

11-29-2015

Towards a Relationship-Centered Approach in Higher Education: The Dynamic Student Development Metatheodel (DSDM)

Mark Frederick

Pietro A. Sasso

William R. Barratt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/nyjsa>

Recommended Citation

Frederick, M., Sasso, P. A., & Barratt, W. R. (2015). Towards a Relationship-Centered Approach in Higher Education: The Dynamic Student Development Metatheodel (DSDM). *The New York Journal of Student Affairs*, 15(2). Retrieved from <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/nyjsa/vol15/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The New York Journal of Student Affairs by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu, hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu.



New York Journal of Student Affairs
Article

Volume 15, Issue 2 (2015)

**Towards a Relationship-Centered Approach in Higher Education:
The Dynamic Student Development Metatheodel (DSDM)**

Mark Frederick, Ph.D.
Indiana State University
Mark.Frederick@indstate.edu

Pietro A. Sasso, Ph.D.
Monmouth University
psasso@monmouth.edu

William R. Barratt, Ph.D.
Indiana State University
Will.Barratt@indstate.edu

Abstract

College student success is often too simply measured as ultimate graduation and overlooks students' critical need for a perceived sense of affiliation and belonging to the collegiate community which develops self-identity as a college student and can result in a higher level of performance over the academic lifespan. This article presents the dynamic student development metatheodal (DSDM) which was developed from common factors identified in multiple theories and models of human development, student development, and learning. When intentionally deployed, the DSDM can be expected to improve retention, persistence, and ultimately graduation, as well as improve students' academic and co-curricular experience.

Keywords: college success, student development, metatheodel, DSDM

American postsecondary education institutions are loosely coupled through peer-reviewed accreditation, best practices, and continued partnerships in research. It is additionally coupled through its common mission. The notion of a common mission is somewhat of an artifact given the evolution of the American university into a multiversity, a term coined by Clark Kerr in the 1960s and referring to institutional evolution to large universities focusing on research at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Kerr, 2001). The role of the traditional American four-year institution has historically been to create and disseminate new knowledge and serve as a repository for existing and historical knowledge (ACE, 1949). However, that historical role has evolved as the multiversity has taken new form in an attempt by colleges and universities to serve an increasing number of stakeholders while at the same time facing financial pressures caused by decreased federal and state appropriations and the inability to create additional revenue streams to satisfy budgetary needs.

Whether it is as an economic engine or an entrepreneurial endeavor, the traditional college and university still serves the traditional 18-24 year-old, full-time enrolled, residential student. In serving the traditional college student, colleges and universities have been the purveyor of the middle class and a certifier of the professions as a continuation of being connected to the educational dream of bettering oneself and as an effective means of social class mobility. However, in attempting to satisfy the educational dream, institutions have fallen short of their practical potential as retention levels have remained stagnant despite impressive increases in enrollment over the last few decades. Mortenson (1998) reported that during the 1980s and 90s, graduation rates “dropped about 6 percentage points from near 58% to near 52%” (p. 250). To add to their dilemma, the degree of preparation students’ exhibit on entry to the world after graduation has been called into question by employers, legislators, and the nations’ citizens.

To understand the failure of institutions to meet their practical potential in producing highly-qualified graduates, it is important to understand the existing higher education heuristic and its guiding paradigm. That paradigm assumes students arrive on campus with highly refined skill sets which support independent functioning. If colleges and universities continue to assume such to be true, there will be little change in prevailing student graduation rates, academic performance, and preparation to enter the world beyond college from what we see today. To be sure, expecting current outcomes of access, retention, and ultimately graduation to remain static

is inadvisable. Much more likely is the reality that current outcome levels will decrease from their current and unacceptable levels to the point that decision-making by colleges and universities might well be assumed by external concerns. There are already winds of change affecting higher education as federal and state level governments, accrediting bodies, and the general public issue demands for change at an ever increasing rate. In many cases, demands are being mandated through law, public policy, or funding decisions.

Few, if any, current student development theories or models exist from which institutions can draw to inform the holistic development of their students that positively affect both persistence through graduation and full-potential performance. Numerous studies have identified predictors of college success, persistence, and ultimate graduation such as those of Wolfe and Johnson (1995), Pritchard and Wilson (2003), Perkhounkova, Noble, and McLaughlin (2006), Ishitani (2006) and Strauss and Volkwein (2002), among many others. Yet none have arrived at an ideal regression equation which fully informs the development of services, supports, interventions, and programs (SSIPs) to the degree that absolute predictability of success can be expected and replicated with other students across all developmental levels. Moreover, Reeves and Lose (2009) even cautioned against the development of one-size-fits-all approaches as decision-makers might well be led astray by over-relying on regression as an accurate predictor of success.

As Popper (1963) asserted, accurate scientific prediction is much like prophecy where, if we can accurately predict what the future holds, we can base decisions on that knowledge. Unfortunately, the dream of creating a regression equation or a set of standards that would consistently and accurately predict student performance and eventual outcomes as measured by ultimate graduation is something which will not be achieved given our current level of scientific knowledge. Therefore, a more integrated approach informed by multiple traditional learning, human development, and student development theories needs to be established to serve as a theoretical framework for the effective delivery of SSIPs.

Most social scientists and practitioners dream of a model which would accurately present and define the human experience and predict outcomes. Again, as observed by Popper (1935), unconditional scientific predictions exist in only rare occasions and then, within the narrow confines of well-isolated, stationary, and recurrent systems. To be sure, as in the lived human

experience, the college student experience is anything but isolated, stationary, and recurrent. This is consistent with the notion of a metatheodel, a term created by the authors.

Even in accepting these realities, it is unreasonable to think that no current theories or models of college student development hold enough truth to render them untenable. As such, identifying common themes or factors within sets of theories and models could lead to a reliable assumption as to their validity to the degree that they can appropriately inform practice. This is precisely the intention of the dynamic student development metatheodel (DSDM).

A metatheodel is defined as the joining of multiple (meta) theories (the) and models (odel) focused on a broad construct; in this case, the construct of college student development. If one examines a set of theories or models attending to the same construct, common elements will emerge. By first defining common elements and then establishing accurate operational definitions, the planning and engagement of appropriate SSIPs and actively assessing the outcomes of their application in practice can lead to a more effective response to current challenges in higher education.

Background

When one considers the three domains within which the human experience can be understood, including the cognitive (how we think), behavior (how we act), and affective (how we feel), it becomes apparent that the traditional higher education model attends primarily to the cognitive and behavioral domains while paying only minimal attention to the affective (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Yet it is college students' affective domain and its interaction with the cognitive and behavioral domains that has primacy in driving their decisions (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). In the present context, those decisions are regarding persistence to graduation, the level of academic performance demonstrated, personal motivation, and the pursuit of excellence.

More often than not, the processes college students employ in their ongoing decision to remain enrolled and how well they perform while enrolled in school lack clarity and focus within the cognitive sphere of functioning and are driven by the affective, feeling-based domain (Rubaltelli, Rumiati, & Slovic, 2010). Unless students are understood and engaged within the affective domain, interventions aimed at either the cognitive or behavioral domains alone will produce little change in their overall performance. In not addressing the affective domain, fundamental and critical decision-making processes that impact students are not addressed. To that end, students' ongoing decisions to remain enrolled or to depart the institution prior to

graduation, the motivation to achieve a high level of academic achievement, their understanding the need to acquire broad skills sets, as well as myriad other critical cognitive, behavioral, and psychological self-management skills that are necessary for entry to the world post-graduation might not be adequately addressed within the current higher education paradigm.

As an approach to encourage and support student success, institutional personnel have attended to what can be referred to as structure and throughputs in such a way to affect quality of life in terms of cognitive and behavioral growth, learning, and development (GLD), but have lagged in their attention to the affective domain of individual students' lives. Structure and throughputs include such things as processes, procedures, infrastructure, regulations, physical plant, and a variety of other factors designed to improve efficiency and support the basic functioning of the institution. While structure and throughputs are critical to support student success, they are insufficient to fully support the broad concept of success in which most higher education institutions are interested. Clearly, phenomena that most impact students' affective functioning have the greatest of all domains' impact on critical decisions regarding academic performance, motivation, persistence to graduation, and ultimately, the perceived quality of their lived experience. As such, institutions must attend to affectively-based phenomena if they are to expect measurable changes in desired outcomes and student success.

The concept of structure and throughputs as opposed to affectively-based endeavors was presented by Heifetz (1994) and Sparks (2002) as the difference between addressing challenges in technical as opposed to adaptive means. Heifetz (1994) defined the addressing of challenges with a technical approach as when professionals know how to respond since both knowledge and capacity already exist to deal with challenges effectively. Often, institutions turn to existing models and best practices to guide their response to technical problems. In contrast, facing challenges in an adaptive way would be far more effective but is extremely difficult as responses, approaches, models, or best practices have not yet been developed. Yet, in order to truly improve student success, we must overcome the challenges higher education faces in an adaptive way. And those adaptive problems will best be overcome through the intentional and effective application of SSIPs created in response to demonstrated student need.

Simply put, unless institutions develop SSIPs aimed at impacting and complementing students' affective domain, the probability of improving overall performance and ultimate graduation will remain painfully low and we will continue to see the same unacceptable 6-year

graduation rate of around 56%, with private not-for-profit institutions typically graduating 65% of their students, while public institutions and private for-profit institutions on average graduate 55% and 22% of their students respectively (Aud & Hannes, 2011). Thus, a new approach is needed to address the affective domain of the contemporary college student with a focus on defining their success.

Defining Student Success

Greater attention needs to be focused on the construct of student success. However, operationalizing that broad construct to a highly functional level is impeded due to institutional and organizational attention to mere “bean-counting.” When the current functional higher education paradigm is examined, the primary factors for defining student success can be identified and include (a) how many students enroll, (b) how many students persist semester after semester, (c) how many students maintain a minimal grade-point average, and (d) how many students ultimately graduate. While we have to acknowledge that such quantitative numbers-based operationalization is being forced upon us by higher-level decision-makers such as accrediting agencies, institutional governing boards, federal and state agencies and legislatures, higher education decision-makers must employ far more refined operational definitions if they are to produce the type of information needed to truly inform and guide them in improving overall student success.

While enrollment, academic performance, and ultimate graduation are absolutely critical to include, they alone are wholly insufficient for a full and comprehensive definition of student success. To complete the definition, we have to attend to students’ GLD in broad and holistic ways that include behaviors, cognitive improvement, and affective states. Higher educators are being called upon to prepare graduates to assume positions of responsibility in the communities into which they will enter, to improve the quality of the nation’s workforce, to provide support to those with whom they will develop significant relationships, and in general, to improve the quality of life for themselves and those around them.

To assist in both refining the definition of student success as well as to provide functional as opposed to aspirational guidance, the dynamic student development metatheodel (DSDM) is presented. The DSDM is designed as highly flexible to meet the unique needs of each student, while demanding few resources beyond those already available at most colleges and universities,

as it calls upon the expenditure of time and attention from existing institutional people resources as opposed to an outlay of already limited dollars.

The Dynamic Student Development Metatheodel

The dynamic student development metatheodel asserts that student GLD should be understood as an integrated phenomenon that best occurs within a set of assumptions, including that (a) GLD is best supported within the confines of a trusting relationship; (b) GLD is an active as opposed to passive process; (c) the degree and level of GLD is improved as student internalization increases; and (d) on entry to college, students possess a definable and acquired set of qualities, skills, and attributes which can be improved upon as a result of their collegiate experience.

Current observation suggests that many students enter college with poorly refined self-management skills and high degrees of dependency needs. Kim, Newton, Downey, and Benton (2010) suggested that entry-level attributes fall within three broad categories, including academic achievement and aptitude (i.e., high school grade point average, innate intelligence, aptitude), circumstance variables (i.e., first-generation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), and personal variables (i.e., work ethic, motivation, self-perception, values).

While the claim is made that the college experience can contribute significantly to development beyond that of normal maturation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), the validation of that claim is mediated by the degree to which an individual student is self-invested in the educational enterprise and possesses necessary skills that complement effective self-monitoring and self-management. While supports and opportunities abound for all college students that can improve their self-management skills, the decision to actually access and fully exploit those supports and services is all too often left in the students' hands alone, and as a result, access and exploitation are not fully realized.

The key features of the DSDM maximize the potential for reaching hoped-for outcomes as a result of creating and effectively managing (a) meaningful relationships; (b) the psychological, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of students' lived experiences; (c) flexible responses to meet individual student needs; (d) intentionality and planfulness; and (e) individual students' inherent need and desire to be successful on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, social, and professional levels.

Overview of the Metatheodel

The DSDM supports the intentional transition from entering students' state of dependency, through independence, and finally, to the optimal state of interdependence with others and the environment. The DSDM is designed to meet students where they are as they arrive on our campuses for their first year of study. While they might well perceive themselves as more highly developed, the vast majority students entering college arrive in a highly dependent state. Whether the result of experiencing highly prescribed, standards-based K-12 systems, a prevailing cultural heuristic that seeks to level the playing field for all and rewards minimal performance, or any number of other factors, allowing students to remain in a dependent state can reinforce a belief that merely meeting minimal standards of GLD is sufficient to assure success in life.

In the applied setting of college, learned or reinforced minimal performance can result in many students maintaining a low yet acceptable grade point average and the accumulation of a minimum number of semester hours or their equivalent at the institution in which they are enrolled to merely satisfy the current paradigm's definition of student success. Students' lived experiences that have resulted in their belief that minimal performance is acceptable must be addressed and changed to help them learn that true success requires maximum effort.

The DSDM actually exploits students' entering dependent state as its first stage is one of considerable prescription and is primarily managed by a significant other (SO). The critical role of the SO can be assumed by a faculty member, professional staff person, club or organization advisor, a concerned community member, or even a highly-developed upper-class student. The necessary people resources most likely already exist on most college campuses and the key is to adequately train those people for their responsibilities as the SO. Adding to the economy of scale of the DSDM, a single SO can serve that role for multiple students.

The SO's role evolves from highly directive in the early portion of a student's academic years to that of a mentor/guide in the middle portion of the academic lifespan, and finally, to that of a sounding board and informal advisor in the latter portion of a student's college career. Each stage of the DSDM calls for the SO to manage different overarching goals in students' lives.

From dependency to interdependency. The following overview presents the essential elements needing to be addressed by the SO when working with students. While the elements

listed are not exhaustive, attention to those listed will build a strong foundation on which additional elements can be addressed, based on individual student needs.

Stage 1. There is full exploitation of the student's dependency state. Concrete expectations of such things as classroom attendance, completion of assigned homework, preparation for class participation and examinations, and engagement with the institutional community are included. There are several less concrete but none-the-less critical expectations as well, including the exploration of self, identification of existing and the creation of new self-management skills sets, and a heightened sense of self-agency. While all are psychological constructs, they are absolutely critical to students' GLD. The broad goal of Stage 1 is to assist in student identity development, the early establishment of positive habits, the creation and maintenance of a meaningful relationship with the SO, acclimation to the institutional environment, and finally, the development of an effective goal strategy.

Stage 2. Stage 2 is designed to assist student GLD through the state of independence. Self-agency, critical thinking, communication skills, appreciation for differences in others, community stewardship, working with others, and relationship management are learned through meaningful interaction with and modeling positive behaviors of the SO and in the active participation in the wide variety of activities available within the institutional community. In addition to modeling the SO, students become more conscious of their own qualities, skills, and attributes, their purpose for being, and their identity as college students. The role of the SO is far less directive in Stage 2 as students are encouraged and expected to become the primary decision-maker in their lives. The SO assumes the responsibility of a guide by offering suggestions, recommendations, and support for student independent decision-making. The intensity of support needs to remain flexible and applied appropriately to given situations and circumstances.

Stage 3. DSDM's Stage 3 is designed to support the advancement of students to the level of interdependence. Interdependence cannot be achieved unless students fully understand who and what they are within the environment. They should have a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and be focused on intentionality, all of which are supported and developed as a result of earlier work in Stages 1 and 2. Interdependence finds students having moved past being overly reliant on others or too focused on the self. Interdependent students find themselves capable of and wanting to help those around them, whether to meet individual or

group goals or to engage in altruism with the intent of contributing to the betterment of both self and others.

Dynamic Aspects of the Model

No static developmental model can be expected to meet the needs of all students. While static models inform better understanding of student development or the creation of broad SSIPs designed to benefit the whole, they fail to adequately address the idiosyncrasies of individual students. As such, a dynamic model must be engaged that will respond to both group and individual student needs. The DSDM is such a dynamic model as it includes the critical SSIPs' development function.

While the majority of the functions within each stage (goals, role of the SO, and measures) are static, the SSIP function calls for the development of an individual action plan for each student, created by both the student and their SO and thus creating the critical dynamic aspects of the model. The SSIPs accessed by students will serve to meet their individual needs while reinforcing the critical relationship maintained between them and their SO. While not exhaustive lists, suggested measures are given for each of the DSDM stages and can inform both student and SO as to what SSIPs are necessary to support individual GLD.

Theoretical Base of the Metatheodel

The DSDM is based on a variety of human and college student development theories as well as college student support models. The following sections address the theories incorporated into the metatheodel.

Chickering's Identity Vectors

Chickering (1969) and later Chickering and Reisser (1993) established a foundational identity development theory for traditional undergraduate students. The theory is unique in that it does not utilize sequential stages to conceptualize growth, but rather, identifies "vectors" and movement within them. This freedom of movement is intended to recognize that development is not linear and therefore some students may regress with regard to their individual maturation process. The seven vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering, 1969).

This directionality of the vectors is embedded in the DSDM as the use of the SSIPs and the role of the SO attempt to buttress against regression toward the mean of lesser maturation

as seen in the first two vectors. Moreover, the DSDM truly intersects with Chickering's (1969) model beginning with the fourth vector of developing mature interpersonal relationships. Within the DSDM, this is congruent with stage two in which students begin to benefit from the influence of the significant other (SO). The fifth and sixth vectors of establishing identity and developing purpose are congruent with stage three. The role of the SO continues, but it has more clarity and a greater degree of influence or impact. Thus, as students grapple with the "white space" or the cognitive dissonance of the college experience in their formation of the question of "who am I?," where they learn to be accepting of this existentialism. The role of the SO and the additional provision of SSIPs allow the student to eventually gain a level of comfort in their appearance, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion or faith affiliation, and sexual orientation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This leads to successful integration and interactions with others, or interdependency, which is a core principle of the DSDM.

Astin's Model and Theory of Involvement

Astin's (1999) model assumes that the degree to which and meaning student's perceive from involvement with the institutional community will trigger affinity which will positively affect retention, ultimate graduation, and performance. The model has three core components including (a) student characteristics that are brought with them when entering the institution, (b) the institutional environment itself with which the student interacts, and (c) outcomes of the interaction between student inputs and the collegiate environment. Astin (1999) argued that five key elements are basic to enhancing ultimate outcomes, including (a) the quality and degree of student investment of psychosocial and physical energy; (b) that involvement must be continuous, but students will invest varying degrees of energy throughout their collegiate careers; (c) that involvement has both qualitative and quantitative aspects; (d) outcomes will be impacted in proportion to the degree of energy expenditure and students' perceived quality of their involvement; and (e) the overall impact of the educational experience is directly related to the level of student involvement.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's (1993) model provides greater understanding of student inputs (pre-entry attributes), student's goals and commitment to achieving those goals, the experiences of the student within the institutional environment, students' ability and willingness to integrate their

experiences within the institution with their own goals, and the outputs triggered by the previous four concepts.

Students are often unaware of their pre-entry attributes and the actual reasons or purpose for seeking a college education beyond broad areas such as moving toward greater independence or further discovering of the self (Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002). The use of Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure within the DSDM provides for an exhaustive assessment of individual qualities, skills, and attributes in addition to supporting the creation of new ones when and where necessary.

Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change

Pascarella's (1985) model identifies several core components, including student input variables, structural and organizational characteristics, the institutional environment, interactions with agents of socialization, and quality of student effort. Like Astin's (1999) and Tinto's (1993) models, Pascarella (1985) contends that what the student brings to the institution in terms of qualities, skills, and attributes along with the degree and quality of student effort will interact with the institutional environment, leading to positive change and growth. He illuminates the need for connecting with agents of socialization, namely the people of the institution (Pascarella, 1985).

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977) asserted that people will learn from observing the behavior and outcomes of that behavior in others, which leads to modeling like behaviors. The core components of his theory include (a) attention, which forces conscious as opposed to pre-conscious processing of the learning process where meaning can be more easily attached to the behavior; (b) retention, or remembering what was observed and its outcomes (again, a process better engaged at the conscious level); (c) reproduction, where observed behaviors are replicated by the observer; and (d) motivation, where intentionality and purpose is given to reproduce the observed positive behavior. Bandura also asserted that if an individual perceives positive benefits from engaging in a particular behavior, the probability of repeating that behavior increases, while if little or no benefits are perceived, the probability of the repeated behavior will decrease.

Critical to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory is the conscious processing of observed behaviors, and further, through their replication. The DSDM supports conscious processing of the behaviors of self and others, along with critical analysis of their perceived

outcomes. While many students, especially in the early stages of their collegiate careers, have great difficulty in processing observed behaviors because they lack the ability to attach word symbols to the behaviors and their affective outcomes (Sifneos, 1996), the DSDM calls for ongoing processing and articulation of observed behaviors and their perceived outcomes with the SO. In time, ambiguity will diminish as students improve their ability to attach word symbols to make more appropriate meaning and understanding of behaviors and their resultant outcomes.

Baxter-Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship

Baxter-Magolda's (1998) theory of self-authorship examines how one constructs meaning from events which occur in their individual environment. Self-authorship consists of three dimensions in which young adults create knowledge construction, including the epistemological, the development of a personal identity (intrapersonal), and forming relationships with others (interpersonal). Development occurs at four levels, including external formulas, the crossroads, self-authorship, and building an internal foundation (Baxter-Magolda, 1998). Students use external formulas developed by others to make decisions until they eventually reach a crossroads in which they move away from dependence. This existential movement is initially fraught with external pressures as they begin a process of self-authorship ultimately resulting in a greater interdependence based on a built internal foundation in which the internal-self is secured and greater trust is placed within one's self (Baxter-Magolda, 1998). This developmental process begins in college and continues for the next several years as one evolves toward more refined levels of interdependency.

Self-authorship is embedded within the DSDM as students move toward self-authorship through stages one to three with the support of the SO as an interpersonal relationship in which the student has the capacity to develop authenticity to establish an internal foundation. The SSIPs will certainly bolster a digression away from external formulas. A significant portion of this movement or experience towards self-authorship relies on how the student interfaces with SSIPs across the institution and how the SO facilitates reflection to encourage building of the internal foundation.

Utilizing the Baxter-Magolda (1992) epistemological reflection model, the SO can help students move from absolute knowing in the first-year experience toward transitional knowing, catering to the affective domain by instilling a stronger sense of interpersonal and impersonal knowing. Baxter-Magolda established a cognitive-structural model to facilitate self-authorship

through meaning-making and reflection. This model is guided by six assumptions: (a) ways of knowing and patterns within them are socially constructed; (b) ways of knowing are understood through naturalistic inquiry; (c) fluid use of reasoning patterns; (d) patterns are related to, but not dictated by, gender; (e) student stories are context-bound; and (f) ways of knowing are patterns (Baxter-Magolda, 1992).

The goal would be to ensure that students reach the third stage of independent knowing, thereby recognizing that knowledge is mostly uncertain and becoming ready for the cognitive dissonance of the postgraduate experience. Baxter-Magolda (1992) found that the majority of students, regardless of gender, reached this third stage in their first year as a postgraduate. In concert with SSIPs, the role of the SO should help facilitate this process at an increased ratio through individual reflection and meaning-making.

Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering

Schlossberg (1989) developed a theory to explain why students who are involved on campus are more successful. It is assumed that success occurs as a result of students feeling connected with others and the institution, and that their experience is meaningful. The theory of marginality and mattering examines five ways in which students feel they matter to others, including attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation (Schlossberg, 1989). Marginality occurs when transition occurs in the student's life such as beginning college.

Within the DSDM, the role of significant others assumes an essential role as they assist in students' transition from dependence to independence and further, to interdependence, across the DSDM's three stages. The significant other (SO) assumes marginality within the model's three stages as stage one addresses attention and importance, stage two addresses ego-extension and dependence, and stage three addresses appreciation.

The Role of the Significant Other

Kegan (1982) referred to a significant other (SO) as one with whom a protégée can establish a trusting relationship and from whom the protégée can grow, learn, and develop under the guidance and mentoring of the other. Most humanistic theories of learning contend that learning best occurs within the confines of a trusting relationship. The role is critical in that the SO can serve as a role model from whom positive behaviors can be learned and replicated, can assist in students' construction of word symbols to better describe their lived experiences and

resulting affective states in responses to stimuli, and can provide a perspective external to the student, among others.

Unfortunately, the most critical component of the DSDM will be the one finding the greatest degree of resistance from organizations and institutions. The thought of pairing faculty, staff, or other key members of the institutional community with individual students and managing an ongoing process of face-to-face interactions, observation, and processing support at first appears to be daunting. But deeper consideration will reveal an almost untapped resource of available time and willingness on the part of faculty and staff to serve as students' SOs. Any residual resistance should be overcome when appropriate training and guidance is provided to the SO in an efficient and meaningful way.

In as much as students have a profound need to connect with caring others, so do all of us, and when SOs realize that not only will they be meeting the needs of their students through the relationship, they too will find their own need for a sense of effectiveness, purpose, and connection with others will be satisfied through the SO-student relationship. Too, highly developed undergraduate students are a rich potential source for the necessary personnel to serve as SOs to students early in their academic careers. To be sure, upper class students would actually be developing their skills of interdependency by serving as an SO. Upper class students would be no different than older faculty or staff members as it relates to the support given to mentees as the elements of relationship management would be the same. To some extent, upper class students would most likely find the shared commonality of likeness to be a unique and positive influential factor impacting the relationship, as asserted by Cialdini (2001).

Perhaps the best description of an effective SO would be to define the position as one of a changing power differential. Early in a student's college education, the role of the SO is to provide direct guidance and oversight of behaviors, to assist in the meaningful processing of the student's experiences, and to manage an ongoing conversation with the student focusing on meaning-making, identity formation, intentionality, and purpose. The role of the SO is not to give easy answers or to tell students what they must do, but rather, to support students' internal processing in such a way that the students themselves will find their own answers. Rogers (1969) held that "certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner yield significant learning" (p. 106).

Perry (1970) provided a framework of cognitive development in his nine-step progression of positions from dualistic to relativistic thinking. Perry (1970) used the term position as opposed to stage because it represents the positional view the student has when it comes to cognitive matters of right and wrong. This framework would inform SOs as they move from a highly-directive approach to satisfy students' dependency needs to the more subtle support and collaboration in support of meeting interdependency needs.

Above all, the SO should not allow students to take the easy way out by allowing insufficient processing, failure to engage in meaningful dialogue, and to put off until tomorrow or any other strategy designed to minimize the impact of the SO relationship from the perspective of the student. The SO must acknowledge the tendency for people in general to respond to probing questions with an answer of "I don't know." Reality would suggest that students in fact do know, but they do not have a developed a refined skills set to articulate what they are thinking and feeling. It falls to the SO to assist the student in developing the skills of articulation to appropriately represent what the student is feeling, what they believe, or what they need.

While the SO should never attempt to provide supports for which it is clear a higher degree of knowledge or licensure is required such as a professional counselor or therapist, the vast majority of students are not in need of such levels of counseling. Rather, the SO should understand and effectively manage what Rogers (1957) defined as necessary and sufficient conditions which include (a) that a meaningful and purposeful relationship must exist between the SO and student; (b) the SO must be genuine with the student, which means the SO is freely and deeply him or herself; a dynamic that Rogers (1957) referred to as being congruent in the relationship (c) that the SO must have unconditional positive regard for the student which holds that unconditional does not suggest withholding or deflecting judgment, but wholly free of conditional regard; and (d) the ability to empathize or the ability to experience the student's private world as if it were their own. These same conditions were found by McCombs (2004) who stated, "Learning is enhanced in contexts where learners have supportive relationships, have a sense of ownership and control over the learning process, and can learn with and from each other in safe and trusting learning environments" (p. 7).

A final note regarding the effectiveness of the SO is dependent on the relative level of development that SO has achieved. According to Chandler and Kram (2005), if SOs are at a

lower developmental stage than is the student, the SO will be lacking in terms of the type and degree of developmental assistance that can be offered the student. For that reason, appropriate screening and training are necessary to assure SOs have achieved an appropriate developmental stage and are skilled enough to provide appropriate support to the students in their charge.

The Development of SSIPs

Each of the DMSD's stages calls for the development of supports, services, interventions, and programs (SSIPs) designed to assist advancing student growth in specific functional areas which include critical thinking, self-awareness, communication, diversity, citizenship, membership and leadership, and relationships (Barratt & Frederick, 2015). Through appropriate assessment, student weaknesses in specific behaviors can be identified and directed to where attention should be focused by the SO and student.

Presentation of the functional areas as well as the behaviors used to define those areas is included as part of the formal training provided SOs before their work with students begins. As work progresses, the SO and student alike will more than likely identify other behaviors in need of attention that may or may not fall within the seven functional areas. The SO and student can then define those areas to facilitate the development of behavioral responses to guide their ongoing work. Tailoring specific SSIPs for each student renders the DSDM a highly flexible and adaptable model and overcomes the inherent weaknesses found in typical manualized or one-size-fits-all programs.

SSIPs development should occur within a tripartite structure which includes the experiences students have within the spheres of (a) academic emphasis; (b) co-curricular emphasis; and (c) environmental and process emphasis. Within each of the three areas, each has two overlapping levels, one for the overall campus community and one for the individual student (See Figure 1).

It is important to note that the three areas of academic, co-curricular, and environmental and process management spheres exist as overlapping as opposed to independent areas of emphasis. Changes to one will no doubt lead to changes in the others due to their unique relationship to one another.

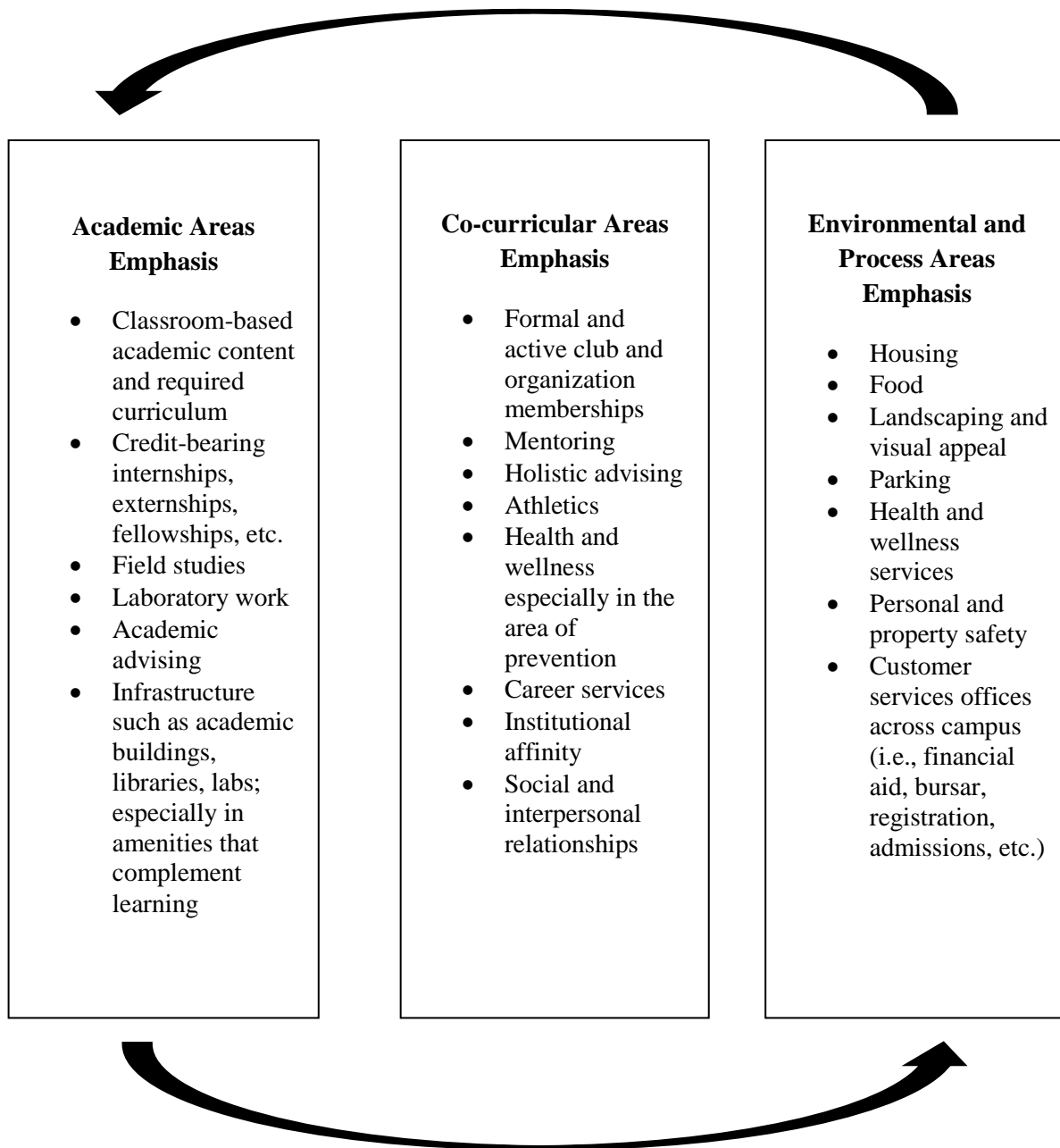


Figure 1. SSIP development areas.

Structures and processes must first be constructed to provide for SSIPs across the entire campus and student population. Fortunately, most institutions have many of those already in place. It is the second level, that of the individual student, that must receive considerable attention and unfortunately has not been attended to within the current higher education paradigm. Institutional-level SSIPs have existed and been modified over the years. Yet, as we look at overall persistence and graduation rates, it becomes apparent that institutional-level

SSIPs that now exist or will come to be in the future, even with additional modification, will have little if any substantive impact on overall persistence, retention, and graduation rates. Nor can individual student academic and co-curricular improvement be expected by merely focusing on institutional level SSIPs.

Critical to each area of emphasis is the understanding of how relationships and the quality of those relationships impact the perception of quality and realized outcomes with regard to student GLD. While structure and throughput might be appropriate in the planning and management of the many SSIPs, failing to attend to students' affective states through a meaningful relationship will result in less than hoped for outcomes. Attending to student need in such a way transitions change from being technical to the more effective adaptive type.

Meeting Individual Student Needs

Maslow (1943) provided a hierarchy of needs and posited that the probability of meeting higher-level needs is limited when there is a failure to meet lower-level needs. Unique to today's college environment is a focus on meeting of the early stages of survival and safety needs, but then seems to advance to the meeting cognitive needs, a higher-level area of need. While institutions of higher education have been highly responsive to meeting the basic safety needs of students and meeting cognitive development needs in many ways, they seem to have fallen short of meeting the needs of belongingness/love and esteem needs. Not attending to the basic needs of belongingness, love, and esteem will result in lower probabilities of meeting higher level needs. The DSDM assures appropriate attention is given to those often overlooked needs.

As noted, the development of effective SSIPs is informed by broad assessment and evaluation findings as well as developmental theories and models, yet a one-size-fits-all assumption cannot be made. Each student has unique needs based on their ever-evolving skills sets and SSIPs must be created that meet those needs while remaining congruent with the broader goals and objectives. The holistic GLD summary represented in Figure 2 presents each stage of development along with characteristics, goals, roles, and foci of the SSIPs.

The DSDM and Development of SSIPs

The DSDM presents in three stages or states, each of which has unique characteristics, goals, roles, and foci of the SSIPs as shown in Figure 2 which should be developed in varying degrees with student participation. Because of the relative degree of dependency with which new student begin their college work, their ability to articulate or even understand their

individual needs as they pertain to becoming successful students should not be assumed. As a result, the SO should maintain a higher degree of involvement and direction than is required for

State of Dependence → State of Independence → State of Interdependence

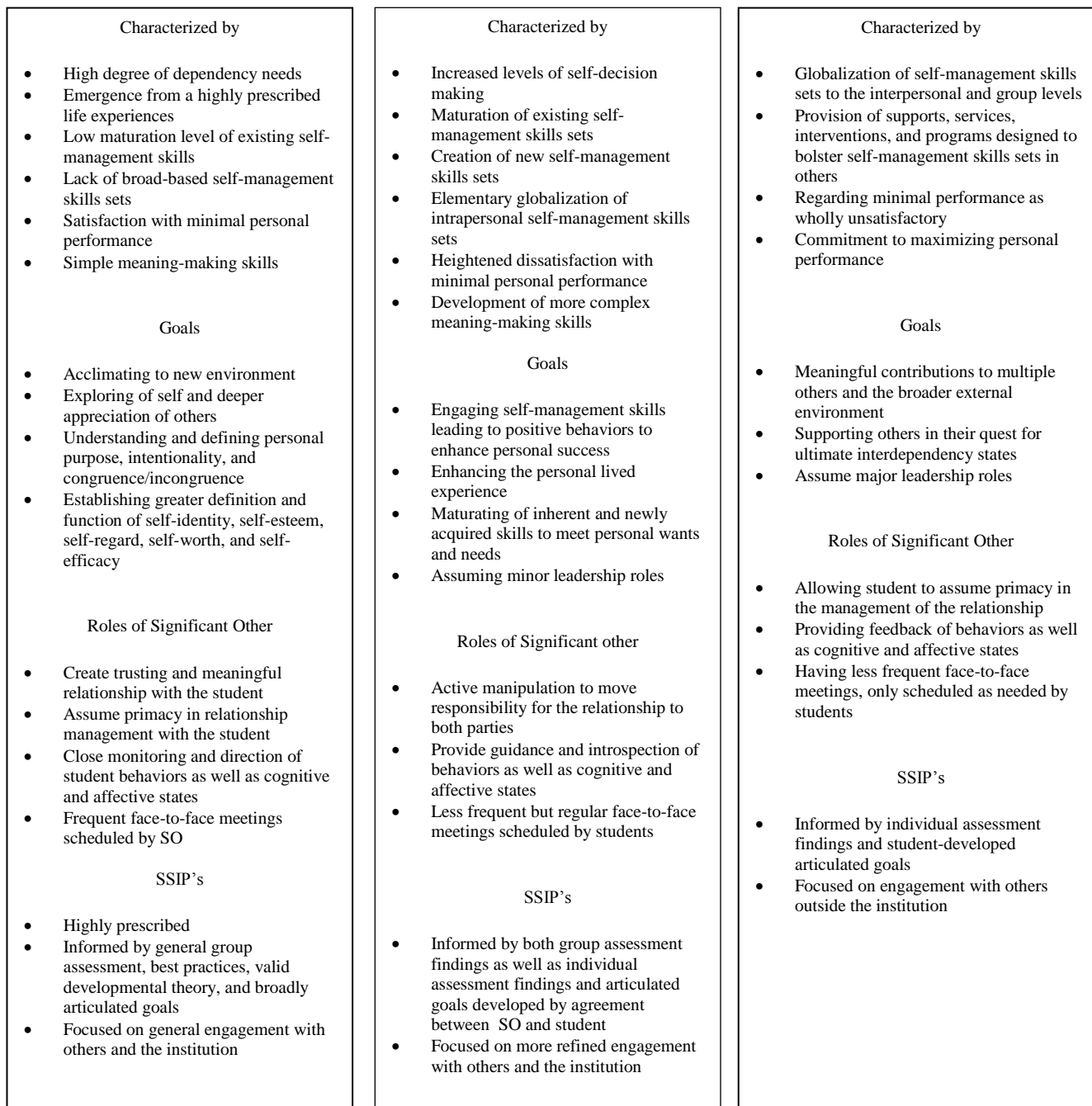


Figure 2. Holistic GLD summary.

students with more advanced independent and interdependency skills. Students should be expected to move in a generally linear progression from dependency to interdependency, but circumstances will arise that will find them retreating to an earlier state at times.

The development of the holistic DSDM follows a fairly prescribed path as a linear model, yet each step of the process should be revisited and reviewed on a constant basis to assess the individual student's effectiveness in meeting the challenges of higher self-management challenges. As ongoing review of progress is addressed, the full assessment cycle is embedded in the process as is the means of operationalizing the student success construct.

Implications

While the DSDM might appear to be a novel approach to supporting student GLD, there are identifiable instances on college campuses across the country that essentially employ the strategy. Understanding those approaches might serve to assist in better understanding the essential elements of the DSDM (Barratt & Frederick, 2015).

Highly engaged students seem to experience holistic growth, learning, and development at a higher level than other students and examining similarities in how those engaged students experience their collegiate careers reveals a number of factors that most likely account for higher magnitudes of both performance and growth over time (Barratt & Frederick, 2015), including:

- Clearly articulated individual and group goals.
- Maintaining a long-term engagement with individuals and groups which in most cases, span nearly the entire collegiate career,
- Existence of relationship-rich environments at multiple levels (adult, peer, departmental/organizational).
- High performance expectations for both the short and long-terms with individual members agreeing to meet those expectations.
- A wide variety of highly complementary activities (i.e., professional, social, academic, etc.) included in the overall experience.
- Individual and group performance clearly observable to those outside the organization on an ongoing basis.
- Intentional provision of broad-based supports, services, interventions, and programs designed to meet dependency, independency, and interdependency needs and foster growth toward interdependency.

- Focus on meeting unique individual needs as well as aggregate group needs.

Conclusion

The DSDM challenges the existing higher education paradigm as it currently supports college student GLD. The existing paradigm appears to fall short of an ideal state of functioning not due to lack of desire, but rather, to the lack of clarity in defining student success and providing critical SSIPs that support clearly articulated goals and desired outcomes.

Higher education personnel along and their institutions and organizations have the ethical and moral obligation to effectuate the multiple promises made to students. Whether explicit and tacit, present and future students perceive higher education promises that, if they choose to study with us, their lives will be enriched and improved as a result. Unless we do all we can to assure those promises are being fulfilled, we fall well short of performing as we should.

As a result of creating a relationship-centered approach, higher education can expect that not only enrollment, persistence, retention, and ultimate graduation rates will markedly improve, and ultimately so will the quality of students as measured in their ability to effectively manage their own lives.

References

- American Council on Education. (1949). *The student personnel point of view*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Astin, A. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
- Aud, S., & Hannes, G. (Eds.). (2011). *The condition of education 2011 in brief* (NCES 2011-034). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. New York, NY: General Learning.
- Barratt, W. R., & Frederick, M. A. (2015). *University learning outcomes assessment (UniLOA) national report of means*. Retrieved from <http://www.uniloa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NationalNormsPublic.pdf>
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). Students' epistemologies and academic experiences: Implications for pedagogy. *Review of Higher Education*, 15(3), 265-287.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1998). Developing self-authorship in young adult life. *The Journal of College Student Development*, 39(2), 143-156.
- Chandler, D., & Kram, K. E. (2005). Applying an adult development perspective to developmental networks. *Career Development International*, 10(6/7), 548-566, 587. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13620430510620610>
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Grites, T. J., & Gordon, V. H. (2000). Developmental academic advising revisited. *NACADA Journal*, 20(1), 12-15.
- Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hendrickson, R. M., Lane, J. E., Harris, J. T., & Dorman, R. H. (2013). *Academic leadership and governance of higher education: A guide for trustees, leaders, and aspiring leaders of two-and four-year institutions*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

- Holmstrom, L. L., Karp, D. A., & Gray, P.S. (2002). Why laundry, not Hegal? Social class, transition to college, and pathways to adulthood. *Symbolic Interaction*, 25(4), 437-462. doi:10.1525/si.2002.25.4.437
- Ishitani, T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the United States. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 861-885. doi:10.1353/jhe.2006.0042
- Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human adult development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kerr, C. (2001). *The uses of the university* (5th ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kim, E., Newton, F. B., Downey, R. G., & Benton, S. L. (2010). Personal factors impacting college student success: Constructing college learning effectiveness inventory (CLEI). *College Student Journal*, 44(1), 112-125.
- Kirk-Kuwaye, M., & Nishida, D. (2001). Effect of low and high advisor involvement on the academic performances of probation students. *NACADA Journal*, 21(1), 40-45.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- McCombs, B. L. (2004, April). *The case for learner-centered practices: Introduction and rationale for session*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Mortenson, T. G. (1998). Institutional graduation rates by control, academic selectivity and degree level 1983 to 1998. *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, 73, 1-10
- Pascarella, E. T. (1985). College environmental influences on learning and cognitive development: A critical review and synthesis. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 1, pp. 1-66). New York, NY: Springer Netherlands.
- Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Perkhounkova, Y., Noble, J., & McLaughlin, G. (2006). *Factors related to persistence of freshmen, freshmen, transfers, and nonfreshmen transfer students* (Professional file No. 99). Retrieved from the Association for Institutional Research: http://works.bepress.com/elena_perkhounkova/8

- Perry, W. G., Jr. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Popper, K. (1935). *Logik der forschung*. Vienna, Austria: Springer-Verlag Wein.
- Popper, K. (1963). *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge*. London, England: Routledge.
- Pritchard, M. E., & Wilson, G. S. (2003). Using emotional and social factors to predict student success. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 18-28.
doi:10.1353/csd.2003.0008
- Reeves, E., & Lowe, J. (2009). Quantile regression: An education policy research tool. *Southern Rural Sociology*, 24(1), 175-199.
- Roets, A., & Van Hiel, A. (2011). In integrative process approach on judgment and decision making: The impact of arousal, affect, motivation, and cognitive ability. *The Psychological Record*, 61(3), 497-520.
- Rogers, C. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95-103.
- Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to learn*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.
- Rubaltelli, E., Rumiati, R., & Slovic, P. (2010). Do ambiguity avoidance and the comparative ignorance hypothesis depend on people's affective reactions? *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, 40(3), 243-254. doi:10.1007/s11166-10-9091-z
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. In D. Roberts (Ed.), *Designing campus activities to foster a sense of community* (New Directions for Student Services No. 48, pp. 5-15). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sifneos, P. E. (1996). Alexithymia: Past and present. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153(7 supp), 137-142.
- Sparks, D. (2002). Bringing the spirit of invention to leadership (An interview with Ronald Heifetz). *Journal of Staff Development*, 23(2), 44-46.
- Strauss, L.C., & Volkwein, F. (2002). Comparing student performance and growth in 2- and 4-year institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 43(2), 133-161.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wolfe, R. N., & Johnson, S. D. (1995). Personality as a predictor of college performance. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 55(2), 177-185.