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BECOMING A STUDENT- READY COLLEGE



A NEW **CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP**
FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

SECOND EDITION

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PRAISE FOR THE SECOND EDITION OF *BECOMING A STUDENT-READY COLLEGE*

“In this second edition of *Becoming a Student-Ready College*, the authors are to be commended for making an already outstanding resource even better for college presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, faculty, student services personnel, board members, and others interested in and committed to promoting student success and closing equity gaps. The book serves as an exceptional ‘how to’ guide for colleges laser-focused on promoting success as a student-centered institution.”

—**Sonny Ramaswamy**, President, Northwest Commission
on Colleges and Universities

“In a doctorate program for community college practitioners, this text was instrumental in highlighting perhaps the most important skill for our future community college leaders - creating effective and mutually beneficial relationships that increase student success. As instructors, we frequently returned to the concept of the “ecosystem,” as we challenged our students to identify community partners who could help accelerate our work to increase student success.”

—**Dr. Naomi DeWinter**, President, Muscatine Community
College, and
Dr. Cameron Brunet-Koch, President (Retired), North
Central Michigan College

“Campuses need this book more than ever as they recover from the pandemic and try to address long-standing racial inequities on campus where stakeholders no longer have

patience to wait for us to redesign higher education so that it is 'student ready.' Using students as the foundation for campus design - policies, practices, structures, and ultimately our culture is the essential challenge of the next decade. This book continues to provide the steps campus leaders can take to make all students successful and to fulfill their mission and be accountable to policymakers, parents, and students themselves."

—**Adrianna Kezar**, Wilbur Kieffer Endowed Professor and
Dean's Professor of Leadership, USC, Director of the
Pullias Center

BECOMING A STUDENT-READY COLLEGE

A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success

Second Edition

Tia Brown McNair

Susan Albertine

Nicole McDonald

Thomas Major Jr.

Michelle Asha Cooper

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For my husband, Maurice; my son, Austin; my mom, Patricia; my sister, Tammi; and my brother-in-law, Tyvi. Thank you for your unwavering support. To my dad, who is always with me from Heaven, I feel your love every day. - TBM

For Vera, who in the 1950s taught me to see. - SA

For my mother, Frances McDonald, and my grandmothers Mary Porter and Louise Fairbanks. Thank you for your love and your courage. - NM

With all my love to Linda, Eric, and Rachael, for being my reasons why. And to Thomas Sr. and Lorene, for showing me how. - TM

Thanks to my parents, Chester Cooper, Sr. and Yvonne Cooper, for giving me roots; and to my daughter, Grace, for giving me hope! - MAC

Joint dedication:

For all of America's college students—previous, current, and future. This book is for you and your success!

PREFACE

“Students today are less prepared for postsecondary education.”

“Why are we admitting students who are not ready for college?”

“Aren't we lowering our academic standards?”

“Students are not motivated. It is not my responsibility to convince them that getting an education is important for their lifelong success.”

“We can't be all things to all people.”

“With all of the increasing demands from our current circumstances, I am too busy to advise and/or mentor students.”

“It is their responsibility to learn how to navigate college. I did it. Why can't they?”

If any of these statements sound familiar to you—whether you heard them in a meeting or in a conversation with colleagues or you have thought them—then this book is for you. In the years since the book was first published, we constantly have heard from educators who are hungry for guidance to address such statements as these and the attitudes they represent.

At the same time, we have been surprised and heartened by the positive reception of this book and the many places where the phrase *student-ready* is used. We know we are asking questions that resonate with educators. Given the number of individuals and institutions that have engaged with our book since the initial release, we are hopeful.

As we revise the manuscript in 2022 for the second edition, we are reminded that these questions remain as pertinent as they were in 2016, and even more so, given what we have experienced over the past couple of years. As before, we want to be clear that this book is not about judgment or casting blame. We embarked on this journey because we believe in the promise and vision of higher education. We also recognize the constraints and the frustration of our colleagues, and even our own, in trying to do the work we are committed to accomplishing. This book is our effort to reframe the dialogue on student success. We feel the need for that reframing even more urgently now than we did 6 years ago. We are calling for—and we want to create—a paradigm shift, from focusing more on what students lack to focusing more on what we can do, as educators, to create stronger, higher-quality educational environments that promote full inclusion and continuous improvement. The promise of higher education is essential to a healthy democracy.

The central theme for this book emerged from a conversation at a meeting in Indianapolis. A couple of us were talking about how institutions can examine their institutional efforts to improve student success. Not surprisingly, the conversation shifted to some form of the quotes noted at the opening of this preface. Instead of going down a path of blaming the students, Thomas Major, Jr., asked a very provocative question: “We talk a lot about students not being college-ready, but why don't we ask what it means to be a student-ready college?” From that one question, the concept for this book was born.

Our goal is for this book to be a catalyst for action and for change at postsecondary institutions. To accomplish this, we present the book as a discussion driver. You will find that we offer a series of principles, case examples, and questions to prompt discussions. The book is intended to

offer advice and guidance that you and your institution can apply and adapt in your own context—to find your own pathways and your own policies and practices. We hope that the book encourages you to embark on institutional assessment and self-reflection for the very best of reasons, to strengthen what is most precious in American higher education: the opportunity for learning that we offer our students now and into the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tia Brown McNair has spent more than 25 years advocating for underserved students in higher education through various administrator roles and as an adjunct faculty member at several institutions. She is currently vice president of diversity, equity, and student success and executive director for the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Washington, D.C. She oversees both funded projects and AAC&U's continuing programs on equity, inclusive excellence, high-impact practices, and student success. McNair also directs AAC&U's Summer Institutes on High-Impact Practices and Student Success and TRHT Campus Centers.

Susan Albertine began teaching middle school in 1971. She later became a professor of English and served in an array of academic leadership positions, including vice provost for undergraduate studies at Temple University and dean of humanities and social sciences at the College of New Jersey. In 2008, she joined the Association of American Colleges and Universities (now the American Association of Colleges and Universities; AAC&U) as vice president of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Student Success and also became senior scholar for faculty in 2015. She retired from AAC&U in 2020.

Nicole McDonald serves as assistant vice provost for student success strategies at the University of Houston and leads operations for Houston Guided Pathways to Success, a regional consortium of 13 public institutions in the Gulf Coast-Houston metro region, focused on improving outcomes for all students through the innovation and scale

of evidence-based practices. Previously, she served as a strategy officer at Lumina Foundation, where she managed more than \$15 million in grants focused on student success and learning pathways; as system director for transfer and retention at Kentucky Community & Technical College System; and associate for academic affairs for the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

Thomas Major Jr. is associate general counsel at Lumina Foundation, where he works to ensure 60 percent of American adults will have a college degree, certificate, industry certification, or other credential of value by 2025. He serves as Lumina's legal lead on a broad array of strategic, programmatic, and general corporate matters. His work also supports efforts that engage higher education systems, institutions, and stakeholders to increase completion rates and close attainment gaps of historically underrepresented and low-income students. Major's professional background includes private corporate law practice, educational consulting, and various roles in workforce development.

Michelle Asha Cooper is acting assistant secretary of the Office of Postsecondary Education, where she leads efforts to strengthen the capacity of colleges and universities to better serve students, especially those who have been historically underserved. Cooper is a passionate advocate for racial and economic equity, with over 20 years of experience in postsecondary education. She has also held leadership positions at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, American Association of Colleges and Universities, the Council for Independent Colleges, and King's College.

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Preparing the second edition of *Becoming a Student-Ready College*, we have relied on the support of family, friends, and colleagues. They are too many to name but are all deeply appreciated. To everyone who helped, we say thank you with gratitude. We especially want to thank Nicole Fry, Program Coordinator/Assistant to the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and Amy Davis, our editor. Nicole guided us through the work of revision, organizing drafts and handling the schedule with thoughtfulness and expertise. Amy gave us careful and responsive feedback in her editing.

To the staff and editors at Wiley, we offer particular thanks for encouragement, patience, and flexibility.

Finally, we hope that you, our readers, will continue to find this book useful in your discussions and in your leadership wherever you work at your institution. We hope that the book is a catalyst for needed change founded on the hope and promise of higher education for all students. The action that we seek to inspire is practical but not easy. Our inspiration comes from the enthusiasm we encounter from colleagues along our professional journeys, even in the midst of such challenging times as these. We hope that you turn to this book for advice because you, too, want to lead serious change, shifting the paradigm from focusing solely on college-ready students to exploring what it means to become an institution truly ready for students.

CHAPTER ONE

The Time Is Now: A Call for Student-Ready Colleges

CHAPTER TWO

Leadership Values and Organizational Culture

CHAPTER THREE

Intentionality by Design to Support Student Success

CHAPTER FOUR

Leveraging Ecosystem Partnerships in Support of Student Readiness

CHAPTER FIVE

Educating the Whole Student

CHAPTER ONE

The Time Is Now: A Call for Student-Ready Colleges

In higher education, there is growing concern and accountability for student success among college leadership, and at state and national levels, out of a growing awareness of the persistent challenges that threaten higher education opportunities for millions of today's students. While many within the higher education community desire to improve student success, they continue to aspire for students who, when they enter college, are ready for the rigors of higher education and come with better standardized test scores, from high schools with better resources, with parents who attended college, with a sense of independence, with few distractions and fully focused on college. Yet issues of college accessibility, affordability, and success remain, and student success still prioritizes college readiness. So what's the harm in defining student success this way? While it is important for students to be as prepared as possible for a college education, defining student success primarily by students' college-readiness limits the possibilities for student success almost exclusively to pre-college factors over which higher education has only limited influence and places the burden of success in college almost entirely on the students. Here we advocate for a different vision of student success: a vision of the student-ready college as the optimal setting for student success and deeply rooted in the transformative power of higher education institutions, and their commitment to ensuring the success of students and students' capacity to participate in twenty-first-century life and work.

What does it mean to be a student-ready college? Being a student-ready college requires more than a mission statement that touts expressed commitments about student-centeredness or espouses philosophical ideals of inclusiveness, excellence, or diversity. It requires more than aggressively implementing an assemblage of disconnected, piecemeal, or niche programs and initiatives to improve student recruitment, retention, and completion. Being a student-ready college is as much about how higher education institutions define student success and their relationship with students—and how they take action—as it is about the strategies they implement. Student-ready colleges take an intentional, systemic, holistic, and transformative approach to ensuring student learning and ensuring that every student receives what is needed to be successful. At student-ready colleges, students are responsible for doing the work needed to complete the path to a higher education credential, and the college takes leadership, ownership, and accountability for everything associated with curating the path through the institution and aligning learning and post-college outcomes. And all activities and services facilitate an equitable opportunity for every student to make steady, efficient progress toward completing their studies and to become fully informed and educated for civic and economic participation in a global, interconnected society.

Being a student-ready college is about how higher education institutions enact a culture across their campuses to ensure student success, and how they engage as members of the broader postsecondary ecosystem to help ensure student success. Student-ready colleges appreciate their role as complex, dynamic organisms within the larger postsecondary ecosystem, and they operate systemically within and across their various internal functions to support students. Moreover, they fully

appreciate that students operate as fluid parts, moving organically between both the college and larger postsecondary ecosystem. In honor of the student-institution relationship, student-ready colleges challenge the status quo, and stay attuned and responsive to the opportunities presented by the broader ecosystem as well as the implications the current context may have on the needs of students.

Student-ready colleges define student success in a way that represents a paradigm shift—reframing the student success conversation from one of pre-college characteristics and student deficits to one of student assets and institutional opportunity, leadership, and accountability. Student success is defined in terms that go beyond traditional notions and predictors of completion to include a focus on student learning, growth, and development that meets students where they are and addresses the needs they have along their journey through higher education.

At student-ready colleges, all services and activities facilitate an equal opportunity for every student to make steady, efficient progress toward completing their studies and fully participating in twenty-first-century life, work, and communities. Attention and accountability extend from admissions to the classroom and to every policy, practice, budget, and business decision that affects the student experience on campus. Financial aid office? Check. Student services? Yes. Informed choice and options for scheduling classes? Absolutely. Health, wellness, and other wraparound student support? Yes. The unique mix of institutional mission and academic programs? Absolutely. All of the above.

Further, student-ready colleges enact an institutional culture in which organizational learning and improvement are central institutional values and serve as the primary

drivers of institutional and individual action. All principles are aligned with the mission of the institution and shared among members of the campus community. At student-ready colleges, the commitment to leadership and collaboration is so elevated—all members of the campus community are empowered to be engaged as leaders and educators. Student-ready colleges are committed not only to student achievement but also to identifying and removing systemic barriers to the achievement of every student. They promote excellence for every student by ensuring and engaging every student in integrative learning experiences and high-impact practices. Instead of reserving these experiences for only a select few students, student-ready colleges make these experiences universally available so that all students have opportunities to engage in first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, integrative and service learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects.

In the first edition of *Becoming a Student-Ready College*, we shared a new lens through which campus leaders can view existing and emerging issues and the opportunity to transform institutions for the success of their students. We highlighted promising and innovative practices that we have witnessed in our work. These practices are not exhaustive but reflect a range of interventions occurring all across the higher education community. In the second edition, we seek to do the same, and—based on ideas and practices learned and observed in years of work with colleges across the nation and internationally—we offer recommendations to minimize the threats posed by current and future challenges to higher education students, institutions, and communities. Although individual leaders can pursue the strategies outlined in this book, we