

ADDRESSING DIFFICULT COURSES AN EQUITY-EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE

Presented by

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OVERVIEW

What is it and Why Does it Matter?

Overview of Kent State Difficult Course Project

Opportunities to Address Equity Gaps



WHAT IS IT?

Phenomenon with different names - Difficult /Killer
/High DFWI or DFW Courses

Gardner Institute Definition - Courses where 30% or more of enrolled students earn a D, F, or withdraw or receive an incomplete.



WHY IT MATTERS?

- Black and Latinx students are 20% less likely to graduate than their White and Asian counterparts
- 60% of all men who started college in 2014 had graduated within six years compared to 66% of women. Fewer Black and Latinx men than Black and Latinx women
- 71% of the highest income students graduate in six years, compared to only 32% of lowest income students



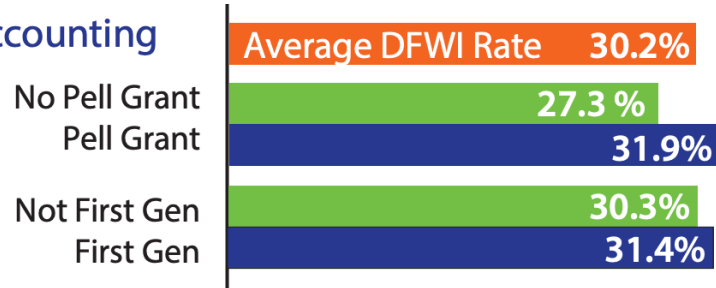
WHY IT MATTERS?

- Access without completion is detrimental to individuals, communities and higher education
- Shift in population demographics
- Address employer needs
- U.S. competitive edge
- Do well and do good
- Higher DFWI rates result in higher student attrition, increased time to degree, increased loan indebtedness, exhaustion of financial aid and serve as a gatekeeper to further study.

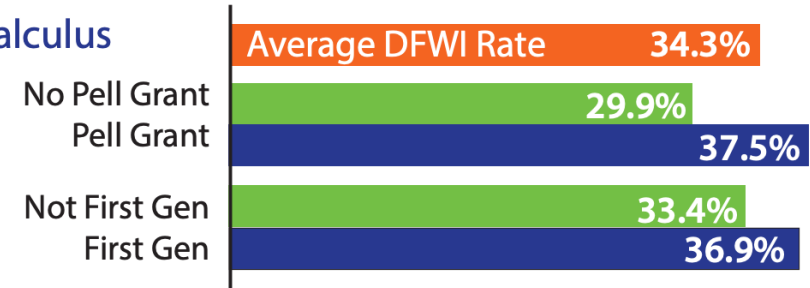


DIFFICULT COURSE COMPLETION — GARDNER INSTITUTE STUDY

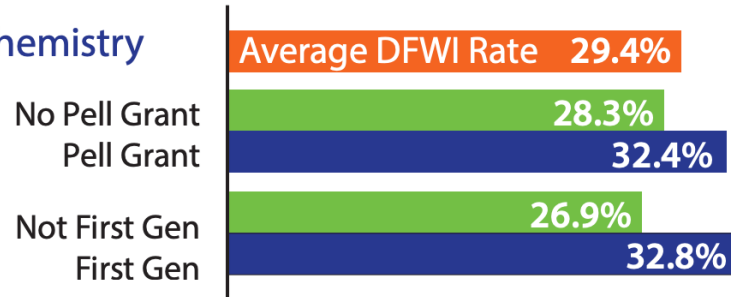
Accounting



Calculus



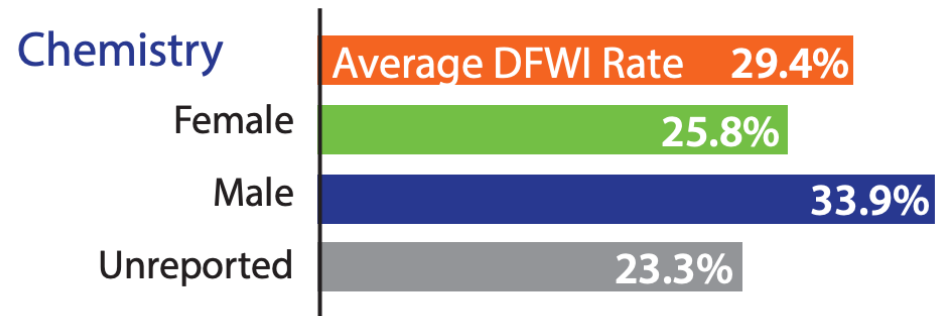
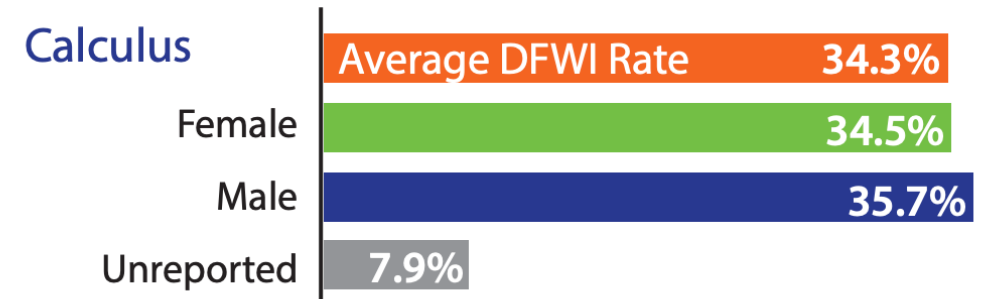
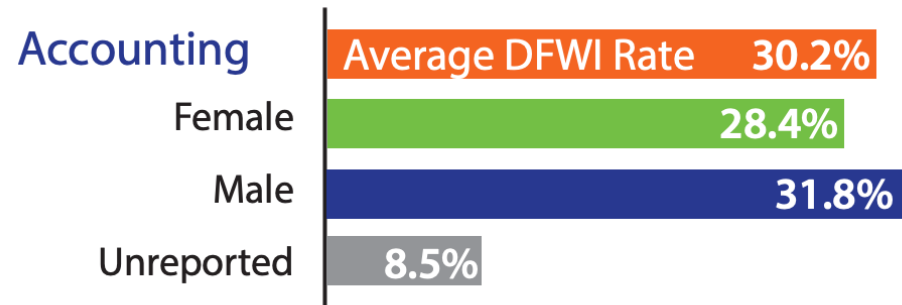
Chemistry



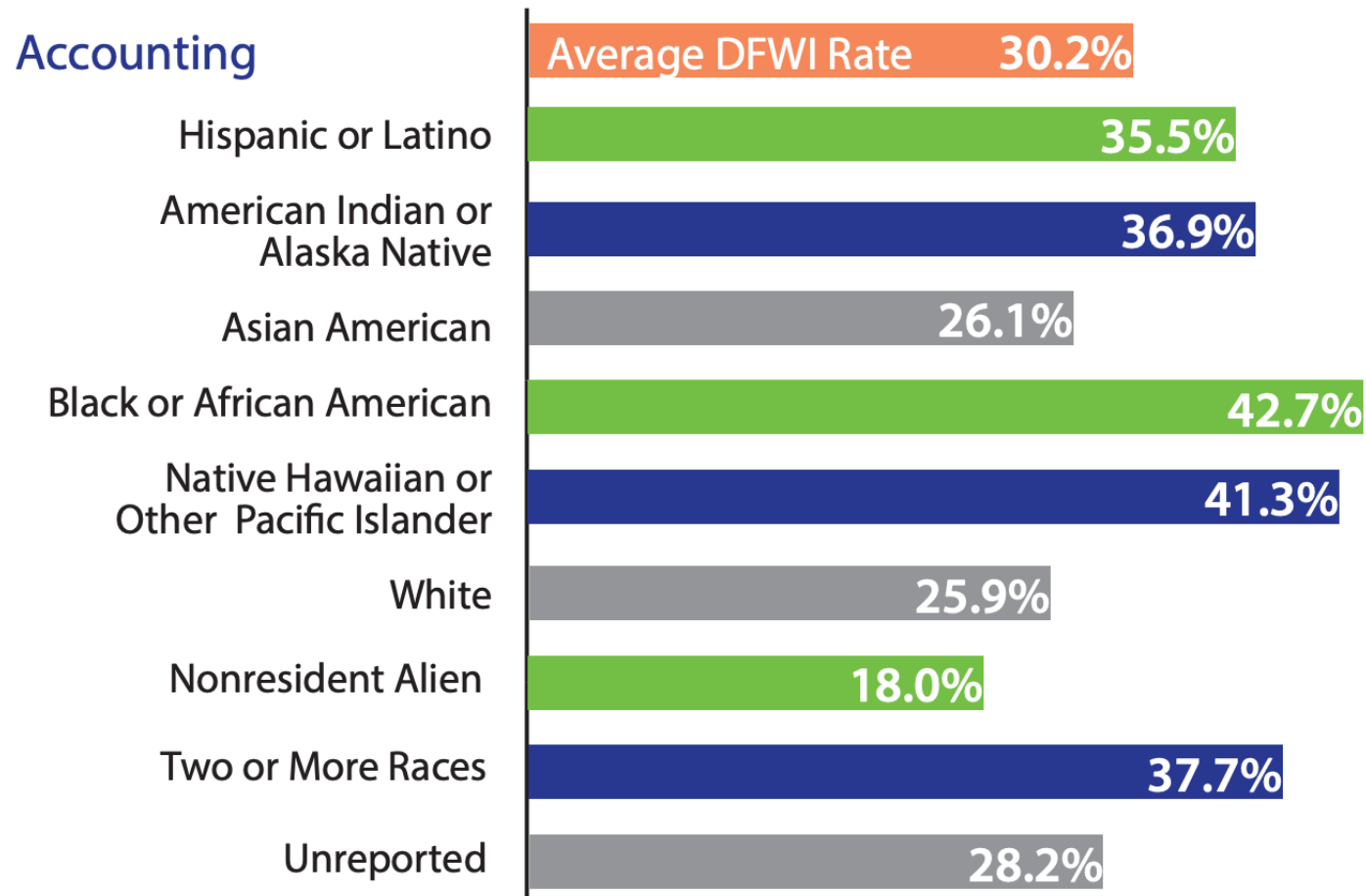
Digging into the Disciplines, Gardner Institute Study,
2018



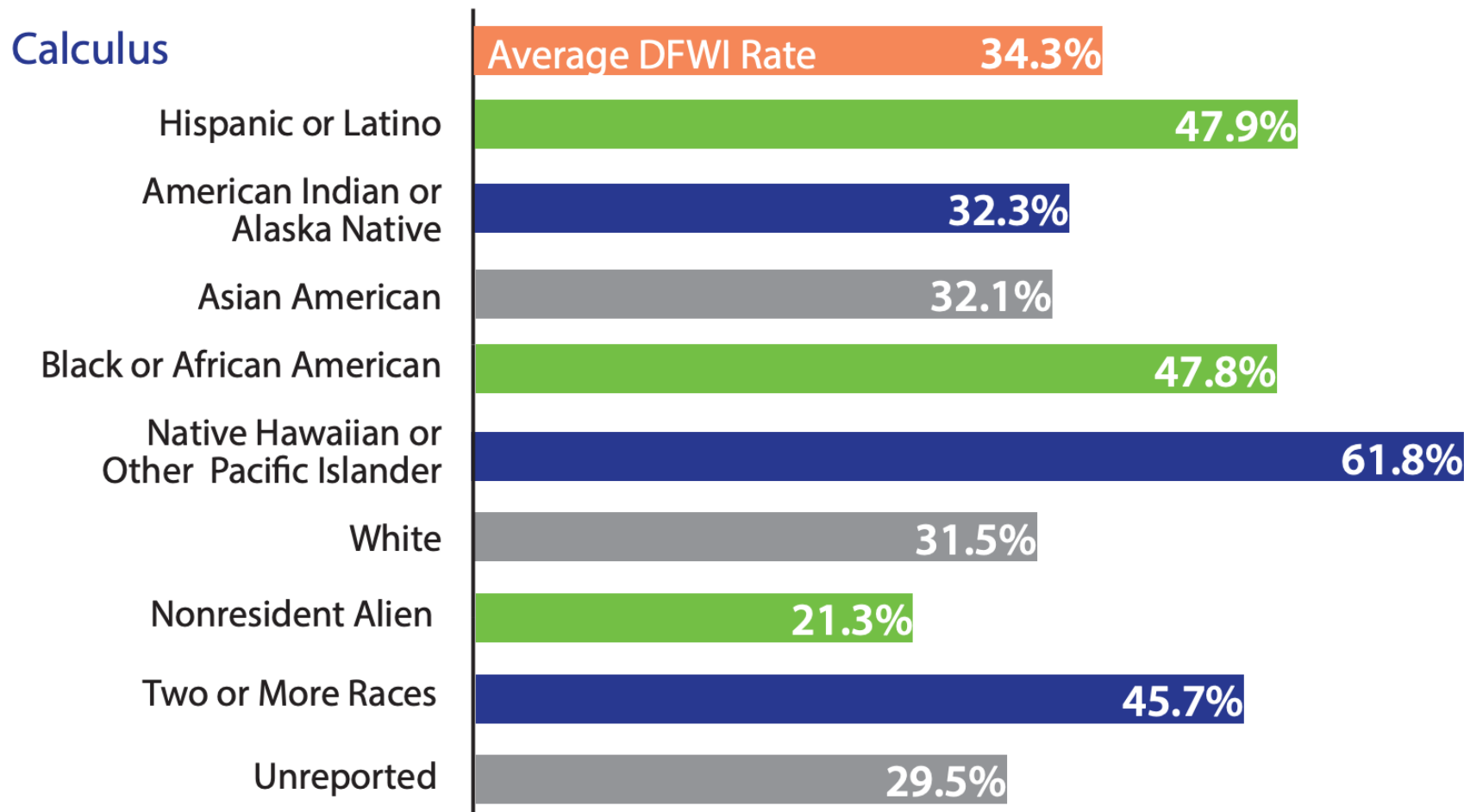
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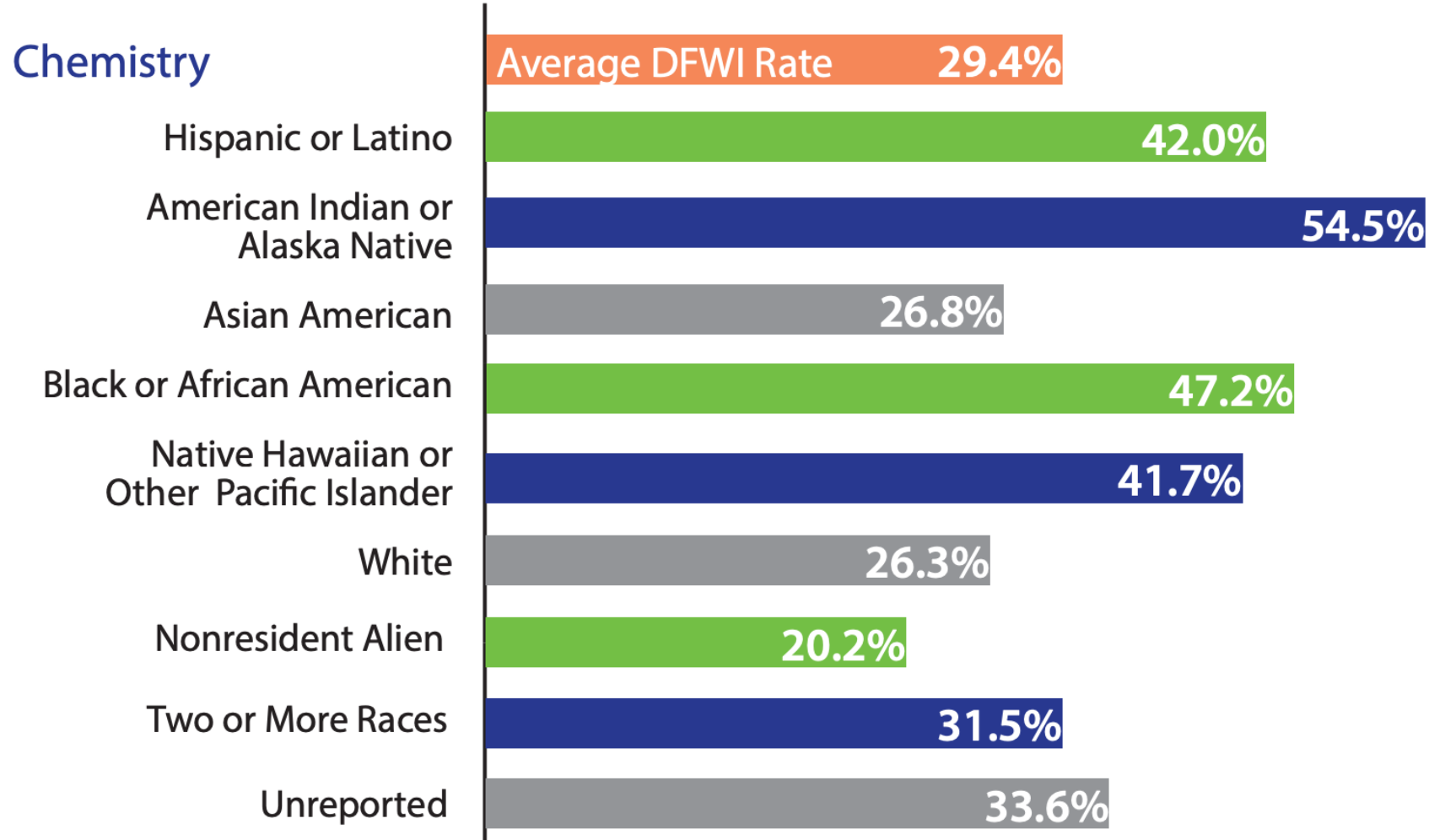
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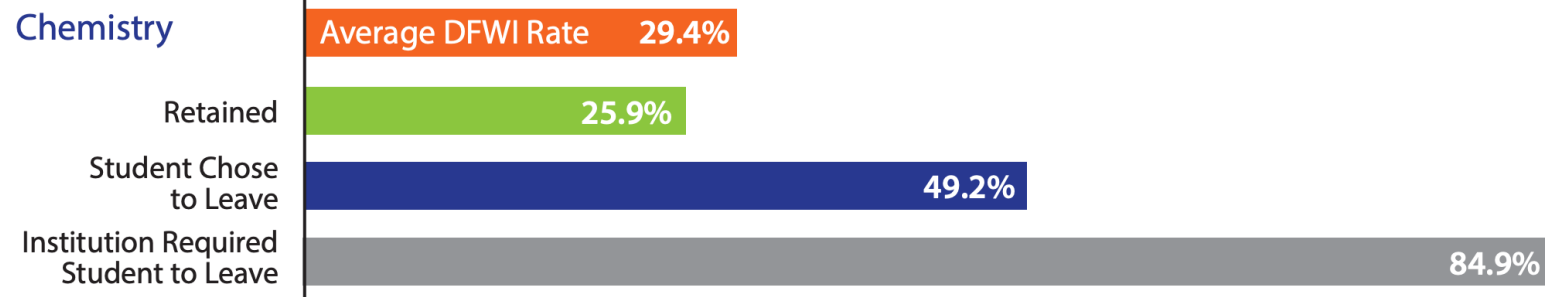
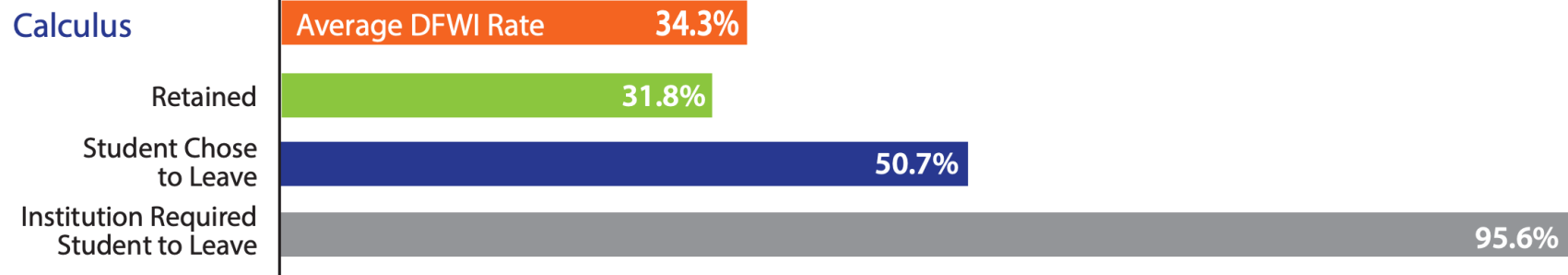
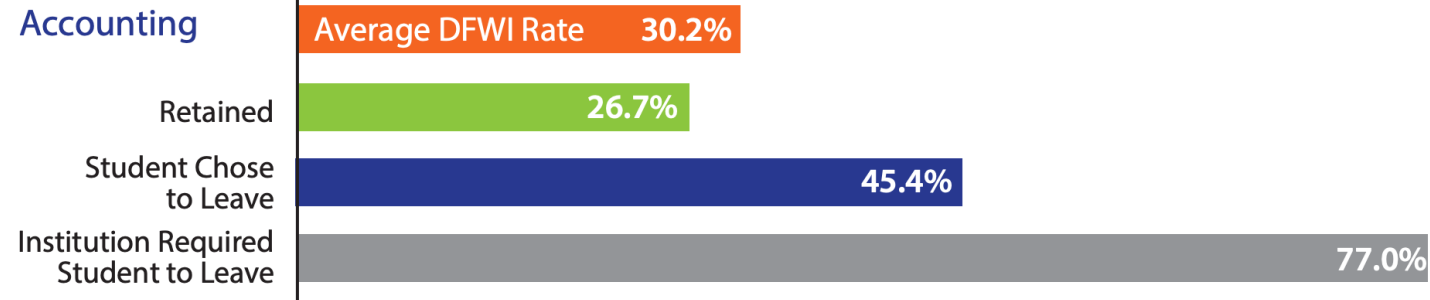
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**WHAT DO YOU WONDER ABOUT THESE
DATA?**



DIFFICULT COURSE OUTCOME DRIVERS

- Academic preparation
- Class size
- Class delivery mode (online vs. in person)
- Lack of early and often opportunities to practice and assess learning
- Pedagogy
- Student engagement
- Ineffective or nonexistent placement processes
- Lack of sense of belonging



INCONVENIENT TRUTHS



KENT STATE DIFFICULT COURSE PROJECT

- Began work in 2014
- Set goal to decrease the number of courses that met difficult course criteria
- Examined data for 29 courses with the highest DFW rates and highest enrollment (total courses on list was 79)



KENT STATE DIFFICULT COURSE PROJECT

Insights gained:

- One third of all Kent State students were enrolled in difficult courses.
- Freshmen were highly represented in difficult courses at a rate of 59%.
- Enrollment in difficult courses decreased as students accumulated hours and moved to a new class level, eventually resulting in 18% enrollment by seniors.
- An average of 44% of all students enrolled in difficult courses across all class levels earned a D or F or withdrew.
- Twenty-nine of the courses on the list had an enrollment of 100 or more students across all sections.
- Of the 29 courses that had an enrollment of 100 or more students across all sections, 11 or 1/3 represented Kent Core courses.
- The greater the number of difficult courses a student was enrolled in, the more likely he or she were to earn a D or F, or to withdraw from the course.
- Students in different majors had difficulty in different courses.



KENT STATE DIFFICULT COURSE PROJECT

- Deans charged with addressing the DFW rates
 - Data shared with deans
- Chairs and directors invited to data sharing and discussion session
 - Chairs and directors encouraged to form a working group and include those individuals in data sharing and discussion sessions



KENT STATE DIFFICULT COURSE PROJECT

- Disaggregate data to understand what is happening in the course
 - By section
 - By enrollment
 - By student groups (race and ethnicity, gender, income indicators, first generation status, major, class)
 -
- Avoid inclination to fix student – ask how can my course maintain rigor and increased learning for all students



UNIVERSITY-LEVEL ACTIONS

- Updated placement practices
- Expanded Linked Course initiative
- Expanded Supplemental Instruction to cover courses that have the higher percentage of enrolled students and work with faculty to identify opportunities to reward use of SI.
- Reviewed degree requirements to reduce the number of difficult courses any one student is enrolled in a given semester.
- Educated advisors about the DFW issue.
- Worked with Learning Communities representing majors enrolling in difficult courses to identify opportunities to provide additional support and outreach to students.



COURSE-SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Placement, Academic Support
 - Chemistry (ALEKS, SI)
 - Phil (SI)
 - Physics (Online Preparation Module)
- Early and Often Feedback
 - Business Stats (Early and Often Feedback/Practice/Assessment)
- Course Sequencing
 - Engineering course (made physics a prerequisite instead of math)
- Department-specific CTL support plans -opportunities for faculty to learn more about the DFW conversation, progressive pedagogy and other strategies that can be used to encourage student success in difficult courses (e.g., Course Signals, formative assessment, attendance monitoring)



Success!

- **Reduced by 50% the number of DFW courses**
- **2,387 students benefited**





PRACTICE CURIOSITY BEFORE JUDGEMENT

- **“I noticed”**
- **“I wondered”**
- **“Help me to understand”**
- **“How can I help?”**

QUESTIONS?



QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

- Is the focus of course content on quantity over quality?
- Are students given early and often opportunities to practice/assess?
- How does the pedagogy and material engage the unengaged?
- How does faculty mindset influence student learning?
- What does student ready pedagogy look like in practice?
- What support is provided to faculty?
- How is teaching excellence rewarded?
- Should department have a strategic teaching mission?
- How do we define and measure rigor?
- Who isn't being served through academic support?
- What support can be provided through the course?
- Does it matter when during their career, students enroll in the course?
- Does it matter how many they take in one semester?
- Does it matter who is teaching?
- Does course size and delivery mode impact course outcomes?
- Who is disproportionately impacted?
- What is the expected DFWI rate?



TOOLKIT STRATEGIES

Early and often feedback/assessment/practice

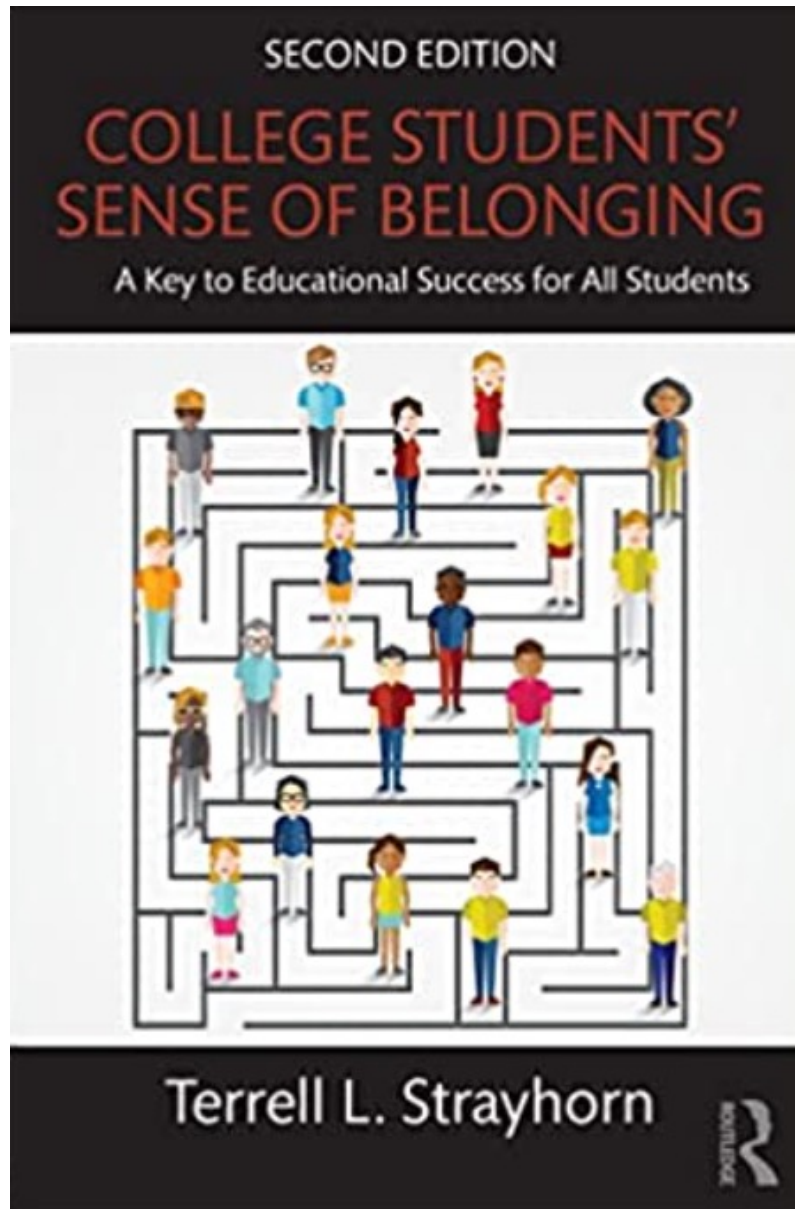
Supplemental Instruction

Wraparound support and community – TRIO

Communicate and demonstrate care and belonging

Communicate and practice growth mindset

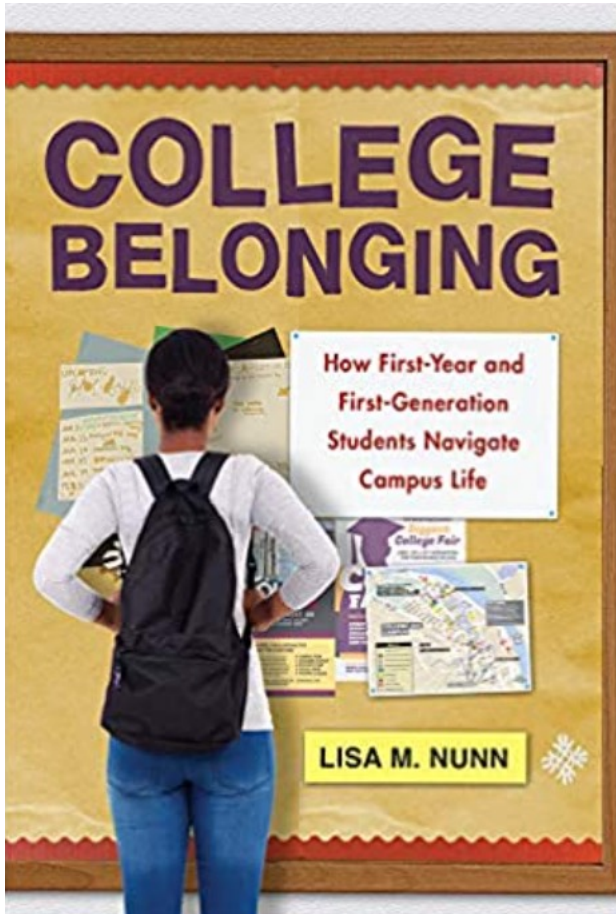




Belonging is a student's perceived support on campus, a sense of connectedness, and an experience of mattering, feeling valued, accepted, and respected by peers, faculty, and staff.



COLLEGE BELONGING



Social Belonging

- Finding friendships; getting involved in clubs, organizations, sports teams; feeling wanted and valued by others.

Campus Community Belonging

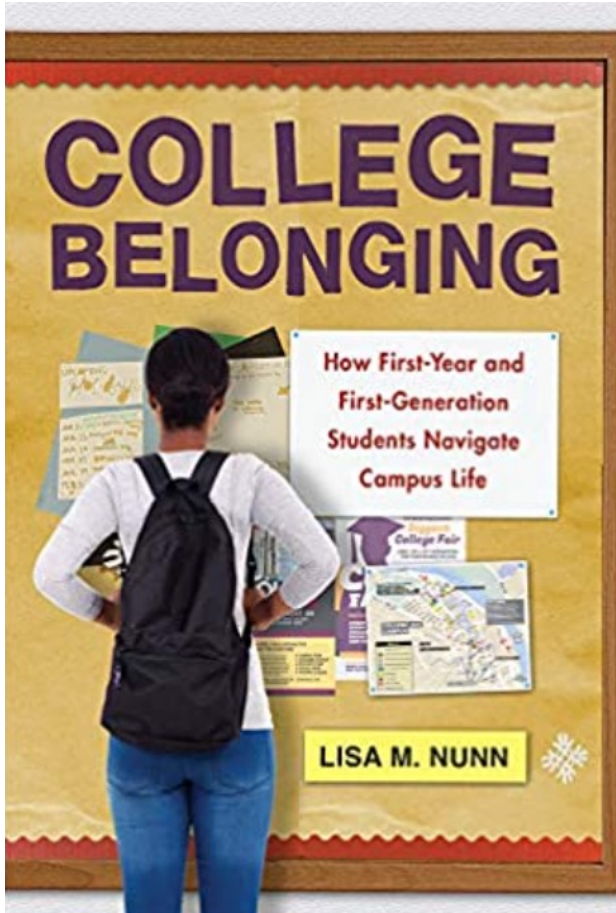
- Feeling at home; feeling valued; validated and comfortable in campus spaces; a sense of ease.

Academic Belonging

- Doing well in classes; feeling competent; comfortable studying with peers; confident to raise your hand in class or talk to a professor one-on-one.



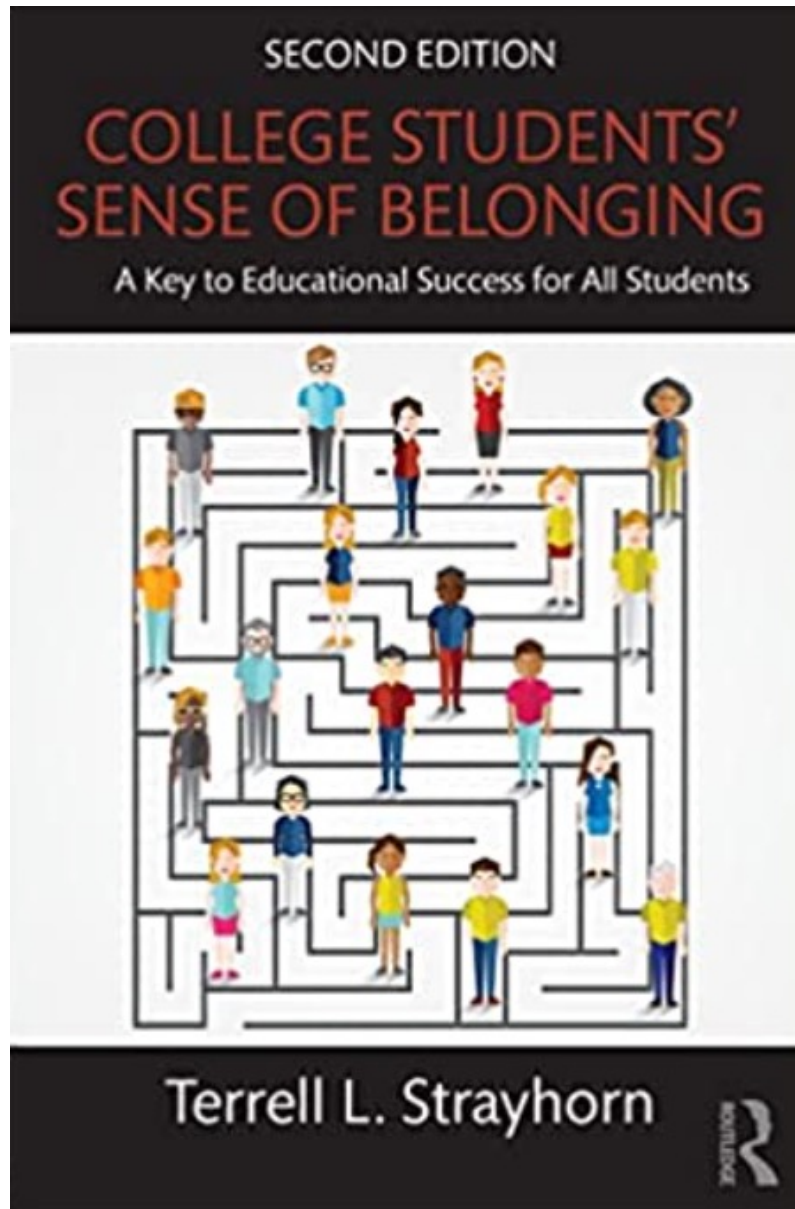
COLLEGE BELONGING



How First Generation Students Experience Belonging Academic Belonging

- **Mismatch between cultural norms**
- **Is challenging and requires more effort**
- **Results in a lot of missteps, frustration, and disappointment**

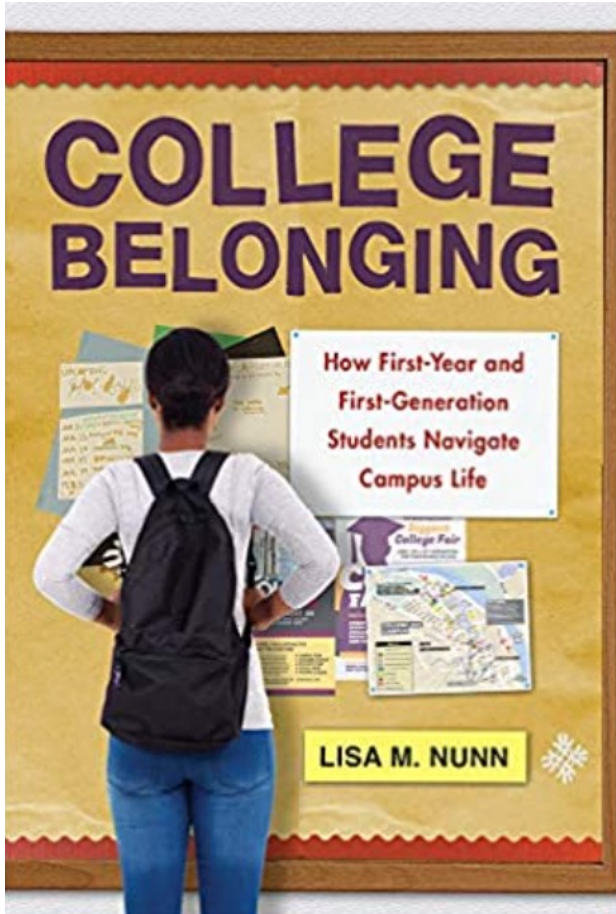




Any struggle leads to an internalized sense that they do not belong



COLLEGE BELONGING



Current Approach leads to Incomplete Belonging

Find your place

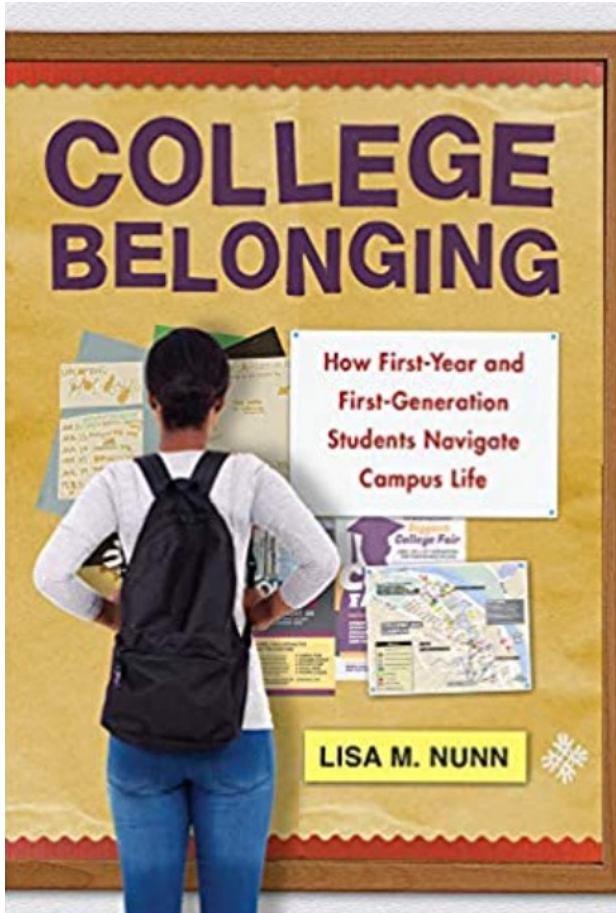
Boutique programs

Dedicated spaces

Unintentional messages that failure and struggle are abnormal



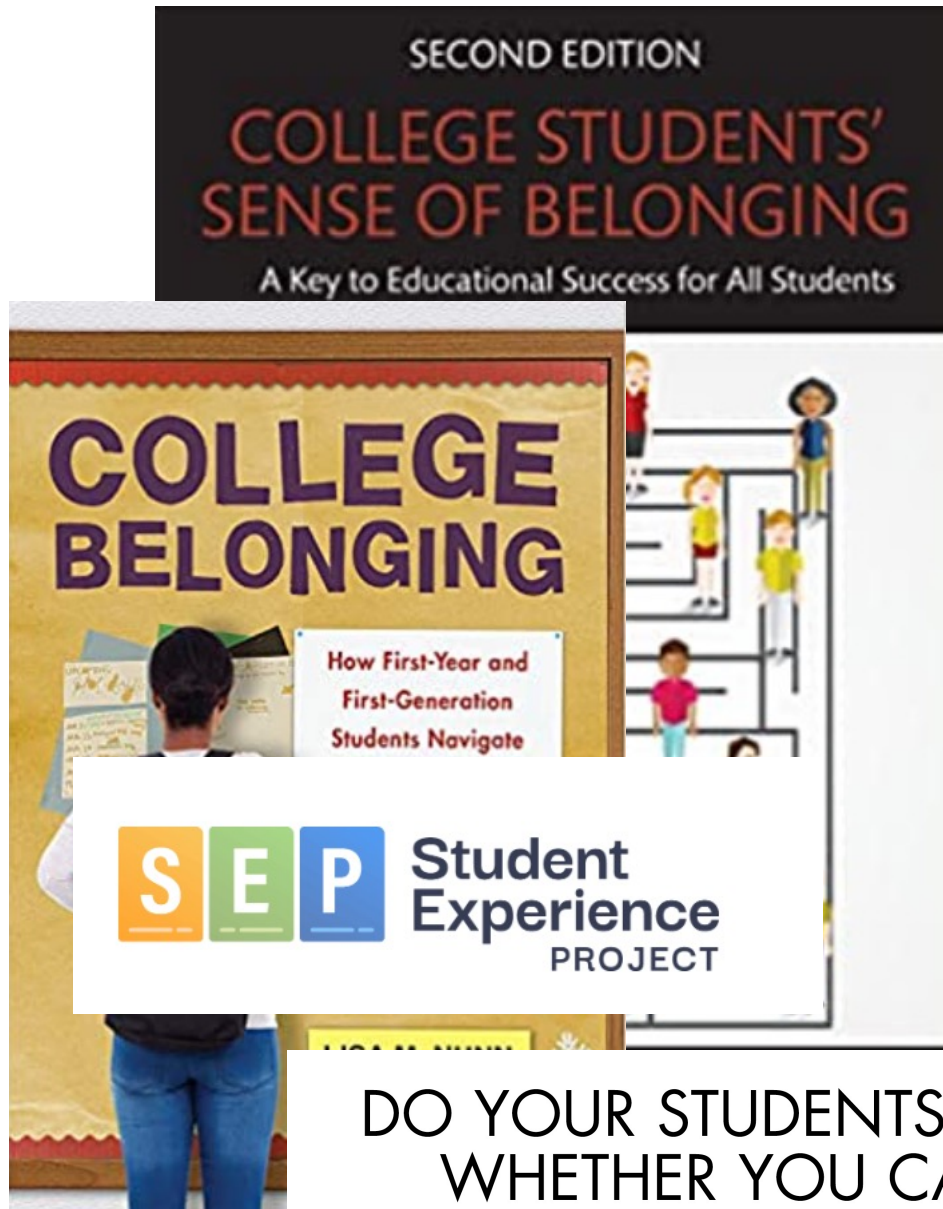
COLLEGE BELONGING



Recommended Approach

Actively and intentionally offer belonging to all of our students by ensuring that our actions, words, curriculum, and climate reflect all members of our community.





DO YOUR STUDENTS CARE
WHETHER YOU CARE
ABOUT THEM?

Steven A. Meyers

Warmth and Openness

Share relevant personal stories/stories of woe

Come early; leave late

Encourage Student Participation

Call students by name

Give time for student discussion of ideas

Encourage disagreement; value prior knowledge

Instructor Organization

Grade and return assignments early and often

Review class “agenda” and expected outcomes before each class

Adjust Language

Change “office hours” to meet and greet

Adjust syllabus language to promote growth mindset

Normalize struggling “All students struggle with this content”

My class vs. Our class



WHO IS AT THE TABLE?

- Curriculum
- Center for Faculty Excellence
- Assessment/IR
- Faculty success champions
- Faculty teaching courses
- College and department leadership
- Academic advisors
- Students
- Academic support professionals
- General education leadership





Q&A

Thank you!

REFERENCES

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