



**Increasing Equity in
College Student Experience:**
Findings from a National Collaborative



The Student Experience Project (SEP) is a collaborative of university leaders, faculty, researchers, and national education and improvement organizations who are committed to accelerating the adoption of innovative, evidence-based practices that improve student academic outcomes by transforming the college student experience and creating equitable learning environments.

UNIVERSITY PARTNERS

- Colorado State University
- Portland State University
- The University of New Mexico
- The University of Toledo
- University of Colorado Denver
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Other institutions of higher education are participating in the SEP as part of a Peer Learning Network focused on the first week of class. They are Florida International University; Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis; Morgan State University; North Carolina A&T State University; Rutgers University–Newark; University of Illinois Chicago; University of North Texas; The University of Texas at San Antonio; and West Virginia State University.

LEARNING PARTNERS

The Student Experience Project is led by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU); the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU); the College Transition Collaborative (CTC, now part of Equity Accelerator); EducationCounsel; the Project for Education Research That Scales (PERTS); and Shift. The SEP is funded by the Raikes Foundation.



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Introduction

As our K-12 education system works to prepare students for their future, and as our nation grapples with how to make college more affordable, institutions of higher education are seeking new ways to ensure that every student knows they belong on campus and is supported to complete their degree.

More than three decades of research demonstrates that learning environments designed with students' psychological experiences in mind can lead to increases in students' academic engagement, improved well-being, and more equitable outcomes (e.g., Tinto, 1987; Hurtado et al., 1998; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Paunesku et al., 2015; McNair et al., 2016; Yeager et al., 2016; Brady et al., 2020; Canning et al., 2021). The findings are clear: when students' learning environments help them feel competent, valued, respected, connected to others, and supported in their learning, students are more likely to engage in behaviors that support academic achievement (e.g., attend office hours, seek mentors, use institutional resources, etc.), and this in turn supports greater retention in college and degree attainment. Supportive learning environments are particularly important for structurally disadvantaged students—such as Black, Latinx, and Native American students, first-generation college students, and students from low-income backgrounds—who are more likely to face obstacles to their education that compound long-standing societal inequities.

Leveraging this evidence in social psychology, educational psychology, and brain science, the Student Experience Project (SEP) sought to develop practical approaches that would enable instructors and administrators to establish learning conditions that are known to promote academic engagement and increase equity in academic outcomes¹. This effort has yielded professional development resources and measurement tools aimed at helping faculty adapt practical classroom practices in authentic ways that fit their teaching style. Additionally, these resources and tools can help university leaders create a student-centered institutional culture where all students are valued, respected, and supported to succeed. Critically, the SEP has also demonstrated—in real-world practice and context—that such interventions result in improved student experience which is associated with academic success, such as lower rates of withdrawal and failing grades and increased rates of students receiving A's and B's in their courses. The work of the SEP suggests ways in which faculty, institutions, and policymakers can adapt and implement these powerful tools to improve their students' educational experience, and therefore, the likelihood of students' success in higher education.



¹The purpose of the SEP was to learn through continuous improvement how practices derived from scientific research could be adapted for wide-scale implementation by higher education practitioners for their specific contexts, with outcomes similar to those observed in rigorous research trials. The project was not designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge about causal relationships, and the findings should be interpreted as results from a continuous improvement effort.

About This Report

The SEP has worked intensively with partnering universities to understand how to apply social-psychological research in practical, scalable ways to support more equitable learning environments both within and beyond the classroom. This report describes early findings and lessons learned from the SEP and presents future directions for university leaders seeking to systematically measure and improve student experience. The primary focus of this report is the work done by faculty in communities of practice starting in fall 2020 to develop knowledge about students' psychological experiences of their learning environments, adapt and implement evidence-based pedagogical practices, and gather data about how these efforts were associated with students' experiences and outcomes for the purpose of improvement. These faculty-focused efforts were also accompanied by institutional leaders' actions in other areas critical to student experience and success, such as creating non-stigmatizing and accessible academic and social supports, building inclusive physical and virtual campus environments, and developing student-centered institutional structures and policies.

This report includes student experience and academic outcome data from the 2020-2021 academic year. Faculty and instructors surveyed students about their experiences at regular intervals throughout the term, and those responses comprised an overall student experience score paired with the student grade. The data were used to assess the association between classroom-based efforts to improve students' experiences and academic outcomes. The learning reflected in this report is also complemented by qualitative feedback from faculty participants and university leaders concerning the impact of the SEP on their own experiences and on wider cultural transformation at their institutions.

Overview of the Project

Over the course of the project, nearly 300 faculty at six universities convened to learn about and adapt new classroom practices, ultimately implementing them to create more supportive and equitable learning environments. The SEP focused on improving learning conditions across five social-psychological constructs that, according to past research, play a key role in students' academic success and retention: Social Belonging, Institutional Growth Mindset, Identity Safety, Trust and Fairness, and Self-Efficacy. Using knowledge about these key constructs to guide their efforts, along with support and guidance from the SEP network and organizational partners, SEP faculty:

- ▶ **Participated in SEP-developed professional development workshops** that focused on practices to create growth mindset cultures in their courses, promote student social belonging and identity safety, and create an inclusive classroom environment;
- ▶ **Revised course syllabi** to include messaging and language proven to increase sense of belonging and convey a growth mindset about student abilities;
- ▶ **Used a library of evidence-based teaching resources** to implement practical, adaptable approaches in their courses that academic research has found to positively affect students' well-being, engagement, and academic outcomes by addressing one or more of the key SEP constructs. Examples of evidence-informed practices implemented by faculty include revising course policies to better promote equity in students' experiences, using feedback approaches that support academic engagement and growth, and highlighting the work of diverse scholars in course materials;

- ▶ **Engaged in communities of practice** to examine student data on the classroom experience, learn and share lessons across faculty, grow interest among other faculty in adopting changes, and contribute to the body of knowledge on campus about the student experience;
- ▶ **Identified and spread productive strategies across the SEP network** of institutions, researchers, and faculty through focus groups, surveys, monthly calls and network newsletters, and presentations at semi-annual convenings.

One of the primary goals of the SEP was to make educational experiences and outcomes more equitable for students, with an initial focus on STEM contexts. In service of this goal at the onset of this project, SEP researchers drew on national trends and institutional data at the six participating universities to identify priority populations with the most significant inequities in outcomes. These analyses led to the identification of three priority populations: Women, students from structurally disadvantaged racial backgrounds (e.g., Black, Latinx, and Native American students), and students experiencing basic needs (e.g., food or housing) insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018). Informed by this exploratory analysis, the SEP network aimed to not only improve student experience and outcomes for all students but also to eliminate the disparity across demographic groups.

The launch of the project coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden shift to remote learning heightened awareness of disparities in students' experiences and created urgency to support both students and faculty in adjusting to the changing circumstances. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic and its impact on the campus experience posed initial challenges for faculty engagement in the project. These challenges were overcome through co-designing with campuses and being responsive to faculty input throughout the process. The SEP adapted by redesigning in-person events to the virtual space and devising practices that faculty could use in a remote teaching environment. Campuses convened faculty virtually to build community and help faculty seek feedback on connecting with and supporting students.

After the launch of the network, many participating faculty surveyed students every three to four weeks about their classroom experiences. Surveys were administered using an SEP-developed online tool that enabled each instructor to receive timely feedback on students' experiences in their course, track students' progress, and identify new opportunities for improvement throughout the term. In addition to the disaggregated classroom-level reports provided to instructors, aggregate data were shared in both campus and SEP network-wide reports. Data sharing across these levels modeled transparency at all levels and created a culture of using data to learn and improve.

In addition to the work undertaken in classrooms, participating universities used the social-psychological principles of the SEP to inform changes to their campus environment and student services. Several institutions revised messaging and policies for early alerts to integrate student-centered language normalizing academic difficulty to proactively encourage use of campus resources and promote a sense of belonging. One institution integrated these principles into trainings for academic advisors. Another institution renovated its pre-calculus lab to foster greater collaborative learning among students while emphasizing that setbacks are a normal part of the college experience. As part of their involvement in the SEP, participating universities also partnered with student leaders in their efforts to create student-centered environments. Examples include an SEP network-wide, student-led #WeBelongInCollege social media campaign conducted in partnership with Get Schooled, as well as peer facilitators' efforts to create small communities and a sense of belonging in STEM gateway courses.

Participation by Students, Faculty, and Administrators

Over the course of the project, 295 faculty² participated in the Student Experience Project's classroom-based efforts to improve student experience. Approximately 40% of faculty voluntarily disclosed their demographics to the SEP research team. Of those who responded, the majority of participants were white (68%) and were women (77%). Eighty-six percent of faculty who provided demographic information were in non-tenure track teaching positions.

Participating instructors on each campus were supported by a team of 6-10 faculty leaders and administrators who helped to facilitate, institutionalize, and spread the work of the SEP over the course of the project.

Approximately 10,000 students in SEP-participating courses provided feedback on their experiences via surveys each term. Of those who provided demographic information, an average of 55% per term identified as women; 30% identified as Black, Latinx, and/or Native American; and 34% reported having experienced basic needs insecurity in the previous 12 months.

Findings

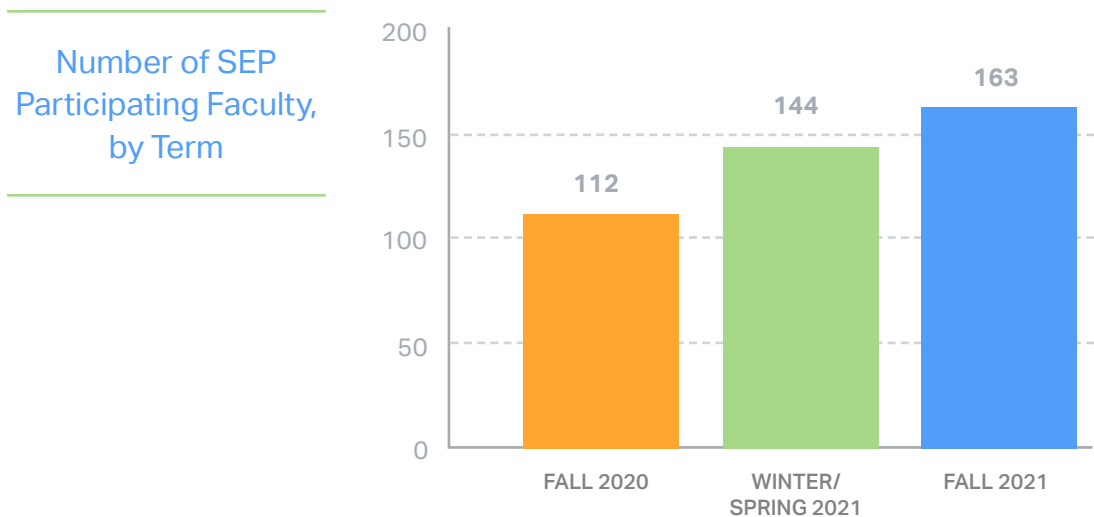
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FINDINGS

Faculty are essential and interested partners in efforts to improve student experience and create institutional change.

Faculty are often underutilized as levers of institutional change, despite numerous reports that point to the importance of engaging faculty in efforts to improve student success (American Council on Education, 2017; Gyurko & Snow, 2020). The SEP outcomes highlight the benefits of such engagement for faculty. **Faculty cited this work as a motivating factor for teaching excellence, re-invigorating their dedication to teaching, and increasing their connection with students and peers.** This enthusiasm is reflected in the growing numbers of faculty who participated with the SEP over the course of the project, despite the context of a global pandemic (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



² This report covers results from the 2020 – 2021 academic year, during which 188 unique faculty participated in the project. Data from fall 2021 are currently being processed, and instructor participation totals for this term are preliminary.

While many faculty care about and want to be engaged in efforts to improve their students' experience, the support and opportunities for faculty to learn and build skills in this area are sporadic and often on the margins of faculty responsibilities (Astin, 2016; O'Meara, 2022). The SEP worked to shift this norm by creating ongoing opportunities for faculty to expand their knowledge and gain new skills, as well as share learning and reflections in community with their peers. Investing in this kind of structured support for faculty to develop the expertise needed to improve student experience in their own classrooms was key for gaining faculty buy-in and participation.

The following characteristics of the SEP design were found to be particularly helpful in building faculty interest and engagement:

► **Evidence-based education and resources:** As part of their SEP participation, faculty were introduced to relevant foundational social-psychological research and provided a set of practices informed by empirical evidence. Workshops and implementation resources provided faculty with the training and tools necessary to confidently incorporate these evidence-informed practices into their courses in ways that felt authentic to them. Communities of practice provided the structure for faculty to adapt and integrate these approaches into regular teaching and to share resources that facilitated implementation. Faculty and administrators relayed that having strong empirical evidence for SEP resources paired with discussion and tools for translating the research into practice was a key motivating factor for their participation.

Our work here has really created a spark in me that I always had, but could not find where to start or how to learn. My past experiences and knowledge about the classroom were lacking something. This work has really helped me focus my intentions in the classroom.

SEP Faculty Participant



[This work] has opened my eyes to how I can create a more inclusive classroom. I feel the tools I implemented, from exam wrappers to sharing my own personal struggles, have helped me become a more effective instructor and improve student success.

SEP Faculty Participant

► **Measurement for improvement, not instructor evaluation:** Universities recognize that creating student-centered environments is important for ensuring equitable experiences and outcomes. However, most universities don't have reliable or timely mechanisms for understanding how students experience their learning environments in ways that support actionable change. Regular measurement of student experience in the SEP courses allowed university leaders and faculty to use a continuous improvement approach in their efforts to support student experience. Faculty were able to track student experience over the term, identify opportunities for improvement, and share their insights with colleagues for support and learning. Importantly, data collected on students' experiences in the SEP were used to help faculty identify opportunities for their own growth and inform their adaptation of new practices. This formative process allowed faculty to be critical partners in advancing student success and equity. It also helped to ensure that faculty felt comfortable sharing their data with each other in collaborative efforts to improve.

The act of measuring student experience and the available resources really helped me to see how much teaching is a science that we can practice and experiment with to continually look at and improve our service to students.

SEP Faculty Participant



► **Creating a sense of community:** When faculty are engaged with a supportive community of peers and equipped with practical, approachable resources to inform implementation, they can translate their care for their students into more inclusive and supportive classroom environments. SEP leaders worked with faculty to ensure that communities of practice were characterized by trust and mutual respect, resulting in open sharing and dialogue about challenge points and effective practices. Faculty consistently cite this feature of SEP communities of practice as a benefit they derived from participating in the project.



Not only would faculty embed a few change ideas and test them, but they would really start thinking about how they're designing all of their courses and have that impact with conversations they have with departmental colleagues and the work that they're doing in service....This is not just about making changes in a particular course, but it's really a vehicle for changing the culture of the institution, to focus on the student experience, and these faculty have become a sort of core population who are really advocating for that work and those kinds of changes.

Institutional Leader, SEP Participating University

► **Elevating student voice:** Throughout the SEP, students' voices, experiences, and perspectives were integrated into university initiatives, network events, and decision-making processes through the use of surveys, focus groups, student panels, and student leadership programs on SEP campuses and in the SEP network. Students' rich contributions to the work of the SEP played an essential role in motivating faculty participation, directing the trajectory of the project, and informing impactful change.

It's been really illuminating to see how empowering it is (both for students and the instructor) to actively work on valuing diversity in the classroom, and to collectively shift language/behavior to promote a more welcoming space. Students seemed to open up more in discussions and be willing to share personal stories related to the course content.

SEP Faculty Participant

The participation in SEP this semester has been impactful in helping me understand that students are facing challenges outside of the classroom and that a little grace and understanding can go a long way to making a positive impact on a student's experience in my class.

SEP Faculty Participant



Once they were involved in the SEP, many participating faculty became champions for the work, drawing other faculty into SEP participation and helping to spread SEP efforts within other spaces at the university (e.g., advising and non-STEM disciplines). This growth in faculty networks has led to institutional transformation on SEP campuses. As of spring 2022, participating campuses are taking various approaches to sustain and systematize their SEP efforts, including creating permanent staff positions to support communities of practice, partnering with centers for teaching and learning to provide workshops on SEP classroom practices, and training SEP participants to lead their own communities of practice.



There are more and more people engaged every day who are talking about this. Chairs are having more and more experience talking about these issues....We've been building up this group of folks—administrators and faculty alike—who are engaged in working towards these goals [of improving equity in student experience]. I think what we're seeing is that over time, it's going to get harder and harder to retreat from this, because there will be more and more people who are going to work to keep you at the table.

Institutional Leader, SEP Participating University

2

With the right resources and institutional support, faculty can meaningfully improve students' experience.

FINDINGS

Results from the SEP demonstrate that, with the right support, faculty can substantially improve students' experiences in ways that predict higher academic engagement and success. **In the first two terms of implementing SEP practices in their courses, the cohort collectively saw a 10.5% increase in students reporting globally positive experiences³ of their learning environments, with some faculty seeing gains of more than twice the cohort average.** SEP efforts were most strongly associated with improved experiences for Black, Latina, and Native American women who are experiencing financial stress. The percentage of Black, Latina, and Native American women experiencing financial stress who reported an overall positive experience of their learning environment increased by approximately 25% in fall 2020 and spring 2021.

Qualitative data from students confirm that SEP practices contributed positively to their sense of belonging, identity safety, and perceptions that their instructor believes in all students' ability to grow and supports students' learning.

I feel that [my professor] believes each and every one of us can succeed. I believe that his structuring of this course proves this as well....He also has made it clear that he wants us to learn, not just memorize material. He is available to help outside of class time; he has given us the chance to work on things as groups both during lecture and outside of lecture. I think he believes in every single student's ability to learn and grow.

Student, SEP Participating University



³ Students were considered to have a globally positive experience of their learning environment if their responses to SEP survey items indicated they were in the ideal experience range across at least four of the five social-psychological dimensions of student experience measures in the SEP. All survey items were on a 6 point scale, and indexed together into a single student experience score (SEI Score) for analysis.

3

Improved student experience predicts improved academic outcomes and engagement.

FINDINGS

SEP results (fall 2020 and spring 2021) are consistent with a robust body of research that has demonstrated the relationship between students' experiences and their academic performance. As predicted by prior research, students' self-reported experiences of their learning environments in SEP courses were strongly and positively associated with grade outcomes. As students' experiences became more positive over the term, their likelihood of earning an A or B in the course increased, and their likelihood of earning a D, F, or W (formally withdrawing from the course) decreased (see Figures 2 and 3).

Overall, rates of students earning a D, F, or W fell by 26% in fall 2020 and by 18% in spring 2021 compared with historical rates for the same instructors in the same courses. The rates of students earning A's or B's, meanwhile, rose by 12% in fall 2020 and by 7% in spring 2021. It is important to note that this academic year coincided with the pandemic during which different institutional withdrawal policies may have influenced DFW grades outcomes⁴.

In addition to a robust association with academic outcomes, many faculty also observed increased student engagement as a result of participation in the SEP both in class and in office hours.

Figure 2

Probability of Earning A or B in STEM Courses, by Change in Student Experience Score | Spring 2021

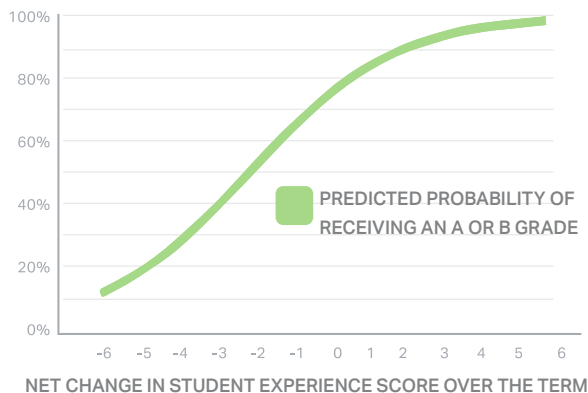
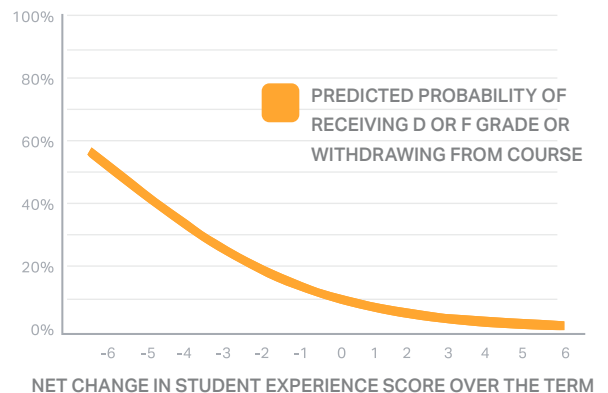


Figure 3

Probability of Earning D or F or Withdrawing from STEM Courses, by Change in Student Experience Score | Spring 2021



Quantitatively gains were made in all categories of the SEP survey. In addition, more students attended drop-in hours and reached out more frequently. The use of wise feedback, connecting concepts to social policy issues, and the use of scaffolded assignments ensured that there was a high degree of communication between instructor and student, that students could focus on improvement, and that they turned in higher quality work. *SEP Faculty Participant*

⁴ The project assessed change in academic outcomes for the same instructors in the same courses to gain insights into the improvement of teaching practice over time for participants in the community of practice. However, different institutional withdrawal policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 likely influenced DFW outcomes in these terms.

4

Student experience has important implications for educational equity.

FINDINGS

University leaders increasingly recognize the importance of addressing inequities in student experience that contribute to inequitable outcomes (The California Higher Education Taskforce, 2021; Bush et al., 2020). The following important trends were found in SEP data:

► **Trends in the data consistently point to a more robust association between students' experiences and academic outcomes for members of structurally disadvantaged groups.**

A positive student experience is associated with reduced likelihood of earning a D, F, or W (withdrawing) from a course for all students, particularly for students from structurally disadvantaged backgrounds (see Figure 4). In the spring 2021 term, the association between a student's positive experience in a class and their reduced likelihood of earning a D, F, or W in a STEM class was 26% greater for women than men; 43% greater for financially insecure students than financially secure students; and 31% greater for Black, Latinx, and Native American students as compared to structurally advantaged groups within higher education. This trend is consistent with past research that has found that structurally disadvantaged, educationally underserved, or numerically underrepresented students (e.g., low-income students; Black, Latinx, and Native American students; women in STEM fields) often see greater benefits from institutional efforts to improve the social-psychological experiences in their learning environments than students from more structurally advantaged groups do (e.g., Walton & Cohen, 2011; Stephens et al., 2014; Harakiewicz et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2020).



The data have shown me that marginalized communities truly do experience belonging differently in my course. It is not theoretical to me anymore. This makes my responsibility toward real change feel more imperative and personal.

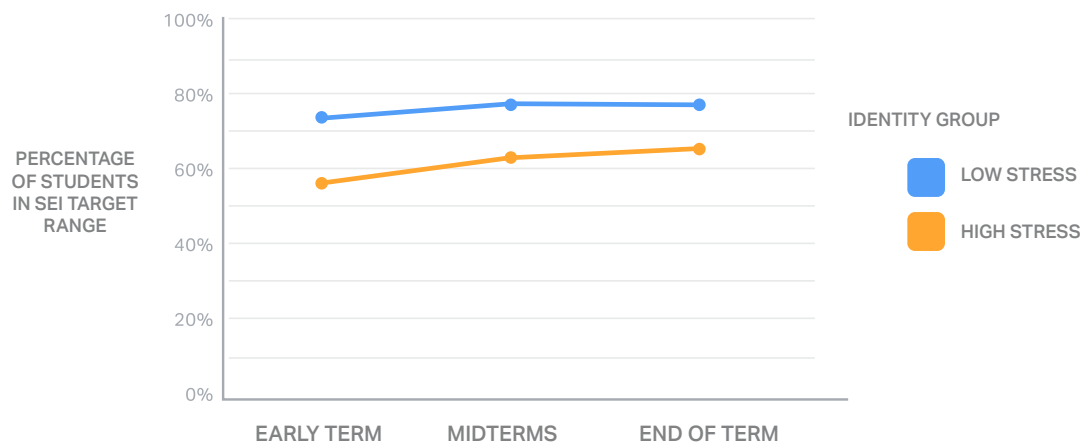
SEP Faculty Participant



► **SEP results are consistent with other reports** (e.g., Dubick et al., Matthews & Cady, 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019) **documenting high levels of basic needs insecurity for participating campuses.** Across the SEP cohort, more than 30% of survey respondents reported experiencing housing and/or food insecurity at some point in the previous 12 months. Students experiencing basic needs insecurity rated their student experience lower than did their peers with more financial resources. Importantly, these gaps narrowed by an average of 20% across the fall 2020 and spring 2021 terms as faculty implemented practices to support equity in students' experiences. Nevertheless, significant differences in student experience by financial status remained, reflecting the durable negative impact of financial stress on students in spite of successful interventions. While the SEP demonstrates that faculty can use targeted strategies to narrow experience gaps between low-income students and their better-resourced peers, these efforts are not sufficient on their own. Addressing the obstacles to educational equity faced by financially insecure students requires institutional investments and commitments that include, but are not limited to, classroom interventions (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Percentage of Students Reporting Overall Positive Student Experience | Spring 2021



5

Efforts to improve student experience can also enhance instructor belonging and job satisfaction.

FINDINGS

While this project did not set out to assess the impacts of the SEP on faculty, an unexpected finding of this work was that, like their students, **many faculty expressed an increased sense of belonging at their universities as a result of their participation in the project.** Moreover, when faculty engage in communities of practice to develop their teaching expertise and to connect with other faculty who have common goals, they feel better equipped as educators and more supported as individuals. Several SEP universities chose to provide small stipends for faculty participation to acknowledge the value and importance of this work; faculty and community leaders alike reported that this validation contributed to the positive experience of the community of practice. This is important for equitable participation of faculty, including adjunct instructors who teach a large percentage of introductory courses. They are critical partners for student success efforts, yet typically are not incentivized and supported to the same degree as other faculty. These findings have significant implications for institutions as they consider how to be responsive to faculty needs at a time when more faculty than ever before are considering leaving higher education (Nietzel, 2021; Schroeder, 2021; McClure & Fryar, 2022).

SEP was a valuable support system for me as a junior faculty member. I have received a lot of pushback from senior colleagues (who are white and/or come from upper-middle class backgrounds) whose feedback suggests that I don't "push" students hard enough and that my policies are too lenient.

My classroom is arranged to support marginalized students especially, and it looks different from "traditional" classroom spaces.

I feel emboldened to stick with many of the SEP strategies, and I know I have SEP to refer to for resources and help if I should need it.

Lastly, my syllabus DOES look different after SEP and is better aligned with who I am as an instructor.

SEP Faculty Participant

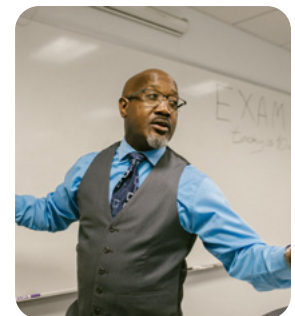


I have never felt like I belonged at [this university] more than I do now.
SEP Faculty Participant



It is my belief that this experience has made me a better instructor and colleague. Not only did it give me these skills, but it also boosted my confidence as an educator. I'm no longer uneasy to try new things in the classroom.

SEP Faculty Participant



Future Directions and Conclusions

The SEP demonstrates that the growing research on student experience can translate to practical and scalable approaches for redesigning learning environments with a focus on equity. The potential for this work extends beyond the classroom. As universities increasingly value student experience, they will learn more about the resources needed to help all students feel they have the support to grow and achieve. This project provides an initial set of resources and tools that universities can use to get started in this important work.

This project also points to the need for future efforts that extend the understanding of how learning environments attuned to student experience can positively contribute to more equitable outcomes.

Future efforts on student experience could focus on the following:

- ▶ **Financial stress:** Financial strain and other crises due to the pandemic led many students to withdraw from classes and from communication with faculty and support services staff. Engaging students who are experiencing overwhelming disruption to their lives requires attention at a broader scale than classroom-based interventions alone. Future efforts should examine the impact of financial stress on students' experiences and academic outcomes, and ways that institutions can alleviate the impacts of financial hardship through policies and practices that support basic needs security and the experiences of low-income students.
- ▶ **Longitudinal tracking of student outcomes:** The SEP focused on continuous improvement by collecting frequent, actionable data influencing academic outcomes over the semester. Future applied projects or initiatives would benefit from follow up over time to adequately assess downstream impacts of student experience on grades, retention in major pathways, and graduation rates.
- ▶ **Student leadership:** Efforts to address inequities are most effective when they center the perspectives and experiences of those most deeply impacted by the problem. As such, the SEP sought student insights and feedback to inform the focus and direction of the project through the use of incentivized surveys and focus groups and compensated student panels. At some campuses, students also gave input on SEP committee leadership and identifying and implementing changes. This is a powerful area for future initiatives to extend efforts to deeply collaborate with students as partners and co-creators in institutional change efforts. Authentic partnership with students positions them as experts in their own needs, compensates them for their expertise and contributions, and encourages them to openly reflect upon and share their experience. To create this culture of collaboration and partnership, future initiatives should explore and address the systemic barriers that prevent student engagement in efforts that inform institutional decision making.
- ▶ **Faculty Demographics:** Insights on the impact of faculty demographics (e.g., race, tenure vs. non-tenure track) was limited due to lack of data. We encourage future endeavors that incentivize and track data for faculty at all ranks and from diverse backgrounds. This will help us better understand how and for whom institutional actions that support student experience-focused faculty efforts are the most effective.

An important conclusion from this work is the value of student success support approaches centered on institutional transformation. By clearly locating the responsibility for change in the university, institutions can begin to address and dismantle systemic barriers to success that perpetuate inequities and undermine students' persistence and achievement in higher education. This work requires building awareness of these inequities among stakeholders across the university (administrators, faculty, staff, and leadership) and developing a shared responsibility and clear roles for everyone to play in changing systems, learning environments, and overall culture.

What Institutions Can Do

Based on the learning from the SEP, universities can take several actions to better understand student experience; address inequities in outcomes; and make changes to support the well-being, engagement, and academic outcomes of all students.

1

Center the perspective and experience of students in efforts to improve student success.

Sense of belonging matters inside and outside of the classroom. In addition to practices that improve course experience, colleges can use insights from this project to improve other aspects of academic and campus experience. Understanding students' experience helps leaders craft academic and social support services that are non-stigmatizing and equitable, design physical and virtual environments that promote belonging, and critically examine existing structures and practices to determine how they can be better attuned to student needs. Centering efforts on building a growth-minded institutional culture where all students feel they belong complements other efforts to advance equitable student success and provides a powerful framing for this work. Every division within an institution—from academic affairs to student affairs, from advising to financial aid to campus police—should be considering how students experience its organization's supports, communications, and policies.

2

Gather real-time data to continuously improve student experience using an iterative approach.

The SEP advanced a novel approach in collecting and using data, not just after the fact with end-of-term evaluations or cyclical assessments, but in real time, so that faculty and staff can best support students when they still have the opportunity to rebound from challenges. Giving faculty ownership of their data allows them to use it formatively to improve instruction and adapt their practices. This process creates the foundation for an authentic partnership that supports buy-in and broader adoption among faculty. Real-time data on student experience also offer a way to assess and demonstrate excellence in teaching; instructors can highlight gains in student experience across the term and connect those gains to their teaching practice. These data complement other campus-wide efforts to support student achievement through early interventions and analytics (e.g., early alerts, adaptive courseware, and midterm grade reporting). At the college or department level, student experience data can provide actionable insights when combined with best practices for disaggregating outcome data by demographic group to identify equity gaps. Disparities in outcomes by demographic group often indicate disparities in student experience by group membership, so having these data can inform leaders where improvement is needed and prompt change.

3

Partner with faculty to support their role as change agents promoting equitable student experience.

All faculty—from department chairs to non-tenure track and adjunct faculty who teach many of the large introductory courses—can play a role in improving student experience. This requires developing approaches that systematically support faculty engagement and align with faculty's motivation to help their students succeed. A first step is making instructor resources widely available and easily accessible and, at the institutional level, clearly valuing and demonstrably incentivizing their use. The development of community is also important; the most successful efforts incorporate structures for collaboration and foster the same concepts of growth and belonging among faculty, staff, and administrators who do this work. Finally, institutions' broader norms, culture, and policies should reflect the commitment to equitable student experience. For example, universities could revise tenure and promotion guidelines to align with the importance of demonstrating actions to understand and improve student outcomes. They could also build a focus on the student experience into the central workload and expectations for faculty. Administrators could partner with faculty governance and unions to consider new ways of working together to improve equity in student experience.

4

Commit to accountability that centers equitable student experience in every division at the institution.

Creating equitable learning environments does not happen overnight and is not a once-and-done endeavor. In order to create sustainable change, institutions should establish long- and short-term goals for improving student experience within and across divisions. Additionally, progress toward these goals should be consistently tracked, disaggregated, and widely shared. Institutions must have a willingness to innovate, as well as an openness to come up short and learn from failures and feedback. Just as professional development for faculty helps them improve students' experiences in the classroom, administrators need opportunities to develop their leadership skills in centering and promoting equitable experiences in the domains where they can affect change.

To support institutions in advancing their goals to promote equitable student experience and outcomes, the SEP has made the tools and resources developed through this project freely available in the new **SEP Resource Hub**. The hub includes:

- ▶ **The First Day Toolkit**, an online module and companion resources for revising syllabi to support student belonging on the first day of class;
- ▶ **The Community of Practice Handbook**, a guide for bringing faculty together to improve student experience;
- ▶ **The Classroom Practices Library**, field-tested guides for faculty to implement evidence-based practices to support equity, belonging and growth throughout the term;
- ▶ **Ascend**, a data-driven professional learning program for instructors and administrators to understand how students are experiencing their learning environment and what they can do to make those experiences more equitable, more engaging, and more supportive of student success.

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