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Student Experience Project Releases First Day Toolkit to Help Faculty Foster Student Belonging

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Washington, DC – Aiming to boost students’ sense of belonging so they have the supportive learning environment needed to thrive, the Student Experience Project (SEP) today released a First Day Toolkit to help faculty use evidence-based practices to revise their course syllabi to advance student success. The toolkit, which is informed by a pilot of such a revision process with nearly 300 instructors from 16 institutions that demonstrated a significant positive impact, includes a self-paced, video-based syllabus revision module, a syllabus review guide, a workshop facilitation guide, and more to help faculty and institutions easily put the research into practice.

SEP is a collaborative effort led by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU); College Transition Collaborative (CTC); Education Counsel; Project for Education Research that Scales (PERTS); and Shift, and is funded in part by the Raikes Foundation.

“We’re thrilled to release the First Day Toolkit to help instructors and faculty create a growth mindset culture and foster a greater sense of belonging for students beginning on the first day of class,” said Samantha Levine, Associate Director for Urban Initiatives at APLU and USU. “The toolkit draws on a strong base of research showing that students’ perception of their instructor’s mindset is a key predictor of their anticipated sense of belonging and their success in the course. We hope the resources we’re sharing today will allow more instructors to enhance the learning environment for students.”

An analysis of a sample of the syllabi showed significant improvements in students’ perceptions of syllabus clarity and supportiveness of students. When asked to rank syllabi for how supportive and clear they are, students reported revised syllabi were 25 percent more supportive and 8 percent clearer than unrevised syllabi. Instructors reported strongly favorable experiences with training in evidence-based practices, too. Over 90 percent of instructors said they would recommend such training to a colleague and 90 percent reported the training helped them incorporate a growth mindset into their syllabus.

The First Day Toolkit includes:

- An [online syllabus revision module](#) with recorded videos to demonstrate practical tips for developing syllabi.
- A [syllabus review guide](#) to help faculty revise syllabi to promote a growth mindset after completing the module.
- A [workshop facilitation guide](#) to inform workshops with several faculty on syllabus revisions may wish to convene faculty to workshop ideas and debrief the revision process.
- A set of [first day practices](#) designed to promote student belonging, equity, and growth on the first day of class after revising

their syllabi.

SEP is now collecting data on the impact of other classroom practices aimed at boosting students' sense of belonging and perception of their instructor's growth mindset, including reviewing course policies to promote equity; delivering feedback in ways that engenders trust and increase academic engagement; increasing efforts to create a collaborative peer learning community; and highlighting the work of diverse scholars.

To measure the impact of this work, SEP convened nearly 200 faculty at six universities to foster a sense of belonging and growth mindset, both in the classroom and the wider campus, and then tracked 12,000 students self-reported experience in the courses every three to four weeks. In June, SEP will unveil an in-depth analysis of the impact of these practices.