

# **For purposes of conversation only**

## **A Comprehensive Model for Student Success**

**Developed by**

**Student Affairs Department Heads**

**Oregon State University**

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*The following document was developed through a series of conversations among Student Affairs Department heads. The ideas offered are meant to serve as a stimulus for discussions. The discussion we seek to have is about the merits of Oregon State University adopting a comprehensive approach to student success. As you read this document, please do so critically - formulate hard questions, identify challenges, consider possibilities. Please keep in mind that **this is not a plan**. This is merely a description of the key dimensions of student success. Any plan for the comprehensive promotion of student success would grow out of a broad-based effort to transform the University.*

*At the end of this model you will find a series of questions. As you come to discussions, be prepared to respond to them. At the same time, bring your own questions about and suggestions for enhancing the model.*

### **Overview**

The primary responsibility of Oregon State University to students is to promote student success. No other outcome should be more important. The University's challenge and

imperative is to organize educational structures, activities, programs, services, and relationships in such a way that it is apparent and transparent to students that their success is of paramount importance to all employees of the University.

Different individuals will define student success differently. Student success is defined as the degree to which students achieve their primary academic goals. The hope is that every student who enrolls at OSU does so with the goal of attaining of a degree. However, such will not always be the case. Responding to the educational needs and goals that students bring to the University is an important form of educational/institutional support. At the same time, by appropriately using professional knowledge and acting on institutional expectations, the University can create an atmosphere of challenge that can influence the goals, aspirations and performance of students to be stretched beyond what they bring to the University. A well-constructed University environment can expand and elevate students' aspirations and visions of success without depriving the students of the ultimate responsibility for defining their life's destination.

Students participate in OSU's educational programs through many forms - distant, continuing education, part-time, undergraduate, graduate, residential, non-matriculated, dual enrollment, and many more. In addition to this range of involvement patterns, students come to the University from and with diverse life situations that profoundly influence their perspectives, time demands, and approaches to education. Those life situations include, but are not limited to, factors such as: having dependent children; first-generation college attendance; low-income status; being members of under-represented racial groups; having disabilities; being a sexual minority; speaking English as a second language, and many other powerful variables.

By constructing a comprehensive model and plan for promoting student success the University will target its efforts, use its resources responsibly, and focus its energy on working with students to forge powerful and intentional educational partnerships, centered on the needs of students. Such a relationship between students and the University will enable high levels of achievement, encourage success, strengthen academic engagement, and enhance OSU's performance as an effective educational institution. Academic engagement is a key aspect of

student success. Engagement is a reciprocal process that is created by the energy students bring to their educational experience and the energy exerted by those who create the learning experience.

The following model elaborates eight dimensions that are essential for student success. These dimensions, individually and collectively, represent institutional supports and personal variables that must be present if students are to achieve success. A number of issues that affect student success may not fall in the domain of areas over which the University has responsibility. In those cases the University should use whatever advocacy influence it has to promote outcomes that are favorable to the success outcomes we desire. Because the model is comprehensive and the dimensions are interdependent, deficiencies in any one area pose a threat to student success. Therefore, the efforts of University faculty and staff must consider and focus on all aspects of the student's experience.

The eight dimensions of student success are:

- 1. *Safe Place to Live***
- 2. *Adequate financial resources***
- 3. *Appropriate academic resources, support, and opportunities***
- 4. *Resources and opportunities appropriate to meet students' personal and professional goals***
- 5. *A sense of belonging and membership in a personal community***
- 6. *A Physically and psychologically safe learning environment***
- 7. *Appropriate resources and support for personal life situations***
- 8. *Access to resources for healthy lifestyle development and maintenance***

1. **Safe Place to Live**: Having a safe place to live is a basic human need. Adequate conditions such as meeting accessibility needs, heating, ventilation, plumbing, and security are essential elements of a safe place to live. In addition to having instrumental aspects attended to, a

safe place to live also has psychological, emotional, intellectual and social dimensions.

These basic elements all combine to form the foundation of a safe place to live.

Other important elements of a safe place to live build the foundation for academic success. Living environments must provide conditions conducive to rest, sleep, relaxation, study, and personal reflection. These conditions are critical to students' ability to learn. The living environment goes beyond the space occupied by the student. It encompasses public spaces, the community setting – the total sphere in which the student lives.

Living environments must provide shelter for students in the broadest sense. A quality living environment gives students an opportunity to enhance their individual identity, provides space for personal expression, and allows for unimpeded progression towards goals. A safe place to live is fundamental to academic success.

2. **Adequate financial resources**: Providing adequate financial resources is crucial in ensuring students' comprehensive success and growth. The cost of college education is substantially increasing, while simultaneously, the appropriate financial aid and related resources are diminishing. Due to this trend, there is a need for the University to provide students with access to available financial resources – access may be in the form of institutional funds, information about sources of funds or other roles the University may assume to make education affordable. Financial resources are needed for education and to meet basic instrumental needs. In order for this to occur, collaboration within the University to facilitate the dissemination of scholarships and financial resources is essential.

The University must foster an environment that creates multiple ways for students to be aware of and productively utilize available financial resources. Students must have access to information about money management and personal financial planning. The University can support student success in the form of employment, adaptable forms of financial aid (which match the enrollment profile of the student) and flexible payment plans, when possible.

Adequate financial resources allows students to focus their energies on educational activities and achieving their aspirations.

3. **Appropriate academic resources, support, and opportunities**: Students come to the University to be academically successful in order to achieve their life goals. Academic success at Oregon State University is a function of the dynamic interaction among in-class and out-of-class experiences, resources, and participants in the process (i.e. students, faculty, and staff). Learning support must be accessible, timely and responsive to the needs of students.

In order for students to succeed academically they need to be provided with: appropriate curriculum; qualified, responsive, and diverse faculty; academic support; academic resources; and policies and procedures that are clear and well publicized. Likewise, if they are to achieve success, students must develop an interest in learning and the must acquire solid study skills. If student success is to be promoted across the University an environment must be fostered, in which academic success is broadly supported, and where resources are focused on enhancing academic achievement.

Among the important issues to be addressed in promoting student academic success is the availability of consistent, accessible academic advising. Because students go through a cycle of deciding, “un-deciding”, and “re-deciding” about their major and career direction, they need a stable source of support with which to consult on options and opportunities. There must be sufficient academic courses through which students may explore, test and verify their interests and assumptions. Because of variations in academic preparation and the time at which some students come to the University experience in their lives, students will require appropriate course support in the form of tutoring, academic assistance and access to teaching faculty. For example, for a large percentage of students who enroll at OSU their primary identity anchor at the time of enrollment is something other than “student”. For such students “appropriate support” may involve reintroduction to test taking, orientation to technology, and other support for full participation in the academic program.

Institutional efforts and organization must attend to the need for appropriate academic support, resources, and opportunities.

4. **Resources and opportunities appropriate to meet students' personal and professional**

**goals:** When students possess or formulate compelling personal and professional goals they increase the focus they bring to their efforts and enhance their chances for success. A University organized to promote student success will challenge and support students to enhance their knowledge and skills through academic engagement, use of campus facilities, participation in programs and utilization of services. Students will have the greatest opportunities for success when the University's program design and delivery reflects a commitment to a partnership of resources and opportunities appropriate to meet student's personal and professional goals. The University and the student are partners in the student's success.

The University must provide proper physical space, facilities, resources, technology, information tools, and relationships to support students' goal attainment. In addition, programs and services for personal life skills and professional skill development must be available. Among the opportunities and resources needed to support personal and professional goal attainment are: personal advising; career information; internship and co-op experiences; study abroad opportunities; research and other in-depth scholarly experiences; access to volunteer networks; testing and assessment; and personal and scholarly mentors.

Unlimited opportunities for involvement and support are essential elements of a successful student experience.

5. **A Sense of Belonging and Membership in a Personal Community:** Forming communities

and developing affiliations that foster belonging and mattering are among the most basic human needs. Communities form to accomplish various purposes. At the same time, individuals are shaped by the communities in which they live. Affiliations formed by students are important to their identity development. It is through these affiliations that students learn to value community involvement, diversity, teamwork, and citizenship. Affiliations also provide important identity anchors and serve as the impetus for optimal engagement in the

learning process. When students feel they belong they become more engaged in learning and the life of the University. These anchors form the basis for continuity and clarity around one's role as a learner.

The University learning community is uniquely and purposefully diverse. Because of this, students must be provided with a variety of opportunities for affiliation and access to meaningful relationships. In addition they need academic content reflective of student diversity. The development of identity anchors occurs through a wide variety of student experiences, including: the academic major, social/cultural groups, religious organizations, special interest groups, on campus work settings, personal relationships, professional interest groups, and others. In order for a sense of belonging to be reinforced the campus must not only be “opportunity rich”, but also must provide physical space suitable to and reflective of the diversity of student communities.

The principle of belonging and membership is fundamental to students' success in the University environment

6. **A Physically and psychologically safe learning environment:** A learning environment that is physically and psychologically safe is essential for student success. The conditions under which students learn must foster a sense of safety. Policies and procedures that promote the University's norms and expectations support learning environment safety. If students are to be successful the campus must be constructed as a “safe zone” that affirms support for student diversity, risk-taking, and experimentation. A safe educational environment offers opportunities for both individuals and groups to learn from their mistakes.

Successful students spend significant time on education-related activities in the University environment – libraries, classrooms, computer labs, curricular and co-curricular experiences. If the time spent in these endeavors is to produce success they must take place under conditions of safety. A safe learning environment refers to a setting that allows for the open exchange of ideas, encourages questions and inquiry, enables the pursuit of personal educational interests, allows disagreement, and respects the confidentiality needs of

students. A learning environment designed to promote safety communicates care for the intellectual and personal development of students and allows for full engagement in learning activities. Such a caring environment encourages dialogue and enhances relationships within the learning community.

When students are physically and psychologically safe they are empowered to be successful.

7. **Appropriate resources and support for personal life situations:** Contemporary students come to the University with a wide range of personal characteristics and needs – they come for a variety of life situations. A student's "life situation" is defined by those characteristics that represent the stresses, responsibilities, challenges, impediments, unique personal features or other variables that might interfere with their success at the University. Interference may come in the form of institutional obstacles or the inability of the student to manage the life situation issue concurrent with the other demands of the student experience. The University must provide appropriate resources and support for personal life situations to ensure that non-academic issues do not become a barrier to full participation in higher education. Among the issues that can contribute to having a unique life situation are: disabilities; being from an under-represented racial or ethnic group; family or parenting responsibilities; having a language other than English as one's primary language; being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered; participation in intercollegiate athletics; enrolling in higher education after a substantial time away from an educational institution; and various religious and spiritual affiliations.

In order for the student to be as fully engaged in the educational experience as possible certain critical needs may need to be addressed. Among them are: adequate counseling and crisis intervention; physical and program access; attention to cultural, religious and spiritual needs; re-entry/returning student services; student-athlete support; English as a Second Language and international programs; graduate student services; gender and sexual



orientation support services; and child care services. The preceding list is by no means comprehensive, it merely reflects the array of issues associated with responding to students' life situations.

Appropriate support for and response to students' life situations needs allow students to focus their efforts on achieving success.

8. **Access to resources for healthy lifestyle development and maintenance:** The development and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle is a crucial dimension of students' ability to be successful. In this context institutional resources to teach skills, provide outlets and make available knowledge that promote positive self-care is essential. Key dimensions of students' lifestyle are: relationship development skills; decision making/problem solving skills; fitness, relaxation and recreation; nutrition; self advocacy skills; psychological well-being; health care; substance use; sexual health; spiritual life; and others. A healthy lifestyle is characterized by the ability to balance multiple priorities and challenges without reliance upon coping mechanisms that create some aspect of dysfunction in one's life. The University should provide appropriate resources to support students in developing a personal profile for a healthy lifestyle.

## **Conclusion**

The University's mission and programs are unique - they are local, regional, statewide, national and international in focus. In addition, the University has a Land Grant heritage to which it must remain true. There is remarkable diversity in the student body that is both visible and invisible. The students who come to OSU and participate in its educational programs do so through a wide variety of mediums. The University has a land grant heritage. All of these factors in the contemporary arena suggest the need for a unique institutional organization in order to promote the success of students, however and wherever they participate in OSU educational programs.

Focused efforts to address key dimensions of student success will have a dramatic impact on the retention, graduation and long-term success of students. By aligning the University to consciously and intentionally assure that every student has access to the resources, opportunities, relationships, information and services needed to meet their unique personal and educational needs, we will magnify the power of our mission and the impacts of our efforts. Our challenge is to determine whether we can, should or will organize our programs, structures, services, and relationships to facilitate the promotion of student success.

*Consider the following questions in regards to student success and how it can/might be promoted in a comprehensive way at Oregon State University.*

- 1. Do we need a comprehensive model for student success?**
- 2. Is there any dimension of student success not included in this document that should be included? What is/are they?**
- 3. What are the barriers to student success?**
- 4. Are there any categories of students for whom this model does not apply? Who are they?**
- 5. Do you believe that the University currently functions with or from a comprehensive model for student success?**
- 6. Do we have responsibility for student success? If so, for what aspects?**
- 7. Who else should be included in this conversation about student success?**