

Ten Research-Backed Strategies to Promote Student Success in Higher Education

#	Title	Description	Quick example	Addressing DFWI rates	Supporting Research
1	Supportive Classroom Atmosphere	Create a supportive classroom atmosphere through community building, collaborative learning, and class requirements and expectations.	Clearly communicate roles, expectations, and classroom norms at the beginning of the course. Foster a collaborative learning environment through group activities, peer feedback, and class discussions.	Can help ease the difficult transition from high school to university by fostering a sense of belonging and support, and by addressing both institutional and student barriers such as limited resources and lack of academic preparation.	Cardon, L. S., & Womack, A. M. (2022). <i>Inclusive College Classrooms: Teaching Methods for Diverse Learners</i> . Routledge. Fink, L. D. 2003. <i>Creating significant learning experiences</i> . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Herman, J. H., & Nilson, L. B. (2023). <i>Creating Engaging Discussions: Strategies for "Avoiding Crickets" in Any Size Classroom and Online</i> . Taylor & Francis.
2	Frequent and Timely Feedback	Provide frequent and timely feedback to students and use/direct students to additional resources to improve their learning.	Offer regular, constructive feedback on assignments and assessments. Use a variety of feedback methods, such as written comments, rubrics, and one-on-one meetings. Refer students to additional resources, such as tutoring services or supplemental materials, to support their learning and address identified challenges.	Frequent feedback loops allow for proactive outreach to at-risk students to address academic challenges and connect them with resources early.	Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. <i>Review of Educational Research</i> , 77(1), 81-112. Ramsden, P. (2003). <i>Learning to Teach in Higher Education</i> . Routledge. Wisniewski, B., Zierer, K., & Hattie, J. (2020). The power of feedback revisited: A meta-analysis of educational feedback research. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 10, 487662.
3	Formative Assessments	Use formative assessments to measure student understanding and guide instructional improvements.	Use low-stakes, formative assessments to gauge student understanding and provide timely feedback. Examples include pre-class quizzes,	Low-stakes, formative assessments enable both instructors and students to measure learning progress in real time, allowing for timely	Bennett, R. E. (2011). Formative assessment: A critical review. <i>Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice</i> , 18(1), 5-25. Heritage, M. (2010). Formative assessment: Making it happen in the classroom. In

			in-class polls, think-pair-share activities, collaborative annotation exercises, and exit tickets.	adjustments, interventions, and self-reflection.	<i>Formative Assessment: Making It Happen in the Classroom</i> (pp. 7-20). Corwin Press. Morris, R., Perry, T., & Wardle, L. (2021). Formative assessment and feedback for learning in higher education: A systematic review. <i>Review of Education</i> , 9(3), e3292.
4	Transparent Teaching Practices	Use transparent instructional practices to make the learning process more explicit and understandable.	Use transparent teaching practices by providing clear learning objectives, assessment criteria, and model examples of successful work. Share rubrics in advance and explain the rationale behind instructional decisions.	Transparency about academic expectations and available resources is especially important for underprepared and first-generation students navigating unfamiliar university systems.	Faculty Focus, (2024). Transparent teaching and learning. https://www.facultyfocus.com/tag/transparent-teaching-and-learning/ Winkelmes, M. A., Boye, A., & Tapp, S. (Eds.). (2023). <i>Transparent Design in Higher Education Teaching and Leadership: A Guide to Implementing the Transparency Framework Institution-Wide to Improve Learning and Retention</i> . Taylor & Francis. Winkelmes, M. A. (2013). Transparency in teaching: Faculty share data and improve students' learning. <i>Liberal Education</i> , 99(2), 48.
5	Accessible Syllabi	Design accessible curricula that set clear expectations and help students get off to a strong start.	Design an accessible, learner-centered syllabus that includes inclusive language, clearly defined policies, and proactive connections to academic support services. Ensure that the syllabus is available in multiple formats, meets accessibility guidelines, and provides a clear roadmap for student success by outlining	Accessible and engaging course syllabi serve as a critical roadmap for student success by demystifying academic expectations and proactively connecting students to a network of support from day one.	CFD, (2023). Syllabus Template. https://www.odu.edu/sites/default/files/2023/documents/cfd-syllabus-template.pdf Fuentes, M. A., Zelaya, D. G., & Madsen, J. W. (2021). Rethinking the course syllabus: Considerations for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. <i>Teaching of Psychology</i> , 48(1), 69-79. Yarosh, J. H. (2021). The syllabus reconstructed: An analysis of traditional and visual syllabi for information retention and inclusiveness. <i>Teaching Sociology</i> , 49(2), 173-183.

			course expectations, resources, and support systems.		
6	Relevant and Engaging Assignments	Make learning relevant to students by offering choices in assignments and connecting instruction to broader goals.	Offer students choices in assignment topics or formats to increase relevance and engagement. Encourage students to reflect on how coursework aligns with their personal interests, career goals, and real-world applications.	Meaningful assignments that tap into students' intrinsic motivations can increase engagement and persistence, easing the transition to college-level work.	<p>Kursurkar, Croiset, & Ten Cate. (2011). Twelve tips to stimulate intrinsic motivation in students through autonomy-supportive classroom teaching derived from self-determination theory. <i>Medical Teacher</i>, 33(12), 978-982.</p> <p>Elizondo, K., Valenzuela, R., Pestana, J. V., & Codina, N. (2024). Self-regulation and procrastination in college students: A tale of motivation, strategy, and perseverance. <i>Psychology in the Schools</i>. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23088.</p> <p>Thorpe, M. (2000). Encouraging students to reflect as part of the assignment process: Student responses and tutor feedback. <i>Active Learning in Higher Education</i>, 1(1), 79-92.</p>
7	Inclusive Pedagogies	Promote inclusive pedagogy that fosters awareness and acceptance of differences among students.	Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to provide multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression in your course materials and assessments.	Inclusive, UDL-informed instruction proactively designs learning to be accessible from the outset to the variability of students' circumstances, identities, and abilities, reducing the need for individualized accommodations.	<p>The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning (2019). Inclusive Teaching. https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/inclusive-teaching</p> <p>Stentiford, L., & Koutsouris, G. (2021). What are inclusive pedagogies in higher education? A systematic scoping review. <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>, 46(11), 2245-2261.</p> <p>Brussino, O. (2021). Building capacity for inclusive teaching: Policies and practices to prepare all teachers for diversity and inclusion. <i>OECD Education Working Papers</i>,</p>

					No. 256, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/57fe6a38-en
8	Metacognitive Strategies	Incorporate metacognitive strategies to help students develop effective study habits.	Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning processes, set goals, and assess their progress through activities such as exam wrappers or learning journals.	Weaving explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies into courses equips students with lifelong tools for managing their own learning and addresses potential gaps in their overall readiness.	De Boer, H., Donker, A. S., Kostons, D. D., & Van der Werf, G. P. (2018). Long-term effects of metacognitive strategy instruction on student academic performance: A meta-analysis. <i>Educational Research Review</i> , 24, 98-115. Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 34(10), 906-911. Lawson, C. A., McGuire, S., Hodges, R., Gray, R., McGuire, S. Y., Killingbeck, M., & Segovia, J. (2021). Recipe for Success: Teaching Students Metacognitive and Self-Regulatory Learning Strategies. <i>Learning Assistance Review</i> , 26(2), 149-178.
9	Scaffolded Learning	Provide examples, break down assignment steps, and have intentional conversations with students.	Provide opportunities for student choice in assignment topics or formats to increase relevance and engagement. Encourage students to think about how coursework aligns with their personal interests, career goals, and real-world applications.	Scaffolding creates more accessible entry points to challenging college-level work for students with varying levels of prior knowledge. By providing structured support and guidance, scaffolding helps students gradually develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed, thereby mitigating potential barriers created by uneven academic preparation and reducing	McGuire, S. Y. (2015). <i>Teach Students How to Learn: Strategies You Can Incorporate into Any Course to Improve Student Metacognition, Study Skills, and Motivation</i> . Stylus Publishing. Vespone, B. (2023). Co-constructing teaching and learning in higher education: a literature review of practices and implications. <i>Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education</i> , (27). Barkley (2010). <i>Student engagement techniques</i> . Jossey-Bass.

				the likelihood of DFWI outcomes.	
10	Critical Reflection	Incorporate reflective activities to help students monitor their learning progress and adjust their approaches accordingly.	Encourage critical reflection through techniques such as The Muddiest Point, where students identify areas of confusion, and exam wrappers, which encourage students to analyze their performance and study strategies.	Promotes students' metacognitive skills and self-regulated learning, which can mitigate challenges related to mental health, well-being, and varying levels of academic preparation.	Tanner (2012). Promoting student metacognition. <i>CBE—Life Sciences Education, 11</i> (2), 113-120. Chan, C. K., & Lee, K. K. (2021). Reflection literacy: A multilevel perspective on the challenges of using reflections in higher education through a comprehensive literature review. <i>Educational Research Review, 32</i> , 100376. Van Beveren, L., Roets, G., Buysse, A., & Rutten, K. (2018). We all reflect, but why? A systematic review of the purposes of reflection in higher education in social and behavioral sciences. <i>Educational Research Review, 24</i> , 1-9.