

# ***Thriving in Transitions: A Research-Based Approach to College Student Success***

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Colleges and universities across the United States invest significant resources, human and fiscal, to recruit and enroll students. As external constituents question the success of students in relation to the rising costs of education, attention to retention and matriculation has been heightened. While volumes of research have been devoted to studying the first year of college, growing attention is being directed to the actual transition into the college environment, subsequent periods of transition, and the inherent challenges. This distinction is important in that, if transitions are marred with difficulties, students will be less likely to endure and not fully reap the benefits of institutional initiatives and services.

The authors of *Thriving in Transitions* attempt to call attention to specific variables and critical points where students can be adversely impacted in the midst of transition. The preface frames the intent and a focus on thriving. "Thriving" is asserted as the central perspective of the chapters, in which students are not simply progressing towards matriculation, but they are experiencing success through a more complete engagement within the college experience. A unique facet of this publication is viewing transition from the positive attributes, rather than student deficits. Transition is posited as a positive necessity with an emphasis on utilizing a student's personal strengths to illuminate internal qualities students can tap into to navigate a transition successfully. While not a new topic, this approach offers an alternative vantage point for the reader.

The text begins by outlining the research on thriving and defining the conceptual lens for the remainder of the text. Expanding the operational definition of student success is also a central theme. The "Thriving Quotient" is presented as a statistical formula to derive the impact of demographic characteristics on student success. Thriving is rooted in positive psychology and models of psychological well-being. Academic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal thriving are presented as three variables in the quotient. The text then moves into an in-depth discussion of the strengths development model to consider. A focus on the model and the

institutional settings where changes must occur expand the second chapter. While many of the recommendations may not be realistic for some campuses, there are solid points to consider. The chapter concludes with strategies to consider implementing for altering campus culture.

The remainder of the text focuses on thriving in specific transitions (First year in college, students of color on predominantly white campuses, high-risk students, sophomores, transfers, and the senior year). Each chapter outlines specific challenges and strategies for the aforementioned subpopulations. The information provided would be repetitive to those familiar with the literature and does not present substantially new findings. In a few cases, some broad generalizations are put forth as to why students in those groups face challenges. While support from the literature is offered, some assertions are broad and only offer one dimension. The chapter on students of color only focuses on how the institution interacts with the student and does not present a viewpoint for how a student's preconceived notions could impact the experience they have with the campus community. The view of "high-risk" students only mentions first generation status and those needing remediation or concern. Though supported by the research, the chapter expands upon the role of mindset in student success. This factor also spans the other demographics covered by the text.

Many implications from the research conducted in the chapters are not new revelations, but rather reinforce the necessity of attention to those areas. Some implications are more far-reaching and would be difficult to execute. This may cause some readers to dismiss the information or question whether they could create an institutional paradigm and culture shift. Recommendations regarding the role of faculty in student engagement cannot be understated, but the text does not offer any new mechanisms for achieving the goal. There were opportunities for authors to provide practical solutions or best practices to the reader on elevating faculty engagement with the process.

The chapters on sophomores, transfers, and seniors are welcome additions to the literature in that many campuses are now shifting their focus to student success beyond the first year. Campuses may have assumed a student's successful transition past the first year increases the odds of matriculation. Rising costs, waning interest, and a job market in flux are just a few of the factors that are leading to declining effort of students and ultimately reducing retention. Those chapters present added dimensions campuses must consider to fully engage students at all levels of enrollment and varying entry points. The section on transfer students could be of value to campuses seeking to better understand and serve that subpopulation. There is, however, no differentiation between lateral and two-year transfer students. That factor could completely alter the institutional approach.

Some chapters offer best practices for addressing needs, but each chapter presents the overarching message of engagement. Though not a new message, the focused importance sub-dividing the campus population to create intentional engagement for students based on some demographic variables will offer campuses a more meaningful method of student thriving.

The text concludes with some very broad recommendations for practice and campus-wide recommendations. The power of any of the recommendations is dependent upon the lens and position of the reader. The messages of creating the cultural change may be frustrating to those familiar with the literature, but not in positions to effect broader change.

Overall, the text flows and is valuable for the expansion on the notion of “thriving.” The text is not written to a target audience, for instance student affairs practitioners or academic administrators. The text’s broad viewpoint would allow for use by any facet of the campus. The text could easily be utilized for professional development and to engage members of a staff or campus community in a conversation to discuss the status of the demographics discussed. The notion of “thriving” does present opportunities to discuss student success in various campus arenas, including academic advising, career services, and fundraising and development. Educating the campus community about the benefits of more engaged and thriving students could reap major benefits in transforming the campus culture.