First-Year Thrivers

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<th>LOW THRIVERS</th>
<th>HIGH THRIVERS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficulty adjusting to demands of college life</td>
<td>• Strong sense of community and social connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Loneliness, lack of friends, lack of sense of community</td>
<td>• Engaged in learning and succeeding academically</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of fit with campus</td>
<td>• Good fit with campus ethos</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of physical/emotional health</td>
<td>• Positive perspective on adjustment issues</td>
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## After the First Year

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<th>LOW THRIVERS</th>
<th>HIGH THRIVERS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Stress of balancing school, work, and life</td>
<td>• Strong sense of community and social connections with friends and faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of community and social connections</td>
<td>• Engaged in learning, succeeding academically</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Declining grades, difficult classes</td>
<td>• Busy and stressed, but energized</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of physical/emotional health</td>
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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
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
Learning Satisfaction and Faculty Interaction

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
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