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Social Mobility through Higher Education

Best Practices for Student Success



Dear Reader,

Once, not so long ago, US institutions of higher learning were essentially finishing schools for social elites. Colleges were not originally intended to serve the general population. Of course, attitudes have evolved over time, in step with such social and political forces as the GI Bill and the Civil Rights movement as they raised the national consciousness about equity and social justice. Certainly campus demographics have changed over time, as well.

Indeed, a recent study published by Fabian T. Pfeffer at the University of Michigan,* which compares shifts in college admission and graduation rates across socio-economic groups, shows a narrowing gap in admission numbers between the wealthiest and poorest students over a 10-year period. This would be an encouraging report, were it not for the accompanying data: the study also shows that while the number of poor students getting into college has increased, the percentage graduating has remained almost flat at around 11.5 percent. Among the wealthiest group, however, the rate of graduation has actually increased, from 40 percent to 60 percent during the same period.

In other words, when it comes to providing an avenue for student success and the attendant social mobility, colleges and universities are still disproportionately benefiting the rich. And that gap is growing.

The higher education professionals whose insights are represented in this publication have dedicated their careers to correcting the disparity in student success and social mobility by investing in innovative new programs that identify and directly support disadvantaged students' academic, personal and financial needs. They represent a growing and concerted effort to correct what many in the profession consider one of the greatest social injustices of our time.

In the introductory essay, Dr. Mitchel Wallerstein, President of Baruch College, presents an overview of higher education's crucial role in social mobility. In the following essays, Dr. Michael Dennin, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning at University of California, Irvine; Dr. Elwood Robinson, Chancellor of Winston-Salem State University; and Dr. Jaye Padgett, Vice Provost for Student Success at University of California, Santa Cruz, each discuss their institutions' innovative and impactful approaches for supporting student success.

In the concluding essay, Jim Wolfston, CEO, CollegeNET, Inc., discusses the implications of social and economic divergence in American culture, as well as the role diversity plays in critical thought.

CollegeNET is the developer of the Social Mobility Index (www.socialmobilityindex.com), a data-driven ranking that evaluates 4-year US colleges and universities based on the levels at which they admit and support the academic and professional success of disadvantaged students.

*<http://fabianpfeffer.com/wp-content/uploads/Pfeffer2018.pdf>



College as a Catalyst for Social Mobility

By Mitchel B. Wallerstein, PhD, President, Baruch College

Since his appointment as President of Baruch College in 2010, Dr. Wallerstein has raised nearly \$140 million in private contributions and \$40 million through lobbying efforts to fund scholarships, faculty support, and campus-wide improvements. He has launched numerous undergraduate and graduate degrees and expanded global programming to send Baruch students abroad and attract international students to campus.

In this age of entrenched income inequality, higher education is perhaps the key path out of poverty in the United States.

Institutions that serve a broad mix of students – from the middle class, to families living below the poverty line, and undocumented immigrants – are increasingly the vehicle for social mobility in the twenty-first century. Rigorous, comprehensive, and well-

social pressures weigh heavily on institutions of higher education, as well as on the students who would benefit greatly from attending college, we need to double down on our efforts to serve those who need it most. This includes students, and their families, who could potentially be moved out of poverty permanently and those who currently reside on the increasingly vulnerable fringes of our eroding middle class.

environments. Baruch College’s start-to-finish philosophy includes soft-skills training, career advising and résumé writing, networking etiquette and opportunities, financial support so students can take valuable and often unpaid internships, and sometimes even suits to wear to the job interview. Students who are often the first in their family to go to college, or who are undocumented and may be living below the poverty line, have particular needs that colleges must address so they can manage the financial, psychological, emotional, and social demands of higher education and professional life.

As we strive to make education more relevant to the real world, we ought to bear in mind the following points:

- From start-ups to major corporations, as well as in the arts, non-profits, and government, employers want to hire well-rounded thinkers who are excellent problem solvers and who



know how to process information. They want students who can think and write, who can extrapolate and collaborate, who can anticipate pitfalls and come up with innovative solutions, who are strong and articulate in their beliefs but who are also nimble, responsive learners. America must always be a country where people learn to think as well as to act.

- As government support for public institutions continues to decline, we must be creative in our fundraising to offset this growing imbalance. We must combat the myth that “the state pays for everything” and therefore private fundraising is not needed. At Baruch we have had a successful and innovative fundraising division for many years, one that draws on alumni and foundation support as well as special government and corporate donations to fill in the funding gap.

- Education and social mobility are inextricably linked. How can people be moved out of poverty? With education. How do you create a powerful, dynamic society? Through educated citizens. How do we create a better way of life? By providing education and training to promote social mobility. Higher education and social mobility are an essential part of the American success story. Baruch and other public institutions of higher learning are the gateway to get there.

About Baruch College

Part of the City University of New York system, Baruch is within easy reach of Wall Street, Midtown, and the global headquarters of major companies and non-profit and cultural organizations, giving students unparalleled internship, career, and networking opportunities. The College’s more than 18,000



Photos provided by Baruch College.

graduate and undergraduate students, who speak more than 104 languages and trace their heritage to nearly 170 countries, have been repeatedly named one of the most ethnically diverse student bodies in the United States.





Moving to a Model of Higher Education Designed to Serve Everyone

By Michael Dennin, PhD, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, UC Irvine

As Dean of the Division of Undergraduate Education and Vice Provost of Teaching and Learning, Michael Dennin is dedicated to enhancing the undergraduate experience at UC Irvine. He oversees programs that connect students to a wide range of academic programs and services and supports faculty and TAs in their efforts to teach undergraduate courses.

When discussing student success, essentially everyone seems to agree that we want students who are able to think critically, solve complex problems, work in diverse teams, be independent learners, and communicate effectively in written and oral modalities. However, I would argue that the current system of

it does not achieve the stated goal of selecting for students who can learn to be strong in these skills and developing them to a high level. This is where a focus on student success and social mobility enters. It reimagines the highly selective university experience in terms of student outcomes for a diverse set of starting points for the students. There

set of incoming student characteristics. If you change the input, as any good systems designer knows, you must change the process if you want to achieve the same output. Therefore, if we wish to redefine an elite university as one for which a diverse set of incoming students can achieve a well-defined set of high level outcomes, we must develop a new process.

We are at a very exciting time in developing what this new process might look like for a number of reasons. First, we are rapidly gaining evidence on how pedagogical techniques (the process) can simultaneously improve the outcomes for students who were previously declared “under-prepared” without negatively impacting the performance of “the prepared” students. Even better, generally all student outcomes improve when evidence-based methods of teaching are utilized!



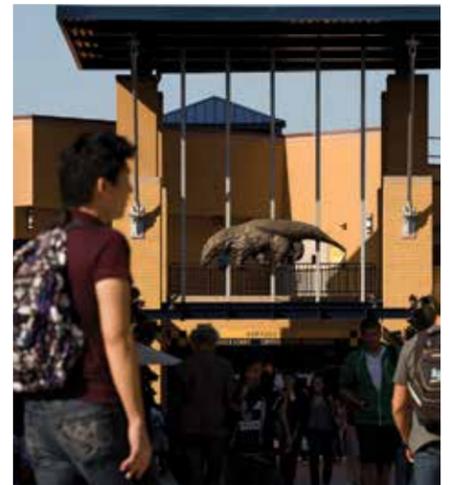
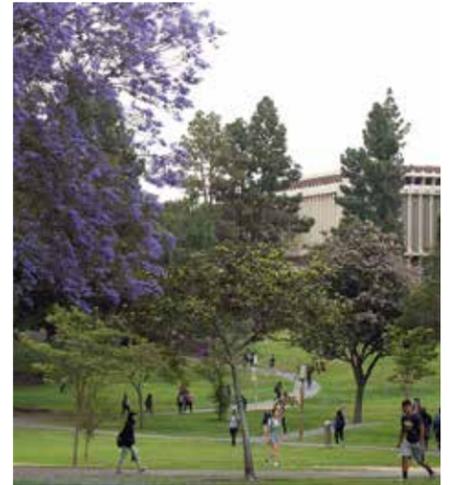
This is in part possible because we are slowly increasing access to top tier research Universities to a diverse set of students. For example, at UCI, over half of our students are the first in their family to achieve a higher education degree, and over 40% are low-income students (as measured by being Pell eligible). As part of this, we are also gaining evidence into how traditionally “non-academic” experiences and actions can impact student success in what has been traditionally viewed as the “classroom” experience.

As important as what we are doing right now is our recognition of the questions we need to continue to ask about our basic assumptions of how the University experience is designed. Is the basic structure of a general education and major experience the best design for the 21st-century student? Is there something inherent in the four-year

degree model? What is the right financial model for student success and to effectively fund universities? How do we scale effective practices to serve larger numbers of students? As people research and debate these questions, we will move universities from the current model that evolved to serve a select portion of society to ones that are able to serve everyone.

About UC Irvine

UC Irvine offers 90 undergraduate degree programs; 68 master’s, M.D., Ed.D. and J.D. programs; and 50 Ph.D. programs. As of 2017, the school posted a total student population of nearly 36,000 and at 6-year graduation rate of 88 percent.



Photos provided by UC Irvine.



Creating a Formula to Support Equity in Higher Education

By Elwood L. Robinson, PhD, Chancellor, Winston-Salem State University

Elwood L. Robinson is a proven leader known for his unwavering commitment to academic excellence and student success. After three decades of experience as a faculty mentor, dean, department chair and provost, Robinson became chancellor of Winston-Salem State University, a historically Black constituent institution of the University of North Carolina, in 2015.

I believe that colleges and universities must take responsibility to ensure that all students receive access to the opportunities needed to prepare them for the demands of the 21st century. A liberal education – an education that readies students for whatever comes

students’ academic experience to their relationship with the community in which they live.

The goal is to give every student a unique, intensive academic and social experience. Having said this, however, I realize that we can’t personalize every

effective one, especially when academic counselors and professional advisers join forces on behalf of students.

I don’t believe that financial resources alone will close the widening academic success gap in the United States. In recent years, Ivy League and other selective institutions have awarded scholarships to high-achieving students from low-income families. Sadly, though, once these students arrive on their campuses, they often become overwhelmed.

So, while scholarship funding is essential, students, particularly first-generation and those from low-income families, also require an educational experience that integrates academic guidance, mentoring, support services and a caring community. This will help us produce well-rounded and well-prepared graduates who are

“...building a one-stop shop for student support, mentoring and advising services... isn’t a revolutionary idea, but it is an effective one.”

next – cannot be only for the fortunate. To achieve greater equity, every institution of higher education needs to examine its students’ entire educational experience, from the relevance of the curriculum to the availability of co-curricular activities that connect all

student’s experience. But we can make every student’s experience feel personal. One way we’ve done this at Winston-Salem State University is by building a “one-stop shop” for student support, mentoring and advising services. This isn’t a revolutionary idea, but it is an



critical thinkers, analytical problem solvers, effective communicators, and innovative and creative collaborators.

I’m encouraged that a number of thought leaders in higher education have begun to focus on “equity-mindedness” and the ways that we can remove historical barriers to higher education for poor and minority students.

Still, this is no easy challenge. More students from lower-income families are enrolling in college today versus 40 years ago, yet students from the wealthiest families in the United States are eight times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree by age 24 than their counterparts from the lowest earning families. This has serious consequences. According to a Pew Charitable Trusts report, among those between 25 and 32, 22 percent with only a high school diploma are living in poverty, compared with 6 percent of

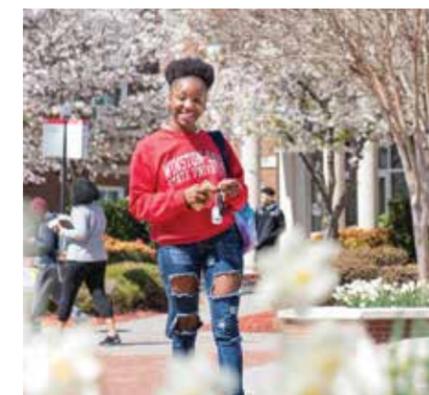
today’s college-educated young adults.

The rising cost of college is certainly a factor here. Students from lower-income families, on average, get smaller grants from the colleges they attend than students from more affluent families.

But, in the end, I think the academic success gap in the United States stems more from the lack of a supportive academic environment. That’s why we need to re-double our efforts across the country to create educational opportunities for promising students, regardless of their economic backgrounds.

About Winston-Salem University

Founded in 1892, WSSU enjoys a distinguished reputation as a historically Black constituent institution of the University of North Carolina. The university enrolls approximately 5,100 students and offers more than



Photos provided by Winston-Salem University.

40 bachelor’s programs, nine master’s programs, two professional doctoral programs, and two certificate programs. In 2017, Money Magazine ranked WSSU the #1 HBCU in the South.





An Organizational Commitment to Serving the Whole Student

By Jaye Padgett, PhD, Vice Provost for Student Success, UC Santa Cruz

In addition to heading the UCSC Student Success Division, which comprises health services, dean of students functions, and many departments that support student life and academic success, Jaye Padgett is also a Professor in the Department of Linguistics, where he continues to do research and advise graduate students.

Those of us who work in student success in higher education often talk about serving the “whole student”. We know that a student’s academic performance is affected by – and affects – what goes on outside of the classroom. A student’s sense of safety and belonging; their financial well-being; health – all of these factors and

in a separate Student Affairs or Student Life division provide services and opportunities to engage and develop students outside of it.

I believe that an organizational commitment to – or reflection of – the whole student is important to student success efforts. This is all the more true given our changing student

improve educational equity – to reduce gaps in graduation rates and other outcomes related to background and income.

At UC Santa Cruz our Student Success Division resembles a Student Affairs division in many ways. But it is core to our mission to partner with faculty and academic leaders, and our work has, as a primary goal, the academic success for our students. For example, our division’s Student Success Evaluation and Research Center (sserc.ucsc.edu) is faculty led and has nearly 20 faculty affiliates. These faculty do research – often action-oriented research in partnership with our student life staff – that can directly benefit our students’ success inside and outside of the classroom. We are engaged in ambitious projects that address pedagogy, curriculum, sense of belonging, and student well-being in an



integrated way.

We need such partnerships, because we cannot improve student success by simply tracking long-term outcomes like graduation rates. Success depends on understanding the myriad mediating factors that impact those long-term outcomes, such as sense of belonging, student self-efficacy, mental health, financial struggles, as well as grades and learning outcomes. It involves understanding how our student life services and practices, as well as our pedagogical practices, curricular structures and our policies affect those mediating outcomes. Doing all of this well requires the energy and expertise of our student life staff and leadership, in partnership with administrators, faculty, and academic leadership. We are still working out how to do this at UC Santa Cruz. But I think our organizational commitment

to collaboration between those of us in academics and those who support students in other ways is on the right track.

About UC Santa Cruz

Since its founding in 1965 with a student body totaling 652, UC Santa Cruz has grown to an enrollment of more than 18,000 students. The school offers bachelor’s degrees in 65 different majors supervised by divisional deans; in addition to graduate certificates, master’s degrees, or doctoral degrees in 41 academic programs under the supervision of the divisional and graduate deans.



Photos provided by UC Santa Cruz.

“We cannot improve student success by simply tracking long-term outcomes like graduation rates.”

more affect academic success. Yet the way universities are organized does not normally help us address academic and non-academic factors in an integrated way. Faculty in academic divisions design the curriculum and engage students in the classroom, while staff

body. At UC Santa Cruz, roughly 40 percent of our students are low-income, and many are historically underrepresented minorities. Many come from underserved schools and have experienced hardship in their lives. Our primary student success goal is to



Economic Inclusion: A Campus Strategy for Developing Critical Thought

By Jim Wolfston, President,
CollegeNET, Inc.

Jim Wolfston is President and CEO of CollegeNET, Inc., a Portland, Oregon-based company that develops and operates Web-based, administrative systems for higher education institutions worldwide.

Mr. Wolfston has spoken and written on broader policy and service issues for higher education, with articles published in the The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Education, and the Wall Street Journal.

Education is the most important rung on the ladder for social mobility. And in our complex, fast-changing world, the critical joint supporting the education rung is Higher Education. Higher Education's capacity to spread advanced knowledge and disperse the ability to learn across all social classes is key to both

the US higher education system is failing at broadly optimizing human capital development and spreading opportunity for economic advancement.

Making higher education available only to the rich makes no sense in a country that has historically touted economic opportunity, sought to broadly optimize its citizens' potential

of country, evolution does not first check family income before assigning eye color, intellectual potential, or any other phenotype. Yet, generally in the US, only if you are a rich child or are willing to shoulder oppressive debt, are you then free to step onto the higher education rung.

Beyond the questions of social justice

“Making higher education available only to the rich makes no sense in a country that has historically touted economic opportunity, sought to broadly optimize its citizens’ potential and prepare them for participation in our democracy.”

providing social advancement and optimizing our nation's human capital development. Unfortunately, with less than 10 percent of the graduates of four year institutions now coming from families below the median income,

and prepare them for participation in our democracy. Perhaps restrictions on US college access have emerged because poorer people have become inherently less capable of college work? This idea makes no sense. Regardless

and human capital development, however, lie the more fundamental questions of institutional quality, mission, and example. Uncritically accepting US News' outmoded ideas about "prestige," trustees continue



to direct decisions that conflict with broadening our nation's access to higher education. No matter that classroom size has zero impact on learning at the tertiary level. Or that SAT scores correlate most closely with family income, not academic achievement in college. Or that hoarding endowments proves nothing except the power of capital to grow faster than inflation or the returns to labor. Or that recruiting and admitting only richer students

undercuts campus diversity. As institutions unquestioningly chase these arbitrary goals for a higher US News "ranking," they devolve their institutions from civic contribution towards self-aggrandizement. Not only does probity suffer, but also, interestingly, the capacity of an institution to stimulate critical thought. It is this growing endangerment to critical thought from economic sameness that presents a historic opportunity for new leadership.

Fortunately, a few institutions (notably those here) are rethinking the university mission and reshaping what it means for a university to be "prestigious."

As Michael Dennin writes, the new Selective Institution is defined in terms of its ability to create pathways for success for students arriving on campus from a diverse array of starting points. If widely adopted, this strategy could help powerfully reshape and improve

US campuses so that they can optimize the development of critical thought, regardless of a student's starting point. The potential for improvement owes to two important rigors inherent to critical thinking.

First, among a diverse audience of students, it is not enough for either teachers or fellow students to merely state the "right" information. As one communicates within a diverse environment, one must learn to craft messages and ideas for broad understandability. The power to communicate this way is a valuable skill for loving parents, good citizens, and ambitious scholars. However, the chances for developing and practicing this skill are reduced in environments of demographic and economic homogeneity. Participating in a university of the new variety – one that selects for a diversity of economic backgrounds – each member of the community naturally encounters more circumstances where they must convey ideas to a broad array of thinking minds. The core environment of the university advances if it applies this new model, invites more economic diversity, and thus organizes itself implicitly so that it fosters the development of flexible communication skill for all members of the campus community.

The second and most important point is that in order to solve the major problems of our time, including social and economic divergence, our colleges need to train more individuals for advanced critical thinking. At the typical university, critical thinking is



viewed as the capacity to objectively and dispassionately question and analyze errors in the work of others. This is, of course, a valuable skill. But the greatest power of critical thought is when an individual can turn the question mark all the way against his or her own most fundamental ideas and preconceptions. Such advanced skill is more likely to be piqued and developed in diverse environments where individuals thoughtfully and respectfully encounter others who have different backgrounds, ideas and preconceptions. Through such a heterogeneous environment, one's surest convictions may become less sure, and the individual mind can thus become more open to pivot and advance.

Almost all major insights and innovations happen when someone is willing to look differently at their

received wisdom and convictions. For example, those who considered that the earth just might be a ball had to first discard their own strong and received conviction it was flat. Ditto for watching the sun "move" across the sky – a motion that is, of course, obvious to everyone! Yet someone was willing to rethink their own intuition and consider instead that the earth might be turning. Heterogeneity of thought, economic background, culture, and philosophy are all powerful environmental stimulants for developing the advanced, rigorous capacity to rethink one's own received wisdom. The writers here understand this. We applaud them for challenging our nation's outmoded notions about university "prestige" as they lead their campuses towards economic inclusion and inspire others to restore education as a rung for social mobility.

