What a 'Holistic' Student Experience Actually Means

How colleges can integrate learning and personal growth

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This report is based on a roundtable discussion held at The Chronicle's office, in Washington, on August 2, 2019. Questions or comments? Email ci@chronicle.com

*Photographs by
Julia Schmalz*

Go to a conference or join a conversation about serving 21st-century students, and before too long, you'll probably hear the word "holistic." It has gained traction across higher education as institutions of different types focus not only on access, or enrolling a diverse population of students, but on their success academically and personally, in college and beyond.

Treating students as whole people isn't a novel concept. Research a century ago found a connection between personality development and achievement, and colleges created programs like orientation to nurture students. Over the decades, "student engagement" became a watchword, as researchers and educators identified models of classroom and extracurricular learning with positive results.

These days, lagging graduation rates, disparate outcomes by income and race, public doubt about the value of higher education, and new accountability measures have led campus leaders to try harder to help all students thrive. Add to that demographic change and increasing competition for students, and for many institutions,

raising the retention rate has become both a moral and a financial imperative.

That's partly why increases in spending on student services have generally outpaced those in other categories in recent years. The trends are toward more support and more personalization, as colleges establish so-called touch points over the student life cycle. The goal is to serve a broader college-going population by cultivating students' sense of belonging and well-being, while expanding resources for issues such as mental health, hunger, and homelessness.

To examine the holistic model, *The Chronicle* brought together a panel of experts who approach this work in different ways, as researchers and administrators, across sectors of higher education, on campuses and at national organizations. They came to our office, in Washington, to share their insight on sticking points and promising new directions.

This report offers key points of discussion to help campus leaders make sense of popular terms, keep up with effective practices, and consider systemic changes to improve the student experience. The following excerpts from the roundtable have been edited for length and clarity.

Randy Bass is the vice provost for education and a professor of English at Georgetown University, where he leads educational innovation through the Designing the Future(s) initiative and the Red House incubator for curricular transformation. In three decades of work in teaching and learning and technology, he founded Georgetown's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship; directed the Visible Knowledge Project, a study involving 70 faculty members on 21 campuses; and served as a consulting scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Bass is the author and editor of numerous books, articles, and electronic projects, including, with Bret Eynon, *Open and Integrative: Designing Liberal Education for the New Digital Ecosystem* (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2016).

Shauna Davis is the executive director of holistic student supports at Achieving the Dream, a national network of nearly 280 reform-minded community colleges committed to improving student outcomes. In that role, she leads the organization's strategy for redesigning advising and student-support services, and leads a team that coaches colleges as they adopt changes. Davis previously served as the executive director of the Virginia Community College System's Student Success Center and Office of Professional Development, as the director of student services at Northern Virginia Community College's Extended Learning Institute, and as the assistant vice president of work-force development at the Community College Workforce Alliance.

Ashley Finley is the vice president for strategic planning and partnerships and senior adviser to the president at the Association of American Colleges and Universities. In that role, she consults with campuses on program design and implementation, as well as equity goals, seeking to connect students' personal development with their learning and civic engagement. She previously served as senior director of assessment and research at AAC&U and the national evaluator for its Bringing Theory to Practice project. A sociologist by training, she recently spent three years away from AAC&U as the associate vice president for academic affairs and founding dean of the Dominican Experience at Dominican University of California. She is the author of several articles, book chapters, and monographs, including "Well-Being: An Essential Outcome for Higher Education" (Change, 2016).

Nance Lucas is the executive director of the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, an interdisciplinary center at George Mason University, as well as the university's chief well-being officer, helping to lead a campuswide effort to promote students' learning and personal growth. A scholar of positive psychology and ethics, she is an associate professor of leadership studies in the university's School of Integrative Studies and co-author of *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* (Jossey-Bass, 2013).

Tiffany Beth Mfume is the assistant vice president for student success and retention at Morgan State University, which has earned national recognition for its rising graduation rates. In her role, she manages programs and services including new student and parent orientation, financial-literacy training, and early alerts. She is the author of *What Works at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Nine Strategies for Increasing Retention and Graduation Rates* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and *The College Completion Glass — Half-Full or Half-Empty? Exploring the Value of Postsecondary Education* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

Amelia Parnell is the vice president for research and policy at NASPA, the national association of student-affairs administrators in higher education, where she also directs the Research and Policy Institute, which examines effective practices to promote student success. In that role, she focuses on colleges' use of data and the intersections of campus functions. Parnell previously served as the director of research initiatives at the Association for Institutional Research and an education policy analyst for the Florida Legislature. She is co-editor of *The Analytics Revolution in Higher Education: Big Data, Organizational Learning, and Student Success* (Stylus, 2018).

Josipa Roksa is a professor of sociology and education and the senior adviser for academic programs at the University of Virginia. Her current research focuses on understanding the experiences and outcomes of traditionally underserved populations, including first-generation, low-income, and racial- and ethnic-minority students. She is the author of numerous articles and reports, as well as two books, with Richard Arum, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (University of Chicago, 2011) and *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates* (University of Chicago, 2014).

Sara Lipka has focused on the student experience in 17 years as a reporter and editor at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She has covered a range of topics, including student and academic affairs, campus life, legal issues, and community colleges, and has appeared frequently on radio programs and conference panels. As editorial project manager, she directs special reports on pressing questions in higher education, including "The Truth About Student Success: Myths, Realities, and 30 Practices That Are Working" and "Career-Ready Education: Beyond the Skills Gap, Tools and Tactics for an Evolving Economy."

"I want to tell everybody who's just getting on board with what the needs of students are, how institutions have to meet those needs, and how to handle account-ability: It's challenging work."

—Tiffany Beth Mfume

Interpreting Terms Like 'Holistic' and 'Well-Being'

Terms that become buzzwords can lose their meaning. On any campus, it takes a common understanding of a "holistic" philosophy or approach to make it a reality. What skills and qualities does the institution want to cultivate — and how?

Knowing your students is fundamental to developing an educational experience that enables them to learn and grow. What are their motivations, their challenges? By recognizing those factors, educators can begin to set students up for success in college, a career, and life. An underlying concept is what the psychologist Carol Dweck called a growth mind-set, a belief that intelligence is not fixed.

Our panelists discussed how to define and promote students' well-being, why a holistic model is more important than ever, and what lessons can be gleaned from institutions that have long enrolled and supported an underserved population.

Sara Lipka: When people talk about a "holistic student experience," what do they mean?

Tiffany Beth Mfume: There are two ways I hear "holistic approach" thrown out. First, from the perspective of colleges and universities, it means creating an experience for students that's not just academic, but about how they interact with the institution. Then, looking at individual students, what are their challenges? What are they dealing with personally? What's going on with their health, families, financial circumstances, housing, food, safety, relationships, mental health?

Amelia Parnell: There should be alignment between what students need, what we actually provide, and then what they experience. If we manage that well, I think we can use the term "holistic." If we don't, students' experiences may feel more transactional: They came, they paid, they left, and that was it.

Nance Lucas: To me what defines "holistic" is tending to the well-being of our students. It's intentionally providing experiences inside

and outside the classroom that deepen their meaning and purpose in life, providing opportunities for them to grow and learn in physical, social, financial, and emotional domains.

Ashley Finley: There may be a well-being element to this, but that term doesn't necessarily get us to resilience, coping, thriving — to a growth mind-set and the fundamental equity questions around that. We spend so much time talking about learning outcomes and soft skills. What about self-motivation, self-efficacy? For critical thinking, written communication, even teamwork, students have to have a good sense of who they are. How do we talk about equipping students with the capacity to learn, to develop interpersonally and intrapersonally? How as institutions are we holding ourselves accountable for that?

Josipa Roksa: One thing I wish we talked about more is an environment in which students are welcomed, supported, respected. That has to be the foundation to support growth and development.

Randy Bass: Everything we haven't always cared about, but now suddenly do — that's often what "holistic" means. You almost have to answer the question: What do we mean by education? If education means preparing students to be effective in the world at anything — in the workplace, as citizens — then to me you're already in holistic territory.

Lipka: "Holistic" has become something of a buzzword. What's behind the new interest?

Shauna Davis: If you look at higher education across the board, while we have a system that has worked to become more accessible, it was not designed for all. But when you have lots of people coming in the door — especially at access-oriented institutions — you're less inclined to stop and say, Are we doing this right?

As enrollments have gone down, there's more scrutiny of how well students are doing. Access is one thing, but are they actually getting what they need? Are they completing? Are they achieving some upward economic mobility? People are stopping to say, Well,

wait. We really do need to look at the student experience. That is what we own in higher-education institutions. That is what we shape.

When I'm out working with colleges, I'm focusing in on their structures, their processes, their policies, their attitudes. Those influence students' experiences and outcomes. Do we understand who we have and what they need, and are we willing or able as an institution to then try to address that?

Finley: The field is trying to respond to a lot of indicators that things are changing — that the students we meet today are very different from those a decade ago. It's not uncommon now for campuses to talk about food insecurity and homelessness. Things of that sort are no longer just one-off issues, but the current state of affairs for our students. As we started hearing more of the same narratives, it was like, OK, we've got to do something. We've got to respond.

Lucas: I would add to that the historically high number of students coming in with mental-health challenges. We have defined "well-being" at George Mason to mean building a life of vitality, purpose, resilience, and engagement. And it's contextual. It's also about social justice, about removing the barriers that prevent some populations of students from thriving at our own institutions.

Bass: What also makes this very current is workplace skills — the growing awareness of AI, machine learning, human traits, and what it means to prepare students for the next few decades. There's actually a powerful convergence — and a reinforcement of what we broadly mean by "holistic," because it is about producing the most human graduates.

Mfume: This discussion is always so interesting to me, coming from a historically black university, because the rest of higher ed is coming around to welcoming the same students we've had at Morgan State for 152 years: first-generation students, poor students, students who need some developmental remediation, who didn't necessarily have the best K-12 preparation for college, students who may lack

confidence and a sense of belonging. It's like, Welcome to our world. When I go to conferences for majority institutions, and people are talking about subpopulations of minority students or poor students or first-gen, I think, That's all our students. All 7,000 are pretty much in all of those buckets at the same time.

I want to tell everybody who's just getting on board with what the needs of students are, how institutions have to meet those needs, and how to handle accountability: It's challenging work. You're going to understand that for students already coming to you with challenges, modest success will be an overperformance. How do you explain that to your legislature? How do you engage with students who are not going to be in and out within six years? When they've stopped out, how do you get them back?

So yes, welcome. There's so much that universities have to do. And in our experience as historically black colleges and universities, you're going to be asked to do a lot more with less. And the most effective strategies to create a holistic experience, like summer bridge programs, have high price tags. So what do you do?

Lipka: What *do* you do?

Mfume: We write grants. That's what we've had to do. And there's funding available for students like ours, because student success is the hot topic. There's more money out there than there's ever been. But you have to have the time to write the grants, and you have to be able to build programs that can be sustained.

Davis: Whether it's getting external resources or taking an internal look and auditing policies and practices, we need to look at how we teach, why do we do it this way, and whether that lines up with who we are today.

Bass: The whole history of U.S. higher education is basically each institution with a theory of who belongs there and how hard the institution needs to work to have them succeed. Once you use words like "all" or "every" in front of "students," you start to define things.

"We spend so much time talking about learning outcomes and soft skills. What about self-motivation, self-efficacy? For critical thinking, written communication, even teamwork, students have to have a good sense of who they are."

—Ashley Finley

"Some people have been getting obsessed with, Does your institution have a first-year seminar, an internship program? They become check marks, like, OK, check, check, check. The new research suggests that it's actually less about what is offered than about having multiple touch points integrated over time."

—Josipa Roksa

High-Impact Practices and the Power of Data

What makes college meaningful? What stays with students years later? Most people asked to recall a defining experience point to something outside the classroom, according to research by Richard J. Light, a Harvard University education professor. Human connection is vital: That was a key finding of the Gallup-Purdue Index, a study of 30,000 graduates nationally. People are twice as likely to be engaged in their work and to be thriving over all if they can identify a professor or mentor who stimulated them, cared about them, and encouraged them.

Many institutions have sought to sustain that kind of interaction with opportunities like learning communities and semester-long projects. But the challenge of engaging and retaining more students can create a fixation on solutions. New ideas quickly become trends. The risk for colleges is rushing to adopt certain practices and ending up with a disjointed array of offerings, even one-offs.

Our panelists discussed today's most effective practices, how to make advising less transactional and more purposeful, and the importance of sharing and applying data to designing programs and services.

Sara Lipka: What practices, whether established or less common, are you seeing have some kind of impact?

Amelia Parnell: This is a huge time for us to be highlighting certain things that are effective, like the e-portfolio, a relatively new high-impact practice. The e-portfolio is an opportunity for the faculty and student affairs, in an advising capacity, to help students tell their story. Like, I had an orientation role, and I learned how to coach students to become active on campus.

Nance Lucas: There is a lot of evidence that when students have the opportunity to engage with a faculty member or a student-affairs educator in a semester-long or yearlong project, whether it's in or outside the classroom, there are considerable gains in not only their learning, but other dimensions, too. They feel more emotionally attached to the institution, and they gain more meaning and purpose in their lives. We have a structured opportunity for students to engage in research projects, and in our living-learning communities, students do an experiential-learning project each semester or year.

Tiffany Beth Mfume: Some of the effective practices really merge faculty with student affairs, like faculty living in residence halls or eating in dining halls with students and having informal discussions around tables. It's

about creating environments to engage with students in and outside the classroom.

Parnell: Student employment on campus can also be highly impactful. Moraine Valley Community College and Clemson University are two completely different types of institutions that have both made campus employment about more than just answering a phone or filing paper. They've paired students up with mentors who advise them on, say, how to create a LinkedIn profile. And you can build in connections to the classroom.

Shauna Davis: At community and technical colleges, there is a lot of emphasis on reimagining advising.

Also on onboarding and intake processes, in terms of, what do we know about students as they're coming through the door? How are we being proactive in putting them on the right path as opposed to waiting for them to come and tell us, I have a problem, and I know what question to ask? We're seeing a lot of mentoring focus on guided pathways, this idea of starting with the end goal: Who or what do you want to be?

"One of the most popular questions I hear is, What product should we invest in, what tool should we use? I oftentimes say, It's actually less about the tool and more about the change-management process of how you would use it."

—Amelia Parnell

Ashley Finley: At my former institution, we built up integrative coaching, or holistic advising, many parts of which I borrowed from LaGuardia Community College, ripped them off shamelessly. How do we think of advising not as transactional, but as a fundamental part of helping students connect the dots? More attention to what students are doing in the advising process can mean that they actually produce something: an education plan, a career plan.

We were able to wrap in pure mentoring, alumni mentoring, and coaching, which we employed adjunct faculty and staff members like the women's assistant basketball coach to do. One thing we've got to do much better in higher education is think more about the resources we have.

Any one high-impact practice is, what, maybe a semester, a year if we're lucky. We need to get more interested in the accumulation of high-impact practices. Also, they are just the means to an end. Being very clear about outcomes is critical.

Josipa Roksa: Some people have been getting obsessed with, Does your institution have a first-year seminar, an internship program? They become check marks, like, OK, check, check, check. The new research suggests that it's actually less about what is offered than about having multiple touch points integrated over time. That means thinking about who you are, who you're serving, and what you're trying to accomplish.

I think we're getting there, beyond the buzzwords, even though there's always a new one, a cool new thing you're supposed to be doing. A commitment to serving students has to be at the center, and then measuring the outcomes.

Parnell: One of the most popular questions I hear is, What product should we invest in, what tool should we use? I oftentimes say, It's actually less about the tool and more about the change-management process of how you would use it. We know what could work really well, but there's always an element that people don't quite want to embrace.

Davis: More institutions are asking, How do we get to a student-centered design? You can't do that well if you don't understand your data, and you don't understand how students are experiencing the institution. Whether through mapping the student experience, shopping your own institution or others and trying to get a feel for what it's like to be a student, or student focus groups, I am seeing more emphasis on trying to understand the real experience and the why behind it. Maybe faculty had a classroom policy but no idea what the financial-aid impact was. A number of institutions are now more focused on taking attendance and reporting midterm grades to help run interventions and provide supports.

Mfume: I'd been collecting data for several years about why students choose Morgan State University, and the No. 1 reason is to have an HBCU experience. So we went from a basic freshman orientation — placement testing, advising — to an HBCU-transition experience. One of the things we do is take our students to the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum. They literally cry, hug, faint — and every single time, they say it was their most impactful experience. That matches new research on belonging. And it's been the exact period of time that we've seen our retention and graduation rates go up.

It's hard to determine what ingredient is responsible, but it really gets down to knowing who your students are, what their goals are, and why they're there. I would challenge everyone to go get their own data and create a holistic student experience that's customized for their students and institution.

Lucas: Sometimes good pieces of data can be incredible conversation starters. We all have images in our heads about how things work and what our students are doing or not doing, how they're spending their time. We've gone to departments and presented not 30 slides, but just, Did you know these few things? And that context gets people to talk.

Roksa: We've done surveys of why students persist in their majors or not. Faculty have their own mind-sets about why, but when we talk to students, it's like, Oh wow, *this* is what

they really care about. And if we'd change just one thing, it'd actually make a big difference.

Randy Bass: Downstream data can be so powerful. I heard somebody say that if we ran a couple of zip codes of students and showed faculty how much a zip code was destiny in their classes, they would be stunned.

Finley: Data can really illuminate the picture. If we talk about flourishing, what is that? What is thriving? What is belonging? The power of good data is bringing people into a conversation because they understand what

you're talking about. They finally have some metrics to conceive of it.

Shauna made a great point on intake. We care a lot about GPA or how students scored on certain entrance or placement exams, but let's talk about their mind-set. Let's talk about their motivations for being in college, their current levels of thriving, their support networks. If we are more thoughtful about our students coming in, we'll be more able to understand how they are doing.

I was at an institution where the learning outcomes had a category for the cultivation of well-being. That became a powerful touch

point for the entire community to say, This is explicit. This is something we all care about. Faculty can see how their classroom practices and how the learning process itself contribute. And the course evaluation, a wasted assessment in most places, could get a lot smarter — and match the kinds of questions we're talking about today.

Parnell: I think about all the different types of student-success data you might be able to put into an algorithm, everything from high-school GPA to parents' income, all the way down to how often students swipe in at the fitness center. But it still comes down to the depth of the questions you can answer. One practical example is a school that saw its first-year students entering with really strong GPAs, we're talking well above 3.5. But starting in their sophomore year, the number who were leaving the institution was steadily increasing. In interviews, some students said they hadn't gotten into selective flagship institutions, so they were trying to get their GPAs up to transfer. Combining data, you find the nuance. So expand the scope, or refine the scope of what you want to know to get better information.

"Part of the challenge of the next phase is to think about how to better integrate the curricular and the co-curricular. Not just helping students do that themselves, but actually finding ways to reimagine the educational experi-ence."

—Randy Bass

Becoming a Student-Centered Institution

Making good on the increasingly popular claim to be a student-centered institution requires taking a step back. That means re-examining fixtures like administrative structures and the curriculum to spot where colleges might get in students' way or miss opportunities to foster deeper learning. Finding ways to integrate academic and student affairs can make the whole educational experience greater than the sum of its parts.

To transform themselves, some campuses are devoting resources to change management and capacity building, creating their own training programs, coordinating with peer institutions, hiring consultants, or joining networks committed to common goals like closing achievement gaps. Two common struggles are dealing with resistance to change and designing new incentives and forms of evaluation to sustain momentum. To overcome institutional barriers, strong leadership and clarity of vision are essential.

Our panelists discussed what it takes to blend the curriculum and co-curriculum, the role of faculty engagement and development in enacting such changes, how to spur culture change, and the difference between coddling students and supporting them.

Sara Lipka: Institutions of all types are having some kind of reckoning at this moment of increased attention to student success and the student experience. Let's talk about that process of asking, "Wait, how are we doing things? Are we really student-centered?" and where to go from there. How do you move from a boutique program that serves a fraction of your student population — something that requires a lot of coordination but is relatively easy for an institution to do — to changing the way you operate?

Josipa Roksa: Institutions that have primarily served a traditional population have not quite figured out effective ways of supporting students new to them. They have done a lot of "a summer program here, a mentoring program there" without really thinking through how to support all students. You admit 2,000 first-generation, low-income students, and you have a summer bridge program with 20 of them, and those 20 students have an awesome experience meeting with faculty, developing skills, and meeting friends. But if you're adding a small thing without rethinking structures, you will keep doing what you've been doing.

Shauna Davis: It is very hard to bring about any large-scale changes in student outcomes without looking at how the institution

works. That's the key if you're really committed to a holistic approach. You're accepting: These are the students we have, and we want these students. This is the population we serve.

Nance Lucas: One thing we need to reckon with is the mentality that holistic education is the domain of student-affairs professionals. It is an opportunity for all of us — faculty, staff, university leaders, upper-class students — across the board to positively impact our students' well-being. When we talk broadly about the union between academic and student affairs, it's so amorphous. We need to be more strategic in our structures and processes using a systems approach. We're not incentivized necessarily to do that. And we're not going to go anywhere fast if we just say this is a concern of a very small slice of the institution.

Randy Bass: Speaking historically, in the 18th and 19th century, people thought of the classroom as the place where students developed moral character. As research structures professionalized the university, that work got pushed out into what became student affairs. The academic side basically said, You do all the moral development. We might think of this moment as a paradigm shift, a time for us to reunite the development of the mind with the development of human character.

Part of the challenge of the next phase is to think about how to better integrate the curricular and the co-curricular. Not just helping students do that themselves, but actually finding ways to reimagine the educational enterprise. What does it look like to build a much more holistic, responsive environment, given that the incentives for tenure and promotion are not going to change?

To me, a big piece of it is to create new models of team teaching in the broadest sense: team-designed, team-delivered, experience-based, community-based, applied learning. It's happening in centers for social justice, for service learning, and in entrepreneurship hubs and makerspaces. There's a growing group of people who already have a hybrid academic-student-affairs mentality about personal growth and development.

Lucas: In many cases, our promotion and tenure criteria and faculty incentives are the institutional barriers that prevent us from doing exactly what you just described.

Roksa: I'm usually a pessimist, but I'm going to say something optimistic here. I work with a lot of faculty, and I would say many are pushing against the old version of the tenure model. Our faculty is becoming more diverse, with a lot more understanding that students have a life outside of the time they sit in class. I'm hopeful that the younger faculty, despite the tenure wall, are going to be engaged and willing to collaborate. I'm impressed by how many of our faculty do that even though they really have no incentives other than knowing it's the right thing to do to support our students. I hope we can change the structures to make it even more likely for them to see what needs to happen.

Amelia Parnell: A lot of what we're hearing now about student services and student affairs mirrors what happened years ago with institutional research. There used to be a centralized function, and then offices like HR, financial aid, and academic affairs needed somebody to run their own analyses. Today you see graduate programs like medicine and law saying, Hey, I need somebody to talk to students about loan debt or the pressures of the field. It's a coexistence of the student-affairs function, the centralized office, and learning in different domains.

That creates a bit of a rub: Why should I do this work that previously I didn't have to do? But if we follow the trends of institutional research, whether you have a student-affairs position or, say, a faculty role, some aspect of your work will be student-focused, like putting information about the food pantry in the syllabus and thinking more holistically about what students need.

Tiffany Beth Mfume: We've been pretty blessed to have just two presidents in the last 30-plus years because we've been able to think these questions through without major interruptions. We're an outlier. When leadership turns over, there's sometimes a whole new vision for what works best, where different offices

"What I call the 'seduction of the example' is to insert programs or services here or there thinking something could be really successful. But without the foundational components of leadership and culture change, it's really hard to achieve good results."

—Shauna Davis

belong, where programs belong. You scrap what you have and start all over — I've seen so many of my colleagues go through that. A new visionary comes and says, Well, where I come from, we do it this way. I'm going to restructure. So you start all over, and you ask the same questions again and again. That's a challenge I see across higher ed. There comes a point when you just can't ask yourself any more questions. The question is, What are you going to do about it?

It's been a nice progression of us as an institution critically asking ourselves questions about processes and how things work together. You begin to make changes like moving financial aid and the registrar under academic affairs. Now we're going to the one-stop student services so they don't have to figure out, I go to the bursar for this, I go to residence life for that. Students don't need to know who has the answer to their question. They just need to bring their question to a team that's cross-trained.

"One thing we need to reckon with is the mentality that holistic education is the domain of student-affairs professionals. It is an opportunity for all of us — faculty, staff, university leaders, upper-class students — across the board to positively impact our students' well-being."

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Davis: When you look at an organization that achieves any type of transformation, true transformation, you can usually point to leadership. The president isn't necessarily the only one doing the work. But the clarity of the vision, the consistency of the vision, the commitment to resourcing the vision, the accountability pieces in there — those are the key points.

The other piece a lot of institutions will talk about is culture change. You can't just give an announcement at a convocation and say, We're going to transform the student experience. When people who work at the institution have autonomy to carry these things out, and there is faith placed in them, the alignment is clear. The exemplars we point to nationally have that in common. What I call the "seduction of the example" is to insert programs or services here or there thinking something could be really successful. But without the foundational components of leadership and culture change, it's really hard to achieve good results. There has to be an understanding as to what you prioritize, what you value, what you give space and time to, what you evaluate yourselves against, what we communicate out in public, how you talk about yourselves. The institutions that are moving the needle have in common the clarity there.

Mfume: Two things I see that can act as a gateway to culture change are keeping the wins in front of people and having people feel that their roles are valued. When we won an advising award, for $2,500, we gave five $500 cash awards to faculty, with no restrictions — buy a computer, go to a conference, fix up your office — based on who was engaging with our advising tool. We publicized it greatly, to say, The work you do matters. We accomplished this for our students because of your work. It was a small investment in making people feel valued.

Lucas: We've operationalized in our 10-year strategic plan at George Mason the goal that all members of our community thrive. That has allowed us to be really creative. Faculty receive curriculum-transformation grants to design new courses or add modules. There are research groups on well-being — and a well-being pathway in our general-education core. Our student-affairs educators are working on a resilience badge, a digital credential we're aiming to put fully online. Our plan is to require all incoming students, including transfer students, to complete that resilience badge.

We are not going to be finished at the end of the 10-year strategic plan. We're still learning and redesigning.

Davis: Whether or not holistic support is seen as coddling is an important conversation. People have different schools of thought in terms of, How much support? What are we going to provide? When we talk about wraparound services, some people think that's taking education into another area.

If you're not taking attendance because students are adults, well yes, they should be able to get to class. But what if you are in a service area where students lack transportation, or depend on public transportation, or what if they have other real-life issues that get in the way? Being able to use attendance as an indicator of when students stop engaging means you could run an intervention and potentially not only keep a student in school but change the trajectory of his or her life. I don't see that as coddling. I want to make that distinction.

If we're really committed to upward mobility, and all those sorts of things we talk about, we need to understand who our students are, where they come from, and how they experience the institution — and then be responsive and proactive to remove systemic barriers that don't need to be there.

Holistic support means being more aware of who you're serving and what they need. That doesn't mean the institution doesn't teach well or believe in rigor or have standards. It means we understand what our mission is, and we're committed to giving more people an opportunity to actually reach their potential. Or at least not stand in the way.

To deepen your understanding of the holistic student experience, here is a selection of articles and reports that build on ideas or programs mentioned in the discussion.

Beyond the Skills Gap: Preparing College Students for Life and Work, by Matthew T. Hora with Ross J. Benbow and Amanda K. Oleson, Harvard Education Press, 2016.

"The Future of Learning: How Colleges Can Transform the Educational Experience," by Beth McMurtrie, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2018.

The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World In Flux, by Cathy N. Davidson, Basic Books, 2017.

"The Promise and Peril of Predictive Analytics in Higher Education: A Landscape Analysis," by Manuela Ekowo and Iris Palmer, New America, 2016.

Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice, by Lori D. Patton, Kristen A. Renn, Florence M. Guido, and Stephen John Quaye, Jossey-Bass, 2016.

"The Truth About Student Success: Myths, Realities, and 30 Practices That Are Working," by Sara Lipka, Kelly Field, Claire Hansen, Maura Mahoney, and Lauren Sieben, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2019.

"Using Data to Improve Student Outcomes: Learning From Leading Colleges," The Education Trust, 2016.

Using Evidence of Student Learning to Improve Higher Education, by George D. Kuh, Stanley O. Ikenberry, Natasha A. Jankowski, Timothy Reese Cain, Peter T. Ewell, Pat Hutchings, and Jillian Kinzie, Jossey-Bass, 2015.

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