

Understanding and Advancing Student Success and Well-Being

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Purpose and Objectives. There seems to be a societal push to see college as a means to a financial end. As such, much attention has been focused on the individual benefits of attaining a higher education degree, with colleges and universities being held accountable for their contribution to those benefits. Accountability is measured through graduation rates and potential earnings, nearly to the exclusion of the other benefits higher education provides to individuals and broader communities. Studies show that a higher education degree serves broader purposes including individual growth and development and service to society through research, outreach, and civic engagement. Studies also show that these purposes lead to individual, family, and community well-being. Common sense and research both show clearly that people need a richer definition of “success” in order to experience well-being. Missing in the research literature and college success initiatives is an exploration of how students’ understanding and self-perception of success and well-being are related to college persistence.

It is vital to improve retention and graduation rates, as approximately 25% of first year MSU students do not return for their second year, and the university’s 4-year and 6-year graduation rates hover at 20% and 50%, respectively. Moreover, we know what MSU has to offer should not only serve a greater percentage of those who choose to stay but should also be viewed as a worthwhile investment by those who choose to leave. We conjecture that the extrinsic reasoning students use to attend college, to get a good paying job, provides a limited motivation for college attendance and that family and faculty messages (implicitly or explicitly) may reinforce students’ extrinsic logics. The goal of this planning grant (Phase 1) is to establish a baseline understanding of incoming MSU students’ and existing faculty members’ definitions of success and well-being. The findings from Phase 1 will be used to *catalyze interdisciplinary basic and applied research projects in Phase 2 that can enrich students’ concept of success and well-being* such that students understand the role of higher education in facilitating their holistic development which in turn enables students to contribute to organizational and community well-being.