College of Education and Human Services

Group 5 - Student Success: Persistence and Retention Final Report (AY 20-21)

Submitted by

Elena Andrei, Marketa Fuller-President, Gail Nelson, Laura Northrop, Ovella Roulette-McIntyre,

John Shaefer, Glenda Toneff-Cotner, and Keisha Wilkins

Abstract

In this report, Group 5 - Student Success: Persistence and Retention shares the findings of a College of Education and Human Services student survey sent to students as part of the larger 2020-2021 CoEHS *Interrogating Teaching and Learning Structures in Pursuit of Equity and Social Justice*, which comprises six different groups focused on a variety of aspects. Three hundred and fifty-one current CoEHS students responded. The findings inform both micro and macro-level recommendations.

Keywords: CoEHS, student success, social justice

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Group Purpose and Primary Research Question

This current report and work is part of the larger 2020-2021 CoEHS *Interrogating Teaching and Learning Structures in Pursuit of Equity and Social Justice*, which comprises six different groups focused on a variety of aspects. The statement of focus of the *Interrogating Teaching and Learning Structures* is to establish a learning community focused on equity and justice-oriented inquiry and initiatives in CoEHS. Group 5 pursued the theme of *Student Success: Persistence and Retention.*

We began our work through open discussions of our own personal observations and experiences working with students across the college. Through this dialogue we developed the following research questions: 1) What challenges and barriers do CoEHS students encounter as part of their journey? 2) What supports, if any, do students use as part of their journey? and 3) Do the challenges and barriers experienced by students, disproportionally affect students of color and/or culturally and linguistically diverse students more than others?

Group Organization and Methods of Inquiry

To continue our inquiry, we developed a mixed method survey and disseminated it to the whole CoESH student body. We developed the survey around the following key constructs that map into the research questions: Life Circumstances (Question 1), Supports (Question 2), and Demographic Information (to support Question 3). The survey was drafted by the group and validated by expert reviews with the assistance of the Associate Dean's office: "to assess whether ... [the] content is appropriate for measuring the intended concepts" (Graves et al., 2009, p. 260). We utilized two types of questions: 1) closed-questions with likert scale or multiple response options and 2) open-ended questions for short responses. The full survey is provided in Appendix A.

We distributed the survey in February to all CoEHS students following the schedule below:

- The survey opened Monday, 2/8/2021 and left opened until Monday, 2/22/2021.
- Emails to students were sent from the general address beginning with 2/5/2021 with the "heads-up" correspondence.
- Monday 2/8/2021, a second email with the link was sent
- Thursday 2/11/2021, an email reminder was sent
- Monday 2/15/2021, a second email reminder was sent
- Monday 2/22/2021, the survey closed

Three hundred and fifty-one current CoEHS students responded. The respondents represented a large sample of each graduate (n = 189) and undergraduate students (n = 100). We had respondents from each department in the college, although the Teacher Education Department made up almost half (46.7%) of respondents. Although the largest groups among respondents were women (64.1%), white students (48.7%), and younger students (40.8% were 29 or younger), we did see representation for many different groups of students. For example, at least 27.9% of respondents were students of color, including 17.6% of respondents who identified as African American. At least 18.8% of respondents were age 40 or older. About 8% of respondents identified as multi-lingual and 27.4% of percent of respondents were first-generation college students. For all of the demographic data that we collected on the survey sample see Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents (n = 351)

Characteristic	n	%	Characteristic	n	%
Program			Gender		
Undergraduate	100	28.49%	Female	225	64.10%
Graduate	189	53.84%	Male	58	16.52%
TE	164	46.72%	Non-binary	2	0.57%
C&F	10	2.85%			
HHP	10	2.85%	Race and/or Ethnicity		
CASAL	72	20.51%	African American	63	17.59%
PhD	15	4.27%	Arab	5	1.42%
			Asian	11	3.13%
Time at CSU			Hispanic/Latinx	14	3.99%
0 to 25 Credit Hours	79	22.51%	White/Caucasian	171	48.72%
26 to 50 Credit Hours	49	13.96%	Multi-racial	5	1.42%
51 to 100 Credit Hours	48	13.68%	Other	2	0.57%
101 + Credit Hours	49	13.96%			
Other Characteristics			Age		
Multi-lingual	28	7.98%	18-19	7	1.99%
First generation college students	96	27.35%	20-24	84	23.93%
Active duty service members or veterans	7	1.99%	25-29	51	14.53%
Transferred from a 2-year institution	46	13.11%	30-39	71	20.23%
Transferred from a 4-year institution	29	8.26%	40-49	46	13.11%
Currently in education field placement	74	21.08%	50-59	15	4.27%
Currently in counseling field placement	17	4.84%	60+	5	1.42%

Findings of the Survey of the Student Body

Barriers

When responding to questions about challenges and barriers, the most consistently identified concerns were financial. Around 43% of students surveyed responded that both stress over financial concerns and the demands of their work schedule negatively impacted their education. Additionally, 21% of students surveyed said they had not taken a class they otherwise wanted to, because they could not afford to and an additional third of students surveyed said that they could

not afford a textbook at some point in their experience. When responding to an open ended question multiple students talked about the stress of financial concerns, the price of textbooks, and the time demands of their full time (or multiple) jobs, and coordinating their class/field placement schedules with their work schedules as being significant barriers to their success.

Respondents identified demands of child care or caring for family members as another significant barrier to their education. Between 15-20% of our students that responded had missed classes, field placements, and meetings with advising/faculty because of the demand of caring for family. Multiple respondents to the open ended question described the challenges of coordinating care for children with their class schedule. Several students said the demands of childcare and caring for family members has gotten worse during the pandemic.

Narrative comments related to personal challenges overwhelmingly identified mental health challenges and needs as a factor impacting students' educational experience. Many students shared that their struggles with depression and anxiety significantly impacted their education. As one student described her challenges coping with mental health issues, "This greatly affected my ability to focus and be able to complete work. My mental health took a big dive and so did my grades."

In addition, multiple students mentioned the impacts of their own disability status ranging from ADHD to cerebral palsy and family-related challenges with pandemic (such as death or loss of childcare options) as being big challenges.

Table 2. Barriers Faced by Respondents [a]

	n	%
I have not been able to take a class that I wanted to because I could not afford it.	74	21.08%
I have not purchased a textbook for a class because I could not afford it.	118	33.62%
Stress or concerns about my finances have impacted my ability to be successful in class.	150	42.74%
The work schedule I have to maintain outside of school has prevented me from focusing on my education.	152	43.30%
I have missed classes or field placements because I had to care for children/family members.	69	19.66%
I have missed advising appointments or not attended to other business on campus because I had to care for children/family members.	53	15.10%
Lack of access to child and family care has resulted in my inability to focus on my education.	57	16.24%
I have missed classes or field placements because I could not secure reliable transportation.	27	7.69%
I have missed advising appointments or not attended to other business on campus because I could not secure reliable transportation.	17	4.84%
Lack of access to a computer has resulted in my inability to participate in online classes on a regular basis.	22	6.27%
Not having experience and knowledge with using technology has resulted in my inability to access course and/or other materials.	32	9.12%

[a] The number of respondents reported for each statement represents respondents who either chose agree or strongly agree with the individual statement.

Concerningly, we had several students respond that "discriminatory acts," "racism and xenophobia," "age and race discrimination," negatively impacted their experience at CSU. One student suggested that CSU should be "hiring non discriminatory staff that has energy to teach all students equally." and that we need "Implementation of an effective "Zero tolerance " policy for discrimination committed by faculty against students." Although these were mentioned by a very small number of students (four comments from 351 respondents) they do represent a serious perception on the part of at least some students that runs counter to what we say we want to be as an institution. Especially given the express mission of this group, we intend to continue to investigate student perceptions on whether discrimination by CSU faculty and staff have impacted student success. Full responses to the likert scale questions on barriers can be found in Table 2. If you are interested in looking at the responses to the open ended questions, contact Elena Andrei in Teacher Education.

Supports

Looking at the quantitative responses to the questions on students' knowledge and use of existing students supports, the plurality of respondents said that college and university advising (ESSC, faculty program advisors) and student services (Campus 411) were helpful. There were data suggesting that many students are not aware of the range of support offered or that they are not utilizing these supports despite recognizing their own need for them. A larger than expected group of students said that they were not aware of some of the more basic and widely used supports. Specifically, 24.4% of students said that they did not know about the ESSC and 11.5% said that they did not know about program advising. When asked about counseling services 18.2% of students said that they did not know this support was available and an additional 18.2% said that despite feeling that they might need it, they had not used this support.

Of particular concern, three supports that are instrumental in protecting students against discrimination, the Office of Disability Services (ODS) and the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) and Safe Space, were under recognized or under utilized. Responding to the question about ODS, 9.2% of respondents said that they might need this support and have not utilized it and 13.6% said that they did not know it was available. Responding to the question about OIE, 7.1% of respondents said that they might need this support and have not utilized it and 49.1% said that they did not know it was available. Responding to the question about Safe Space, 5.3% of respondents said that they might need this support and have not utilized it and 58.8% said that they did not know it was available. For each of these supports the percentages of students who said that they have used the support and found it helpful was smaller than the percentage that said they have not used the support despite feeling that they might need it.

Table 3. Respondents' Utilization of College and University Supports

	I have used it and it was helpful	I have used it and it was not helpful	I know about this but haven't needed it	I know about it and might need it and haven't used it	I don't know about this support
University Advising	46.15%	11.08%	21.23%	11.08%	10.46%
ESSC Advising Office	37.96%	7.41%	20.06%	10.19%	24.38%
My Program Advisor	56.66%	11.76%	13.00%	7.12%	11.46%
CET	14.20%	2.78%	31.48%	9.57%	41.98%
Counseling Services	14.51%	4.63%	44.44%	18.21%	18.21%
Campus 411	48.00%	3.38%	28.92%	6.46%	13.23%
CARES Team	9.54%	0.92%	26.46%	7.38%	55.69%
Lift Up Vikes	15.79%	1.86%	31.89%	7.74%	42.72%
ODS	8.33%	0.62%	68.21%	9.26%	13.58%
OIE	2.47%	1.54%	39.81%	7.10%	49.07%
TRIO	3.72%	1.86%	25.70%	4.33%	64.40%
Safe Space	2.17%	0.00%	33.75%	5.26%	58.82%
Veterans Affairs	2.17%	0.62%	60.87%	2.48%	33.85%
Key Bank Scholars	0.93%	0.00%	20.99%	2.47%	75.62%
Parker Hannifin Living Learning Community	0.93%	0.00%	16.98%	1.85%	80.25%
Sullivan Deckard Program	0.93%	0.00%	12.69%	1.86%	84.52%

In response to open ended questions on supports, students identified a large range of other supports with faculty the most recurrent support mentioned. Staff from a variety of offices have also been mentioned (such as from the advising office, graduate school, CARE Team, writing center, career services, financial aid, and success coaching) to build personal connections and provide service, peers. Students mentioned again a variety of supports that would be helpful for them such as child care options, improved advising, mentoring/peer groups, supporting field placements (transportation and childcare). Full responses to the forced choice questions on supports can be found in Table 3. If you are interested in looking at the responses to the open ended questions, contact Elena Andrei in Teacher Education.

Discussion and Recommendations for Change

Through this investigation we collected a lot of meaningful data that addressed our first to research questions focused on barriers and supports experienced by students. The biggest barriers we identified from our survey include: financial issues, childcare issues, mental health issues, and issues related to disability. Our survey also indicated that our students do not have a good understanding of the support services available to them through CSU. The impact of barriers and knowledge and utilization of supports was present across all subgroups of students. We were not able to collect as much information as we would have liked about the possible disportionality of

impacts on students of color and culturally and linguistically diverse students that is present in the literature across multiple facets of life. As we move forward, more targeted investigation of those populations is needed. Regardless, we feel the following recommendations will serve to better support the success of all students.
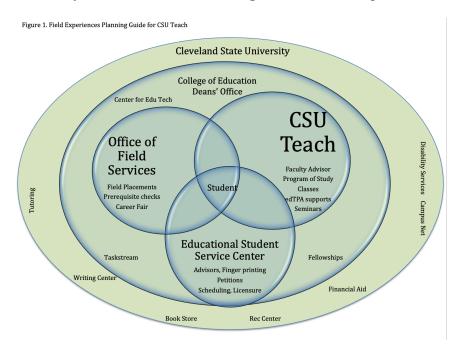
College-level Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey, we make the following recommendations using currently available resources to address financial, childcare, mental health, and disability issues. These are actionable items we can begin implementing in the 2021-2022 academic year.

- **Increase student awareness about financial obligations throughout the program** (i.e., background checks, licensure exams, etc.) through standardized documents created for each teaching program given out when a student is enrolled in the college and posted on each program's webpage.

- **Increase student awareness of existing scholarships** by keeping a working list of available scholarships in the ESSC for easy student access, such as a handout kept in a publicly accessible area in ESSC.

Table 4. Student Funding

Title	Website	Dollar Amount	Availability	Student Status
Grants				
Teach Grant	www.grants.gov			Undergraduate / Graduate
Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	www.grants.gov			Undergraduate / Graduate
Emergency FA Grants to students (HEERF)	https://www.csuohio.edu/financial-aid/grants			Undergraduate / Graduate
College Opportunity Grant	https://www.csuohio.edu/financial-aid/grants			Undergraduate / Graduate
Scholarships				
Soroptimist women's opportunity award	https://www.soroptimist.org/our-work/live-your-dream-awards/index.html			Undergraduate / Graduate
Association for Non-traditional students in Higher education (ANTSHE)	https://www.myantshe.org/			Undergraduate / Graduate
Adult students in Scholastic (ASIST)	https://ewiconnect.com/scholarships/			Undergraduate / Graduate
Transition Scholarship	https://ewiconnect.com/scholarships/			Undergraduate / Graduate
Bold.org	https://bold.org/			Undergraduate / Graduate
College Scholarships.org	www.scholarships.com			Undergraduate / Graduate
Foundations				
The Cleveland Foundation	www.clevelandfoundation.org			Undergraduate / Graduate
The Gund Foundation	info@gundfdn.org			Undergraduate / Graduate
The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation	www.mhjf.org			Undergraduate / Graduate

- **Increase student awareness of resources for finding childcare.** These resources may include Starting Point Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, 211 for Help, or Invest in Children (IIC) This could be a list created on CoEHS website listed under childcare needs or a similar type heading.

- **Use visuals throughout Julka to communicate about resources**. These visuals would show where in the University, College, or department each resource is housed.

- **Provide information about available resources** through updated website, Blackboard, and weekly PowerPoint slides. See *Figure 1* for an example.

Figure 1. Field Experiences Planning Guide for CSU Teach

- **Increase awareness of resources amongst faculty and staff** so they can provide information to students. This can be done monthly as presentations at faculty meetings.

- **Revising information recommended to appear in all syllabi** highlighting existing resources and how to access them. We recommend revising the statement on disability services, adding statements on conflict remediation and mental health services.

University-level Recommendations

In addition to the above immediately actionable items, our survey results also suggested the need for increased supports, particularly financial, for our students. We suggest coordinating efforts with other university departments and organizational units to work on the following:

- **Coordinate a CSU or college scholarship fund raising campaign** to directly address the financial burden of education, which was the most pressing need identified across student groups.

- **Explore additional childcare options.** This could include partnering with existing local childcare centers or looking at the feasibility of running an on campus daycare.

- **Coordinate our efforts with existing campus advising programs** (i.e., 411).

Recommendations for future study

The survey that his group administered collected a lot of valuable information but had clear limitations. The sampling methodology did not allow for direct comparison of sub-groups. Some key issues identified in the narrative responses were not included in the questions posed to all respondents. This survey was not designed to get richer descriptive data about the students' experiences facing barriers or seeking and engaging with supports.

- We recommend that a revised version of this survey be used next school year with a more structured sampling methodology that might allow for more direct comparison of sub-groups. A revised survey would add questions about mental health related barriers/supports, a revised demographic question section, and be smaller overall (we had ~10% non-completion rate). Ultimately, our goal would be to develop a valid and reliable survey instrument that we could administer periodically to evaluate the effects of initiatives to improve supports and mitigate barriers and that could be used with a larger population (e.g., our future merged college, the university as a whole, across Ohio public institutions of higher education).

- We recommend removing the narrative questions from the survey and establishing a line of inquiry into student experiences of barriers and supports using qualitative methods. This line of inquiry could better provide more information on some key questions resulting from the survey like "why did so many students say they were aware of a service, recognize that they needed the service, and yet not engaged with the service?" This line of inquiry might also help us better explore the unique experiences of sub-groups like students of color, culturally or linguistically diverse students, students with disabilities and other traditionally marginalized peoples.

References

Graves, R. M., Fowler, F. J., Couper, Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., Tourangean, R. (2009). *Survey methodology* (2nd ed.). Wiley.

Appendix A

College of Education and Human Services Student Needs Survey

Group 5 Survey of Students Needs
Draft Dec 3 2020

Part One: Life Circumstances

Read the following scale from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)	1	2	3	4	5
Financial concerns					
I have not been able to take a class that I wanted to because I could not afford it.					
I have not purchased a textbook for a class because I could not afford it.					
Stress or concerns about my finances have impacted my ability to be successful in class.					
The work schedule I have to maintain outside of school has prevented me from focusing on my education.					
Childcare/family needs					
I have missed classes or field placements because I had to care for children/family members.					
I have missed advising appointments or not attended to other business on campus (e.g., visiting campus 411, visiting the registrar, visiting treasury services) because I had to care for children/family members.					
Lack of access to child and family care has resulted in my inability to focus on my education.					
Transportation					
I have missed classes or field placements because I could not secure reliable transportation.					
I have missed advising appointments or not attended to other business on campus (e.g., visiting campus 411, visiting the registrar, visiting treasury services) because I could not secure reliable transportation.					

Access to technology					
Lack of access to a computer has resulted in my inability to participate in online classes on a regular basis.					
Not having experience and knowledge with using technology has resulted in my inability to access course and/or other materials.					

Additional Questions:

Regarding the statements above, is there any specific information you would like us to know about that might provide a better understanding of the challenges and/or barriers that impede your success here at CSU?

From the areas above what other challenges you have impacted your education at CSU?

What other personal challenges (e.g., substance abuse, mental health care, disability status) have impacted your education at CSU that you would like us to know about?

Part Two: Supports

	I have used it and it was helpful	I have used it and it was not helpful	I know about this but haven't needed it	I know about it and might need it and haven't used it	I don't know about this support
University Advising					
The Educational Service Student Center (ESSC) Advising Office					

My Program Faculty advisor					
Center for Educational Technology (C					
CSU Counseling Services					
Campus 411					
CARES Team					
Lift up Vikes					
Office of Disability Services					
Office of Institutional Equity					
TRIO					
Safe Space					
Veteran Affairs					
Key Bank Scholars					
Parker Hannifin Living Learning Community					
Sullivan Deckard Program					

Additional Questions:

What other university supports have been helpful to you?

What other supports do you think could be helpful if provided by the university?

Demographic information (optional)

Gender (How do you identify):	
Race and/or Ethnicity (How do you identify):	
Age:	
Which are the language you use on a daily basis:	
How many credits have you completed at CSU?	
What program are you in?	
I am the first one in my family to go to college.	Yes No
I am an active duty or a veteran of armed services.	Yes No
I am in an undergraduate program.	Yes No
I am in a graduate program.	Yes No
I transferred from another institution.	Yes No
If you transferred from another institution, which one?	
I am in field placement connected to a course (e.g., student teaching, counseling internship)	Yes No
If you are in a field placement, which one?	

Appendix B

Student Needs Survey Responses

The full data set of responses to the survey can be found on OneDrive under CoEHS and contact Elena Andrei (e.andrei@csuohio.edu).

The data set contains a summary page with the results of each forced choice question, the coding of open ended demographic questions (e.g., Q34. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity), and additional pages with the full narrative responses to open ended questions.