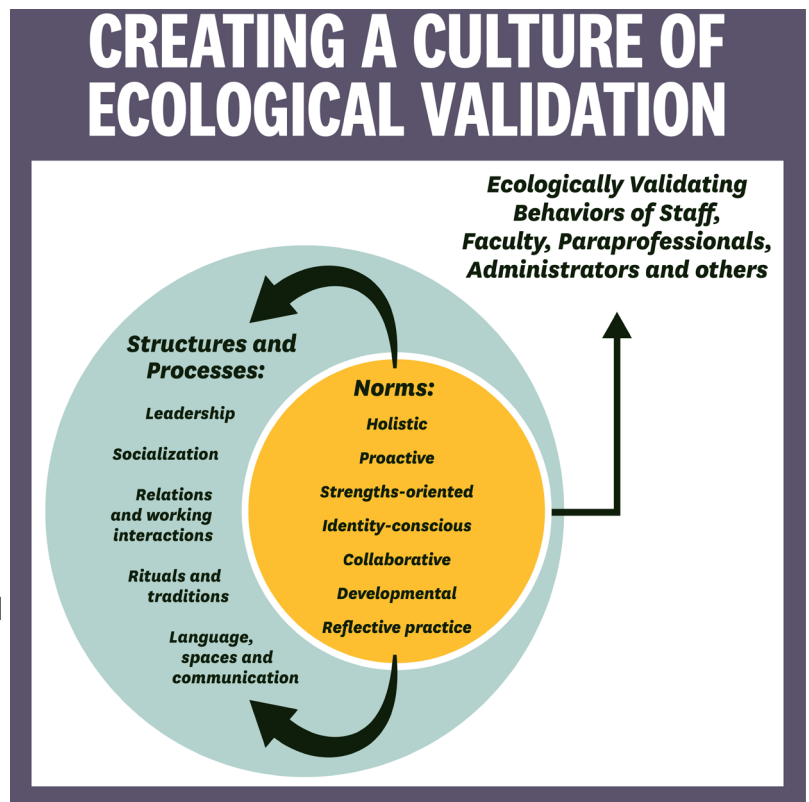


Promoting At-Promise Student Success

CREATING A CULTURE OF ECOLOGICAL VALIDATION TO IMPROVE AT-PROMISE STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

A culture of ecological validation is a research-based approach that emerged from the Promoting At-promise Student Success (PASS) Project, which was conducted in partnership with educators at three of the University of Nebraska campuses. A culture of ecological validation is an approach to creating a postsecondary culture that centers the strengths, needs and experiences of at-promise students through the implementation of seven norms: holistic, proactive, strengths-oriented, identity-conscious, developmental, collaborative and reflexive practice. These norms shape the structures and processes (e.g., leadership, socialization, relations and working interactions, rituals and traditions, and language, spaces and communication) in ways that result in ecologically validating behaviors and practices of the staff, faculty, administrators and other educators. A culture of ecological validation moves away from the siloed approaches that exist in higher education and focuses on shifting institutional culture toward a more collaborative and cohesive approach to support at-promise student experiences and outcomes.

The norms and ideas presented in the culture of ecological validation are not necessarily new in higher education; however, the framework focuses on being intentional about enacting all seven norms to embed a culture of ecological validation into current higher education structures. The framework we present involves a comprehensive approach to addressing the larger structural and culture issues instead of focusing on siloed and piecemeal attempts to address smaller problems. A culture of ecological validation is an intentional and comprehensive approach that is best accomplished within a cross-functional committee.



Holistic: Considers all aspects of a student's background, identities, personality, and goals, as well as academic and interpersonal experiences in college when connecting them with resources and opportunities.

Proactive: Places the onus on institutional agents to regularly reach out to students to build relationships, address challenges, and identify opportunities.

Strengths-oriented: Focuses on the cultural assets, talents and skills, previous successes, and personality traits that students bring with them to campus rather than employing a deficit approach, which focuses primarily on the assumed challenges that at-promise college students may face.

Identity-conscious: Intentionally considers students' identities—with acute attention to the identities of those students from underserved (e.g., at-promise) backgrounds.

Developmental: Involves supporting students throughout their educational journeys in a cohesive way from admission through graduation.

Collaborative: Explores ways to build connections across various campus services and programs to create integrated and reinforcing validating experiences across a student's ecology of experience, which requires cross functional work across departments, programs, support services and other aspects of academic and student affairs programming.

Reflective Practice: Involves continually considering how students, staff, and leadership experience initiatives to make shifts necessary to improve student success. This process uses both formal and informal data to inform decision-making.

