

a new chapter

How parents fit into their students' lives at college

The Value of Getting Involved: What the Research Says

Purpose

When students are marginally committed to their college or university, they're more likely to leave. Yet, when they become more committed by engaging in purposeful activities, their connection to campus strengthens. They feel obligated and responsible (Bean, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993).

For instance, student leaders who hold positions in student groups "know that others depend on them for service, guidance, and follow-through on important initiatives. Thus, they feel committed to their respective organizations and the institution at large, and are less likely than are disengaged students to leave" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 4).

Retention

Getting involved—or *engaging*—in educationally purposeful activities, both in and out of the classroom, is the most significant factor in determining whether a student will stay in school or not (Tinto, 2000). Those who leave school often do so because they feel disconnected – from their peers, from faculty, from administrators and from their school. "Leaves of this type express a sense of not having made any significant contacts or not feeling membership in the institution" (Tinto, 2000, p. 7).

Involvement Theory

Alexander W. Astin's student involvement theory says that "the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (Astin, 1999, p. 13).

He considers involvement to be an active term and shares verbs that go along with it:

- Attach oneself to
- Commit oneself to

- Devote oneself to
- Engage in
- Go in for
- Incline toward
- Join in
- Partake of
- Participate in
- Plunge into
- Show enthusiasm for
- Tackle
- Take a fancy to
- Take an interest in
- Take on
- Take part in
- Take to
- Take up
- Undertake

So, student involvement can:

- Enhance students' connection to campus
- Increase students' commitment to the institution
- Encourage students to stay in school
- Increase students' personal development
- Enhance students' learning

Sources: All information, except Student Involvement Theory, from *Student Engagement in Higher Education* edited by Shaun R. Harper and Stephen John Quaye, 2009; Student Involvement Theory section from "Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education" by Alexander W. Astin in *Journal of College Student Development*, Sep/Oct 1999.

Belonging

Searching for a sense of belonging can be a potent force among students. They want to belong to something bigger than themselves, whether it's a group of close friends or a community in which they take pride. Providing positive ways for them to find that sense of belonging so they don't turn to destructive habits and people who may not be the best influence is just one of the benefits of creating a community where everyone feels welcome.