

# The Significant Six: Effective & Distinctive Features of *AVID for Higher Education*

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AVID *for Higher Education* (AHE) may be described as a holistic, integrated college-success system designed for students with the determination to succeed and for campuses committed to promoting student success. AHE is predicated on the proposition that college students who have the *will* to succeed will succeed—if they are challenged and given the academic and psychosocial support needed to meet that challenge.

AVID *for Higher Education* builds on the success of AVID's precollege system that has effectively promoted high school students' college access and preparedness of secondary students for over 30 years. By now expanding its scope to span both sides of the secondary-higher education bridge, AVID extends its historic mission of promoting college *readiness* to include college *success*. The need for this expanded mission is captured in the following comment made by a low-income, first-generation college student during a focus-group interview: "I think we need a program from high school to the ending of college. That'd be good 'cause that'll keep a lot of people going like they kept us going from high school to college. Since you got us in college . . . well, help us finish" (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006, p. 31).

It could be said that AVID's college-readiness system has already built the *cornerstone* for student success—opening the door to higher education for thousands of high school students; AVID *for* is designed to provide the *capstone*—helping them walk through that door and exit higher education with a college degree.

The following six distinctive features collectively differentiate AHE from other student success initiatives and educational reform efforts:

1. **Holistic:** AVID engages the *whole student* and the *whole campus*.
2. **Systemic:** AVID creates a *comprehensive, cross-divisional infrastructure* with the potential to generate synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success.
3. **Sustained:** AVID provides a systematic plan for *ongoing campus involvement* that incorporates *follow-up support* to maintain continuous campus commitment and *follow-up assessment* to evaluate the system's cumulative impact on student success.
4. **Transformative:** AVID is intentionally designed to catalyze *organizational change* and drive institutional movement toward the development of a *student-centered, learning-focused culture*.
5. **Empirical:** AVID is built on a solid base of *research evidence* that spans *multiple campus sites, multiple research methods, and multiple points of assessment* (tracking of student progress across time).
6. **Customized:** AVID *for Higher Education* is *tailored* to "fit" students and campuses that have the commitment and determination to *implement* its essential features *with fidelity*.

This manuscript describes how AVID incorporates the foregoing features, explains each of them and why they should exert a positive impact on the success of college students in general and underrepresented college students in particular.

## 1.

### **HOLISTIC**

#### **AVID engages the *whole student* and the *whole campus*.**

AVID is a student-centered support system that goes beyond basic academic skill-building to address the student as a “whole person”. It does so by adopting the following practices:

- 1.1 Providing instructors and advisors with personal validation strategies that build rapport with students and address student success from a psychosocial perspective
- 1.2 Increasing students’ self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self- motivation through mastery of moderately challenging tasks that balance academic rigor with academic and psychosocial support, i.e., curricular and co-curricular support provided by trained student-centered instructors, peer tutors/mentors, academic advisors, and personal counselors
- 1.3 Facilitating the transition from high school to higher education through delivery of a student-centered, first-year experience seminar that acclimates new students to the culture of higher education
- 1.4 Utilizing collaborative learning teams led by experienced peer tutors to provide a positive peer-group experience for students, which promotes their social and academic integration into the college community
- 1.5 Intentionally encouraging and enlisting the support of students’ families (e.g., via family workshops, meetings, and accessibility to the AVID coordinator)
- 1.6 Helping students develop a sense of life purpose, personal identity, and educational direction through a personalized system of academic advising that includes long-range educational planning, exploration of college majors and potential career paths, and networking with career mentors

## 2.

### **SYSTEMIC**

#### **AVID creates a comprehensive, cross-divisional infrastructure with the potential to generate synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success.**

AVID for Higher Education includes creation of organizational structures designed to promote interdisciplinary integration, cross-divisional collaboration, and a heightened sense of campus community that is built on the joint pursuit of a common cause: increasing student success. AVID implements this systemic feature through use of the following practices:

- 2.1 Structured partnerships between Academic and Student Affairs (Student Services)
- 2.2 Creation of cross-functional campus planning teams comprised of administrators, staff, and faculty from diverse academic divisions

- 2.3 Formation of learning communities by co-enrolling cohorts of students in two or more courses taught by instructors who integrate effective learning strategies into their course pedagogy and build interdisciplinary connections across their different subject areas
- 2.4 Empowering students with transferable learning skills (e.g., writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading) that they can apply to achieve “success across the curriculum”
- 2.5 Strengthening communication and collaboration with local (“feeder”) high schools, community colleges and community-based organizations (e.g., inviting class speakers from the community and forging partnerships that enable students to engage in community-based experiential learning, such as service-learning and internship experiences)

### 3.

#### **SUSTAINED**

**AVID provides a systematic plan for *ongoing campus involvement* that incorporates *follow-up support* to maintain continuous campus commitment and *follow-up assessment* to evaluate the system’s cumulative impact on student success.**

AVID for Higher Education ensures sustainability via the following practices:

- 3.1 Developing annual and multi-year plans, which include identification of measurable short-range, mid-range (intermediate) and long-range outcomes
- 3.2 Ensuring that administrative leaders faithfully support AVID-system implementation by providing the necessary fiscal and human resources to sustain long-term campus commitment (AVID national and regional centers also assist campus leaders to locate and procure funding from governmental and philanthropic sources to help sustain campus commitment.)
- 3.3 Establishing an AVID Campus Team that meets consistently (at least twice a term)
- 3.4 Providing on-campus organizational development opportunities which serve as a stimulus for sustained internal dialogue among members of the campus community
- 3.5 Providing professional development experiences (in-person/blended) that are ongoing and cumulative, arranging for successive experiences built on previously acquired knowledge and skills
- 3.6 Continuing professional development opportunities provided at AVID-sponsored national conferences and off-campus (week-long) summer institutes, which enable participants to access additional resources and research findings from practitioners and scholars beyond the boundaries of their home campus
- 3.7 Availability of ongoing consultative support (formal and informal) from regional and district AVID Centers
- 3.8 Integrating students’ first-year experience with subsequent stages of college development (sophomore, junior and senior year) to help create an undergraduate experience that is intentionally sequenced and coherent
- 3.9 Establishing an “AVID Center” on campus to provide a visible place and physical space for collaborative student learning, peer tutoring, and out-of-class interaction with faculty and advisors

## 4.

**TRANSFORMATIVE**

**AVID is intentionally designed to catalyze *organizational change* and drive institutional movement toward the development of a *student-centered, learning-focused* culture.**

AVID motivates and mobilizes campus-wide change by encouraging postsecondary institutions to adopt the following organizational structures and professional incentives:

- 4.1 Strategic formation of an interdisciplinary/inter-departmental campus team whose members are intentionally selected from a broad cross-section of faculty, staff and administrators, representing both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs (Student Support Services), thereby ensuring campus-wide input, involvement and ownership
- 4.2 Strategic selection of a respected, influential AVID *for* Higher Education liaison to lead the on-campus team
- 4.3 On-campus professional development experiences that extend the impact of AVID *for* Higher Education beyond those directly involved in its implementation by supplying all interested faculty and staff with practical strategies grounded in postsecondary research, theory and scholarship
- 4.4 Access to outside AVID consultants whose neutral (third party) perspective allows them to provide non-threatening institutional introspection and serve as a catalyst for inducing institutional change
- 4.5 Supplying strategies for incentivizing and rewarding faculty involvement in student-success initiatives
- 4.6 Creating opportunities for campuses to receive validation and institutional recognition through “certification”, and possible national visibility as a “model demonstration site”

## 5.

**EMPIRICAL**

**AVID is built on a solid base of *research evidence* that spans *multiple campus sites, multiple research methods, and multiple points of assessment* (tracking of student progress across time).**

The AVID system rests on bedrock of research conducted and gathered at diverse school settings, using a variety of research methods and outcome measures. Systematic collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data by the AVID Center is a cardinal feature of the AVID system. This comprehensive data-collection process enables campuses to accomplish the following objectives:

- 5.1 Bridge the “research-practice gap”
- 5.2 Identify student needs and institutional barriers to student success (e.g., policies or practices that impede student access to, and expeditious progress through, credit-bearing courses)
- 5.3 Gauge the effectiveness of existing student-support initiatives on campus
- 5.4 Track students’ academic performance and college persistence from matriculation to graduation
- 5.5 Obtain data that can be used as feedback to *improve* implementation and execution of AVID’s essential features (formative evaluation)
- 5.6 Obtain data that can be used to “*prove*” the overall impact of AVID *for* Higher Education on student-success outcomes (summative evaluation)

- 5.7 Report results internally to members of the campus community (helping to create a “culture of evidence”) and to external constituents (e.g., accrediting bodies, governing boards, and funding agencies)

## 6.

### **CUSTOMIZED**

**AVID for Higher Education is tailored to “fit” students and campuses that have the commitment and determination to *implement* its essential features *with fidelity*.**

AVID for Higher Education helps campuses define criteria for selecting students whose characteristics “match” (mesh well) with its essential features and requirements. This selection process is designed to identify and recruit students who are:

- 6.1 “Determined”—who demonstrate interest in and commitment to implementing AVID’s success strategies.
- 6.2 “In the middle”—rather than students whose prior achievement is too low (who cannot or will not do the extra work) or too high (who think they don’t need to do the extra work in order to succeed)
- 6.3 “At risk”—academically underprepared, ethnically underrepresented, and/or economically disadvantaged students who have the potential to succeed, but who have not received the educational support, cultural capital or college knowledge to do so.

AVID for Higher Education is also customized to fit the distinctive context, culture, and needs of each campus that commits to implementing its essential principles. AVID’s campus-customization process involves the following practices:

- 6.4 Acquiring knowledge about the campus, respectfully acknowledging its uniqueness, and ensuring that AVID’s features align with the institution’s mission, strategic plan, and future vision
- 6.5 Tailoring its system’s features to dovetail with existing campus support programs and student success initiatives
- 6.6 Accommodating delivery of its services to the scheduling needs and preferences of the campus, thereby maximizing breadth and depth of campus participation
- 6.7 Assessing and providing feedback to the campus on the fidelity and quality of system implementation

# Research & Scholarship Supporting AVID's Six Significant Features

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## 1.

### **HOLISTIC**

#### **AVID engages the *whole student* and the *whole campus*.**

Tinto (1993) reminds us that the “*whole student* is the focus of effective retention programs” (p. 173). Research on college campuses with higher-than-predicted graduation rates for low-income students reveals that one distinguishing feature of these campuses is their provision of ample academic and social support services, such as tutoring and personal and career counseling (Engle & O’Brien, 2007). Research consistently shows that student persistence to degree completion is strongly influenced by factors that are not strictly academic in nature. The reality is that the vast majority of students who withdraw from college are in good academic standing at the time of their withdrawal (estimates range between 75-85%). Thus, most students who leave college do so *voluntarily*—i.e., they do not “flunk out,” nor are they “forced out” by “academic dismissal” (Gardiner, 1994; Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1988, 1993; Willingham, 1985).

Kuh, et al. (2005) identified campuses that had higher-than-predicted student engagement and graduation rates for the type of students they served (e.g., campuses serving high percentages of low-income and underprepared students). Visiting research teams made multiple site visits to these high-performing institutions and discovered that one feature they had in common was “an emphasis on holistic student learning [that] runs broad and deep in institutional policies and practices” (p. 65). Similarly, in a national study of student success programs for at-risk students funded by the federal government, it was discovered the most effective programs employed a combination of cognitive and affective services, an approach that its program providers described as “holistic” (Muraskin, 1997, p. 52).

Unfortunately, research on student retention initiatives in higher education indicates that most institutions do not take such a holistic approach to promoting student persistence. One national survey of student retention programs on college campuses, conducted under the auspices of the College Board, led its researchers to conclude that “many programs rely on traditional academic factors to identify students at risk of dropping out. Our findings suggest that this approach may be limited and may miss students who are at risk due to other, non-academic factors. Students who master course content but fail to develop adequate academic self-confidence, academic goals, institutional commitment, and social support and involvement may still be at risk of dropping out” (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004, p. vii).

Taking a holistic approach to supporting student persistence is also a more effective way to promote student *learning*. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conducted an extensive review of studies on how college affects students and reached the following conclusion: “The evidence strongly suggests that these [college] outcomes are interdependent, that learning is holistic rather than segmented, and that multiple forces operate in multiple settings to shape student learning in ways that cross the ‘cognitive-affective’ divide” (p. 269). Pascarella and Terenzini’s conclusion is reinforced by brain-based research, indicating that human learning involves interplay (not parallel play) between cognition and emotion. “The brain does not separate emotions from cognition, either anatomically or perceptually. Such artificial categorization may be helpful in designing research projects, but it can actually distort our understanding of learning” (Caine & Caine, 1991, p. vii). Disappointingly, such “artificial categorization” typifies higher education’s approach to supporting students from underserved student populations. In a comprehensive review of programs designed to support the college readiness and success of underserved students, the following conclusion was reached:

Most discussions of academic and social support categorize these strategies as separate entities, suggesting that such supports are commonly delivered and experienced independently. In practice, however, academic and social supports are interrelated, intertwined, and experienced simultaneously. Policies and practices that enable emotionally supportive relationships can have a positive impact on academic achievement by helping students develop the capacity for strategic thinking, problem-solving, information-seeking, experimentation, and optimism—all of which are associated with positive academic behaviors. Social support [also] builds the networks, connectedness, and motivation which underpin students' willingness and capacity to take advantage of academic strategies. In other words, social support provides the foundation on which students are most likely to benefit from academic support strategies (Savitz-Romer, et al., 2009, pp.1, 9 & 11).

A holistic approach to promoting student success also faithfully enacts the espoused goals of higher education by addressing the full spectrum of intended learning outcomes cited in college mission and university mission statements. Most of the intended outcomes of a college education include personal development outcomes that lie beyond the strictly intellectual or academic domain (Astin, 1991; Kuh, Shedd, & Witt, 1987; Lenning, 1988), such as effective citizenship, leadership, and personal character. As Rendón (2006) points out, "The idea [of holistic education] is not only to break down the notion that only intellectual forms of intelligence matter, but also to bring educators and policymakers to think more deeply about what it means to be an educated person" (p. 19).

Viewed collectively, the foregoing findings and arguments lend strong support to AVID's integrated holistic ("whole person") system. Such a comprehensive approach should serve to advance learning, persistence to graduation, and the overall quality of education for undergraduate students, especially students from underserved or underrepresented populations.

## 2.

### **SYSTEMIC**

**AVID creates a comprehensive, cross-divisional infrastructure with the potential to generate synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success.**

Tinto (1993) identifies seven action principles associated with successful implementation of student-retention programs, one of which is that "institutional actions should be coordinated in a collaborative fashion to insure a systematic, campus-wide approach to student retention" (p. 151). Supporting this principle are scholarly reviews of programs created to promote the success of academically-underprepared college students, which indicate that the most effective programs incorporate organizational structures designed to provide students with comprehensive and coordinated support (Kulik, Kulik, & Shwalb, 1983; Roueche & Roueche, 1999).

Organizational research and theory suggest that high-performing institutions utilize "systems thinking" that conceptualize organizational systems affect and are affected by other systems (Schroeder, 2005; Senge, 1990), and how organizational components are positioned to promote cross-functional communication, collaboration, and synergy (Birnbbaum, 1988). Swail, Redd, & Perna (2003) argue that this type of systemic thinking must be utilized by postsecondary organizations if they expect to elevate their graduation rates: "Although departments and offices may conduct their own programs, it is not until the entire campus directs a unified effort at reducing attrition that large-scale changes can be seen" (p. 94).

Unfortunately, change efforts made by postsecondary organizations are often disjointed and run as “trains on their own track”, not as complementary components of an interconnected system (Ewell, 1997; Kuh, et al., 2005). The same is true for student retention efforts; national survey data reveal that only a small proportion of postsecondary campuses report that their retention programs are well coordinated (College Board, 2009). Such findings do not bode well for promoting the persistence of underserved student populations because research indicates that these students need a network of academic and social supports that are “integrated, coordinated and cohesive” (Savitz-Romer, Hager-Hyman, & Coles, 2009, p. 21). Addressing the implications of these findings for college students’ critical first-year experience, Schroeder (2005) reached the following conclusion:

What appears to be missing is a bold, unified vision of a highly integrated and coherent first-year experience . . . that intentionally aligns curricular and cocurricular components in a seamless fashion. Collaboration is the principal strategy for creating such a vision; in fact, it is the only way to bridge the great divide between the curriculum and cocurriculum—between academic affairs and student affairs—that has existed for decades (p. 204).

AVID’s approach to promoting educational change is consistent with the systemic focus called for by organizational theory, particularly its emphasis on developing the whole student and promoting collaboration between higher education’s two major organizational divisions: Academic and Student Affairs. Higher education scholars have repeatedly pointed to the “persistent gap” between these two postsecondary divisions and the deleterious “disconnect” it produced between undergraduates’ in-class and out-of-class experiences (Carnegie Foundation, 1990; Miller & Prince, 1976; ACPA, 1994; ACPA & NASPA, 1997, 2004). AVID’s intentional structures for connecting faculty and student support professionals can serve to reduce this gap by facilitating the formation of partnerships between Academic and Student Affairs.

Postsecondary research also indicates that campus programs aimed at increasing student retention are more effective when Academic and Student Affairs collaborate to design and deliver these programs. In a study of a 12-campus consortium that was formed to implement and assess practices for promoting student retention, it was found that practices developed jointly by Academic and Student Affairs proved more effective than those developed independently (Stodt & Klepper, 1987). More recently, a national research project designed to document effective educational practices (Project DEEP) discovered that a high degree of respect and collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs typifies institutions with higher-than-predicted graduation rates (Kuh, et al., 2005). Similarly, results from an in-depth study of state universities with higher-than-average graduation rates (given their institutional characteristics and student population) revealed that one distinctive feature of high-performing institutions was campus-wide coordination of retention efforts that stimulated communication and cooperation between Academic and Student Affairs (AASC&U, 2005).

Another systemic (and collaborative feature) of AVID for Higher Education is built on its history of success in promoting the college preparedness and college enrollment of high school students. By expanding its scope to span both sides of the secondary-postsecondary bridge, AVID expands from a college readiness system to a college readiness-and-success system. In so doing, it becomes well positioned to build on its successful work at the precollege level and contribute to the construction of an educational pipeline (e.g., K-16 or K-20) whose separate segments segue into a seamless system. Thus, it could be said that, AVID’s systemic approach is bidirectional:

- (a) *Horizontal* (a cross-campus system) that promotes *intra*-segmental partnerships across separate divisions *within* the postsecondary sector (e.g., across Academic and Student Affairs), and
- (b) *Vertical* (a cross-sector system) that builds *inter*-segmental linkages *between* successive sectors of the educational system (e.g., between high school and higher education).

Failure to view the task of promoting student success in this systemic fashion will, at best, result in educational reform efforts that are piecemeal and disjointed; at worst, it runs the risk of overlooking a key segment of the system that must be in place and effectively interface with other sectors in the system. At its very worst, overlooking or ignoring one of the system's key components can trigger a debilitating "domino effect" that disrupts the unity and efficacy of the system as a whole. (Metaphor courtesy of Anna Gonzalez, personal communication, January 15, 2011).

### 3.

#### **SUSTAINED**

**AVID provides a systematic plan for *ongoing campus involvement* that incorporates *follow-up support* to maintain continuous campus commitment and *follow-up assessment* to evaluate the system's cumulative impact on student success.**

One of Tinto's (1993) seven principles of effective student retention is that "institutions should commit themselves to a long-term process of program development" (p. 149). Carey (2005) studied college campuses that had higher-than-predicted graduation rates and found that their success could be traced to a series of intentional institutional actions, policies, and practices that were *consistently* applied over a *sustained* period of time.

One way in which AVID adopts a sustained approach to promoting student success is that it maintains support for students beyond the first year of college, extending it through the remaining stages of the undergraduate experience (i.e., the sophomore, junior and senior year). As Kuh (2001-2002) argues: "Colleges and universities must learn more about the nature of the student experience after the first year of college. This issue is important because while many colleges and universities have implemented an impressive array of interventions to smooth the first-year transition, most know little about the nature of the student experience after this period" (p. 37). Faculty development specialist, Maryellen Weimer, has also called for greater attention to teaching and learning strategies that are intentionally tailored to students at different stages of their college experience: "At different times in the college career, different instructional strategies and experiences are appropriate. We don't think that way often enough when we plan courses. What is unique about each level? And how do we maximize student growth and development at each level?" (1991, p. 4).

If the four academic years of the college experience were viewed as interdependent stages in a cumulative sequence, it would provide a blueprint for the intentional delivery of a systematic, stage-sensitive undergraduate experience that effectively addresses students' transition *into, through, and out of* higher education (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). This intentionally sequenced approach is consistent with AVID's emphasis on "scaffolding", i.e., learning is optimized by balancing challenge and support in a manner that allows academic rigor to be progressively increased and support gradually decreased as the student gains more experience, confidence, and proficiency in mastering increasingly-challenging learning tasks. Such an approach would also help address concerns raised in numerous national postsecondary studies about the failure of the undergraduate curriculum to integrate student learning into a cohesive sequence that has a meaningful beginning, middle, and end (Association of American Colleges, 1985, 1988, 1994). Peter Ewell (1997) argues eloquently for an integrated undergraduate curriculum infused with sequential scaffolding:

Curriculum structures can be effective in producing higher learning only if they are consciously integrated both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal integration emphasizes the consistent practice and development of a few key skill areas in quite different contexts—for instance, "writing across the curriculum". Vertical integration means designing-in explicit vectors of development on each of these skills, so that successive course experiences visibly require, practice, and deepen results of prior learning (p. 14).

Enduring campus change does not take place episodically, nor can it be tethered to the short-term tenure of a single campus champion, university president, or state legislator. In a study of “best practices” in federally funded, student-support service (SSS) programs for at-risk college students, it was found that one common characteristic of exemplary campuses was “considerable tenure of the project directors” (Muraskin, 1997, p. 36). Deep and durable educational change is an evolutionary, not a revolutionary process. Moving a plan for change from its initial conception and inception to full-scale implementation and long-term institutionalization requires substantial start-up and follow-up time in order to maintain its momentum and ensure its cumulative impact (Fullan, 2001). Research on faculty development programs at both the secondary and postsecondary level indicate that follow-up support is necessary to produce substantive and sustained change in teaching behavior (Joyce & Showers, 1983). Single-shot, “one-and-done” workshops may provide participants with the inspiration that ignites an aspiration to change but the perspiration (energy and effort) needed to make that change requires sustained instructional support. As two veteran faculty development researchers and practitioners put it, “A workshop should be used primarily to whet the appetite of a faculty member; more intensive consultation usually is needed to effect significant change” (Bergquist & Phillips, 1981, p. 156).

Research on campuses with *lower*-than-expected retention and graduation rates for at-risk students often reveals an their institutional history marked by a series of “failed” retention efforts that were not sustained for a sufficient amount of time to be faithfully executed and evaluated (Engle & O’Brien, 2007). Similarly, “consistency and longevity” were reported as recurrent themes in a national study of institutions with higher-than-predicted graduation rates, approximating the national average for *all* students, despite enrolling high percentages of students at risk for attrition—i.e., academically underprepared, low-income, first-generation students (SREB, 2010). Based on these findings, the authors of this national study recommend that student success initiatives “develop short-, medium- and long-term goals and then provide the leadership to achieve them” (p. 11). Such sustained commitment is a necessary precondition for promoting the type of deep, durable change that has the potential to transform campus culture—as discussed further in the following section.

#### 4.

#### **TRANSFORMATIVE**

**AVID is intentionally designed to catalyze *organizational change* and drive institutional movement toward the development of a *student-centered, learning-focused culture*.**

*Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) is an oft-cited and highly influential report on improving the quality of postsecondary education. In a follow-up to this landmark report, which was designed to provide campuses with direction on how to apply or “institutionalize” the seven principles of good practice, its lead author concluded that “the single most important ingredient for improving education in any institution is an organizational culture that values, nourishes, and provides support for efforts to become more effective professionals. This kind of culture emphasizes quality performance from administrators, faculty, support staff, and students” (Chickering, 1991, p. 55). The creation of such a culture is critical to the success of all students, and is particularly crucial for the success of underrepresented, first-generation students who are now entering higher education in record-breaking numbers (Thomas, 2010). Rendón (2006) argues that promoting the success of these students will require a radical reevaluation and transformation of postsecondary culture:

Postsecondary institutions should be engaged in transforming their academic and social structures to foster success, not only for the privileged students whose characteristics closely match what postsecondary institutions have traditionally offered and are used to offering, but rather, the challenge is to do things quite differently in the face of a student population that defies homogeneity and seeks to realize an education that values them as capable knowers and views them as whole human beings” (p. 24).

Campuses need to transform themselves if they expect to have a truly transformative impact on the students they serve. Deep and durable change doesn’t take place with “quick fixes”, “magic bullets” or

intravenous injections of “best” (or merely “popular”) practices. “Changes in retention occur when the institution changes, not when a new program is added” (Bean, 2005 p. 237). Postsecondary campuses with higher-than-predicted graduation rates did not “plug-in best practices” from the retention literature to improve their graduation rates (Engle & O’Brien, 2007); instead, these institutions have developed a student success-focused campus culture (AASC&U, 2005; Carey, 2005; Kuh, et al., 2005). In a multi-campus, longitudinal study of the impact of different sets of “good practices” in undergraduate education, it was found that the composite of good practices was larger than any of its individual subsets. This finding suggests that what really matters most for promoting the quality of undergraduate education is an “institutional ethos or culture that implements good practices, not as isolated programs or experiences, but in a broad-based and integrated manner that may be mutually reinforcing” (Cruce, Wolniak, Seifere, & Pascarella, 2006, p. 380).

A composite campus culture committed to student success is driven by its community members’ underlying beliefs, customs, and day-to-day practices. As Tinto (1993) notes, “Ultimately the success of our actions on behalf of student learning and retention depends upon the daily actions of all members of the institution, not on the sporadic efforts of a few officially designated members of a retention committee” (p. 212). Unfortunately, inducing cultural change in higher education organizations tends to proceed at such a glacial pace and can be such an agonizingly arduous process that it has been described as “harder than trying to move a graveyard” (Fife, 1982, p. xv). The academic discipline-based structure of higher education results in a highly decentralized organizational system with decision-making power so widely (and wildly) dispersed across individual departmental units that its governance has been characterized as “organized anarchy” (Baldrige & Riley, 1977; Baldrige, et al., 1978; Birnbaum, 1988). Consequently, promoting campus-wide change in higher education is much more challenging than it is in other organizational systems. Reflecting on his experience as Chancellor of the University of California system, Clark Kerr (1991) offered the following observation: “Governance within higher education is, by all odds, the most complicated I have known, and I have substantial experience with corporations, unions, government agencies, and foundations. More than any other, it is better understood as a strung-along series of independent or quasi-independent entities; and it is less a unified institution” (p. 201).

The transformative potential of AVID for Higher Education is due in part to its strategic selection of participants that represent a broad cross-section of campus constituents and its intentional inclusion of community members who are influential decision-makers and campus leaders. Research on successful first-year experience change initiatives on college campuses reveals that the change agents garnered support from a wide range of persons and offices across campus; the more trusted and respected those individuals were, the more effective the coalition was in moving the change process from planning to implementation (Chaskes & Annttonen, 2005). Other likely contributors to AVID’s capacity for promoting campus-wide change are suggested by the following research findings: (a) faculty participation in AVID’s professional development is a significant predictor of subsequent instructor leadership on campus (Huerta, Watt, & Alkan, 2008; Watt, Huerta, & Mills, 2009) and (b) AVID-prepared students serve as role models whose productive academic behaviors (e.g., note-taking and collaboration) are emulated by other students on campus (Watt, Yanez, & Cossio, 2002).

### **Pivotal Role of *College Faculty***

Faculty, in particular, can be intensely resistant to change and very ready to use their veto power to oppose any change that may be remotely perceived as threatening their “academic freedom”. So intense can faculty resistance be, it once provoked the founding president of the University of Chicago to caustically claim that “every advance in education is made over the dead bodies of 10,000 resisting professors” (Robert Hutchins, quoted in Seymour, 1988). Transforming faculty attitude and behavior to form a truly student-centered campus culture required attention to faculty motivation, including their *intrinsic* motivation (e.g., creating opportunities for faculty input and sense of ownership of student-success initiatives) and their *extrinsic* motivation (e.g., public recognition, monetary compensation, reassigned time, or advancement in rank, promotion and tenure). The importance of extrinsic motivation is underscored by research indicating that one characteristic of effective change-negotiation efforts is that

they address the question, “What’s in it for me?” (Engelkemeyer & Landry, 2001, p. 10). Attempts to persuade faculty to adopt engaging, student-centered teaching strategies and engage with first-year students outside the classroom do not take place in a vacuum, but as part of an intricate system that includes competing faculty responsibilities and priorities (e.g., research, consulting, and college governance), which draw faculty time, effort, and interest away from student-centered activities.

Intentional reform of faculty-reward practices lies at the heart of any solution to the long-standing problem of faculty indifference and resistance to student-success initiatives (Cuseo, 2009). Tinto (1993) stresses that promoting faculty and staff involvement in student retention efforts requires an “intentional policy of incentive” (p. 149).

Unfortunately, research indicates that use of intentional incentives to promote faculty involvement in student success efforts is the exception, not the rule. For example, in a national survey conducted by the College Board (2009), more than two-thirds of responding campuses reported that use of incentives for involving full-time faculty in teaching first-year classes were “small or nonexistent”. Historically, higher education reform movements have “lacked any plan for transforming middle-level university structures, most notably the academic department. Securing faculty involvement in student success programs are likely to be fruitless unless they are supported by upper- and mid-level campus leaders who control faculty recognition-and-reward policies. Yet the department is arguably the definitive locus of faculty culture” (Edwards, 1999, p. 18). Bold and visionary leadership will be needed to modify or reform faculty reward practices so that faculty members who are willing to invest time and effort in promoting the retention and educational advancement of at-risk students can do so without simultaneously placing themselves at risk by taking time away from tasks that would ensure their own retention and professional advancement.

One reason for the slow progress made by postsecondary reform movements is their failure to consider that colleges and universities are political institutions (Pusser, 2003; Stone, 2002), whose policies on how fiscal resources and professional recognition are awarded to both faculty and administrators can have profound impact on their success of the institution’s primary constituents—the students they serve. A postsecondary institution’s impact on student success can be impeded or sabotaged by policies that reward and recognize faculty and administrators for accomplishments other than promoting the retention and persistence of undergraduates. As Carey (2006) reminds us, “The reality is that colleges and universities do not have to teach undergraduates well in order to prosper. Higher education institutions do what all human institutions do: they respond to the incentives and values of the systems and markets in which they exist. They can’t be regulated or threatened into improving their service to students. They have to *want* to change, not just vaguely or to a slight degree, but so much so that they’re willing to spend the resources and endure the conflict that change inevitably brings” (p. 21).

To engineer the type of transformational change needed to reverse the current tide of poor graduation rates, particularly those for underserved first-generation, low-income and ethnically underrepresented students, will require substantive organizational and system-wide review and revision of professional reward systems. Currently, these systems often serve to *de-motivate faculty and administrators* from investing their time, energy, and resources on student-success efforts. Admittedly, this would be a political hot button to press, but continuing to “conduct business as usual” in the face of high rates of alarmingly high student attrition rates is to shirk an important professional responsibility. Chaskes and Annttonen (2005) note that members of the academic community often eschew campus politics as “something that distracts them from their professional obligations . . . [however] to do nothing in the face of programs one finds ineffective or even injurious to students is to give approval, albeit tacit, to those programs. Thus, we argue that doing nothing is in fact being political (p. 105).”

### **Key Role of Campus Administrators**

Among the seven principles of successful retention programs identified by Tinto (1993), two of them clearly underscore the importance of administrative leadership:

- (a) “Institutions should provide resources for program development and incentives for program participation that reach out to faculty and staff alike.”
- (b) “Institutions should place ownership for institutional change in the hands of those across the campus who have the authority to implement that change” (pp. 149 & 150).

One common feature of campuses with higher-than-predicted student engagement and graduation rates is the presence of a *president* with a “holistic perspective on student development and the institution’s responsibilities with regard to student success” (Kuh, et al., 2005, p. 309). Substantive, transformative campus change cannot take place solely through the altruistic efforts of caring, committed student-centered professionals working “in the trenches” with their students. The bottom-up efforts of these dedicated members of the rank and file need to be supported, rewarded, and augmented by top-down support and leadership from high-level administrators who demonstrate an authentic commitment to improving student-success rates. Without institutional commitment, individual efforts on behalf of students (no matter how altruistic and herculean they may be) are likely to be piecemeal and peripheral, not central and systemic. Betsy Barefoot, a national leader in the first-year experience movement in American higher education, has identified lack of institutional commitment as a major retardant to the movement’s ability to effect substantive change for first-year college students:

A pervasive and central problem is that many of the programs and activities that constitute the “first-year experience” are in a continuous battle for status within the academy. Generally, they are housed in marginal facilities and managed by entry-level employees, never becoming a central, sustainable part of the institution’s fabric. First-year programs often have a single champion rather than broad-based institutional support and frequently operate with a minimal budget or no budget (Barefoot, 2000, p. 17).

Institutional commitment requires campus leadership and conscious effort on the part of high-level administrators to invest resources in institutional practices that have the most direct impact on student success (Clark & Clark, 1996; Ryan, 2004). As Engle and Tinto (2008) note, “Creating an institutional culture that fosters student success requires strong leadership from top college administrators [who] consistently demonstrate their commitment through their words and action. This means allocating the necessary resources and providing incentives and rewards (p. 26).”

In a national study of campuses with higher-than-expected graduation rates, despite enrolling high percentages of low-income and underprepared students, one of their distinctive attributes was “attentive leadership” demonstrated by “a deep commitment to student success in all communications with students, employees, and policy decisions” (SREB, 2010, p. 3). One of the major recommendations for promoting student success offered in this report was that presidents should appoint a “high profile team of campus leaders” to coordinate student success initiatives, which would send a strong message to the entire community that increasing graduation rate is an institutional priority. The report’s authors also recommended that student success should be a main factor in how presidents and other leaders are evaluated and compensated.

AVID’s national certification and demonstration-site recognition provides an incentive for senior administrators who aspire to have their campuses recognized in ways other than by popular and pernicious mass-media ranking schemes—which use fallacious criteria to bestow prestige on postsecondary institutions on the basis of exclusion (student selectivity) and wealth (fiscal resources) (Astin, 1985; Carey, 2006; Cuseo, 2010). The courage that university presidents must muster to resist this prestige-chasing pressure at institutions educating diverse students is poignantly articulated by Natalicio and Smith (2005): “Often the president of such an institution must be tenacious and thick-skinned, resisting the many pressures to abandon the commitment to access in favor of a more elitist approach to

higher education---pressures from faculty on campus, as well as from elected officials, media, and community members” (p. 157).

In short, it could be said that AVID for Higher Education is designed to transform campus culture by engaging all key members of the university community in the change process, namely:

- (a) *students*—supporting and empowering them with transferable, self-help strategies for promoting
  - (a) Success across the curriculum and beyond (e.g., strategies introduced in the first-year seminar and reinforced through academic advising);
  - (b) *Peers*—capitalizing on the power of peer influence through use of peer models and peer-support groups led by advanced peer tutors/mentors who are well trained, evaluated and rewarded;
  - (c) *Faculty and staff*—supporting them with effective strategies and incentives for teaching, advising, and mentoring, as well as structured opportunities for collaboration and mutual support; and
  - (d) *Administrators*—providing mid- and upper-level campus leaders with a systemic plan and systematic set of strategies for fostering the development of a student-centered, success-focused campus culture (e.g., changes in professional reward structures and opportunities to gain regional or national recognition for their institutions’ student-success efforts).

## 5.

### **EMPIRICAL**

**AVID is built on a solid base of research evidence that spans multiple campus sites, multiple research methods, and multiple points of assessment (tracking of student progress across time).**

Postsecondary scholars have noted a significant gap between research and practice with respect to promoting student learning (Cross, 1988; Schon, 1983, 1987) and student retention (Tinto, 1998). Gardiner (1994) reviewed the higher education research literature and concluded that “the student experience seems more frequently determined by academic tradition than research-based theory; our educational processes are often based on expediency—the convenience of administrators and faculty—than our students’ developmental needs. To produce high-quality results for our stakeholders requires the insights of research-based theory (p. 105).”

As documented in this manuscript AVID for Higher Education is well grounded in higher education research and theory. Furthermore, AHE builds on a precollege system that has been thoroughly researched at the secondary level by a variety of independent third-party evaluators, federal and state agencies, and private foundations (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The results of multiple research studies using multiple research methodologies demonstrate that the AVID system has consistent and significant impact on students:

- (a) *Attitudes*—e.g., college aspiration and anticipation (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009; Slavin & Calderon, 2001);
- (b) *Behavior*—e.g., class attendance, enrollment in advanced courses, application to college and enrollment in college (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002; Mehan, et al., 1996), Hayward, et al., 1997; Watt, Powell, & Mendiola, 2004); and
- (c) *Cognition*—e.g., knowledge of college requirements and expectations; cognitive performance on standardized tests of academic achievement (Gándara et al., 1998; Hooker & Brand, 2009).

One would be hard-pressed to find any other educational support program—at any level of education—that has been subjected to more rigorous data analysis, and whose results have been more consistently replicated and disseminated than the AVID system. AVID’s selection as one of eleven organizations to receive the highest praise for “outstanding rigorous research” in a 2004 national report to Congress (AVID Center, 2010) serves as testimony to the quality (rigor) and quantity (replication) of

research conducted on its system. The strength of AVID's evidentiary base may also explain why its system has been adopted by more than 4,000 schools in 45 states and 15 countries, and has served as the school reform model for the state of Texas (Watt, Yanez, & Cossio, 2002).

Moreover, AVID's assessment program is designed to ensure the fidelity and integrity of its system's implementation. Implementation fidelity can be defined as the degree to which programs are implemented as intended by the program developers (Dusenbury, et al., 2003). The fidelity with which programs are implemented has been found to affect program impact, i.e., higher levels of implementation fidelity are associated with better program outcomes (Noel, 2006; Thomas, Baker, & Lorenzetti, 2007). In AVID for Higher Education, students, faculty, staff and administrators who choose to participate must fulfill their contractual commitments and execute the system's features faithfully. Campus implementation of AVID's essential features are assessed by the AVID Center. If it's found that the campus is not implementing the system with fidelity, it does not receive certification as a bona fide AVID implementation site and the results obtained are not included in the AVID Center's data base of findings on the impact of its system. This practice not only ensures implementation fidelity and consistency, it also ensures assessment validity because the system's intended outcomes are not confounded, contaminated, or diluted by lack of effort on the part of those responsible for execution of the system's essential features.

In addition to collecting data to ensure fidelity of system implementation and to "prove" the system's overall impact, AVID consistently collects data that is intended to *improve* its specific components and practices. As Bailey & Alfonso (2005) suggest, "The interaction between research and practice should not be seen as a search by experts for the final and definitive answer to the question: 'What works?' Rather, it is a constant and continuous process—a conversation within and among the colleges and with outside researchers and policy-makers, using the best possible data. Educators, policy makers and students must move forward based on the best information available (pp. 28-29). One of the core principles for implementing an effective student-retention program posited by Vincent Tinto (1993) is that "institutions and programs should continually assess their action with an eye toward improvement" (p. 152). Similarly, Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) report that, "feedback is perhaps the most important aspect of [retention] program development, implementation, and sustainability. Institutional research is potentially the greatest resource for campus leadership and faculty. Empirical information should be the foundation of any retention effort (pp. 94 & 95)." One characteristic of college campuses with higher-than-predicted graduation rates is that they are more likely to "systematically collect information about various aspects of student performance and use it to inform policy and decision making" (Kuh, et al., 2005, p. 156). Campuses with unexpectedly high graduation rates that serve high percentages of *low-income* students have been found to "focus intently on continuous improvement, through ongoing institutional research, assessment of programs, and monitoring of data—especially around students' degree completion" (SREB, 2010, p. 11).

Reviews of campus retention initiatives indicate that most institutions do not conduct studies with sufficient methodological or statistical rigor to effectively track and diagnose specific strengths and weaknesses in their programmatic efforts (Braxton, McKinney, & Reynolds, 2006; Hossler, 2006). AVID's longitudinal data-collection system can help redress this shortcoming by tracking student progress across time and enable campuses to identify when breakdowns in progress occur. This information can then be used to guide improvements in system delivery by targeting bottlenecks in the progress pipeline and intervening at pivotal points in their students' journey from matriculation to graduation.

## 6.

### **CUSTOMIZED**

**AVID for Higher Education is tailored to "fit" students and campuses that have the commitment and determination to *implement* its essential features *with fidelity*.**

AVID is designed to meet the needs of those students who will most benefit from its system. Research at the high school level indicates that students who have benefitted the most from the AVID system are from economically disadvantaged and ethnically underrepresented groups who do not have a college-going tradition (AVID Center, 2006; Friou & Grueber, 2010). Student-success research at the postsecondary level suggests that the AVID system should have a comparable effect on the success of college students from these very same groups. The following section of this manuscript synthesizes postsecondary research on these underserved student groups and illustrates how AVID's features align with recommendations made by higher education scholars for promoting the success of at-risk students.

### **Low-Income College Students**

While 56% of high-income students (dependent family incomes of greater than \$70,000) earn a baccalaureate degree within six years after beginning college, the graduation rate for low-income students (dependent family income of less than \$25,000) is only 25% (NCES, 2003). Furthermore, the gap between low- and high-income groups is widening (NCES, 2005); between 1972 and 2007, the difference in degree-completion rates between these two groups nearly doubled (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Low-income students are at higher risk for attrition because the quality of education they received prior to college is often compromised by their economically disadvantaged status.

Research at the secondary level indicates that the AVID system can, in effect, wipe out the correlation between family income and college readiness (Mehan, et al., 1996). AVID high school students from the lowest income strata (parents' median income less than \$20,000) enroll in 4-year colleges at proportions equal to or higher than students from higher income strata (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Low-income college students should also benefit from AVID's personalized, holistic system. Engle and Tinto (2008) reviewed research on programs that effectively promoted the college persistence of low-income students and found that successful programs "scale down" the college experience, providing them with personalized attention from faculty and staff, and a place to connect with supportive peers who share common background experiences.

Higher education's traditional methods of providing developmental (remedial) education for students with underdeveloped academic skills at college entry have not been particularly successful: less than 50% of developmental students complete their required sequence of courses (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010) and developmental students are half as likely to attain a degree within six years (Conley, 2005). AVID's focus on the whole student should serve as a refreshing alternative to traditional methods of educating developmental students whose basic academic skills are underdeveloped at college entry. Focusing on the student as a whole person is equally (if not more) important for promoting the success of developmental students because they often experience a drop in self-confidence and self-esteem, resulting from seeing themselves as "less than" students who are able to enroll directly in college-level courses (Moss & Yeaton, 2006). Developmental students may also experience frustration, anger, and possible loss of motivation after discovering that (a) they must take additional courses on skills they thought they had already learned in high school, and (b) their time to college graduation will be delayed because they must complete non-credit-bearing coursework (Attewell, et al., 2006). The importance of holistic support for developmental students is highlighted by a multi-institutional investigation of support programs for academically at-risk students, which revealed that the most successful programs were those that went beyond academic remediation to include student contact with campus professionals who address the "affective side of being a student: poor self-concept, passivity, lack of confidence, [and] fear of failure" (Astin, 1982, p. 11).

Historically, postsecondary interventions designed for academically underprepared students have often focused narrowly on academic "skill-and-drill" strategies (Attewell, et al., 2006; Oudenhoven, 2002), which fail to address the "hidden curriculum" (Giroux & Penna, 1983)—the plethora of social, emotional, and other personal issues that undermine students' academic achievement and underlie the bulk of student attrition from higher education (Barefoot, 2004; Cuseo, 2008). The importance of providing more than "study skills" support for developmental students is reinforced by the results of a national survey of

students in community colleges—where the largest percentage of developmental college students are enrolled (Strong American Schools, 2008). Only 19% of the community college students that were surveyed reported that “being academically unprepared” would cause them to withdraw from college, ranking well behind other reasons such as: (a) “caring for dependents” (29%), (b) “working full-time” (38%) and (c) “lack of finances” (45%) (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008).

AVID’s holistic approach should enrich traditional methods used for promoting the success of academically-underprepared college students and would do so in a way that aligns with the stated mission of the National Association for Developmental Education (1995): “Developmental education is a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive *and affective* growth of all postsecondary learners” (p. 1) (*italics added*).

### **First-Generation College Students**

College-going students whose parents did not graduate from college, i.e., first-generation students, are at greater risk for college attrition regardless of their prior level of academic preparation (e.g., their entering SAT scores and the rigor of course work they completed in high school) (Glenn, 2008). First-generation students withdraw from college at a rate that is more than twice that of other students—only 26% earn a bachelor’s degree within eight years after college matriculation (Chen, 2005). In focus-group interviews, first-generation students consistently report that persisting in college is more difficult than gaining college readiness and access. As one student put it, “Getting into college is one thing. It’s actually sticking it through that’s the hard part (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006, p. 6).”

For first-generation students, going to college is a “leap of faith” for first-generation students because no one in their family has ever done it (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006). These students “live in multiple worlds, which may include not only college, but also work, family, barrio, ghetto, or reservations. Students enter college, but during that time they are also interacting with their other worlds” (Rendón, 2006, p. 13). First-generation students encounter more than just academic barriers in higher education; they also encounter cultural barriers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The cultural norms, customs and expectations of their families and home communities often conflict with the culture they encounter on campus, which can trigger tensions because most try to live “simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither” (Rendón, 1992, p. 56). It is not uncommon for first-generation students to report strained relationships and lack of support from family members and neighborhood friends who did not go to college (London, 1989, 1992; Olenchak & Herbert, 2002; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Terenzini, et al., 1994, 1996).

First-generation students comprise more than 80% of AVID’s high school students who successfully complete college readiness requirements and continue their education at the postsecondary level (Friou & Grueber, 2010). After entering college, it is reasonable to expect that AVID’s holistic personal and familial support will help first-generation students cope with the cultural conflicts they are likely to encounter in college. Postsecondary research has found that one key characteristic of campuses with unexpectedly high graduation rates for low-income, first-generation students is a strong emphasis on supporting their intercultural transition with an intentionally designed first-year experience that includes a substantive new-student orientation program, a first-year seminar (student success course), and first-year learning communities (Engle & O’Brien, 2007)—all of which are key features of AVID *for Higher Education*.

AVID’s instructional development program for college faculty should also serve to promote the success of low-income, first-generation college students because the vast majority of these students live and work off campus. Thus, the lion’s share of time they spend on campus is class time, making the classroom the primary, if not sole venue in which first-generation students can become engaged in the college experience (academic integration) and develop connections with other members of the college community (social integration). “Institutions must provide professional development for faculty and staff to

not only help them acquire a broader range of pedagogical skills, but also to learn how to effectively use those skills with at-risk populations” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 26).

### **College Students from *Underrepresented Ethnic and Racial Groups***

There is more social, racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in the American educational system now than at any other time in its national history. Minority student enrollment in K-12 increased from 35% in the 1995-96 school year to 43.5% in 2006-07, resulting in the following ethnic/racial proportions in America’s K-12 system during the 2006-07 school year:

- White: 56.5%
- Hispanic: 20.5%,
- Black, non-Hispanic: 17.1%,
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 4.7 %, and
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 1.2%.

Moreover, the proportion of minority students in America’s educational system is projected to continue increasing throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Hispanic, African-American and Native-American college-going students withdraw from higher education at significantly higher rates than white and Asian students (Cook & Cordova, 2007; Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010), even after controlling for socioeconomic status and level of academic preparation at college entry (Light & Strayer, 2002). AVID has a long track record of increasing the academic preparedness and college-going rates of diverse student populations. Students of color who participate in the AVID system in high school complete college-entrance requirements at rates 3-4 times higher than non-participants. Recent research reveals the following differences in college-readiness rates between AVID participants and non-participants:

- Hispanic (Latino) students: AVID participants (90%) vs. 22% for non-participants
- Black (African American) students: AVID participants (94%) vs. 25% for non-participants
- Native American (American Indian/Alaska Native): AVID participants (88%) vs. 21% for non-participants (AVID Center, 2010; Greene & Foster, 2003)
- Hispanic and African-American students who participate in the AVID system also evince significantly higher college-enrollment rates (Mehan, et al., 1996; National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students 1998; Slavin, 1998).

Savitz-Romer, et al. (2009) reviewed programs designed to support the college readiness and success of underrepresented students and reached the following conclusion: “Much progress is being made in promoting academic rigor in schools and raising standards for college degree attainment. However, less attention has been given to the academic, social, developmental, and financial needs of students that must be addressed in order for them to respond to high expectations and achieve rigorous academic standards” (p. 1). Greene (1993) also argues that postsecondary efforts aimed at promoting the success of diverse students need to view the student as a “whole human being”—not solely as an academic entity cranked out by an educational system bent on the narrow development of work-specific competencies and pre-professional proficiencies for occupational success in a technology-driven economy.

AVID’s emphasis on holistic support dovetails with college-level research on strategies that effectively promote the success of diverse students. For instance, African-American students are more likely to succeed at institutions that take a holistic approach to their education, which includes attention to their

social, emotional, and spiritual development (Davis, 1998). Hispanic students have also been found to demonstrate greater college persistence when they receive social support that embraces their family and home community (Gloria, et al., 2005; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004-2005). In addition, AVID's emphasis on strong transitional support during the first-year of college is consistent with postsecondary research indicating that minority students' early academic performance in college (e.g. first-term and first-year GPA) is more predictive of their subsequent retention and persistence to graduation than it is for majority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Zea, et al., 1997).

### ***AVID System / Campus Fit***

Effective retention programs should not only be fitted to the characteristics of students who experience them, but also to the campuses that implement them. As Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) note: “Student retention programs must be designed to match the characteristics and conditions at each campus. The students, faculty, and institutional mission bring different aspects to the campus that makes it a unique and special place, and these characteristics must be considered in the planning cycle”. Supporting this observation are the results of a study conducted on federally funded student-success services (SSS) programs, which found that programs with greater impact on student retention were more effectively integrated into existing campus structures (such as learning centers) than programs delivered as “stand-alone” projects (Muraskin, 1997).

At the high school level, AVID has a long and virtually unprecedented track record of ensuring cross-campus consistency and fidelity of implementation of its system. AVID *for* Higher Education seeks to ensure a similar level of implementation integrity, but it also acknowledges that institutions of higher education are diverse in nature and purpose. Rather than imposing its features in a rigid or inflexible fashion, AVID *for* Higher Education is designed to adapt to the unique individuality of each campus. Although its system includes core requirements, it offers different options and entertains alternative strategies for fulfilling these requirements. AVID is able to walk the fine line among ensuring implementation, cross-campus consistency and accommodating cross-campus diversity because its system emphasizes portable principles that are transferable across different campus contexts and flexible enough to fit into different campus programs. For example, AVID’s features can be integrated with such postsecondary endeavors as: (a) assessment and accreditation, (b) first-year experience programs and first-year seminar courses, (c) supplemental instruction and peer tutoring, (d) academic advising and career counseling, (e) support programs for at-risk students (e.g., EOP), and (f) “across the curriculum” initiatives, such as writing and critical thinking across the curriculum. Thus, rather than being imposed as a labor-intensive “add on” that is layered on top of already-institutionalized responsibilities and programs, AVID’s features have the versatility and flexibility to interface seamlessly with existing campus practices.

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