By Karen Maitland Schilling *and* Karl L. Schilling

INCREASING EXPECTATIONS *for* STUDENT EFFORT

Although there is a lot of discussion about outcomes, very little has been said about expectations. If students don't spend time and effort studying and engaging in other learning activities, the learning just won't happen. It's time, say the authors, to better define our expectations and make sure students know what they are.

IN CLASSROOMS ON CAMPUSES across the country, as another semester begins, faculty are meeting classes for the first time, distributing syllabi, and earnestly voicing to students their personal variants of that time-honored mantra, "I expect that you will devote at least two to three hours outside of class for every hour that you spend in class in order to be successful in this course." Likewise, student affairs staff are greeting students and articulating opportunities for involvement in extracurricular life and standards of acceptable conduct on campus.

On many of these same campuses, in the fall, even before they unpacked their boxes, arriving first-year students sat down to complete the Cooperative Institutional Research Profile (CIRP), providing information for people on campus (as well as those at UCLA who develop the yearly national profiles of the entering class) about what their experiences were in high school. The students responded to the question, "During your last year in high school, how much time did you spend during a typical week studying/doing homework?" The responses from most suggested that their investment in out-of-class studying in their last year of high school totaled about an hour a day.

Many of these students got the message from their high school teachers and their parents that in college they were going to have to work harder. Some have heeded it. At Miami University, for example, we have found that most incoming students report expecting to spend thirty to forty hours a week in academic pursuits,

including attending classes. Some quick math suggests that in contrast to their reported high school commitment of an hour a day of studying to cover all of their classes, students expect to spend about an hour a day outside of class for every hour in class. Still, the two- or threefold gap between expectations for academic engagement voiced by students and that voiced by faculty is stunning: faculty state that two to three hours of work outside of class for every hour in class is necessary to succeed, yet entering students report expecting to spend about a third of that amount of time.

A Brief History of Student Performance Expectations

WE CERTAINLY DON'T CLAIM to be the first to highlight the importance of attending to expectations. Although interest in expectations for student performance probably extends back to the medieval foundations of the university, recent focus on this issue can be traced to the influential 1984 National Institute of Education report *Involvement in Learning*. The authors of that report identified what they termed "three conditions of excellence" for undergraduate education: student involvement, conducting assessment and providing feedback, and setting high expectations. In the fifteen years since the report was released, a great deal of attention has been given to enhancing student involvement in their own learning. There also has been remarkable progress on assessment, fueled in part by external pressures. Repeated reminders of the importance of setting high expectations, for example, have come from Trudy Banta and associates in discussing assessment that makes a difference, from Art Chickering and Zelda Gamson in their work on principles for good practice in undergraduate education, and from the Wingspread Group in producing their report *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*. However, few concrete efforts have been undertaken in higher education to address this issue.

This is surprising because the literature on motivation and school performance in younger school children suggests that expectations shape the learning experience very powerfully. For example, classic studies in the psychology literature have found that merely stating an expectation results in enhanced performance, that higher expectations result in higher performance, and that persons with high expectations perform at a higher level than those with low expectations, even though their measured abilities are equal.

Despite all of this research, few higher education institutions have publicly articulated clear, high expec-

tations of the knowledge, skills, and capacities students are to attain. So students come to colleges and universities with expectations for their own engagement that are at best vague and uninformed, or, worse, wildly divergent from the expectations that faculty and staff hold for them. They may know little about the *what* of learning intended for them by the institution and even less about the *how much* and *how well* expected of them.

Many of their expectations about schooling have been shaped by their experiences in high school, where demands for time investment were likely modest (and—data from yearly comparisons of the CIRP, for example, would suggest—decreasing over the past several years). Most colleges and universities do very little to influence or alter students' entering expectations, nor do they inform the faculty about the discrepancy between their expectations of students and the students' expectations of themselves. Likewise, they do not highlight for the faculty the fact that most students are quite successful in terms of GPA while working considerably less than faculty assert is necessary.

It is the "great divide" between students' expectations and faculty or institutional expectations that piqued our interest. Conversations with colleagues at other institutions led us to believe that we were not confronting a problem unique to Miami University. So in 1995, with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), we began developing a collaborative project designed to address the issue of expectations for student academic effort. Our goals were, first, to develop a set of strategies or assessment approaches for understanding the culture of expectations on a campus, and then to identify strategies that could be used to alter or influence that culture.

The expectation gap may be most vividly captured in data on "time on task," but this same gap manifests itself across the academic landscape, with faculty despairing of data indicating how rarely students use the library or attend campus lectures or arts events, or criticizing students for reading so few books, or for never reading nonrequired articles on science. Likewise, student affairs staff bemoan the lack of civility among students, their absence of involvement in organized activities on campus, and their failure to adhere to adult norms of behavior. Faculty and staff seem to expect one set of behaviors

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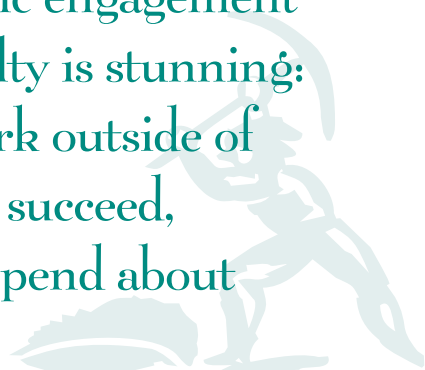
from students, while students expect something very different for themselves.

It seems particularly ironic that, in the era of the most intense focus on improvement of instruction and student learning in the history of higher education, we see many indications of persistently decreasing expectations for student academic effort. With "full-time" students committing roughly twenty hours a week to watching TV, twenty hours to working, and twenty hours to relaxing or hanging out (according to Marchese's informal summary in *Change*), faculty's claim on student time has been reduced to a few hours a day. Interestingly, even though students are studying less, grades haven't fallen to reflect this lessened investment of time in academic work. Indeed, during this same time period, the national statistics on average student GPA were rising. The curriculum can be outstanding, the professors knowledgeable, the pedagogies engaging and appropriately tailored to the students being taught; the students admitted can be intelligent and capable and have excellent prior preparation; but without a shared institutional understanding of reasonable expectations for student academic effort and investment of student time and effort in appropriate activities, aspirations for enhancing the impact of colleges and universities on student learning must remain modest at best. Clearly, there is a mismatch between what institutions say students must do to be successful and what students' actual experience with the institution has taught them is really necessary. Our project began with a focus on this gap.

A Collaborative Project for Understanding and Addressing the Expectations Gap

IN CHOOSING CAMPUSES to be involved in our project, we sought to mirror, insofar as possible and practical in a small regional working group, the range of

institutions in American higher education. We also wished to include in our conversations individuals who held various roles within their institutions and could bring the perspectives of these diverse roles to our discussions. (See the box listing FIPSE project participants and institutions.)

The working group has met three to four times per year over the past three years. We have shared unique strategies developed by each campus to understand and affect its culture of expectations as well as worked together on common approaches to be used across several campuses, including development of a set of questions to be used in interviewing faculty about their expectations for students. Working with George Kuh at Indiana University, with special direction from Deborah Olsen and her colleagues, the group developed an "expectations" version of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ, created by Robert Pace). The expectations version is called the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ). Each campus agreed to use this instrument as part of their campus project. For most campuses, this has involved administering the CSXQ to a sample of entering first-year students in the fall semester, followed by administration of the CSEQ to the same students at the end of the first year. This has allowed institutions not only to understand expectations of entering students but also to look at how students' reported experiences compare to their initial expectations. (See page 10 for information on obtaining the CSEQ and CSXQ.)

Participating in this project, each campus representative has also initiated a local project or projects on that campus to better understand and then influence the local culture of expectations for students. At Antioch College, for example, focus groups on expectations were conducted as a key element of the long-range planning process. They determined that students come to this distinctive, small private institution with very

high expectations for the quality of the academic program they will experience. However, these very high expectations relate to different aspects of the institution depending on the student. For some, the quality of the co-op experience is most important; for others, issues of community ethos and the close learning environment are most important. Student satisfaction relates to meeting or exceeding expectations. But for such a small institution to meet such diverse high expectations is a considerable challenge.

Retention of first-year students has been a significant problem at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). New resource-intensive first-year seminars have been designed to bring together faculty, advisors, librarians, and student mentors to introduce students to this scholarly community. These seminars work to clearly communicate institutional expectations and shape student expectations for their academic involvement. Chicago State University, a predominantly African American female institution, has worked at linking expectations to development of departmental and program assessment plans. At Xavier University, data from students and faculty on academic expectations have been the focus of faculty retreats. Grand Valley State University has approached the issue of expectations at the departmental level, examining in particular how faculty expectations for students are communicated differently in professional and traditional liberal arts programs. Indiana University and Miami University have linked the CSXQ and CSEQ data to other data sets. At Miami, for example, we have also brought in other institutional data sets on student time use and analyses of student work from portfolios, and data on students and faculty expectations and behaviors. The insights from each individual campus project are shared in meetings of our collaborative group and add to our collective understanding of expectations.

SOME PROVOCATIVE FINDINGS

AS NOTED PREVIOUSLY, our initial interest in this area began with a focus on the gap between student expectations and faculty expectations for academic effort. Our assessment efforts have provided data that exemplify and concretize the range and magnitude of this gap. Across several of our participating institutions, we find faculty articulating expectations for student time investment in work outside of class that are two to three times greater than the expectations for investment of their time reported by students themselves. These data have proven very useful for stimulat-

ing animated discussions among faculty and staff on several of our campuses.

Further data collection on several of our campuses has led us to identify yet another gap—and this one may be even more disturbing. This is the gap between expectations for academic effort articulated by students at point of entry to the institution and students' reported experiences after their first year. Students report working even less than they expected! For example, at Indiana University more than nine hundred students completed the CSXQ before the start of the academic year and the CSEQ in the spring semester; at Miami University, more than three hundred completed the instruments on the same schedule. Before the start of the academic year, more than four-fifths of these students anticipated spending thirty to forty hours per

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Setting High Expectations for Student Academic Performance— FIPSE Project Participants

From **Miami University,** a selective, comprehensive university: Karl Schilling, scholar in residence, Office of Residence Life

From **Antioch College,** a small private liberal arts college: Ric Weibl and later Saide Mounzadeh, Office of Institutional Research, and Jim and Cheryl Keen, dean of the faculty

From **Chicago State University,** a historically black university: Delores Lipscomb, assistant provost for academic development

From **Xavier University** in Cincinnati, a private Jesuit university: David Kalsbeek, associate vice president for academic affairs for admissions and enrollment services and later Carol Rankin, associate vice president

From **Indiana University,** a large research university: Deborah Olsen, assistant vice chancellor for academic affairs

From **Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis,** a metropolitan university: Scott Evenbeck, dean, Gail Williams, assistant dean of University College, and Trudy Banta, vice chancellor for institutional planning and improvement

From **Grand Valley State University,** a new, rapidly expanding comprehensive university: Jacqueline Johnson, professor and chair of sociology, anthropology, and geography

week on their courses, including time spent in class. On both campuses, by spring a thirty-hour-per-week schedule was modal, with decreases in the number of students experiencing a forty-hour week and increases in the number of students reporting that they worked twenty or fewer hours per week on academic work.

Actual work fell short of expectations not only in the amount of time invested but also in the kinds of activities in which students engaged. For example, texts were emphasized rather than primary source materials; in science, students reported memorizing formulas and definitions and rarely using the scientific method; studying relied on the most passive of study strategies rather than higher-level thinking skills. Students attended arts and other campus events even less often than their meager expectations upon entering. First-year experiences seem to widen rather than narrow the gap between faculty and student expectations for student academic effort. The reported lived experience of students in the first year is apparently less demanding of student time than either faculty or students themselves had expected.

Studies of student time use at Miami University, as a part of this project, have underscored for us the importance of setting high initial expectations for student academic effort early in a student's academic career. Using programmable watches, we have been able to signal students on a random schedule one hundred times during a typical week in the semester. When students are signaled, they record in just a few words what they are doing at that moment. This sampling strategy provides a good representation of time allocation by students.

We are able to look precisely at percentages of time devoted to academic work, employment, social activities, and so on. Although we have observed considerable variability across students in their patterns of time allo-

cation, the variability within student patterns across years is minimal. That is, in studying patterns of time use for the same students over four years, we have observed that the economies of time use that students put in place during their first year are the very same economies that structure their allocation of time in the last semester of their senior year. Students appear to determine in their first months on campus how much time they will devote to academic pursuits, and this pattern of time allocation is durable over the rest of their college experience. What is required of students in their first semester appears to play a strong role in shaping the time investments made in academic work by students in their last semester of their senior year.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

AFTER HAVING DEVELOPED and used several different approaches for assessing campus cultures of expectations, we have moved on to thinking about how to affect these campus cultures to enhance expectations. We have come to several insights or perspectives on setting expectations through our work to date:

1. *Coordinated efforts by academic and student affairs are necessary if the issue of setting expectations for student performance is to be effectively addressed.* Achieving and imparting a systematic message about intellectual rigor is important. If the student affairs division during summer orientation is assuring students that college won't be that difficult, while the academic area is trying to raise the level of intellectual rigor by having students enter with expectations of working very hard, then there is a problem.

Similarly, if the university's recruitment materials and admission tours devote most of their communication with students to life outside the classroom, then it is rea-

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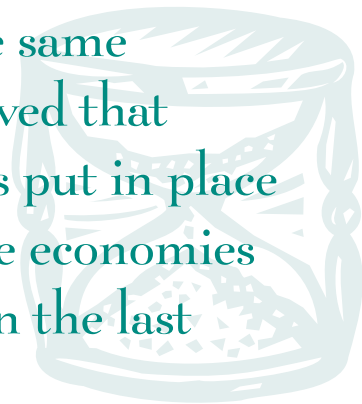
sonable to expect that students might feel misled when they find that academic work is interfering with their involvement in the cocurricular life on campus. Indeed, one campus involved in the project proposed using an "audit" of campus viewbooks as a way of looking at the messages that the institution is sending prospective students about the kinds of expectation they should have about college life.

2. *Enhancing expectations is not just about raising the bar; this is not simply another discussion of standards.* The debate on standards focuses on outcomes. It necessarily presumes specification of minimal competency associated with awarding a credential, degree, and the like. In contrast to this, discussion of expectations for academic effort focuses on process—clarifying those activities students must pursue in order to achieve desired ends.

Specifying expectations is simply identifying the reasonable steps to follow in order to reach standards. The debate on standards asks the question, "What is the minimal level of performance that we deem acceptable?" Focusing on expectations asks very different questions: "What kinds of work, and how much work, will need to be completed to meet the specified standards?" Spelling out expectations requires going beyond setting standards, to look more closely at the kinds of effort that help students achieve desired outcomes.

3. *Faculty and staff play a very significant role in shaping or creating the kinds of students that populate our campuses.* FIPSE project participants have come to think about the problem of expectations as "students being on the job without a job description." After observing students and student failures for many years, most faculty and staff probably have a pretty good idea of what kinds of behavior lead to student success, yet most of us are hesitant to require students to engage in those behaviors. It is clear that institutions need to provide the job description for "college student" or else students will make one up for themselves. We know that the ones students make up for themselves are not nearly so likely to assure their academic success. (At Miami University, the several student affairs staff members of the working group have begun writing drafts of job descriptions for students at various levels, first year through senior.) At IUPUI, they are using this understanding to structure new first-year seminars for students. Poor retention data tell them that what they did in the past has not worked. So they have set out to create a program that ensures students will intentionally be socialized to the expectations of an academic community, with the hope that if an instructor, a librarian and technology expert, an advisor, and a peer mentor come together in a seminar consciously designed to teach first-year students how to be

college students, they will experience greater success at the institution.

We know that if we require students to attend outside lectures, arts events, or group study sessions, they are more likely to attend such events in the future than they would be if we simply suggest attendance at such events. (At Miami University, several faculty have been successful in some beginning efforts in this direction.) We also know that students who are required to attend such events one time are more likely to attend similar activities in the future, even when they are not required, than are students who have never been required to attend such events. Faculty and staff bemoan students' failure to take advantage of such opportunities on campus, yet they are loathe to revise syllabi to require student attendance.

4. *Collective action by faculty and staff is essential.* Individual faculty members can control the level of intellectual demand of their own courses, but they frequently experience pressure from students and colleagues if their expectations are too far out of line with those of the rest of the department or campus. Many new faculty fresh from graduate school have been quickly given the message to dumb down their courses if they wish to continue—because of the importance of student evaluations as the primary indicator of teaching effectiveness on many campuses. Many students begin avoiding sections in which the faculty member is perceived as being too demanding because they are seeking to maintain GPAs, have time for extracurricular activities, and the like. Both faculty and staff may inadvertently contribute to this problem by urging students to shun faculty members with a reputation for providing challenging courses.

Likewise, faculty may contribute to student behavioral problems by not holding students accountable for incidents of academic dishonesty and other inappropriate behaviors. Therefore, any efforts to raise the levels of expectation for student performance must be at least departmentwide, if not institutionwide, if there is to be any substantial improvement.

5. *Increasing expectations does not simply translate into grading harder.* Departments need to evaluate the intellectual challenge that their courses offer to students. Many of the earlier conversations about expectations confounded the idea of expectations for student performance with grading. At most institutions, grading is not grounded in specific standards of performance. It is a highly arbitrary act and does not provide a standardized metric by which to assess performance across sections or courses. Nor does it reveal much about what students have achieved. Indeed, in program review reports on many campuses, it is not uncommon to find departments that have a low average GPA for their

courses claiming that this low GPA is an indicator of the high departmental standards for student academic achievement—the department is rigorous! But those departments with high average GPAs for their courses argue that the high GPA is an indicator of the high quality of instruction the students have received, thus accounting for their students' high level of performance—the department is excellent at teaching!

Increasing expectations means heightening the intellectual challenge of courses, moving beyond memorization to engaged critical analysis that creates excitement for students. Our work suggests that it is crucial to do this in the very first semester of college, or else students will resist any attempts to raise the stakes in the later years in college.

We hope that this article encourages you to begin conversations about expectations for student academic effort on your campus. Start by asking:

- What kinds of work are we asking students to do?

- What kinds of intellectual demand do these assignments make of students?

- What kinds of expectation do we have for students' involvement in campus activities?

- How much time do students spend studying on this campus?

- How do we know this?

- How much would be enough?

- How could we gather evidence?

We believe that change efforts should start with conversations based on evidence rather than opinion. Start a refreshing conversation on your campus by collecting some evidence about your students' academic efforts. Share it with colleagues. The point is not to establish blame, but to see how our policies and ways of working may be hindering our institutional efforts to create powerful learning environments for our students.

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To obtain copies of the CSEQ or CSXQ, contact the Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, School of Education, Indiana University, 201 North Rose Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405-1006.