EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOUNDED IN EQUITY

A New Vision for Student Success at Rutgers University

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It is not true that universities can have equity only at the expense of excellence—and excellence only at the expense of equity. What if excellence were defined as the difference between what a student entered and left college with?....Excellence founded in equity requires us to think differently about why we do what we do, not only what we do and how we do it. (Boyer 2030 Commission, 2022, pp.8-9)

This report, which was researched and written by the Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity and Justice at Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, was commissioned by the Educational Excellence and Equity Collaborative (E3C) to serve as landscape analysis of student support and success programs for underserved student populations across Rutgers University's three campuses: New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark.

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Our goal was to better understand the range and scope of programs available to support underserved students, both those considering applying to Rutgers and those already enrolled who are at risk of academic failure or dropping out. By "underserved" we mean students that identify as first-generation, low-income, students of color, students re-entering the education pipeline from full-time work, military service, or incarceration, students of non-traditional age, undocumented students, LBGTQ+ students, students who are immigrants and/or students who are English Language Learners. We also consider these programs in light of larger questions: What does educational equity founded in excellence look like, and how do we know it when we see it?

The relationship between equity and excellence in higher education has long been a contentious one, in that many people view them as oppositional. It is still common for faculty and scholars in higher education to believe that a more diverse student body comes at the expense of selectivity and excellence, and that committing to providing equitable opportunities for underserved students undermines what should be a blind process based primarily on test scores, GPAs and "hard work" (Smith, 2020). As the Boyer 2030 Commission suggests, the idea of "excellence founded in equity" requires us to think differently about programs and initiatives aimed at student achievement and success.

Written under the auspices of the Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities, the Boyer 2030 Commission published *The Equity-Excellence Imperative: A 2030 blueprint for undergraduate education at U.S. research institutions* in 2022. This extensive report underscores how important it is to use measures of student success in higher education that go beyond narrow statistics about college access, retention, and four-year graduation rates.

Specifically, the Commission reminds us that: "Questions of access don't end when students are accepted to college" (2022, p.23). They compel us to also ask additional questions such as: "Are enriching educational experiences that are particularly beneficial accessible to all students?" and "What is the quality of the education available to students?" Defining these experiences through the lens of high-impact practices, the report states:

> We can approach those questions by considering the 'high-impact practices' (HIPs)—hallmarks of transformative educational practices—that teach students the critical life and problem-solving skills they need to thrive outside the classroom. They include such experiences as first-year seminars, faculty-mentored research, study abroad, internships, and living-learning communities (Boyer Report, 2022, p.23).

The conversation about student success in higher education is rapidly changing. Institutions are now using new metrics that emphasize several key questions: whether stated interventions and programs are accessible to the students who most need them, whether they meet students' diverse (and sometimes overlapping) needs and expectations, and to what extent they actually make a difference.

Moreover, the time has come to ask more expansive questions about how and to what extent these various student success initiatives are woven into the larger institutional culture of higher education, meaning that they seek to address systemic inequities while still supporting individual student success.

Any meaningful research on student success programs at an individual institution must consider broader questions about the institutional mission statement and leadership's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the campus culture, how resources are allocated, and what kinds of data the institution collects to measure impact and student progress. These new metrics are meant to augment, not replace, more traditional quantitative methods of data collection around access, retention and graduate rates that have defined the field for decades.

As reflected in its name, The Educational Excellence and Equity Collaborative (E3C) at Rutgers University, has created new impetus and pathways for this work to happen. The organization describes itself as an "eco-system that is committed to equitable outcomes for New Jersey's historically underserved populations" and that will "provide a platform to amplify the enduring Rutgers story of opportunity and excellence…." The significance of this mission statement should not be underestimated, as it invites us to rethink the relationship between education, excellence, and equity as three equal partners, thus bringing us the name E3C.

In this report, we preview a much more expansive vision of what student success looks like – drawing from a vast body of current research on high impact practices in college preparation and undergraduate support – including addressing institution-wide initiatives around: college preparation, student inclusivity, community and belonging, academic and intrusive advising, financial wellness and literacy, faculty diversity and institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), experiential and student-centered learning, living learning communities, professional development and leadership opportunities, mentorship, extra-curricular opportunities, service-learning and community partnerships, college re-entry programs and pathways, and summer bridge programs.

In addition to researching and cataloging all the programs that we could find on Rutgers' three campuses, we consider herein several central research questions:

1. How are these programs defined and categorized, especially as they align with broader research literature about high impact practices in college support and success?
2. What are the common themes and approaches across their mission and vision statements?
3. What specific student populations are they designed to serve?

Our findings – which include over 100 programs across three Rutgers campuses – underscore the variety of support services and programs offered, as well as the many diverse groups of students who are benefiting from these programs. Most of the programs we found, in fact, offered a combination of these resources, as the students who apply for them have a combination of intersectional identities and risk factors, and benefit from multiple, scaffolded, and aligned opportunities.

We conclude this report with some recommendations for creating and sustaining high impact programs for diverse groups of students, as well as foreshadowing some additional research questions and methodological approaches. We believe this research would be highly beneficial as E3C seeks to increase and sustain student success across Rutgers' three campuses.

Moreover, because these programs exist within a larger institutional context and culture, we make note of best practices in assessing institutional readiness to support and prioritize high impact student success programs.

STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SERVING THE NEW NORMAL

> 74% of all undergraduates have at least one non-traditional characteristic; 66% transfer between institutions; and 63% are first-generation…These "new normal" students may already be working or have families and may need access to non-academic services such as childcare and financial assistance to meet their work and family obligations as they take courses and study (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p.7)

Current research on college success has found that there is still a huge gap (30%) between college completion rates for White students and historically underrepresented groups of students, including that about 90% of low-income, first-generation students do not graduate within six years (Educational Advisory Board, 2019, np). This research reflects a decades long trend where the student population in higher education has grown increasingly diverse[1] while at the same time: "The challenges that cause students to stop out of college disproportionately impact first-generation college-goers, older students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color" (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2022, p. 9).

As a result, traditional models of measuring student success as a direct pathway or pipeline from admission to 4-year graduate rates are not the best indicators of success for all students. Noting the "post-traditional learners represent as much as 60% of enrolled undergraduates," in *Defining Student Success Data: Recommendations for changing the conversation*, The Higher Learning Commission underscores: "Current discussions and measures of student success are based on a construct that does not represent students now enrolled in U.S. postsecondary education institutions. The conversation must shift" (2018, p. 9).

The "new normal" changes the way we think about measuring student success in higher education. The need to look at student success within a broader, more institutional framework, and across intersectional identities, is echoed across most of the recent research and literature on the subject. As Chen et. al., (2019) suggest: "Recent research has pointed to the need for establishing benchmarks and a differentiated understanding of adult-learner enrollment pathways across contexts and over time" (p. 39). The authors also stress that "It is thus imperative to understand dropout risks of nontraditional students….and to develop policies and practices that fit with the realities of these underserved students and promote their college success" (p. 39).

Likewise, as noted by the National Post-secondary Education Cooperative (NPEC): "Instead of the familiar 'pipeline' analogy depicted by a direct route to educational attainment, a more accurate representation is a wide path with twists, turns, detours, roundabouts, and occasional dead ends that many students may encounter during their educational career" (2018, p. 7). In other words, research on college students' success must pay closer attention to what happens in between college going-intent and graduation.

As a result of these kinds of findings, many institutions of higher education have sought to increase support services and opportunities for non-traditional, underserved, and "at-risk" students. However, as the Higher Learning Commission also underscores, just having these resources available on campus does not mean they are indeed being utilized or that they are high impact practices: "In essence, offering resources does not mean that students are supported. The support needs to be available to them when they need it, in the form they need it, and not based on institutional convenience" (2018, p.2).

1. According to the National Student Clearing Research Center, "Black, Latinx, and Asian students accounted for most of the undergraduate and graduate enrollment growth this fall. Enrollment of White students continued to decline at both the graduate (-1.9%) and undergraduate levels (-0.9%), most acutely among freshmen (-9.4%)" (October 26, 2023).

The Commission concludes by recommending: "What is needed is an examination of these interventions to determine if they are appropriate for the students. Are institutions asking learners to conform to the systems or are institutions attempting to redesign themselves for student success? To what extent is the success-focus driven by institutional success rather than student success?" (2018, p.4).

So, what does this new definition of student success look like? For one thing, it goes beyond the acquisition of pure academic skills, to examine the holistic student experience in higher education, including skills such as leadership, confidence, and self-efficacy. As far back as 2006, for example, The National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) published an expansive report titled *What Matters to Student Success: A review of the literature*, in which they noted that: "Student success is also linked with a plethora of desired student and personal development outcomes that confer benefits on individuals and society. These include becoming proficient in writing, speaking, critical thinking, scientific literacy, and quantitative skills and more highly developed levels of personal functioning represented by self-awareness, confidence, self-worth, social competence, and sense of purpose" (p.5).

Moreover, as the Higher Learning Commission has warned, institutions of higher education are still prone to add programs and services "on the side....without a substantial rethinking of the core campus functions and practices" (2018, p.7). Citing what Daryll Smith (2007), a pioneer of research on student success and diversity in higher education, once referred to as "programmitis," the Higher Learning Commission observed that issues of diversity, equity and inclusion continue to plague institutions of higher education as these they struggle to make student success for all students a part of their "central mission, values, goals, policies, and practices" (2018, p.4).

The Commission goes on to state that programs to support student success are inherently interwoven with institutional values and culture and urges us to consider a different framework for student success that includes: "1. Clear understanding of the student population served; 2. Regular and ongoing involvement of students in the process of designing supports and making sense of data; 3. Clarity of process on the part of institutions to select and implement approaches that align with students that build upon and inform research; and 4. Examination of what works and for whom and under what circumstances to achieve success" (2018, p. 7).

A few years after the Higher Learning Commission published its report, in 2021, the American Council on Education (ACE) produced its own report *Creating a Diverse Student Success Infrastructure: The key to catalyzing cultural change for today's student*, in which it found that: "…diverse student success infrastructure elements share similar features that enhance effectiveness, including equity, alignment, broad stakeholder engagement, collaboration, learning, clarity, and transparency. These features capture basic ways of re-orienting higher education to be better organized towards supporting student success" (p. 2). ACE recommended that: "It is time for diverse student success to move from being on the margins of campus, in isolated programs and services, to a diverse student success infrastructure that makes good on new values which promote the success of all students in college" (p. 2). ACE called for an infrastructure that institutionalizes these interventions as "the challenge of serving diverse students is an organizational one," and must include central elements such as "broad stakeholder engagement; collaboration; learning, clarity & transparency; equity, and alignment" (p.9).

In *Historically Underrepresented Students: Redefining success in higher education*, Ramos and Sifuentez (2021) agree that we need to redefine the term college success in a much more expansive manner: "College success encompasses how students navigate the college context and overcome social, political, and economic disparity that work in tandem to limit opportunity and success…." The authors further note that through this lens "College success then becomes students' collection of obstacles defeated and benefits gained throughout the college experience. These benefits also serve to reshape the institutions they attend" (2021, p.95). So, how to we put these new definitions of student success into practice? The following list is a compilation of best practices in student support and success, taken from multiple sources.

STUDENT SUCCESS HOLISTICALLY REDEFINED

As noted, student success in higher education must be defined by more than just enrollment, retention, GPAs, and graduation rates. We need a more inclusive definition that includes student belonging, agency, motivation, persistence, as well as access to co-curricular opportunities, leadership opportunities, professional skill-building workshops and networking opportunities, attention to mental and physical wellness, financial aid, and financial literacy, and living and housing opportunities that affordable, expansive, and inclusive (National Institute for Student Success, 2023). For example, in *Enhancing Student Success in Education* (2007), The National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative reminds us that: "Recognizing differences in academic preparation and cultural background among students may lead to different treatments, but all students should be expected to meet the same outcomes or standards" (p. 9).

There is also a substantial body of research that demonstrates that the timing and coordination of programs are essential to their impact and success, especially given that students often participate in more than one program (NPEC, 2006). A recent review of Rutgers New Brunswick's student success programs, for example, found little coordination between programs, leading to the recommendation that student success programs "must center on enhancing coordination" and connecting students experiences in these individual programs with "larger learning goals" (Rutgers University, Discovery Advantage, 2023). In *Student Success in College: Creating conditions that matter,* Kuh et al., also remind us that:

> Alignment does not happen naturally. It requires that some persons or groups regularly monitor the efficacy of current initiatives and review proposed new efforts to determine their complementarity and potential for enhancing student success (2005, p. 297).

AN INSTITUTIONAL MISSION THAT PRIORITIZES EQUITY AND SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

To achieve this kind of holistic student success, institutional mission statements must emphasize and prioritize success across all groups of students, reflecting a campus culture in which all students are considered capable of college achievement and success with the right support and resources. According to the Higher Learning Commission (2018): "In such a complex landscape of competing priorities, student success is not just about getting students to and through, but about redesigning institutions to support students in the complex interplay of their lived experience" (2018, p. 2). This means rejecting stereotypes and deficit models of underserved students, building a culture of inclusion, and belonging, and working within a framework of high expectations/high support.

In *Learning Better Together*, authors Engstrom & Tinto (2018) stress that to enable students to meet high expectations we must also help them to "gain confidence in themselves as learners and to view themselves as belonging in college, thereby enabling their success" (p. 19). Likewise, in *The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention*, an ACT Policy Report, the authors underscore that: "Retention affects the entire campus community. All members of the college community need to be committed to the welfare of the student and have a stake in the success of policies and practices that reduce student departure" (2004, p. 21). Of note, Minority Serving Institutions, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) have been singled out as prime examples of institutions that model this kind of holistic commitment to student inclusion and success (Conrad and Gasman, 2017).

However, it is also important to be mindful that changes in infrastructure must be accompanied by a willingness to reallocate resources, a move that can be unsettling for those already benefiting from current structures. According to the Boyer 2030 Commission Report: "The change called for in this report goes beyond the idea that diversifying the community of students, faculty, and staff will lead to equity and inclusion. Institutional structures need to change. Resources must be reallocated, and complex decisions made about what can no longer be done. These changes require the resolve, power, perspective, and vision that only senior leadership can provide" (2022, p. 51).

Likewise, in *Connecting the Dots between Learning and Resources*, published by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, author Wellman (2010) cites research that "the more effective institutions did not spend more per student than their peers but that they did spend differently, putting proportionately more money into academic and student support than their peers did" (p. 11).

According to the Higher Learning Commission, the following questions are offered as critical elements of the new conversation when examining an institution on student success:

- Does the institution know and understand its various student bodies (including their intents and goals), the communities it serves, and the communities its graduates will serve?
- Is the institution student-ready and transparent about who it can and cannot serve well?
- Can the institution collect, protect, and analyze data related to its students' success, making sense of the data with students?
- How has the institution aligned its processes, practices, culture, and related measures of success to the students it actually serves?
- Given existing funding constraints, how is the institution moving from boutique or siloed approaches addressing student success to collectively integrated, intentional, and systematic approaches?
- Can the institution explain to various interested audiences why it is doing the things it is for the students it has and document that they work?" (p. 9)

PROGRAMS THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE AND FOCUS ON STUDENT AGENCY AND CONTINOUS SUCCESS

Student success programs need to be easily accessible and widely advertised to the students who need them, with clear information about how the program will benefit the student. Kuh et. al., (2005) state that "Making programs and resources available is necessary, but not sufficient to promote student succuss. Schools must induce large numbers of students to use them" (p.268).

Likewise, according to a report by the Pell Institute, *Moving Beyond Access*: "Institutions must reduce the barriers to their participation in such programs – including lack of information, inability to pay, and/or inconvenient hours that conflict with work schedules – by offering flexible services that take low-income, first-generation students' special needs into consideration" (2007, p. 25-26). For example, research has shown that students need access to support programs and extra-curricular opportunities that are convenient even if they do not live on campus, or if they work full-time while going to school (Kuh, et al, 2005).

This emphasis on offering support programs that are flexible and meet students where they are, for example, is noted in the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research Report College and *Beyond II: Outcomes of a Liberal Arts Education*, in which it underscores that "It's not a race to see how many [high impact practices] students undertake" (2018, p.56). In other words, student success should not be measured by how many support initiatives students take part in, but how effective those initiatives are in helping students achieve their goals.

Lastly, while pre-college outreach such as summer bridge programs and programs focusing on first year student success are critically important, students struggle in college at multiple points.

It is therefore also critical that student success programs are available and integrated throughout the entire college experience. Kuh et. al., (2005) have gone as far as to suggest that if a program or activity is critical to student success, colleges should "consider requiring it" (p. 315). Lastly, the literature stresses that college success programs should foster student agency and provide students with the resources and skills to continue to be successful after an individual program or initiative concludes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACULTY DIVERSITY AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY ACROSS CURRICULUM

Given that most underserved students face multiple challenges across intersectional identities, institutions must integrate cultural pedagogy into higher education. It cannot simply be an "add on" for students of color. This means that faculty must not only commit to new ways of teaching but must have continued access to professional development and reward systems that support student-centered learning and priorities. As Kuh et. al., (2005) note: "Substantive, educationally meaningful student-faculty interaction just doesn't happen; It is expected, nurtured, and supported" (p. 280).

The authors further note that: "Faculty members who forge authentic relationships with students often are able to connect with students at deeper levels and challenge them to previously unrealized levels of achievement and personal performance" (p. 281). Institutions of higher education should thus look for ways to affirm students' diverse social and cultural backgrounds, creating an environment that supports diversity and inclusion. This means looking beyond the number and range of student support programs, or the content of course syllabi. Institutions should value diversity among leadership, faculty, and staff as they reflect the larger campus culture and are more likely to hold the institution accountable for diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

In addition, and often overlooked in the literature on college success for students of color, the campus's physical environment should also be aligned with diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

As suggested by Ramos and Sifuentez (2021) "space is the movement and articulation of different social practices" (p. 101), and effects how safe and welcomed students feel partaking in different campus activities and services. Students of color and other underserved student groups, like first-generation students or LGBTQ students, should thus have dedicated spaces to meet with likeminded students, and buildings and classrooms that are visually inclusive of diverse cultures and experiences. According to Kuh et. al. (2005) there is a need to "align the physical environment with institutional priorities and goals for student success" and rather than putting student services "on the perimeter of the campus or in out-of-the-way places," student services must be "centrally located and easy to find" (p. 314).

> It is also important that institutional efforts to integrate students of color into predominantly White academic communities be sensitive to their needs and concerns.... Feeling a sense of fit and belonging at the institution is important because being validated by faculty, staff, and peers helps students believe they can succeed. – National Post-Secondary Educational Cooperative, 2006, p. 72

DATA-INFORMED PROGRAMMING AND DECISION MAKING

It should be obvious that institutional leadership must be well informed about their unique student population and needs, however, many decisions are not, in fact, backed up by current or vigorous data (Squires and Roberts, 2021). The actual impact of student success programs must be data-informed, and this data must be collected regularly and triangulated across multiple stakeholder groups. In reviewing this data, institutions of higher education must also challenge pervasive stereotypes about cultural identity and student achievement. For example, "The Model Minority" suggests that all students of Asian or Asian American decent have the same opportunities regardless of social class, sex, gender, language, religion, or immigration status – which is not true (Hartlep, 2013; Walton and Trong, 2022).

Institutions should also have a growth mindset in which they seek continuous improvement and balance the sustainability of programs with on-going evaluation and innovation, such as keeping an institutional dashboard. The National Institute for Student Success, located at Georgia State University, is a prime example of a university that used data to re-imagine its entire approach to student support, campus services, and institutional culture. According to their website: "Without restricting admissions or raising our tuition to the rates of elite institutions, we have leveraged data and new technologies to deliver unprecedented levels of personalized attention to our students." The website further notes that: "In advising, we are using data to track every student, every day for more than 800 academic risk factors, and reaching out proactively — more than 100,000 times in the past 12 months — to get them the help they need." Georgia State has been held up as an exemplar in changing the college experience for underserved student populations; the institution's focus on using evidence-based best practices is at the heart of their success.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS, PROACTIVE/ INTRUSIVE ADVISING, AND SAFETY NETS

In conjunction, with collecting nuanced data about student demographics and success throughout their college journey, institutions should also have early warning systems to identify students who are struggling or "at-risk," and their progress should be closely monitored at multiple stages. According to the Boyer 2030 Commission: "Research on student success finds that the quality of academic advising is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment for students at four-year schools" (2022, p. 30).

One way that has been found to be particularly effective is the use of intrusive advising (Conrad and Gasman, 2017). In *Historically Underrepresented Students: Redefining college success in higher education*, Ramos & Sifuentez (2021) describe intrusive advising as an approach to advising where advisors meet with students on a regular basis, continually tracking student performance and use of services, and actively intervening, as necessary. In their tool-kit, *Integrating Career Advising for Equitable Student Success*, The American Association of State Colleges and Universities likewise emphasize that: "Integrating career advising into existing advising, learning, and student success practices has the potential to positively influence equitable student success when institutions are proactive about the needs of minoritized students, particularly first-generation students, low-income students, and racially minoritized students" (AASCU, 2021, p. 7).

Lastly, early warning systems should come with built-in safety nets and reward systems. In other words, it is not enough to identify "at-risk" students, we need programs and policies in place that will negate that risk and that inspire students to persist and overcome challenges (Kuh et. al, 2005). This may mean incentivizing faculty to pay more attention to teaching and student development and creating a more collaborative culture among student affairs professionals and other institutional stakeholders.

DIVERSE OPTIONS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND FOCUS ON FINANCIAL LITERACY

When it comes to issues of financial support, institutions should be aware that not all money is not the same. More specifically, as noted by NPEC (2006), not enough money can make college unsustainable, but too much loan debpt can dissuade students from persisting and cause students to drop out. According to the Student Wellness Survey (a report by Trellis Research): "Respondents who borrowed student loans reported experiencing key indicators of distress at higher rates compared to all respondents," and "Overall, 10 percent of students experienced all three forms of basic needs insecurity in the past year: food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness" (2023, p. 7).

The report concludes that: "Research confirms the efficacy of student supports that reduce financial and information barriers to student success, showing that these efforts improve not only academic outcomes but even post-college earnings" (2023, p. 31). What this means in practice is that students in need of financial aid should thus have a variety of resources and opportunities from straight-out loans to scholarships, paid internships, and work-study programs. For example, according to the Pell Institute's report *Moving Beyond Access*: to reduce the impact of financial barriers, low-income, first-generation students need additional opportunities to participate in student/ parent workshops about the financial aid process, as well as "greater assistance with covering unmet financial needs, such as through the use of extended work-study programs" (2007, p.2 6).

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES

Research also affirms that student success programs should reach beyond the institution itself to include intentional partnerships with community-based organizations, corporations, and local businesses, potentially via opportunities for service learning, internships, financial sponsorship, registered apprenticeships, mentorships, and professional development, etc. (IHEP, 2015).

For example, according to the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP): "Community events, workshops, and online tools are examples of programming that can be implemented to build a college-going culture. Greater exposure to different postsecondary pathways can help students identify their education and career options, and opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom can help students learn about academic planning, career exploration, college affordability, and personal enrichment" (2015, p. 5). IHEP further notes that community organizations can play a significant role in bringing adult students back into higher education: "Beyond college readiness and enrollment, communities need to help construct pathway models to ensure that all students are also career-ready and have access to training and employment services. Partnerships between community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, social service organizations, and local businesses are integral to creating on-ramps that get students back on track" (2015, p. 36).

MAINTAINING A FOCUS ON STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES

In *Historically Underrepresented Students: Redefining College Student Success in Higher Education*, the authors urge scholars and practitioners of student success to "retain a focus on structural inequality and its role in shaping student success in college. For instance, societal forces (economic disparity, discrimination, inequitable access to health care) that negatively impact student trajectories to and through college" (Ramos & Sifuentez, 2021, p. 104). At the same time, scholars and practitioners should be cautioned against making simplistic correlations, that are not based on strong research methodologies or data informed. For example, in *Using Research to Improve Student Success: What More Could be Done?*, a report of the National Post-secondary Education Cooperative (NPEC), author Bridget Terry Long stresses the importance of getting to root causes of inequity, while also noting that: "Although many researchers will caution readers not to interpret their results as causal effects, the discussion in those papers often quickly turns back to language of one factor 'affecting,' 'impacting,' or 'influencing' another. This is incredibly confusing for a lay audience" (2006, p. 8). Long further concludes that:

> While the evaluation of this program might show a positive effect on student outcomes, it will be unclear whether the results are due to the services provided by the program or the fact that the students who received the treatment were different from other comparable students. Context also has an important role. Because students come from a variety of backgrounds and face different complex environments, no single solution should be applied to everyone. Careful consideration should be given to applying the proper solution to the appropriate circumstance (2006, p. 10).

In sum, it is important that we are critical readers of the existing research on student success, making sure to pay close attention to diverse challenges and institutional contexts, and keeping at the forefront the understanding that students often have multiple risk factors that cannot be addressed in a single program or initiative. In the remainder of this report, we look closely at student success programs and initiatives at Rutgers University, including what makes these programs and initiatives distinct and unique, as well as what they have in common and how they might best be aligned to support students from diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

To produce this report for E3C we did a broad internet search of all programs for underserved students and/or programs that self-identified as student success programs, across the three Rutgers campuses: New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark. Specifically, we looked for the following information about each program:

- Name of program
- Program mission
- Kind of program (e.g., summer bridge, academic advising, financial aid, etc.)
- Student population served
- Program origin date
- Number of students served
- Program funding sources
- Which department/unit houses the program is
- What specific components/services/activities the program offers
- Program leadership
- Program contact information

In addition, we looked to see if there were any publicly available program evaluations, reports or newsletters that might provide us with additional data on the program's impact. When information was not available on the program website, we reached out to program leadership/contacts for more information. While not everyone responded, where applicable we added this information.

Also of note, in determining the "type of program" we drew upon the literature for the most commonly cited program categories, leading us to use the following descriptors:

- College preparation and access
- Summer programming
- Mentoring, tutoring, and advising
- Academic skill building and resource awareness
- Professional development and leadership
- Cohort and community building
- Financial support
- Health and wellness

It is important to note that most programs fell into at least two if not more of these categories.

KEY FINDINGS

104
Student success programs across all three Rutgers campuses

55
Student success programs at Rutgers–New Brunswick

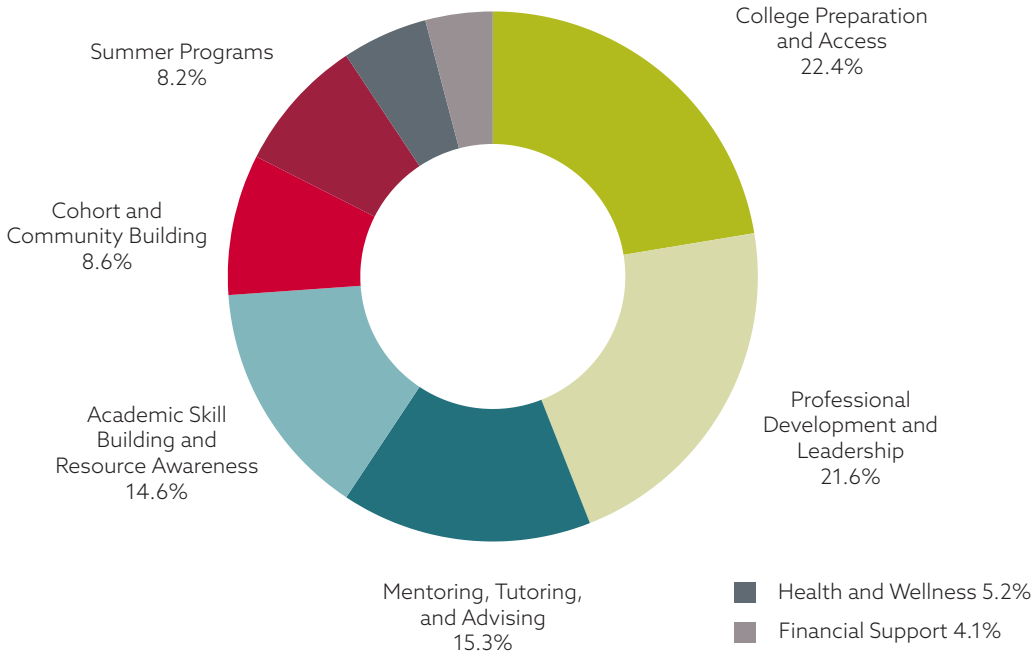
34
Student success programs at Rutgers–Newark

24
Student success programs at Rutgers–Camden

Our findings include a total of 104 student success programs geared toward underserved student populations. Out of these 104 programs, 55 student success programs were available at the New Brunswick campus, 34 student success programs were available at the Newark campus, and 24 students success programs were available at the Camden campus. Of note, several programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) and the Rutgers Future Scholars (RFS) are available across multiple campuses.

The most common programs we found fell under the categories of College Preparation and Access Programs, Cohort and Community Building Programs, Academic Skill Building and Resource Awareness, Professional Development and Leadership Programs, Mentoring, Tutoring, and Advising, and Summer Programs. We find it important to provide more information on how these programs are defined and provide some examples of how they are structured and the support services they offer to different groups of students.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

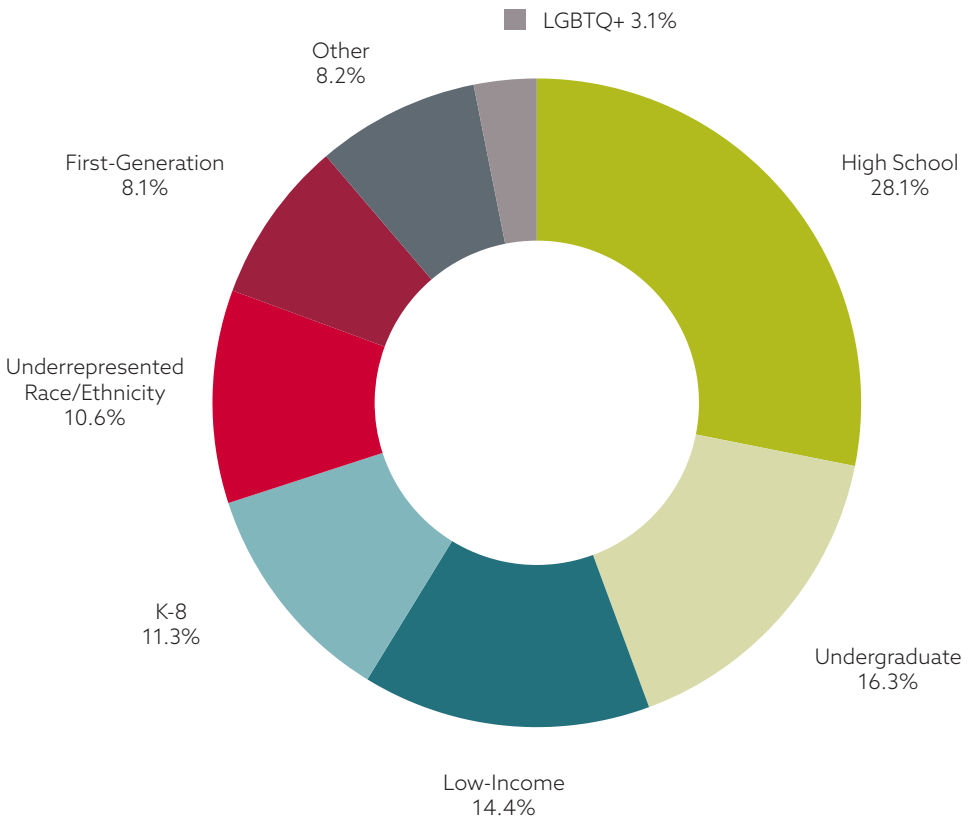


When identifying populations served, we found that the majority of programs were for pre-college students – specifically high school aged students. There were 28.1% of student success programs tailored to high school aged students. There were also 11.3% of programs that were tailored to K-8 aged students.

Further, we were able to identify a significant number of programs that served first generation, low income, and underrepresented race/ethnicity specifically. It is important to note that these programs explicitly stated they were for those respective groups, while some programs that were labeled as serving 'undergraduate' or 'high school' students may have been designed for underserved populations but it was not explicitly stated.

There were also several programs serving groups such as undocumented students, miltary-affiliated students, non-traditional learners, foster care youth, incarcerated/formerly incarcerated students, transfer students, and international students, though the number was not significant enough to warrant its own category. These groups are represented in the 'other' category. Like the type of programs, several programs fit into multiple categories for populations served.

STUDENT POPULATIONS SERVED



LIST OF STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAMS AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Name of Program	Campus	Program Type(s)	Population(s) Served	Origin Date	Program Offering	Number of People Served
The RU1st Initiative	New Brunswick	Community and Cohort Building; Mentoring, Tutoring, and Advising; College Retention and Graduation	First Gen; Transfer; International	2015	First Year Fellowship; Access Week Programming; Advising; Coaching and Courses	600+
Access Week, Rutgers-New Brunswick's Celebration of Equity and Inclusion	New Brunswick	Cohort and Community Building; Academic Skill Building and Resource Awareness	Undergrad	2013	Youth Summit, Student Success Forum, Workshops on Equity and Bias, Alumni Mixers, Faculty Research Panel; Additional Events	
Scarlet Guarantee	New Brunswick	Financial Support	Low-Income	2022	Financial Scholarships	~7,600

CLICK HERE TO SEE THE FULL LIST

COLLEGE PREPARATION AND ACCESS PROGRAMS

While the largest number of programs we identified fell into the category of College Preparation and Access, there was considerable diversity in terms of what these programs consisted of, who they were targeted to, and what age group they were designed for. For instance, many programs sought to support high school juniors and seniors in their efforts to become competitive applicants. These programs provided them with important information about how to select and apply to a college, as well as offering support with standardized test preparation, attaining pre-college course credits, providing financial support for both applying to and attending college, and, offering pathways and summer bridge programs to help support the transition from high school into college. Other college preparatory and access programs at Rutgers, however, begin as early as 5th grade. The majority of college preparatory access and support programs were specifically geared towards first-generation, low-income students and students of color.

The most notable of these preparatory programs is the **Rutgers Future Scholars Program**, which is offered at all three Rutgers campuses. The program is designed for "low-income academically promising middle school students in local Rutgers School districts." Students begin the program in their 8th grade year and continue in the program throughout high school and college. Student participants are offered an array of programming and services, including university-based events and mentoring. Students who successfully complete the pre-college part of the program, receive full tuition funding (through scholarships and federal grants) to attend Rutgers University.

> Being a first-generation college student, conversations about college were not part of my family life, so I looked to RFS for guidance. I interacted with the staff daily to help with everything from everyday office work to communicating with donors through letters and meetings. I then became an Ambassador for the program, speaking to donors and business professionals about the great work that the program was doing for me, my family and inner city kids within Rutgers communities. – Jason, Rutgers Future Scholar

SPOTLIGHT

Rutgers Future Scholars

Founded in 2008, each year, the Rutgers Future Scholars Program (RFS) supports over 200 first-generation, low-income, academically promising middle school students in their quest to become future college graduates. Scholars, who are chosen the summer before their eighth-grade year from schools in New Brunswick, Piscataway, Newark, Camden, and Rahway, become part of a cohort that provides multi-faceted, extensive, and on-going support throughout high school and into college.

During the summer months, scholars enroll in rigorous enrichment courses on a local Rutgers campus providing them with opportunities to earn early college credit while experiencing being on a real-world college campus. Throughout the year, scholars participate in a series of academic college readiness workshops and events, mentoring and tutoring opportunities, and team-building seminars "intended to foster each student's academic, social, and personal development." While entrance to Rutgers is not guaranteed by participation in the program, students who successfully complete the five-year program are eligible to receive full tuition funding (through scholarships and federal grants) to Rutgers University.

The program has 100% of its graduates enroll in post-secondary institutions. Among the program's goals is not only to increase the number of academically talented students who gain admission to post-secondary institutions, but to also encourage them to be "contributing leaders" and inspirational role models while in enrolled in college.

SPOTLIGHT

Camden Ignite

Camden Ignite is a collaborative education partnership with Rutgers Camden Center for Children and Childhood Studies and the North Camden community. Students in 4th-8th grade who attend North Camden schools are admitted to the program through a competitive application. The program seeks to generate student's interest in and capability of attending and completing college, providing academic enrichment through inquiry-based instruction and a wide range of extra-curricular enrichment opportunities in STEM, art, athletics, and literacy.

Students engage in project-based learning clubs, highlighting their results at the end of each semester and the summer. Students in the program also benefit from mentoring and college exposure. Approximately 200 students take part in extended day programs during the academic year, while another 100 students take part in the Ignite Summer Program. Rutgers-Camden undergraduate students serve as education ambassadors and assistant teachers. The program is made possible through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Education.

While the Rutgers Future Scholars Program is open to students interested in any field, other college preparatory and access programs were designed for students focused on specific career pathways, by providing information, professional development and networking opportunities to students interested in pursuing a particular discipline or field, such as law, business, or STEM. **The 4-H RU STEM program**, for example, is sponsored by Rutgers New Brunswick's School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. The program, which is targeted to students in grades 5-8 seeks to provide an "exciting, supportive, and intellectually stimulating environment for young people to explore STEM career fields."

Students participate in after-school science clubs and "engage in research and hands-on investigations led by Rutgers faculty and graduate students." Likewise, **The Youth Media Symposium (YMS)** is a college preparatory program offered at Rutgers Network, which is open to students ages 13-18 in schools across the city of Newark. The YMS seeks to develop student leaders interested in using digital media technology as a tool for social change. The program also includes college tours and visits, help with financial aid, mentoring from current college students and graduates, and tutoring services.

> Ignite is one program within the North Camden Schools Partnerships initiative, which aims to maximize students learning and strengthen families and their neighborhood through leveraging university resources, while also enhancing the education of Rutgers-Camden student and faculty research. (from Website)

Another program in this category is **Camden Ignite**, which focuses on students in 4th-8th grade students who attend North Camden Schools, providing them with opportunities to participate in collaborative and project-based learning after school and during the summer.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

The second largest category of support programs was those focused on professional development and leadership. While these programs often were overlapping with college preparation and access, cohort and community building, and summer programs, they are distinguished in that they seek to diversify professional pathways and support a new generation of leadership in a wide range of disciplines and fields. For example:

The Mark Conference, hosted by Rutgers Student Centers and Activities, is billed as "America's largest and most immersive student-run leadership event." The conference highlights diverse speakers who have made their 'mark' on society, including "extraordinary storytelling, and unique activities to create an experience that inspires students to act, think creatively, and empower their communities." Speakers include social and civic activists in politics, health, and science, as well as comedians, attorneys, poets, writers, and filmmakers. The conference aims to "help students learn new leadership practices, think outside box, get outside of silos and connect with broader range of communities." According to the Program Director, Lawrence Owens "The combined features of the day aim to inspire action amongst students and encourage them think critically about the 'mark' they will leave on the world around them."

Another program of note is the **RU Student Executive (RUSE) Program,** which was designed in 2018 to support students interested in entrepreneurship by connecting them with faculty from Rutgers School of Business and providing them with opportunities to create their own original business plans.

> Each year, the RUSE program impresses us. We are honored to reward the high school students for their entrepreneurial ideas, commitment to the program and excellent presentations. Our foundation seeks to show these young people that they have a village of supporters who are willing to invest in their futures. We expect greatness from them. -Lloyd Freeman, Esq. Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, who served as one of the judges for the 2023 competition.

SPOTLIGHT

RU Student Executives

Since 2018, the RU Student Executive (RUSE) Program introduces high-achieving, underrepresented high school students in the South Jersey area and Rutgers Camden undergraduate students to entrepreneurship and to a wide range of business disciplines, topics, and careers. Sponsored by the Rutgers-Camden School of Business, the nine-week program seeks to encourage high-achieving 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students and undergraduates at Rutgers Camden to become community and business leaders.

The program includes workshops on a different core business topic each week and opportunities for students to engage in case studies with local organizations. RUSE participants work in teams to create original business plans and compete for a chance to win cash prizes for their ideas. First place winners in the 2023 cohort created Connect Fresh, an innovative service network to connect grocers and farmers to provide high quality food in underserved areas that current food delivery apps purposely disregard. First place winners in the college track created ParkWay, an innovative app that connects people who have space to lease for parking to drivers who seek parking spaces. Award-winning students are eligible to earn a RUSE Foundations of Entrepreneurship Badge and the Champion of Business Youth Award.

The Minority Student Program (MSP) "serves students of any race or ethnicity who are members of groups that are underrepresented in the legal profession, and who have faced discrimination or overcome social and economic hardships." As a summer program specifically designed for students who have been admitted to Rutgers Law School, MSP holds a two-week Summer Orientation program that seeks to help students succeed in law school through academic and legal skills development, complemented by alumni mentoring and networking. There are also opportunities for paid summer internships at local law firms, and non-profit legal organizations. The program was launched at Rutgers–Newark in 1968 and expanded to Rutgers–Camden in 2016.

Rutgers–Camden's **The Women BUILD (Business Undergraduates in Leadership Development)**, is a leadership program for high-achieving women undergraduates at Rutgers Business School. According to the website: "BUILD offers students the opportunity to reach their full leadership potential as business students and empowers them to work toward their future as the next generation of female business leaders committed to excellence in business, ethical judgment, and global perspective." The program promotes cohort and community-building through participation in a professional women's network, leadership roundtables, joint coursework, and peer mentorship.

The Ruby (Rutgers University Business for Youth) Program is another example of a professional development and leadership program by having Rutgers' Business School Students serve as mentors to underserved high school students interested in business degrees.

> On a college mentor's side, there's a lot to be learned and a lot to be taken away from the program," one mentor said. "We're always there to be peers and be helpful to everyone ... There's an environment that we're trying to cultivate where there's a spot for everyone, and there's something that you can take away from it.- RUBY Co-President, Riya Sheth

SPOTLIGHT

Rutgers University Business for Youth

Ruby (Rutgers University Business for Youth) Program is a college preparation program developed for underserved, inner-city high school students interested in careers in business. The program engages business students as mentors who provide support to students and communicate with high school teachers. The by invitation only program serves 60 students per year (30 in the Fall and 30 in the Spring). Students begin the program as high school sophomores and continue through graduation. providing them with "information, guidance, and motivation, beneficial to achieving a successful career." Students in the program come to Rutgers' New Brunswick campus where they receive lessons in writing business plans, compete in a business plan competition and go on trips to corporate facilities. Students also receive SAT support and workshops on paying for college. Ruby students begin the program in their sophomore year of high school, and, as they are getting ready to graduate, they are assisted in applying to Rutgers Business School and other colleges under the mentorship of current Rutgers Business School Students. The program is co-led by Kodali, a former student at Rutgers Business School, who works along with a 10-member student e-board which helps oversee the program. "RUBY is completely RBS student-run," Kodali said.

ACADEMIC SKILL BUILDING AND RESOURCE AWARENESS PROGRAMS

Programs that emphasized Academic Skill Building and Resource Awareness share a common goal of leveling the playing field for students who came from underserved K-12 backgrounds where they did not have equal access to college preparatory courses (especially those that emphasized critical thinking, writing, and research skills) and academic advising focused on higher education options. These programs also seek to provide information about academic and financial resources that are available, many of which students with limited social and navigational capital are not aware of or know how to access. Some programs start when students are still in middle or high school, while other are specifically aimed towards first year college students, and/or students who are underrepresented in particular disciplines and social sectors.

The Hill Family Center for College Access, which is located at Rutgers-Camden, is an example of a program which "strives to be the go-to source of pre-college assistance and information for local students, families, and schools," and to create "a more robust college-going culture in the city of Camden and the region." Participating students in grades 11 and 12 – referred to as "strivers" – work with trained undergraduate and graduate students who assist students and their families in "understanding higher education options, exploring career and academic interests, and securing secure financial aid through scholarships and FAFSA completion." Students in the program also get to participate in college visits and workshops that are designed to help students make informed decisions about their college education.

Similarly, **Rutgers Business School's Next UP Program (RBS NextUP)** is a "one-day exploratory pre-college program designed to expose high school students from underrepresented and underserved backgrounds to the full range of opportunities available at Rutgers Business School and opportunities in the business sector." Throughout this experiential learning opportunity, students get to engage with and learn about different pathways from faculty and staff at Rutgers Business School, as well as corporate professionals.

Examples of academic skill-building and resource awareness programs for students who have already matriculated into Rutgers include **The Intercultural Resource Center (at Rutgers Newark)** which seeks to support undocumented students by providing them with immigration advising and other support services. According to the website, the Center provides supports students "through the complexity of financial aid, admissions, career development, and wellness, while being an undocumented immigrant," and has a mission to help undocumented students "find all the resources you need to focus on your education."

MENTORING, TUTORING, AND ADVISING PROGRAMS

Mentoring, Tutoring, and Advising programs, while something that all students can benefit from, are particularly critical for students from underserved backgrounds, many have never had these kinds of opportunities prior to entering college. This is especially true for first-generation students, who come from families where no one has a higher education degree and therefore there is no one in their immediate circle to give them personalized advice or help them work through challenges to their academic success.

The Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) is an example of a program that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to engage in peer tutoring, where they receive "course specific instruction from fellow students who excel in that subject," as well as to work with learning specialists and career coaches who seek to improve student's academic outcomes and work closely with students to cultivate both their academic and personal success. CLASS also offers supplemental instruction, review sessions and study strategies for over 160 undergraduate courses.

The Garden State Louis Strokes Alliance for Minority Participation (GS-LSAMP) program, is another example of a mentorship program that was specifically designed to "increase the number of professionals from minority groups that are traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields." Started in 1991 through a grant from the National Science Foundation, Rutgers' GS-LSAMP program is part of a national alliance of universities in which student participants from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group receive "academic support and specialized advising." The program aims to diversity the STEM pathway by helping underserved students interested in STEM to choose courses that will be most beneficial to them, as well as free tutoring services, and mentorship to help students successfully prepare to apply to STEM Ph.D. programs.

COHORT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

Cohort and Community Building programs were often aimed at a particular group – such as LBGTQ+ students, students from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups, or first-generation students – who typically feel "othered" or excluded from college campus culture. They also target students who are going into non-traditional fields, such as women interested in STEM. While quite different in design, most of these programs consist of social and networking events and living/learning opportunities, along with and an introduction to campus resources that they might not otherwise know about. Some diverse examples of Cohort and Community Building Programs include:

The Douglas Project for Rutgers Women in STEM is an opportunity offered through Rutgers Douglas Women's College for women who aim to pursue careers in STEM fields. The program provides an opportunity for participants to bond through undergraduate research programs, career development and workforce opportunities, and, most notably, a living/learning community. In addition to the opportunity to live in a common space, the program also offers a 10-week non-residential summer learning institute in which scholars can earn a stipend and do research under faculty mentorship. Other cohort and community building activities in this program include a STEM networking night, modeled after speed networking events where students rotate between tables of different corporate partners.

Rutgers' Paul Robeson Institute also offers a living/learning community for students who attend Rutgers-New Brunswick campus and identify as a member of a historically underrepresented group in higher education. Students in the community live on College Avenue Campus while participating in academic and life skills workshops, discussions, cultural activities, and mentoring on the history and origins of the African Diaspora.

SPOTLIGHT

Paul Robeson Success Institute &
Paul Robeson Living Learning Community

The Paul Robeson Success Institute is a three-day convening open to first-generation, low-income, and/or historically underrepresented incoming and transfer students enrolled in Rutgers New Brunswick. The interactive institute includes virtual and in-person programming, while offering students a chance to be part of a cohort and participate in academic and life skills workshops and research opportunities.

Established in 1976, the Paul Robeson Living Learning Community (LLC) "strives to engender curiosity, interest and understanding of the history and origins of the African Diaspora and the relevance and importance of that understanding in day-to-day life." Students in LLC share a common living hall in the heart of the College Avenue Campus. Students take part in cultural immersion and enrichment activities such as cultural dinner, guest speakers and community service activities. Students also have a chance to work closely with professors, building academic connections and mentoring opportunities. They also have structured opportunities to connect with other LLCs such as Latin Images and Asian American Identities and Images.

Students who have participated in the Paul Robeson Living-Learning Community have additional opportunities to be part of the Community Ambassador Program (CAP) where they engage in 1-2 service projects created in collaboration with the community and continue to engage in critical discussions with other LLCs.

> As part of the Paul Robeson LLC experience, I had the amazing opportunity to learn so much more about the political and cultural history of American social movements, especially regarding the civil rights movement and the political philosophies of Robeson himself. Coming into college I was not fully sure of what major I was planning to do, but learning more about Robeson's political activism throughout his life made me realize how personally passionate I truly am about politics and philosophy. – Student Testimonial

The Q-ummunity Program and LGBTQIA + Welcome both seeks to bring together queer and trans students, faculty, staff, and allies to "kick off the fall semester." A mixture of in-person and virtual events, LGBTQIA + Welcome includes a mixture of social and cultural events, such as Social Justice Open Mic (presented in partnership with the Verbal Mayhem Poetry Collective and the Honors College), and an LGBTQIA graduate student social. Likewise, the Q-ummunity Program is an extended orientation and leadership development retreat designed for LGBTQIA+ community and their allies. Participants in Q-ummunity must be in their first year at Rutgers as one of the program's main goals it to help "new first year and transfer students learn about the mission, programs, and services of the Center for Social Justice Education and LGBT Communities." Both programs also seek to "build community with faculty and staff committed to advocacy and support of LGBTQIA+ students." Among the programs many offerings are Project #RUAllyship, Welcome Week, LGBTQIA Welcome, Let's Talk: Drop-in Hours, Project #Ruallyship, TransVisibility and Empowerment, World Aids Day, Gaypril, the Body Positivity Project, and Rainbow Graduation.

The Camden Fellows Program is specifically designed for students who are current or former foster care youth with lived experience in the child welfare system as an adolescent. Founded in 2020, the program seeks to provide "a supportive community on the Rutgers-Camden campus where students with the unique shared experience of the child services system are encouraged and celebrated to reach their full potential." Applicants must be between the ages of 18-24 and be accepted as a full-time student at Rutgers Camden Campus. In addition to community building activities, the program offers housing, financial aid, and personal coaching. The program provides support and advocacy for 25 students per year, many of whom are housing or food insecure and/or navigating the transition from college and adulthood on their own.

SUMMER PROGRAMS

In our analysis, we distinguished "summer programs" from "summer bridge programs," in that these programs were not so much for students entering college in the fall after graduating from high school, as they were summer and extra-curricular enrichment programs for students at all stages in their academic journey – secondary through college through graduate school. Some of these programs are focused on holistic college and graduate success, while others focus on a particular field, such as business, STEM, or legal education. Following are some examples of diverse summer programs:

The Cooperman College Scholars Academic Summer Program, for example, is a summer program designed for academically talented students from under-represented groups who are currently high school juniors. The program begins with a free three-week summer experience where students take classes taught by college faculty, live on campus, and receive exposure to college life. The program then continues into their senior year, including a focus on SAT preparation, assistance in completing college applications, and navigating the financial aid process. Students benefit from faculty and peer mentors in their senior year of high school who stay with them throughout their entire college experience.

By contrast, **The Innovation, Design, and Entrepreneurship Academy (IDEA)** at Rutgers--New Brunswick is a five-week paid summer program designed specifically for college sophomores. IDEA offers students experiential learning opportunities, including working in design labs and using design thinking to solve complex social challenges. The program also seeks to foster student creativity by exposing students to "interdisciplinary projects that provide a systems view of problem solving," and that "facilitate students participation in research, design, or entrepreneurial opportunities at Rutgers." Students participating in the program have the option to live in campus housing for the summer (that they must pay out-of-pocket for).

SPOTLIGHT

RISE at Rutgers

RISE at Rutgers is a nationally recognized ten-week residential summer research program for Rutgers undergraduates from diverse backgrounds, including non-traditional students, first generation students, and students who attend schools with limited research opportunities. Students in the RISE program participate in "cutting-edge" research projects primarily within STEM fields. The program includes a stipend and free on-campus housing. Working under the mentorship of Rutgers faculty members, RISE is designed to support the pathway to graduate school. RISE students also take part in professional development workshops, extensive GRE preparation, graduate school admission workshops, and are offered additional mentor opportunities extending post-graduation. Participants also benefit from "wellness workshops, social and recreational activities, and community engagement opportunities." Given that Rutgers is ranked as a top 20 public research university in the nation and top 100 in the world, with over research 300 Centers and Institutes, RISE participants are eligible for Rutgers' SUPER-Grad (Summer Undergraduate Pipeline to Excellence at Rutgers Graduate) fellowships which are primarily funded by the Office of the Chancellor-New Brunswick.

A law-school focused summer program for high school students is the **Law Summer Academy Program**. As a two-week summer program designed for rising high school juniors and seniors, the program engages Rutgers Law School faculty as virtual lecturers and guest speakers. The program offers participating students an introduction to jurisprudence, while also providing students with an "opportunity to explore topics from a legal view that are among the most controversial issues of the day such as climate change, gun control, and immigration policies." The program also seeks to enhance students critical and analytical skills, boosting their confidence to apply for applying to undergraduate institutions and eventually law schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this report, we identified 104 programs with a mission to further student success in higher education across the three Rutgers campuses: New Brunswick, Newark and Camden. Our primary research questions included:

1. How are these programs defined and categorized, especially as they align with broader research literature about high impact practices in college support and success?
2. What are the common themes and approaches across their mission and vision statements?
3. What specific student populations are they designed to serve?

Most of the programs we found offered a combination of support services, opportunities, and resources, as the students who apply for them have a combination of intersectional identities and risk factors, and benefit from multiple, scaffolded, and aligned opportunities.

To learn more about these programs, and to make a data-informed assessment of their individual and collective impact, we suggest the following additional research:

1. A broad survey distributed to coordinators of all the programs that we identified.
2. A series of selected interviews and/or focus groups with program coordinators, current participants, and program alumni.
3. An institutional assessment of student success culture at Rutgers.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR SURVEY

In the process of doing our landscape analysis, we tried to identify the prime coordinator and/or key contact person for each of the programs we found. In a very small number of cases this information was not readily available, and more research is needed. Once we have this information, we suggest sending a survey to program coordinators, which would include questions such as:

1. Name of program:
2. How long has your program or service been in existence?
3. What was the impetus for starting the program or service?
4. How has it been funded in the past and what funding do you expect in the future?
5. What demographic group is the prime target for your program/ services?
6. Approximately how many students have you served to date?
7. Approximately how many students do you serve per year?
8. How is the program advertised?
9. What are the prime criteria/methods for selecting students to participate?
10. What is the most important goal(s) of the program, and how, specifically, does the design and structure of the program support those goals?
11. Do you work collaboratively with other student support programs at Rutgers?
12. Do you work collaboratively with other student support programs at other IHEs?
13. Is your program part of a larger national initiative? If so, please explain.
14. Do you have community partners? If so, please explain how you engage with them and why:
15. If you see your program growing or evolving over the next five years, please explain your strategic vision:
16. In your own opinion, how do you define "student success," especially for underserved or historically marginalized groups of students?
17. What do you think is unique about your program that can serve as a model for other student success programs seeking similar goals or supporting students of a similar demographic?

After reviewing the data collected on the survey, we would identify a smaller group of diverse program coordinators to interview. The purpose of the interview or focus group would be to get more information on questions 10, 15, 16, 17 and 18.

INTERVIEWS OR FOCUS GROUPS WITH CURRENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Questions for interviews would include:

1. Name of Rutgers student success program you are participating in:
2. When did you begin participating in the program and when do you expect to complete the program?
3. How did you hear about this program?
4. What made you want to participate in this program? [What were the major challenges you were facing regarding higher education and what specifically did you hope to get out of the program? What specific challenges, needs, resources, or opportunities did the program address/provide for you?]
5. What was the application process like for you? [Depending upon their answer, follow-up question: What suggestions would you make so that the process was clearer, less intimidating, less time-consuming, etc.?]
6. What have you gained from participating in the program to-date? Please answer as specifically as possible.
7. How do you personally define "student success" in higher education and how do you think Rutgers can do a better job supporting your success?
8. What other student support programs have you participated in prior to coming to Rutgers or since enrolling in Rutgers? Please list them all:

9. What are your personal goals for the immediate future and how can they be better supported?

INTERVIEWS OR FOCUS GROUPS WITH PROGRAM ALUMNI

Questions for interviews would include:

1. Name of Rutgers student success program of which you are an alumnus:
2. What dates did you actively participate in the program?
3. If you are still receiving support from the program, please explain.
4. How did you hear about this program?
5. What made you want to participate in this program? [What were the major challenges you were facing regarding higher education and what specifically did you hope to get out of the program? What specific challenges, needs, resources, or opportunities did the program address/provide for you?]
6. What was the application process like for you? [Depending upon their answer, follow-up question: What suggestions would you make so that the process was clearer, less intimidating, less time-consuming, etc.?]
7. What did you get out of participating in this program? Please answer as specifically as possible.
8. How do you personally define "student success" in higher education and how do you think Rutgers can do, or could have done, a better job supporting your success?
9. What other student support programs did you participate in prior to coming to Rutgers or since enrolling in Rutgers? Please list them all:
10. What is your current status [undergraduate student, graduate student, working full-time, working part-time, other]?
11. What are your goals for the immediate future? What kind of support do you need to meet these goals?

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT SUCCESS CULTURE AT RUTGERS

We recommend an assessment based on our review of research-based high impact practices in student success programs and initiatives in higher education. The assessment would be tied to a rubric, similar to the one below, in which we would fully develop what constitutes evidence of the different stages of impact.

Institutional High Impact Practice	Little to No Evidence 1	Baseline 2	Exemplar 3
Equity/Excellence Imperative. Institution prioritizes success for all students.			
Reject deficit models of non-traditional, underserved, FGLI, and minority students. Dual focus on challenges and student strengths and cultural capital.			
Holistic and complementary policies and practices that support students academically, emotionally, physically, financially, and socially.			
Student success programs are well-advertised, and students who need them are using them.			
Student success programs work in conjunction with each other where policies, practices and programs are aligned, recognizing students' intersectional identities and needs.			
Early college awareness and preparation is a priority, as are pathways and bridge programs to graduate school and other educational opportunities. These programs should target students at different points in their educational journey.			
Institutions are well informed about their student population and needs. Institutional structures, priorities, and allocations change accordingly.			

Early warning systems are in place, including safety nets and rewards to reinforce them.			
Financial support programs are designed to meet diverse student needs, offering a variety of scholarships, loans, paid-internships, work study and other options.			
Institutions disaggregate data and make data informed decisions with a focus on continuous improvement.			
Institution balances issues of continuity and sustainability with risk and new program innovation.			
DEI is engrained in all aspects of the institutional culture and student experience, including the physical layout of campus and accessibility of services.			
Institution creates meaningful opportunities for community engagement/partnerships that can support students' professional goals.			
Increased focus on first-year support and students with two or more risk-factors.			
Cross-stakeholder engagement and collaboration and differentiated leadership are employed in effective ways. When staff members leave, there are systems in place to support these transitions.			
Campus culture of belonging is prioritized in institutional mission statement and vision in a meaningful and actionable way.			
Success programs support student agency, and continued growth after a support program ends.			
Faculty and staff diversity are a and institutional priority. Faculty professional development and DEI training is a fundamental part of student success.			

Intrusive and Holistic Advising is integrated throughout students' entire higher education experience.			
Institutions also collect data about the larger context of systemic inequities locally, nationally, and globally.			
Pathways programs are available for all types of students, including reentry and older students.			

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