



## Clarifying Perceptions of Students and Learning

As research and practice related to student success continues to emerge, it is refreshing to learn about new perspectives that have potential for shaping the ways faculty perceive, think about, and interact with their students. These new developments can sharpen the lenses through which instructors view the abilities of and challenges faced by their students. This issue of *The Toolbox* examines three promising perspectives on students and learning: *growth mindset*, *mindfulness*, and *grit*. A list of resources is also provided in the sidebar to further explore these vantage points for relating to, and better understanding, students.

### Growth Mindset

Historically, intellectual performance and other abilities have been conceptualized as a fixed quantity of potential that each individual possesses at birth. Psychologist Carol Dweck differentiated between a fixed and a growth mindset:

In a fixed mindset students believe ... they have a certain amount [of intelligence] and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching, and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or any one can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it." (Morehead, 2012, text box 4)

Students then, according to Dweck, even those who experience the greatest challenges, can grow and change under the right conditions (Morehead, 2012). This way of thinking about students and their learning has been translated into very practical interventions. For example, exposing first-year students to essays written by their upperdivision peers, many of whom had the same challenges and feelings, can foster a sense of belonging in college, encourage conversations about what it means to be successful, and reinforce the idea that growth is possible and challenges can be overcome (Yeager et al., 2016). Another strategy, in the day-to-day classroom environment, is to reinforce student accomplishments and walk alongside those who may be struggling. These actions, which may seem rather simple, have been shown to have potentially long-lasting positive effects on the manner in which students see themselves as learners (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness, according to Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer, "is the process of actively noticing new things, relinquishing preconceived mindsets, and then acting on the new observations [i.e., living in the moment]" (Feinberg, 2010, para. 9). Mindful people consistently observe novelty and uniqueness in the things around them; actively engage their minds in what they are currently doing; create novel solutions to observed challenges; and remain flexible to change, growth, new experiences, and learning opportunities.



“ We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses. ”

—Abraham Lincoln

One of the best ways instructors can encourage students to be mindful is to actively model this process both in and out of the classroom (e.g., being engaged, flexible, and ever-aware of new opportunities for learning and growth; always seeking new solutions). Faculty can let their students know they are also learning new things and making new discoveries every day, which not only demonstrates mindfulness but can also strengthen the faculty-student bond.

## Grit

What is it about some individuals who persist against great odds and who are always striving to be better and reach higher levels of performance? Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) identified this personal characteristic as grit and defined it as

perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course. (pp. 1087-1088)

The research of Duckworth et al. (2007) led to the development of the Grit Scale, a short, simple 12-item survey capturing the essence of grit in daily life (e.g., setting and keeping goals, dealing with setbacks, working hard, finishing, never giving up). This tool (see sidebar) can be a great discussion starter with students in first-year courses to raise awareness for persisting in the midst of challenge.

Faculty can once again model grit through their interactions with students. Quite often, students are surprised to learn that their instructors have faced similar challenges in learning and in life. Through their own examples, instructors can be an encouragement for students to stay the course amid those inevitable obstacles that are part of every pursuit.

## Summary

The ways in which faculty engage their students, and their perspectives on students' abilities as learners, can have a powerful impact on student success. As instructors, we need to see and communicate the learning potential in each student (i.e., growth mindset); provide students with the tools necessary to maintain focus on the tasks and learning at hand (i.e., mindfulness); and encourage them as they struggle, persist, and achieve (i.e., grit).

**Take the time to view your students in a fresh light: They can grow, they can invest, and they can overcome— with your help and encouragement.**

## Additional Resources

### Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck's TED Talk on growth mindset: <http://bit.do/Carol-Dweck-and-Ted>

Mindset Kit Resources and Lessons: <https://www.mindsetkit.org/>

The College Transition Collaborative: <http://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/>

### Mindfulness

Ellen Langer's, Mindfulness Over Matter YouTube presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XQUJR4uIGM>.

The Langer Mindfulness Institute: <http://langermindfulnessinstitute.com/>

### Grit

Angela Duckworth's TED Talk on grit: <http://bit.do/Angela-Duckworth-and-Ted>

The Grit Scale: <http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>

Angela Duckworth webpage (with other links to a multitude of resources): <http://angeladuckworth.com/research/>

## References

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# What's Happening at The National Resource Center

## Conferences and Continuing Education

### Conferences and Institutes

#### Save the Dates

#### 23rd National Conference on Students in Transition

October 15-17, 2016

New Orleans, Louisiana

Early-bird registration deadline: September 21, 2016

#### 36th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 11-14, 2017

Atlanta, Georgia

Proposal submission deadline: September 28, 2016

The National Resource Center invites online proposal submissions. Concurrent session, roundtable discussion, poster session, and exhibitor presentation proposals are requested on topics addressing a range of student transitions within and across higher education sectors. For more information on session types, submitting an online proposal, and selection criteria regarding acceptance, visit <http://sc.edu/fye/annual/> or contact Nina Glisson at [fyeconf@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:fyeconf@mailbox.sc.edu) or (803) 777-8158.

#### Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and the instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions or forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 25 participants, and attendees will earn 1.5 continuing education units for each course. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc> for more information.

#### Online Course Offerings

##### Applying Student Development Theory to College Transitions Programs

August 29 – September 23, 2016

Facilitated by Tracy L. Skipper, Assistant Director for Publications

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition

##### Proving and Improving: Foundations for First-Year Assessment

September 12 – October 14, 2016

Facilitated by Dallin George Young, Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition

##### Fostering First-Year Student Success

October 3 - 28, 2016

Facilitated by Stephanie Foote, Director, Master of Science in First-Year Studies; Associate

Professor of Education, Department of First-Year and Transition Studies, Kennesaw State

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## Publications

The National Resource Center, along with Dr. Christina Hardin, Editor, is pleased to announce the inaugural members of the Editorial Review Board of *E-Source for College Transitions*:

Rebecca Campbell, Northern Arizona University

Kevin Clarke, University of Wisconsin

Richard Gebauer, Cabrini University

Andrew Lee, Fort Valley State University

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The review board members serve three-year terms, advising the editor on the suitability of submitted manuscripts for publication in *E-Source* and providing detailed feedback to authors.

New board members will be added annually in the spring of each year. For more information about *E-Source* or to learn about the review board member application process, please visit [sc.edu/fye/esource](http://sc.edu/fye/esource) or email the editor at [ESOURCE@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:ESOURCE@mailbox.sc.edu).

## National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is actively involved in the conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and meet National Resource Center staff members.

Keynote session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2016 Midwest First-Year Experience Conference; September 23, 2016; Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois.

## Awards and Recognition

### 2017 Award for Institutional Excellence for Students in Transition

*Nomination Deadline: August 5, 2016*

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2017 Award for Institutional Excellence for Students in Transitions. The award is presented annually to institutions that have designed and implemented outstanding collaborative initiatives enhancing significant transitions during the undergraduate experience. Award recipients will have demonstrated the effectiveness of the initiative in supporting student success, learning, and development at a variety of transition points beyond the first college year and in responding to unique institutional needs. The award package includes two complimentary registrations to the 23rd National Conference on Students in Transition, recognition at the conference, and opportunity to present a poster session on the award-winning initiative. Nominations will be accepted starting mid-May until early August. Please visit [http://sc.edu/fye/awards/IE\\_Award.html](http://sc.edu/fye/awards/IE_Award.html) for more information and submission instructions, or go to <https://nrcprop.wufoo.com/forms/institutional-excellence-for-sit-award/> to complete a nomination package.

## Sign up for



Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transitions, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for future issues. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and receive content alerts for new issues, please visit:

[www.sc.edu/fye/esource](http://www.sc.edu/fye/esource).

## The Toolbox

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*The Toolbox* is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative, learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

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