

Effective Practices and Experiences from the Wabash National Study

In our research thus far, we have found that three broad categories of teaching practices and institutional conditions predict growth on a wide variety of student outcomes including leadership, openness to diversity and challenge, political and social involvement, and positive attitude toward literacy. These categories of good teaching practices and supportive institutional conditions correspond to scales empirically derived from survey questions in the Wabash National Study:

- **Scale 1 – Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty** ($\alpha^1 = 0.92$), which includes the following subscales:
 - Faculty interest in teaching and student development
 - Prompt feedback
 - Quality of nonclassroom interactions with faculty
 - Teaching clarity and organization
- **Scale 2 – Academic Challenge and High Expectations** ($\alpha = 0.88$), which includes the following subscales:
 - Academic challenge and effort
 - Frequency of higher-order exams and assignments
 - Challenging classes and high faculty expectations
 - Integrating ideas, information, and experiences
- **Scale 3 – Diversity Experiences** ($\alpha = 0.80$), which includes the following subscales:
 - Meaningful interactions with diverse peers – I
 - Meaningful interactions with diverse peers – II

Students answered a variety of questions about their experiences with these good teaching practices and supportive institutional conditions. We added each student's responses to the questions in each scale to create scores for the three good practice scales and ten good practice subscales above. In essence, these scores are nothing more than devices designed to give you a sense of the extent to which students are experiencing teaching practices and institutional conditions that will help them learn.

The higher students score on each scale, the more they grow on the outcomes. Similarly, the larger the proportion of students that have high good practice scores, the more an institution's average scores on the outcome measures will increase. The opposite is also true, the lower students' good practice scores are, the less likely they are to grow on the outcomes.

Although the experiences in these scales appear to produce similar outcomes—for example all three scales have an impact on openness to diversity and challenge—our research indicates that each scale makes a unique contribution to the development of learning outcomes. Hence, providing greater levels of these experiences across the scales should promote greater levels of student learning.

¹ Refers to Chronbach's alpha.

In order to help you identify which students are and are not getting adequate levels of these experiences, we have classified students' scores as one of the following:²

- **Strong:** These students reported “often” or “very often” when asked about the extent to which they experienced good teaching practices and supportive institutional conditions. They are already having a good, high-impact college experience. They would still benefit from changes aimed at helping students in the “moderate” and “weak” categories, but they are probably not the students whom an institution needs to target.
- **Moderate:** The students in this category reported “sometimes” or “occasionally” when asked about the extent to which they experienced good teaching practices and supportive institutional conditions. These students are experiencing modest levels of good teaching and supportive institutional practices, but they would gain much more on the outcomes if they were more deeply engaged in these practices and conditions.
- **Weak:** The students in this category reported “never,” “rarely,” or “neutral” when asked about the extent to which they experienced these good teaching conditions and supportive institutional practices. These students may be completely disengaged from their institutions.

Our data shows that students in these three categories experience different levels of growth on the outcomes. Students in the *Weak* category do not grow as much on the outcomes as do students in the *Moderate* category, and students in the *Strong* category grow the most on our outcome measures.

The important thing to keep in mind about the student experiences highlighted in this report is that the degree of student growth is connected with the frequency of many of these experiences. We can improve the impact of our institutions by helping students experience more of the good teaching practices and supportive institutional conditions described above.

Scale 1 – Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty³

Students who have higher scores on this scale are more likely to grow on our measures of:

- Academic Motivation
- Critical Thinking
- Diversity and Challenge
- Leadership
- Moral Reasoning
- Need for Cognition
- Political and Social Involvement
- Positive Attitude toward Literacy
- Well-Being

² See [Appendix](#) for a detailed description of how we developed these classifications.

³An asterisk following the questions in the scales below indicates that the question is from the National Survey of Student Engagement.

Scale Scores

The proportion of students in the study at the *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Weak* levels of the practices and conditions measured by this scale is shown in the table below:

	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Weak</i>
Small Institutions	44%	56%	0%
Large Institutions	28%	72%	1%

Subscale Scores

The proportion of students in the study who are at the *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Weak* levels for each of the subscales in the *Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty* scale is provided below along with lists of the items within each subscale:

- Faculty interest in teaching and student development
 Strong = 64%, Moderate = 30%, Weak = 6%
 - Most faculty with whom I have had contact are genuinely interested in students.
 - Most faculty with whom I have had contact are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.
 - Most faculty with whom I have had contact are outstanding teachers.
 - Most faculty with whom I have had contact are genuinely interested in teaching.
 - Most faculty with whom I have had contact are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.
- Prompt feedback
 Strong = 28%, Moderate = 61%, Weak = 11%
 - How often have faculty informed you of your level of performance in a timely manner?
 - In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance?*
 - How often have faculty checked to see if you learned the material well before going on to new material?
- Quality of nonclassroom interactions with faculty
 Strong = 31%, Moderate = 64%, Weak = 5%
 - The extent to which you agree that your non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on your personal growth, values, and attitudes.
 - The extent to which you agree that your non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on your intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
 - The extent to which you agree that your non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on your career goals and aspirations.
 - The extent to which you agree that since coming to this institution, you have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.
 - The extent to which you agree that you are satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.

- Teaching clarity and organization
Strong = 55%, Moderate = 45%, Weak = 0%
 - Frequency that faculty gave clear explanations.
 - Frequency that faculty made good use of examples and illustrations to explain difficult points.
 - Frequency that faculty effectively reviewed and summarized the material.
 - Frequency that faculty interpreted abstract ideas and theories clearly.
 - Frequency that faculty gave assignments that helped in learning the course material.
 - Frequency that the presentation of material was well organized.
 - Frequency that faculty were well prepared for class.
 - Frequency that class time was used effectively.
 - Frequency that course goals and requirements were clearly explained.
 - Frequency that faculty had a good command of what they were teaching.

Scale 2 – Academic Challenge and High Expectations

Students who have higher scores on this scale are more likely to grow on our measures of:

- Academic Motivation
- Desire for Professional Success
- Diversity and Challenge
- Leadership
- Moral Reasoning
- Need for Cognition
- Political and Social Involvement
- Positive Attitude toward Literacy
- Well-Being

Scale Scores

The proportion of students in the study at the *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Weak* levels of the practices and conditions measured by this scale is shown in the table below:

	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Weak</i>
Small Institutions	26%	74%	0%
Large Institutions	18%	82%	0%

Subscale Scores

The proportion of students in the study who are at the *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Weak* levels for each of the subscales in the *Academic Challenge and High Expectations* scale is provided below along with lists of the items within each subscale:

- Academic challenge and effort
Strong = 34%, Moderate = 66%, Weak = 0%
 - In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations?*

- During the current school year, how many assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings have you done?*
- During the current school year, how many written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages have you done?*
- In a typical week, how many problem sets take you more than an hour to complete?*
- What is the extent to which your examinations during the current school year challenged you to do your best work?*
- About how many hours in a typical week do you spend preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)?*
- To what extent does your institution emphasize spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions?
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you made a class presentation?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you come to class without completing readings or assignments? (reverse-coded)*
- Frequency of higher-order exams and assignments
Strong = 35%, Moderate = 62%, Weak = 3%
 - How often have exams or assignments required you to write essays?
 - How often have exams or assignments required you to use course content to address a problem not presented in the course?
 - How often have exams or assignments required you to compare or contrast topics or ideas from a course?
 - How often have exams or assignments required you to point out the strengths and weaknesses of a particular argument or point of view?
 - How often have exams or assignments required you to argue for or against a particular point of view and defend your argument?
- Challenging classes and high faculty expectations
Strong = 29%, Moderate = 68%, Weak = 3%
 - How often have faculty asked challenging questions in class?
 - How often have faculty asked you to show how a particular course concept could be applied to an actual problem or situation?
 - How often have faculty asked you to point out any fallacies in basic ideas, principles, or points of view presented in the course?
 - How often have faculty asked you to argue for or against a particular point of view?
 - How often have faculty challenged your ideas in class?
 - How often have students challenged each other's ideas in class?

- Integrating ideas, information, and experiences

Strong = 35%, Moderate = 65%, Weak = 0%

- The extent to which you agree that courses have helped you understand the historical, political, and social connections of past events.
- The extent to which you agree that courses have helped you see the connections between your intended career and how it affects society.
- The extent to which you agree that your out-of-class experiences have helped you connect what you have learned in the classroom with life events.
- The extent to which you agree that your out-of-class experiences have helped you translate knowledge and understanding from the classroom into action.
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)?*
- During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships?*
- During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions?*

Scale 3 – Diversity Experiences

Students who have higher scores on this scale are more likely to grow on our measures of:

- Critical Thinking
- Desire to Contribute to the Arts
- Diversity and Challenge
- Leadership
- Need for Cognition
- Political and Social Involvement
- Positive Attitude toward Literacy

Scale Scores

The proportion of students in the study at the *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Weak* levels of the practices and conditions measured by this scale is shown in the table below:

	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Weak</i>
Small Institutions	5%	84%	12%
Large Institutions	3%	83%	14%

Subscale Scores

The proportion of students in the study who are at the *Strong*, *Moderate*, and *Weak* levels for each of the subscales in the *Diversity Experiences* scale is provided below along with lists of the items within each subscale:

- Meaningful interactions with diverse peers – I

Strong = 5%, Moderate = 85%, Weak = 10%

- How often have you attended a debate or lecture on a current political/social issue during this academic year?
- How frequently have you had serious discussions with student affairs staff (e.g., residence hall staff, career counselor, student union or campus activities staff) whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from your own?
- To what extent does your institution emphasize encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?*
- In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values?*
- How often have you participated in a racial or cultural awareness workshop during this academic year?

- Meaningful interactions with diverse peers – II

Strong = 18%, Moderate = 53%, Weak = 29%

- How often have you had discussions regarding inter-group relations with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views) while attending this college?
- How often have you had meaningful and honest discussions about issues related to social justice with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views) while attending this college?
- How often have you shared personal feelings and problems with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views) while attending this college?