'If They Don't Care, I Don't Care': Millennial and Generation Z Students and the Impact of Faculty Caring

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Abstract: This article draws on a qualitative study of 31 Millennial and Generation Z students to examine the meaning of teacher "caring" in a higher education context. Prior research clearly documents the importance of caring to student engagement, although much of that scholarship focuses on secondary schooling. Research also examines the changing demographics of higher education and new expectations brought to college classrooms by Millennials and others. In this article, we connect the existing research on caring and on generational differences to explore how traditional-aged undergraduates define caring and the degree to which that impacts their willingness to learn. Our findings indicate that students value approachability and relatability as traits in a caring professor; we also find that in-class pedagogical practices can dramatically demonstrate care or lack thereof. Our research suggests that the student success agenda in higher education must take in-class teaching practices seriously in order to impact students' engagement and motivation to learn.

Keywords: caring; pedagogy, Millennials; Generation Z; undergraduate students; higher education; student success

Introduction

The centrality of caring to effective teaching has been well-established in research on primary and secondary schools (Finn et al., 2009), and recent scholarship has begun to call attention to the importance of faculty caring to student learning in higher education as well (Meyers, 2009; Slate et al., 2011). Interest in the impact of caring faculty emerged from both rising efforts to retain an increasingly diverse undergraduate student body and questions regarding the unique perspectives and needs brought by Millennial students (and now, Generation Z). Our youngest college students are often perceived as needing more attention and care than prior generations (Goldman and Martin, 2016; Varallo, 2008), and as schools struggle to recruit and retain these youngest students, questions on what these students need to succeed are pushed to the forefront.

Despite the growing scholarship on both generational differences and the centrality of teacher caring to student success, little research has connected these two areas. Our research seeks to directly address that gap through an in-depth, qualitative examination of student attitudes regarding faculty instruction and course material in five historically difficult courses. These courses are in both the humanities (history) and in STEM fields (chemistry, biology, and mathematics). Across all these disciplinary areas, our research reveals a clear emphasis on faculty caring as an important factor for these Millennial and Generation Z students' motivation and engagement in learning. In this article, we present findings regarding the specific behaviors and expressed attitudes that lead students to see a professor as someone who "cares." Our research reveals some unexpected and important elements to consider in how Millennial and Generation Z students understand what it means to care. By including an emphasis on teachers communicating care to students as part of student success initiatives, we

argue that we can contribute to a stronger culture of engaged Millennial and Generation Z student learning and, ultimately, student persistence to graduation.

Literature Review

Millennials and Generation Z in College

Institutions of higher education are more multigenerational than ever before, with faculty from the "Silent" generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and even a few Millennials (Kleinhans et al., 2015; Rickes, 2016); traditional-age students who comprise the majority of undergraduate students are now transitioning from exclusively Millennial to include our youngest "generation," Generation Z (Seemiller and Grace 2016; Shatto and Erwin 2016). The generational diversity in higher education presents unique challenges to engagement and retention of students, as many of the common attitudes and tendencies of the undergraduates are not congruent with those expected by the faculty teaching their courses, leading some to lament the "entitled" and unprepared Millennial student (Goldman and Martin, 2016; Howe and Strauss, 2000).

The term "Millennial" typically refers to those born between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s. Growing up in the 1990s and 2000s, this generation has always been technologically connected and globally-aware, steeped in a cultural emphasis on dangers and threats to young people, ranging from terrorism to sexual predators on the internet; relatedly, Millennials have had unprecedented parental oversight, leading to the label "helicopter parents" (Rickes, 2016). Millennials have also typically grown up experiencing highly scheduled and monitored involvement in organized social activities, alongside schooling that was assessment-driven, marked by explicitly given measurement "goals" and rubrics to fulfill (Leinberger, 2015). As a result of their upbringing, Millennial college students arrive accustomed to a high level of guidance on educational expectations, considerable oversight of their daily behaviors, and a sense they are to be "sheltered" from threats (Rickes, 2016). They also experience technology as "a natural part of their lives" (Maürtin-Cairncross, 2014) and expect both social organizations and learning environments to integrate technology into day-to-day life and work.

Because many Millennial students have not experienced significant academic challenges and failures prior to college, they tend to have high levels of optimism and low levels of resilience when faced with poor academic outcomes, particularly if they see expectations as unclear. In terms of learning, Millennials seek clarity, practical applicability, and engaged teaching more than preceding generations (Maürtin-Cairncross, 2014; Stasio, 2013). Quick to bore, they want teachers who do more than lecture, and they want opportunities to interact with their peers to learn in collaborative ways, whether in class or while studying.

Although less research exists on our newest Generation Z students, some of these patterns seem to be continuing. Born in the 2000s, this generation is even more technologically integrated than Millennials, living a cyborg-like reality in which who they are, what they do, and how they feel are all intertwined with a complexly intermeshed technology-grounded world. Google preceded their birth, and global-connectedness through social media has always been the norm; uninterrupted connection to others and to the world of information is taken-for-granted. Like Millennials, they have experienced a great deal of oversight and infrequent failures; their attention span is even shorter than Millennials, and their expectation for instant answers and information is even higher (Shatto and Erwin, 2016).

However, some early research is suggesting key differences between Millennials and the emerging Generation Z—Generation Z appears to be more "practical and financially driven" with a stronger "preference for self-learning" (Barnes and Noble College 2017). Seemiller and Grace (2016) describe Generation Z students as more career-oriented, less risk-averse, more entrepreneurial, and (even) more politically disengaged than their Millennial counterparts. Loveland (2017) highlights the

high fraction (42%) who expect to be self-employed at some point in their lives and have a related interest in an education that is customizable and applicable to real-world circumstances. In short, our youngest students have technology at the center of their everyday lives, are accustomed to and comfortable with a diverse world, and are driven by a desire for a helpful, responsive, practical educational environment that will enable them to succeed in future careers.

Both Millennials and Generation Z students often fail to anticipate the myriad of personal, social, and academic challenges they face in the transition from high school to college. The typical University environment is less technology-centric, less connected to a family's oversight, and less explicit regarding academic expectations than high schools. In addition, students often find themselves more academically challenged and less individually supported than previously. As a result, younger students coming to college often face their first real chances to fail academically in a context with little direct parental involvement and more distant teachers than in high school. In this environment, they need and want faculty to "care" about them and support their success, although few studies have looked directly at what the students need and want (Therrell and Dunneback, 2015).

Teaching Caring and Student Success

The importance of teachers' caring about students has been well established, although virtually all of the existing research has focused on secondary schools rather than the higher education context (Dallavis, 2014; Meyers, 2009; Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden, 1995; Teven 2007; Teven and Hanson, 2004). In studies of teacher efficacy and student responsiveness, perceived caring consistently emerges as a significant variable shaping student engagement, teacher credibility, and student performance in these settings (Cooper and Miness, 2014; Finn et al., 2009). Frequent interactions with students, assistance with personal and academic challenges, fairness in classroom treatment, listening and encouraging students, smiling and being "warm," and efforts to learn about students' lives have all been associated with seeing a teacher as caring (Cooper and Miness, 2014; Tosolt, 2010).

In the environment of higher education, a pedagogy of care is a more recent area of attention (O'Brien, 2010; Slate et al., 2011; Thayer-Bacon and Bacon, 1996; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Given the emphasis in higher education as more professional and less "nurturing," some have expressed skepticism that caring should be a central component of the role of faculty at colleges and universities (Varallo, 2008). Research consistently shows, however, that college students' perceptions that teachers care about them increases their motivation to work, engagement in class, and evaluation of the teacher as credible (Chory and Offstein, 2017; Finn et al., 2009; Slate et al., 2011). Although many faculty may see themselves as "caring" in general terms (O'Brien, 2010), they may be skeptical of increased pressure to be proactive in their attempts to demonstrate caring to students, fearing that such expectations might infantilize the young adults and add new duties to their already overflowing plates (Chory and Offstein, 2017). These concerns are related to faculty frustrations with Millennial and Generation Z students and their perceptions of these students as needy, entitled, and demanding; indeed, Varallo (2008) expressly articulates concern that the "intensive mothering" in our culture will become a "mandate to care" for higher education faculty, leading to a "mother-professor" role that will unduly burden female faculty. Varallo (2008) indicates that research on Millennials points to an expectation of "a tremendous amount of communication and guidance" that creates more work for faculty:

> In dutiful responsive fashion, teachers find themselves performing—signing, entertaining, drawing in their otherwise-distracted audiences. These are the children we have mothered. Many of us are still mothering, not our own children, and not out of choice, but because it has become a professional expectation…. (p. 154)

Varallo's (2008) concern is not just that additional duties are expected to demonstrate caring but that that work is also uncompensated and unrecognized by traditional higher education structures of evaluation.

As institutions of higher education wrestle with greater pressure to retain students and recognize the myriad of ways that faculty contribute to student success, the research on caring as an important factor in student engagement and persistence becomes increasingly relevant. Although we know that caring matters and requires effort on the part of those teaching, we know little about how students in higher education conceptualize caring. If it matters to Millennials and Generation Z students that their teachers care, how do they ascertain whether faculty care about them or not? Our research directly explores this question among a sample of undergraduate Millennial and Generation Z students and, as such, seeks to contribute to the literature on caring in higher education by operationalizing what it means to care for this generation.

Research Methodology

Research Context

This research was conducted at a mid-sized regional, research-extensive public institution of higher education that offers a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. At the undergraduate level, the student body is predominately from lower-income backgrounds, with virtually all needing financial assistance and most qualifying for Pell Grants. The majority of undergraduates are first generation college students, and more than 80% are from within a few hundred miles of the institution. In terms of race and ethnicity, the largest groups are white (61%), Black (29%), Hispanic (3%), and Asian (1%). Although the undergraduate student body includes both new high school graduates and non-traditional students, the majority of undergraduates fall into the category of "Generation Z" or "Millennial."

In fall 2016, as part of efforts to continuously improve student performance in line with accrediting body expectations, the University kicked off a new initiative that focuses on improving the learning outcomes and academic engagement of students in five historically difficult gateway courses: Intermediate Algebra; World Civilizations I.; General Chemistry I.; Principles of Biological Science I.; and Human Anatomy and Physiology I. In 2016, each of these courses had a rate of greater than 35% of students receiving a D, F, Withdrawal, or Incomplete (DFWI rate). Our research focused on students enrolled in these courses, as we sought to better understand their perceptions of the classes and faculty, barriers and obstacles to their success, and the behaviors and attitudes of those performing well and those doing poorly. The Institutional Review Board at the institution approved this research prior to the beginning of data collection and analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

The general purpose of this study was to explore the students' experiences in the gateway courses through in-depth interviews and focus groups with volunteers solicited from the classes via announcements in classes and via email. Thirty-one interviews and one focus group were conducted in private on-campus office spaces, and interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Interviews and the focus group were guided by a standard instrument exploring student perceptions (see Appendix 1), and responses were probed through an interactive, respondent-driven process. The topics covered in the instrument include questions on mindset, perceptions of instructors, classroom experiences, college readiness, and study habits.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, primarily to ensure that the total elements of the conversation (hesitancy, pauses, nervous laughter, etc.) were recognizable to the coders of the data. Interview transcriptions were coded using line-by-line analysis to identify emergent themes (e.g., time management, teacher caring), then subsequently re-coded by independent researchers using identified core codes (e.g., use of humor, active learning pedagogy). Cross-comparison of coding patterns indicated greater than 80% consistency across raters. Several key themes emerged from this iterative process of data analysis, including issues with class structure and organization, personal histories and interest in topics, challenges around mindset, and perceptions of teacher caring. In this paper, we focus explicitly on the data related to the theme of caring.

Respondent Profiles

The participants who took part in the study all fell into the "Millennial" or "Generation Z" birth cohorts. The ages of the participants range from 18-29 years old, with the median age being 19 years old. 26% of the participants are male students, and 74% of participants are female. Racially, 45% of participants are white, and 55% are black; no Hispanic or Asian students participated. Roughly 70% of the participants are first-generation college students. Students represent a variety of majors, including arts, humanities, STEM fields, education, and health care. The average cumulative grade point average of the participants in this study is 2.755 on a 4.0 scale. Overall, the sample reflects the demographic and academic profile of our undergraduate student body.

Findings

Caring emerged as a significant theme throughout the data and one directly related to student motivation to learn. Students articulated the importance of "caring" to their engagement in the class, assessment of the course, their likelihood to succeed, and their willingness to work. As one student in the focus group put it, "If they don't care, I don't care." In that group, each student described ways in which they worked harder and were more motivated in situations where they believed faculty member cared.

In contrast to some prior research (Cooper and Miness, 2014; Tosolt, 2010), caring was not exclusively seen as an individual faculty member's personality trait but also as a practice evidenced through teaching techniques employed. Students identified two specific areas in which caring was seen (or not) in their interactions with faculty – faculty attitude or demeanor and pedagogical practices in class. Although individual faculty members' demeanor and orientation to class clearly mattered as demonstrations of care, embracing certain pedagogical practices as "caring" was also highly significant. In fact, good teaching often compensated for a perceived "bad" attitude. In the eyes of respondents, faculty members who did not "seem to care" could show that they *actually* did in how they taught. Teaching strategies that were engaging and responsive trumped faculty demeanor as a determining factor in students seeing a faculty member as "caring."

Caring as an Attitude

As expected, students talked about professors' attitudes as being caring or uncaring. In particular, several elements emerged as repeatedly mentioned demonstrations of care: empathy, relatability, approachability, and encouraging enthusiasm. For many students, when teachers referred to the students' lives being more than just about that class, students saw that acknowledgement as evidence of care. For instance, Jane talked about her chemistry professor mentioning that he knew that students had numerous obligations in addition to his class and how that helped her feel comfortable:

> …he was like a teacher but he kinda seemed like he understood our life outside of the classroom and things like that, so he wasn't, he was more like a friend and a professor kind of thing, which was nice.

Similarly, Lena talked about how her biology teacher "understands the student and the struggle sometimes," caring about their well-being as a whole. In some cases, faculty who were empathetic also seem relatable to students – these teachers talk about their own lives in ways that demonstrate they are people too. That pattern seemed especially true of teachers perceived as "younger" and thus more like them, including those who were graduate student instructors juggling school as well as work, much like the undergraduates.

In addition to empathy and relatability, another dimension of care that emerged in the interviews is approachability, the sense that the teacher is open to interaction outside of class. Some respondents described being intimidated by professors or unsure on how to approach them, and "nice" faculty members increased their willingness to talk about the class content. As Georgia illustrates:

> like I said, she was super nice. She wasn't like, you know, 'I'm busy, go away,' kind of attitude. She was like, 'What do you need?'

Elle echoes this sentiment:

> …she was really easy to talk to, and you know I didn't feel like an idiot when I approached her with questions.

Whether or not students ever went to office hours or talked with faculty outside of class, they valued the sense that they could if they wished.

A final attitudinal piece described by a student was that some faculty seemed generally "encouraging" and enthusiastic in their demeanor and tone. As Georgia describes:

> …she *wanted* us to learn. Some people, you know, they didn't pay attention, but she was like, 'C'mon, guys! You got this!'

That sort of enthusiasm was often contagious to the students. In contrast, faculty who seemed disinterested and unenthusiastic tended to demotivate students, as illustrated in this comment by Cedric:

> You know, you can kinda tell when someone doesn't want to be there, so my teacher before… she drug her feet coming in and you know, I didn't want to be there, she didn't want to be there, so it, in some cases I felt like well, I don't really feel like going to class today… because she acts like she doesn't want to be there, and if she doesn't want to be there I don't want to be there, so I'm not gonna go.

In contrast, the new math teacher Cedric had when he retook the class demonstrated to him that she cared because of her empathy and approachability:

> …this year I actually feel comfortable to go to my teacher and ask her for help, and I think that she really genuinely cares about our success in class, because the very first day of school, she asked us, the very first question she asked was, who's taken this class before? And there

were several of us who raised our hands and she just was kinda like okay, well I want you to start fresh, this is a new semester… right there let me know that she actually cared about what we were doing and she knew that we were in the class for a reason…

Cedric's and other interviews with students clearly demonstrated the importance of a caring attitude, *demonstrated* through empathy, relatability and approachability, as well as an enthusiasm for their learning. When faculty were seen as caring people who wanted them to learn, students were more likely to talk with them and to work hard in their classes.

Caring as a Teaching Practice

A powerful and unexpected theme that emerged in the interviews was that practices widely regarded as fundamentals of effective college instruction were precisely the behaviors perceived by Millennial and Generation Z students as evidence of caring. Contrary to the idea that to show that they care professors must go above and beyond what is expected from a normal faculty role, these interviewees talked primarily about faculty behaviors *during* class and how teaching techniques demonstrating caring about student success or the lack thereof. Overall, the students saw what we term *adaptive teaching* as a clear indication that teachers cared about student success. Teachers who interacted with students in class, solicited feedback on their level of understanding, and adjusted their teaching to try to improve student learning were interpreted as caring. The fact that they adapted their plans, their teaching techniques, and what they told students in response to the feedback that they were given was read by students as direct, unequivocal evidence of caring.

The faculty who were seen as most caring were described as using humor, bringing in relatable examples, and interacting regularly with the students. True to patterns we see in research on Millennial and Generation Z students' heightened anxiety levels (Posselt and Lipson, 2016; Rickes, 2016), many students described being "afraid" or "nervous" prior to the start of the class, given its presumed difficulty, so faculty members who reduced that anxiety were appreciated. As Meagan illustrates:

> …she would be very light-hearted …because she actually cared about… her students and how… they did in her class. And so, just joking around and… making… connecting things to what you could actually understand rather than things that are… abstract to us.

The notion of making the abstract concrete was a recurring theme in many interviews. When specific examples were given, particularly those that were from contemporary social circumstances that were part of students' lives, students saw these concrete illustrations as attempts to help students understand. By using examples from students' everyday social worlds and popular culture, faculty communicated that they understood students and cared about them "getting it." Bradley echoes Meagan's views in his comments:

> … I think she took difficult material and made it relatable. Like she would come up with the weirdest examples… stuff like that that really makes it stick in your brain. So even when she had difficult material to work with she did her best to make it understandable to us.

Faculty who "do their best" to be prepared for class and connect with students were seen as caring by respondents. In contrast, those who seemed to be reading prepared lectures, not interacting with students, or not curious about student learning were seen as not really putting forth effort and thus not caring if students did well or not:

…like I told a few of my friends like I wish we had spent more time in the classroom working I guess one on one just to see like you know a lot of the time she would just go over what we were learning that week and not so much 'oh what are y'all confused on', 'what do y'all need help [with],' like 'are y'all not understanding something'…

Similarly, Cedric described one of his teachers as "just trying to get it over with" and not bringing the "enthusiasm" or "extra push" he believed that students wanted. He explained further:

… I walked away more confused than I was when I walked in, because she just wasn't engaging in the lecture. She just acted like she didn't care what was going on. She just was very blank and monotone and just sped through it and was like okay, there you go, I did my job, now you guys go do you.

This faculty member "didn't care," in his view, because she was just presenting material and pushing through the class content. In contrast, the core of "caring" for students was a sense of responsive teaching that adapts to student feedback. Students praised faculty members who tried different teaching methods, which they saw as efforts to ensure all students are learning. Simon explains:

She teaches in different styles, so like if you can just read the slide and understand it, kudos to you. But, if you don't understand that way, she also has a graph for you. And she will weave in a story of like how something works or she'll give a metaphor as to how something works, so she teaches it in several different ways to where like if you can't learn one way, you're sure to get it another way…

Jamie also describes her teacher who tried different teaching strategies—"…if I still didn't understand it, we'd keep going… he had different methods to use."
For some students, the adaptive teaching included active learning techniques in class as well as inverted or "flipped" classroom experiences for some of the large science classes. Elle was surprised by the format of her class but found it very beneficial:

… we would be talking in class, doing lecture, and then she would – like I said none of my teachers in the past had done this – she actually had us like kind of group up every class and she would give us like a sheet of practice questions, pertaining to the section that we just did. We were able to work together in groups to try to figure out what other people are doing wrong or what our questions may be and she would come around and talk to our groups individually and make sure we were working, and that we were headed in the right direction toward solving the problem…

Michelle had a similar experience in her science class:
… Yeah so when we watch the inverted lecture, I was able to sort of go my own pace to learn the principles and the procedures that we were expected to learn form that before we even got to class so when we got there we could go into greater depth and everybody there had some sort of you know surface knowledge of what was trying to be taught, it wasn't like we were all coming to class without any idea what was going on. It was nice.

Whether discussing inverted lecture techniques, interactive questions in class, or the use of examples, respondents consistently voiced a preference for adaptive teaching that recognized where they were academically. Moreover, they saw such pedagogical practices as "caring" and as such motivating for

them. Many students followed up discussion of teaching style and faculty attitudes with comments about their own motivation to learn. Randall explains:

> It changed in the way that human A&P it was all not a difficult course for me. The expectations I had going into the course were completely changed because the professor herself made it very interesting in the way that she taught the course, you could tell she was very passionate about it, and that made me become very passionate about it as well.

Some students talked about wanting to learn "for" the professor, to please him or her as a response to the faculty member's efforts to teach. Georgia connects her motivation directly to whether the faculty member is teaching well or "wrong":

> … I mean I already want to learn, but I mean, you *want* to do good for her. You know what I'm saying? Like, 'cause if your students aren't doing well, then obviously you're doing something wrong. I don't know, just- wanted to do good.

Along the same lines, Sara talks about her connection to a class and desire to please the professor by doing well:

> … I would just say it's really important to have a relationship with your professor. Because I just feel like it makes you more, have an attachment to the class if you know that person. And also it makes you want to work harder because you want to succeed for them…

Even more directly, Elle states that she "definitely was more willing to do more practice for her because I respected her a lot more as a teacher for actually like caring and helping." Elle's class was a large auditorium-style lecture hall, so her interaction directly with the professor was minimal; her conclusion that the teacher cared and was helpful came primarily from teaching style and the ways in which the teacher included students in lectures and responded to their feedback. Thus, this *adaptive teaching* style was read by these Millennial and Generation Z students as communicating clearly: "I care." That perception in turn enhanced students' motivation because they sensed that someone cared if they "made it."

Discussion and Implications

Prior research often implies (or explicitly states) that Millennials and Generation Z students need and expect a high level of caring akin to the "intensive mothering" characterizing our current cultural milieu (Varallo 2008). However, our research indicates that such extensive emotional investment outside the classroom may not be necessary for students to perceive that faculty care. A clear implication of this work is that *effective teaching is at the core of caring and should be a priority for student success work on college campuses*. When we talk about student success, we often focus on auxiliary or support structures, such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, early alert systems, intrusive advising, and course sequencing or degree paths. All of these elements are important, but not sufficient if in-class engagement of faculty is not present. In fact, utilization of such support structures would likely be enhanced if students are motivated to work harder through their in-class and faculty-to-student interaction experiences. If classes and instruction de-motivate students, they will be less likely to avail themselves of resources. In contrast, if their in-class experiences with faculty inspire engagement in learning, students may well continue that motivation into the resource areas of campus that complement the work of faculty.

Faculty development is thus a central component to the student success agenda. Many University faculty members have not had the opportunity to learn evidence-based teaching techniques; providing such development could dramatically improve student learning outcomes and their persistence to graduation. Teaching in a multigenerational classroom poses unique challenges and requires more nimble pedagogical approaches than in years past. In some cases, we run the danger of cross-generational stereotyping and creating straw men out of "snowflake" Millennials and Generation Z students; when we frame the problem as about students demanding too much attention, it becomes an intractable one that can only be addressed through massive cultural change. If we consider the power of changing the way we teach, however, the conversation shifts. Our research indicates that student motivation can be improved without a huge out-of-class time investment or "hand holding" on the part of faculty. Rather, utilizing adaptive teaching techniques and intentionally communicating that one cares if students learn can impact student motivation and engagement in their own learning process.

Conclusion

This research has joined the literature on Millennials and Generation Z with research on the role of teacher caring to consider the question of what students perceive as evidence of caring. Although limited by a relatively small sample size at a single institution, this research identifies areas for additional research into both student perceptions and the power of effective teaching. We hope to expand this project to include interviews with faculty on teaching strategies and perceptions of student learning and engagement, particularly students from different generations. We also see the need for further exploration of informal and formal out-of-class mentoring between faculty and students and the connections between such mentoring and students' motivation and in-class experiences. From this study, however, it is clear that students look to how a professor teaches during class time to ascertain whether that professor cares if they succeed or not. As such, initiatives around student learning and retention should address adaptive teaching and perceptions of caring as important factors in the student success challenges facing higher education today.

Acknowledgements

Appendix

Appendix 1. Guiding Interview Questions

1. In fall 2016, you took at least one of our "Gateway" courses – MAT 99, Biology 110, Anatomy and Physiology, Chemistry 106, and/or History 101. Which did you take?
2. Think back to the very beginning of the semester and how you felt before classes started. What did you think the class was going to be like? How were you feeling about it going in?
3. In what ways was the class what you expected, and in what ways was it different? (Probe for mindset, beliefs about preparation and strengths/weaknesses)
4. Let's dig into some more specifics about your particular class. We want to understand what it was like being a student in it – your work, what was easy, what was hard, what was boring, what was fun… your general thoughts.

a. What kinds of work were expected to be successful in the class? (push to talk about workload, study strategies, etc)
b. What was the most challenging part of the class (Probe: readings, written assignments, tests, something else...)?
c. What was something that you liked about the class and/or the professor?
d. If you could give the professor one piece of advice to improve students' understanding of the material, what would it be?

5. Were you able to keep up with your grades all semester to know where you stood? Did you check your interim grades? How did knowing your grades (if you did) impact your approach to the class, if at all?

6. Did you meet with your professor about the class? Did you ever meet with the TA? (Why or why not?)

7. Did you use any other resources on campus (like tutoring)? (Why or why not?)

8. Thinking about what you know about the class now versus what you knew at the beginning, what advice would you give someone who was taking the class next semester?

9. Overall, what do you think would improve the class? What aspects of it should we keep?

10. What are some important things we should know about this class that we haven't asked?

11. Any final comments?

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