RESOURCE REVIEW

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Abstract

Sustaining Change: Efforts to Expand Student Success (Vyse, 2025) is a resource that describes the results and impact of a nationwide study on institutional progress toward student success in higher education. This review includes a brief summary, an evaluation of its findings and recommendations, and a reflection on its implications.

Keywords: student success, change, higher education, student services, survey

Review

Sustaining Change: Efforts to Expand Student Success (Vyse, 2025) is a resource that describes the results and impact of a nationwide study on institutional progress toward student success in higher education. It includes data from a survey of 874 administrators and faculty conducted online in February of 2025 and from interviews with individuals. It was published by The Chronicle of Higher Education. Sections include Executive Summary, Introduction, Progress to Build On, Challenges to Navigate, Moving Forward Despite Difficulties, Conclusion, and Methodology.

Sustaining Change is a worthwhile investment of time for administrators, staff, faculty, researchers, and others. Some of its findings may surprise some readers, leading them to examine new data and reexamine strategies they had thought to be effective with the present generation of students. Others are likely to confirm for some readers the validity of approaches that institutions, education departments, and staff already are implementing productively in practice (cf., e.g., Reber, 2024; United States Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse, 2025). Still others will reveal new information that will lead higher education institutions to attempt new approaches to increase their relevance and value to students.

Sustaining Change includes information that faculty and staff members from throughout college and university departments could use to enhance their work. Recruiters, for example, could highlight policies and practices their institutions implement successfully to support students – as specific points of differentiation and competitive advantage. Tutors could learn from the many successful strategies that Georgia State University (2025) and other institutions have used over the years and try new approaches in their own locations. Student support departments and personnel could promote institution-wide self-assessment to counteract lack of coordination among college and university departments and to work toward streamlining student success.

Perhaps the most surprising findings were the relatively low success rates of "predictive analytics," "adaptive-learning technologies," and "technology-based student support tools (e.g., chatbots)" (each with an administration and faculty overall response rate of just 30%) – strategies that many colleges and universities use and actively promote (cf., Stöhr, Wanyu Ou & Malström, 2024; McGrath, Farazouli, & Cerratto-Pargman, 2024). The findings are surprising because *so many* institutions are spending *so much* money on these technologies. One analyst puts it this way:

James Wiley is a technology analyst with Eduventures, which does consulting work for companies in the predictive analytics industry. Wiley says that colleges are typically paying $300,000 a year for these data dashboards, and a third of all higher education institutions have bought them. It's grown into a $500 million market with more than 30 for-profit companies selling predictive analytics tools to colleges. (Barshay & Aslanian, 2019, n.p.; cf., Bird, Castleman, Mabel, & Song, 2021)

These figures are more than a little alarming. The findings also are surprising when one compares those approaches to the high success rates of simple "tutoring" (81%) – an approach with a long history of wide acceptance and significant success (De Corte & De Witte, 2024; cf., Warkentien & Grady, 2009, and data from Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2022, and from Stanford University's National Student Support Accelerator, 2025).

The *Sustaining Change* report could prompt future research on student success in several ways. One of the report's key findings is that higher education institutions do *not* adequately capture "student success" (administration and faculty overall response rate of "No" at 56%, versus "Yes" at 32%; p. 26). In response, higher education institutions could research the following:

(1) *actual* costs and benefits of expanding their "definition of student success";

(2) *more active and efficient* ways of coordinating a common, institution-wide understanding of their "definition of student success"; and

(3) *more precise* ways to measure "post-graduation outcomes" of students (p. 26).

In summary, *Sustaining Change* provides succinct background information and timely, specific, data-driven descriptions of current trends and challenges for higher education student success efforts as well as promising strategies that colleges and universities can implement as they seek to expand student success.

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For Further Study

Achieving the Dream (https://achievingthedream.org/) – nonprofit organization focusing

nationwide on change management, public policy, knowledge generation, and public

engagement.

Ascendium Education Group (https://www.ascendiumeducation.org/) – nonprofit organization

focusing nationwide on research, education, consulting, grant-making, and action with

students, colleges, and companies.

Complete College America (https://completecollege.org/) – nonprofit organization that promotes

student success by focusing nationwide on advocacy.

FirstGen Forward (https://www.firstgenforward.org/) – nonprofit organization focusing nationwide on collaborations with colleges, charities, companies, government, and people.

National Institute for Student Success (https://www.niss.gsu.edu) – nonprofit organization focusing nationwide on systems capacity building for higher education.

Reviewer

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