Advancing TBR's Strategic Plan for Student Success

A Holistic Model for Student & Community Engagement

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Summary

As Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 initiative widens the net of potential students entering the TBR system, it is imperative to respond to the needs of non-traditional students who might be suffering from poverty related issues such as hunger, poor nutrition, and homelessness, as well as other students who might be in need of mental health support…all in the name of supporting student success. Pellissippi State Community College's Magnolia Avenue Campus houses the Center for Student and Community Engagement. It is a holistic model that can be viewed as a template for providing similar student services across the TBR system.

"One of the saddest moments that I have experienced recently occurred at a Council of Presidents meeting when some presidents indicated to me and other members of the chancellery that more and more students appear on their campuses are [sic] hungry. They have not had breakfast or may have missed a meal the night before. In light of the difficult economic times facing very low income students, I have asked the Office of Student Affairs to develop ... programs to focus on issues of hunger, nutrition and homelessness."

- Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, City University of New York Board of Trustees Meeting, April 27, 2009 (Freudenberg, et al., 2011)

"Life sometimes gets in the way of academic success. The goal of the center is to provide every service we can to help our students overcome those distractions and roadblocks to success. Everything we do, we do so they can focus on school."

– Roslyn Tillman, Dean of the Magnolia Avenue Campus (PSCC, 2015a)

Introduction

As the Tennessee state legislature's Complete College Tennessee Act 2010 and Governor Bill Haslam's Drive to 55 initiatives cast an ambitious wider net to bring students into the higher education system, there are various intertwined health/wellness/safety issues that will need to be addressed as schools absorb increasing student populations that are considered to be "high risk". In addition to traditional cognitive factors (GPA, standardized achievement tests, high school rank, repeating a grade) (Sommerfeld, 2011), mainstream press articles have highlighted the stresses that a growing number of students across the country are facing…the struggle to meet basic human needs. This struggle can greatly affect student retention and success rates. The time has come to adopt a holistic perspective/framework that will allow for a broader definition of "at-risk" students. One that is beyond a perspective steeped solely in the cognitive realm, and one that at the base level of human needs, will address success that is difficult to achieve when thoughts turn to food, shelter and safety before classes and class assignments.

Background

Several key priorities for Tennessee's Board of Regents Strategic Plan (TBRSP)

2015-2025 (TBRSP, 2015) address student success through specific goals:

In order to increase access at all levels, the TBR system will broaden opportunities…and engage those who have been historically underrepresented and underserved…*will seek to ensure that every prospective student has the opportunity to enroll* in universities, community colleges, or colleges of applied technology.

…The TBR System and its institutions *will foster student persistence to completion* enhancing the growth of existing businesses, the ability to attract high paying industries, *the enrichment of strong communities, and the future quality of life for each student.*

…The TBR institutions will seek to identify alternate revenue enhancements and efficiently use their resources in order to sustain quality and *provide access for a growing number of students.*

Quality

To achieve excellence in all areas of our collective mission, the TBR System *must provide high quality academic programs, faculty, services, and facilities at all levels.*

Access

Student Success

Quality

Resource-fulness & Efficiency

In support of TBR's Completion Agenda Goal 2025, the Completion Delivery Unit (CDU) was tasked with targeting support to institutions as they identified, implemented, and monitored the impact of priority strategies with a particular emphasis on improving the success of low-income and underrepresented minority students. Contributing to the Completion Agenda goal is the strategy of Community, Belonging and Inclusion. It recognizes that there is a growing body of research that suggests that non-cognitive factors are hugely influential in the transition into post-secondary education and persistence to success (TBR, 2014a). In order to fulfill the various Tennessee state initiatives for college completion, student and community engagement efforts need to consider non-cognitive factors that address basic human needs.

Disciplines contributing to the field of student success, have long defined "at risk" populations through the lenses of their specific disciplines (minorities, first generation college attendance, females, veterans, African-American males, low socio-economic status, disabled individuals, technology deficient, from a single-parent family, repeated a grade) (Jones & Watson, 1990, Bulger & Watson, 2006). While these "high risk" descriptors are indeed non-cognitive factors, however they do not address real life issues of poverty, hunger, homelessness or displacement, mental health/crisis intervention care, medical care, spiritual distress, safety, or care-giving (for child, parent, spouse, other family member) while being a student (Bahrampour, 2014).

Struggling With Meeting Basic Human Needs

Hunger

Hunger is one of those basic human needs that seems to have gone under the radar for quite sometime on college campuses in the United States. Bahrampour (2014) noted that although "food insecurity" is not a term commonly associated with U.S. college students, college administrators across the nation are seeing evidence of students going hungry, especially on campuses with large populations of low-income families and first generation college attendees. The number of food banks on college campuses has risen from 4 in 2008 to 121 in 2014. Some students are confronted with decisions where eating food, or even providing food for their family, is more important than buying a textbook. McColl (2015) reported that according to Feed America, a 2014 report shared that one in ten adults who are hungry and seeking emergency assistance for food, is a student. The number of students in that position, who are full time, is approximately two million.

Another aspect of food insecurity is the stigma that is associated with needing assistance. Historically, poor students did not have the opportunity to attend college. According to Resnikoff (2014), at Michigan State University, a little more than half of the

graduate students are frequenting their food bank. Graduate students are most likely supporting families as well as working and attending school. New York's LaGuardia Community College provides privacy for food bank recipients by not allowing students who require assistance to come into the food bank itself. They sit in an office and receive their food in an unmarked grocery bag to carry home, which is exactly the point according to Dr. Michael Baston, the college's vice president of Student Affairs. The stigma is prevalent not only amongst students who at times refuse assistance because they are "not poor", but also with donors who cannot fathom that students are suffering from food insecurity. This strategy was employed to help reduce stigma, so students could feel that whatever resource they needed to be successful in sustaining themselves, would be available to them. There is a need to re-think the notion that students are privileged.

Homelessness

College campuses are also seeing a rise in homelessness. Gross (2013) noted that though there is no hard statistical data collected regarding college students and homelessness, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) reports that approximately 58,000 students are homeless on campuses across the country. Barbara Duffield who is the policy director for the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) shares that she believes the number of homeless students in recent years has increased, partly due to the economic downturn. FAFSA is the only significant available data, since colleges do not track their homeless students, and Duffield recommends that colleges across the nation become more aware of the problem. Student programs like counseling, or on-campus food banks are just a few ways to reach out and offer support (Gross, 2013).

There is a growing number of American students who are living out of cars and relying on public facilities as economics plays a big role in colleges and families budgeting priorities. According to the Children Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego, of

the 397,122 children in foster care in 2012, approximately 3% of them earn four-year degrees, and by the age of 24, almost 37% have experienced homelessness. Many have to fight to be declared independent because the requirements for receiving financial aid often includes information about parents (Kasperkevic, 2014). It can be a very demeaning and shameful experience to have to document that fact that a student is homeless. Homeless students need support of institutions that offer higher education. It is through higher education endeavors that the opportunity to change one's circumstances can be achieved.

Mental Health

One need not look too far to see press reports about the state of mental health affairs in regard to students who have actively taken lives on campuses across the country. Earlier this year the Center for Collegiate Mental Health released it's sixth annual report noting that more than 100,000 college students sought mental health treatment at 140 colleges and universities across the country (Penn State News, 2015). On the rise are rates of self-injury and suicidal thoughts. Distress related to academics has a strong association with almost half of the mental health concerns posed by college students.

The American College Health Association (ACHA) (2006) surveyed 94,000 college students and found

-67% of women/55% of men feeling hopeless at times over the previous school year;

-47% of women and 38% of men feeling so depressed they could not function at least once during that time;

-10% of women and 8% of men feeling suicidal.

There are very direct academic success implications regarding the ability of college and university campuses to help students reduce their mental health distress. There are reports of students informing someone on campus about their mental health disorder resulting in being kicked out of school or, in some of the worst cases involuntarily being committed to a

psychiatric facility. Many individuals, who experience a mental health illness, can trace back their first experience to when they were in college (NPR, 2014). Having appropriate access to resources for mental health on campus, in conjunction with having administrations that care about the overall health and well being of students, is the beginning of the path to help students succeed in a holistic manner, where non-cognitive basic human needs are addressed.

## A Holistic Framework for Student Success

A holistic approach to student affairs is not new. Melvene D. Hardee, a student affairs administrator, in 1970, advocated for the education of the whole student: intellectually, emotionally, physically, socially, vocationally, morally, economically, and aesthetically (Hardee, 1970). She introduced terms such as the teacher-learner environment as well as concepts relating to student's educational, vocational, and personal concerns. Given the bold Drive to 55 initiative that Governor Haslam has spearheaded, what theoretical framework might be able to help achieve and advance TBR's goals for success in light of an increase of basic human needs in the student population? One that addresses the whole student; one that has a *holistic perspective* on supporting student success. What framework of holism would be acceptable for higher education? Should education be the domain from which holism is viewed? Or should it emerge from psychology's domain? How about from a healthcare domain?

- **Education** – "development of a person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials" (Schools Around Us, 2015).
- **Psychology** – the whole is more than a sum of its parts (California Institute of Integral Studies, 2012).
- **Nursing** - the totality of the human being – "the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotion, spirit, social/cultural, relationship, context, and environment" (American Holistic Nurses Association, 2015).

- How about a conceptual framework that combines all of the above?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

Abraham Maslow was a psychologist and an educator who postulated a hierarchy of eight levels of human needs, ranging from physiological needs (hunger, thirst, fatigue) to transcendence needs (helping others to achieve self-actualization). This hierarchy was proposed as an answer to the lack of existing motivational theories.
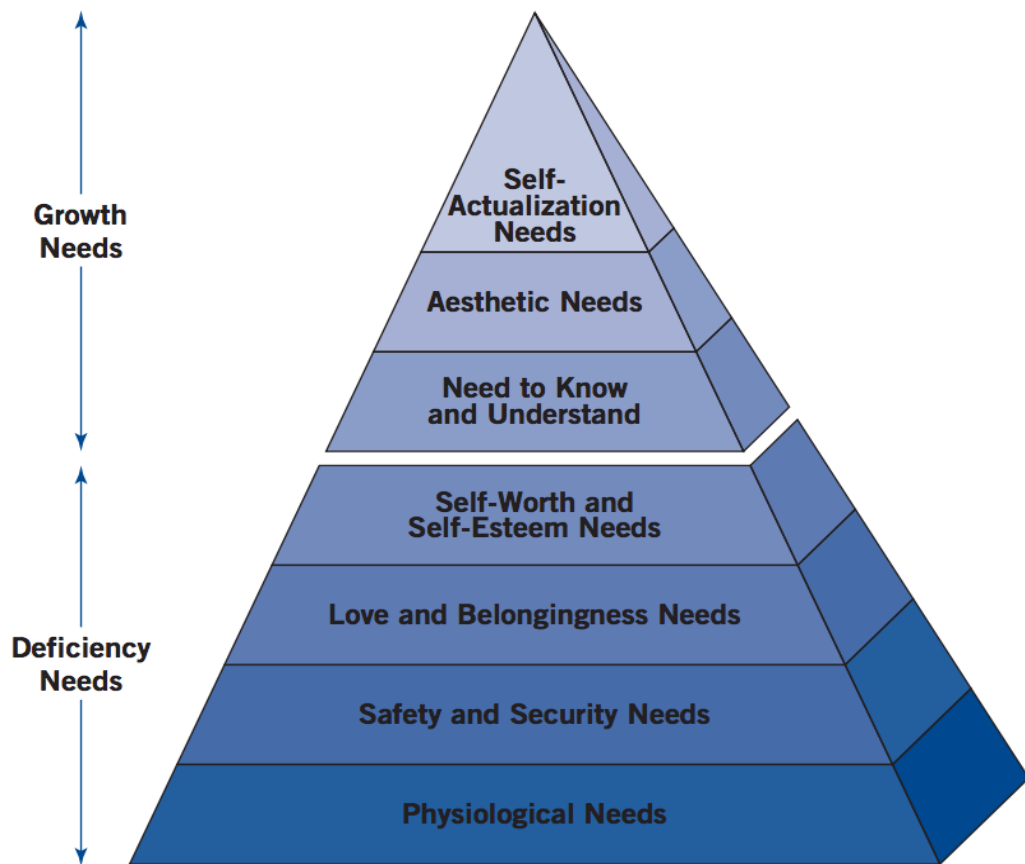
He noted that once physiological needs are met, then humans are able to focus on safety needs, belonging needs (to be accepted), self-esteem needs (to achieve, be competent, gain approval), cognitive needs (to know, to understand, to explore), aesthetic needs, self-actualization needs, and finally transcendence needs (Kneisl & Trigoboff, 2013).

A Holistic Model for Student Success

Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC) has embarked upon an ambitious program for student success. PSCC's Magnolia Avenue Campus is privileged to house the Center for Student and Community Engagement (the "Center"). The Center is a student success related pilot program that is rich with the aspirations of TBR's priority strategy of *community, belonging and inclusion*, which aspires to "engage students in high impact practices and living/learning communities that promote student success," (TBR, ppt. Slide 2, 2014b). The Center's mission is to "bring internal and external resources together, to reduce barriers to successful program completion, and to enhance students' overall college experience" (PSCC, n.d.).

The Center is a model application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to higher education and college completion. The Center's goals are (PSCC, n.d.):

- Provide support and resources to improve students' program completion

- Offer programs and promote students' overall health and wellness;

- Encourage student engagement within the College and the community

- Provide experiences that prepare students for college transfer and/or career readiness

- Connect students with essential social support

These goals are a holistic approach to providing internal and external resources that will reduce barriers to successful program completion and to enhance students' overall college experiences.

The staff of the Center are dedicated to the concepts of student success through advising, counseling, educational resources, navigating financial aid, safety and security, service learning, and community partnerships. The literature supports that one of the most important factors in advising students (who are at-risk) is helping the students feel that they are cared for by their institution (Bray, 1985; Braxton et al., 1995; Holmes, 2000; Tinto,

1993). The demographic breakdown (N. Ramsey, personal communication, July 31, 2015) for the Magnolia Avenue Campus (Fall 2014) is as follows:

- Enrollment: 624

- Gender: 67% female

- Ethnicity: 38% minority with 29% Black

- Not College-ready: 79%

- Pell Recipient: 70% receive Pell

- ACT Average: 19 is the avg ACT composite score

This student population definitively meets the criteria of at-risk students, and thus they are prime candidates for the services and staff support that are available at the Center.

Community partnerships have been a compelling resource for student success. In fact, according to Dr. Anthony Wise, president of PSCC, "the support and partnership of our local governments has been critical to our success in reaching students and helping them succeed…without question, our mission to serve our community has been enhanced through our partnerships with the governments of Knox County and the City of Knoxville" (PSCC, 2015).

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Feedback/Recommendations

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Data is to track at this time since the Center is yet in its infant pilot stage. The Center began operating earlier this year, on February 6, 2014. Although there are demographics for the population most likely to benefit from the services in place (see fall 2014 data above), the highly committed staff at the Center has already been able to provide qualitative feedback on experience and best practice recommendations. The staff at the Center is comprised of highly motivated and committed service providers whether as faculty, administration, staff or counselors.

The consideration of student services in light of the rapidly changing diverse student body of higher education in the state of Tennessee opens up new ways of approaching student success and retention. One suggestion that came from Center staff was a methodology to support highly personalized case management as a powerful retention/ success tool given the wide net of diversity that TBR is seeking. A process that generates a specific care plan, or case file, that includes assessments, interventions, plans, and evaluations of outcomes that are enacted in the framework of that holistic worldview, can include positive outcomes for both the individual student as well as the community that the student engages.

The following are additional recommendations for the continued work, success, and sustainability of the Center:

- Utilize a *case management* model (and case managers, in addition to counselors) in order to broaden the scope of services to connect students to resources that can be provided by the counseling services

- Have faculty/staff exposed to the ***Bridges Out of Poverty*** framework as a means to expand the repertoire ability of personal interactions between faculty/staff and the expanding diverse student body that potentially will be identified as "at risk"/under-resourced (internally done with faculty vs. curriculum for students)

- Establishing a "mall of services" where services can be provided by vendors to better fulfill the broad areas of student needs in-house

- Have faculty and staff participate in advising training that includes knowledge of an array of advising theories

- Service learning, a high impact practice, should be implemented as a part of community partnerships

- o Group homes in the community (geriatric, mental health, adolescent, etc.)
- o Revitalization projects
- Community partnerships need to be established along the lines of proven models of community engagement.
  - o University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships is an excellent example of collaboration between universities, communities and schools (https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/)
- Community businesses as guest speakers (career motivation)
- Food bank partnership for healthy foods/snacks for students
- Homeless organization partnerships
- Use of community school model (university assisted community school - UACS)
  - o Partner with school system for cross training opportunities across K-20
  - o UACS focus on schools as core institutions for community engagement and democratic development, as well as link school day and after-school curricula to solve locally identified, real world, community problems.
    - ▪ https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/programs/university-assisted-community-schools#sthash.m6SLcbKb.dpuf
- Partnership with community groups
  - o Recovery type small groups
    - ▪ Motivate recovery in a higher education setting
  - o Support groups
  - o Faith groups

- Partner with American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Department of Health (state and county) to provide resources if disaster strikes in community, on campus, or in student's, faculty, staff's personal lives
  - Assess feasibility of the Center being designated as a disaster/emergency shelter by Red Cross
  - The Center to be designated as a POD (point of dispensation) site for state and county usage during declared emergencies

Implications for Evidence Based-Practice

To sustain the Center for Student and Community Engagement, outcomes must be measured in as many possible ways as devisable. Data to be collected should be structured and intentional in order to maximize service potential, analyze effectiveness, and evaluate sustainability. There are some basic measures which can be implemeted in order to capture utilization of the Center's current resources.

- Develop methodology for assessment of success of center student learning outcomes (SLO) to center goals

- Track student hours to campus center use in order to generate a master list to disseminate survey to users if meeting outcomes

- Establish ongoing program assessments for mall vendor participation (assessment method for effectiveness as well)

These are just some ways to begin the evaluation processof this pilot program. Although it is in its infancy, the Center has the potential to be a template for student services across the state, as well as a holistic model for advancing TBR's strategy for student success.

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