



Miami University
Assessment

Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter

Project DEEP

Miami University was recently highlighted in the book, “Student Success in College,” which discusses educational practices that promote student success. Researchers for this project (“Project DEEP”) identified policies, programs, and practices at Miami University that potentially account for Miami’s higher-than-predicted graduation rates and NSSE scores on five benchmarks of effective educational practice.¹ Project staff made two multiple-day visits to Miami’s campus, during which they conducted nearly 200 individual and group interviews with students, faculty, administrators, staff, and graduates. Project staff also visited classrooms and reviewed numerous print and web documents.

Enriching Educational Opportunities

Project DEEP staff were particularly impressed with the number of “enriching educational experiences” available to Miami University students. The importance of these experiences is based on the premise that “complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program.” Several of these enriching educational experiences are highlighted below.

Undergraduate Research Opportunities

Project DEEP noted that there is strong support for Miami students who wish to participate in research. Many students help with faculty research or work with a faculty mentor on their own research. Students can also apply for a Summer Scholar position, present their research at the annual undergraduate research poster presentation, or apply for an Undergraduate Research Award.

Capstones

All students are required to complete a capstone course. These courses are often intellectually demanding and challenge students to integrate previous coursework with their work in the class. Courses may also improve students’ ability to work in groups, and in some cases students work on projects that allow them to demonstrate their capabilities to potential employers.

Leadership and Civic Responsibility

Project DEEP identified multiple opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their leadership and civic responsibility. Many of these opportunities are available through the “Miami Leadership Commitment” (MLC) administered by the Office of Student Affairs. In recent years, many students have participated in one or

more MCL events. Project DEEP found that students who were involved in leadership opportunities reported a stronger dedication to their academics the more involved they became.

Diversity

The one area where Miami University students reported fewer experiences than students at comparison schools² was in interactions with students of differing economic, racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Both students and faculty reported a sense of homogeneity among the students. However, DEEP staff identified multiple programs designed to increase and continually assess campus diversity.

Suggestions

Project DEEP’s report serves as a reminder of the interconnections between students’ in-class and out-of-class learning. Faculty members should view students’ out-of-class experiences as opportunities for learning, and should encourage students to share these experiences and relate them to course issues. Enriching educational experiences, when used appropriately, “make learning more meaningful and, ultimately, more useful because what students know becomes part of whom they are.”

Additional enriching educational opportunities not discussed in this brief include study abroad, social fraternities and sororities, academic related co-curricular activities, exposure to the arts, and living learning communities. Read about these in the readings below, or in Project DEEP’s final report at:

http://www.miami.muohio.edu/provost/reports/DEEP_Final_Report.pdf

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J. (2005). Never let it rest: Lessons about success from high-performing colleges and universities. *Change*, 37(4), 44-51.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., et al. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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¹ For further details on the NSSE survey, please see previous assessment briefs (briefs #2, 4, 5, 9, and 10).

² Comparison institutions include all doctoral-intensive institutions nationwide who participated in the NSSE.