

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

Who is an Educator on Your Campus?

The term *educator* often gets narrowly defined as instructors, faculty, and teaching assistants. The assumption may be that educators are only those who develop and deliver curriculum within a classroom setting. While instructors and faculty play essential roles in supporting the learning and growth of students, the identity of an educator can be applied more broadly to shift institutional culture to become student-centered. Everyone has the potential to play an integral role in educating students how to successfully navigate higher education, particularly as institutions seek to holistically develop and support students. This orientation is particularly important when working with at-promise students who may not have knowledge about or comfort in higher education (e.g., low-income, racially minoritized, and first-generation college students).

All individuals working at a postsecondary institution should consider themselves an *educator* who teaches, supports and encourages students as they navigate the educational process. Perceiving yourself and your colleagues as educators means focusing on developing and educating the whole student as they navigate college, instead of prioritizing bureaucratic structures and policies. Educators proactively train and support students in being successful. When a student comes to an office for support, the educator takes the time to explain options, potential resources, and why a consequence may occur. In addition, educators actively engage with students to understand underlying concerns in order to make connections to other educators on campus who may provide support – especially when the student’s situation would require engaging with another office on campus.

Some individuals on college campuses do not work directly with students, which may make it more difficult to envision their role as an educator. However, they help to shape the context within which students learn and the policies that directly influence their experiences. For readers in these roles, perceiving yourself as an educator frames how you approach your work in ways that center students and meet their needs holistically.

This orientation is not about asking faculty, staff, and administrators to do more – especially in this moment when many people feel overworked and exhausted. Rather, the shift occurs in how educators approach their work. For most individuals working in higher education, this reorientation creates a rewarding work context as most people enter this profession to support students in direct and indirect ways. Educators get to leverage their knowledge, experience and expertise to encourage the success of students.

What do “Educators” Do?

- Help students understand and navigate complex systems, offices, and policies, instead of focusing primarily on reinforcing bureaucracies.
- Teach students how to be successful, instead of focusing on enforcing consequences of violating a policy they may not know about or understand.
- Assist students in connecting to other educators who can address the students’ needs or support their goals, instead of assuming that this is not their responsibility.
- See higher education as a space of learning and growth where students can make mistakes, instead of a business designed for individual employee advancement.

- View their colleagues in different roles as partners who can collaboratively assist in helping students learn and grow to meet students' multiple needs, instead of prioritizing the silos and hierarchy that involve incentives and rewards that often relate to competing with educators on campus (or positioning oneself as more important or valuable than other educators).
- Understand that students are an asset to the educational institution and society and that ensuring their success is the mission of the institution, instead of viewing students as a problem or inconvenience that needs to be avoided or dealt with as quickly as possible.
- Work toward helping all students be successful, instead of assuming their role is to weed out students.
- Recognize that every interaction with someone who works for the institution frames how the student thinks about the institution and informs if they feel like they belong, matter and can succeed.

How Can I Align My Practice with Those of an “Educator”?

Educators approach their work by centering students and helping them to learn and achieve their college goals. In practice, this means that several aspects of their work shifts towards:

- Writing policies from the perspective of helping students understand why a policy exists, what it means in clear terms, and offering an explanation of how to follow or use the policy in order to be successful.
- Working in classroom contexts that shift from focusing solely on delivery of course content toward helping students understand the purpose of the course and how it supports their college goals, how to meet class expectations, what resources are available, and how to be successful in college.
- Interacting with a student by helping them think about what would benefit their growth and overall experience instead of rushing through an interaction or focusing on checking a box as part of a job duty. Educators provide information that a student may not have thought to ask about but nevertheless may benefit from. They educate students about how to ask questions and access support. The goal of each interaction is to set students up for success in college and beyond as well as teaching them the habits of mind and tools that will serve them well in meeting their goals.
- Recognizing that questions students ask or mistakes they make are often tied to their first time navigating the issue at hand. While educators may have dealt with an issue hundreds of times in their career, the individual student is new to navigating the process. They benefit from educators who teach them how to negotiate the issue with patience.
- Reviewing policies, practices and communications to see if they are written to educate students or if they are designed to support the bureaucratic structures.
- Viewing every employee on campus as an educator. This means everyone on campus should consider, value, and respect their colleagues across campus as fellow educators – regardless of their roles.

How Can Perceiving Ourselves and Others as Educators Shift Institutional Culture?

An institution where everyone perceives themselves as an educator moves from bureaucratic and siloed approaches that primarily benefit the faculty, staff and administrators at the institution toward centering the students and supporting them in navigating the complexity of college while reducing and removing barriers. In addition to shifting how individuals perceive themselves and their work, this also shifts how individuals think about their colleagues and how they collaborate with them. Students have multifaceted developmental and educational needs (e.g., financial, social, intellectual, emotional, and physical) and succeed best when educators collaborate to address their multidimensional needs. Every educator – whether faculty, staff, or administrator – has valuable expertise they can leverage to educate students and meet their multidimensional needs.

For more information about the PASS project, please visit our [website](#). Please note that resources for practitioners are located [here](#) and materials related to Professional Learning Community can be found [here](#).

Suggested Citation:

Hallett, R. E., Corwin, Z. B., Hypolite, L., Nagbe, M., Kezar, A. (2024). *Who is an educator on your campus?* [Brief]. Pullias Center for Higher Education, University of Southern California.