



# Building Community to Foster Student Success



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**2025 Presidents Institute**

January 4–7, 2025 ● JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Resort & Spa ● San Antonio, Texas



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## Presenters

*Joretta Nelson*, Vice Chairman and Founder of Moving the Needle, Credo Consulting

*Alex Kappus*, Account Executive for Student Success, Credo Consulting

## Chair

*Angela Cant*, Senior Advisor, CIC Presidential Spouses and Partners Program; Presidential Spouse, Wilkes University (PA).

# Why are we here?

Presentation, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Session Roundtables, 11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

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## Session Goals:

- Introduce key concepts about student success in higher education
- Review the relationships between community and retention
- Discuss the power of Presidential Spouses and Partners in fostering community
- Provide space for discussion and sharing promising practices!

# Agenda



Introductions



Why student success matters



Why improving student success is challenging



Why community and sense of belonging matter



Sharing best and new practices

# about Credo

550

College, university, & association partners since 1995

120

Campuses & associations engaged per year

200

Partner projects per year

2

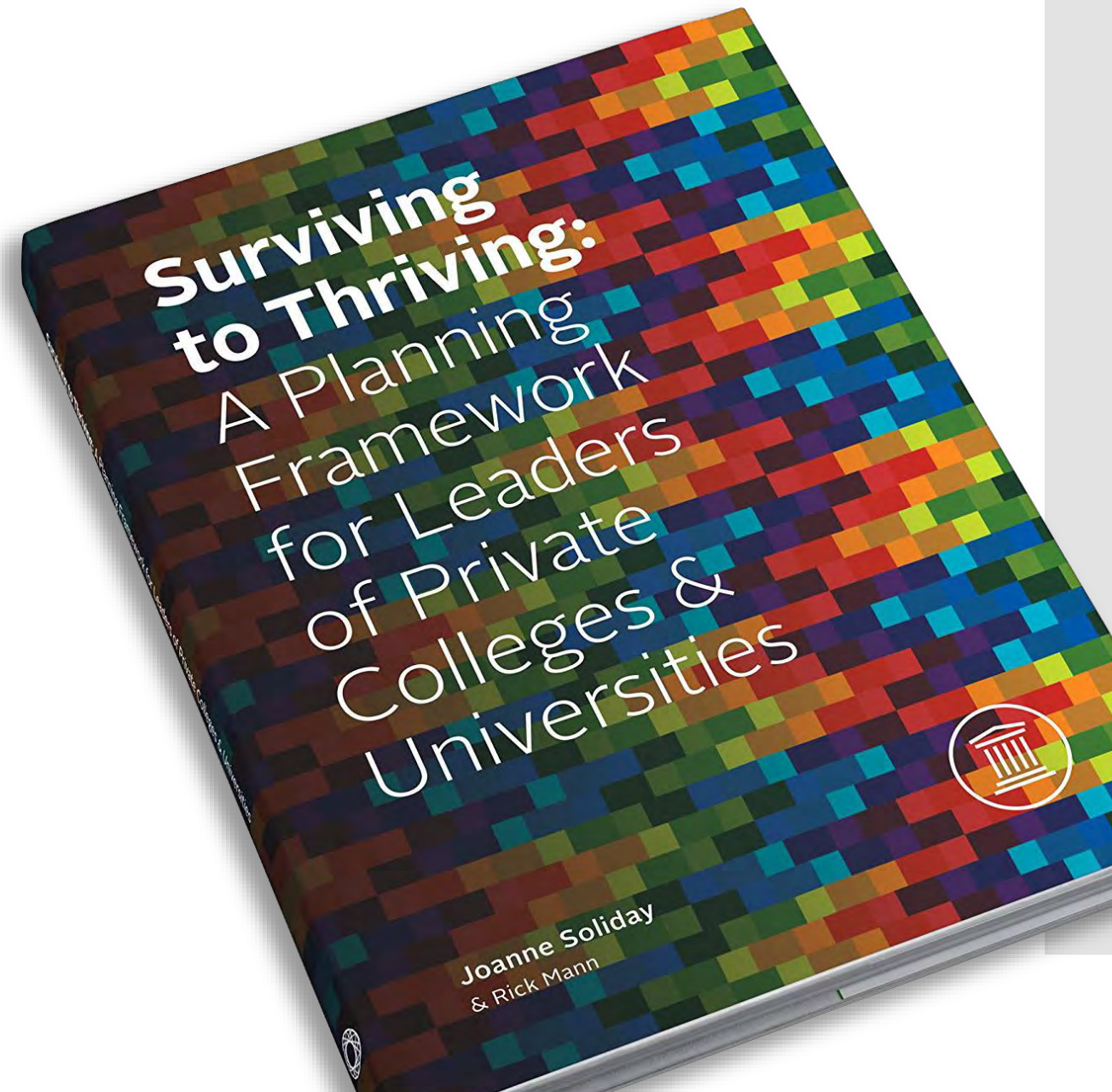
Key areas of focus: strategy & student success

200+

Credo team members around the country



Context:  
We wrote the book  
on institutional  
thriving for higher  
education...



And a book on  
institutional change  
in higher education...







Pair & Share:

Name – Institution/Years

What do you hope to learn in this session?

# Community & Belonging

“The Collective Affiliation Model does not view student dropout as the student’s inability to integrate into the life of the institution; rather, it views it as the **institution’s inability to collectively** affiliate with the student.”

Davidson & Wilson, 2017

# Navigating the Campus Environment to Impact Student Success

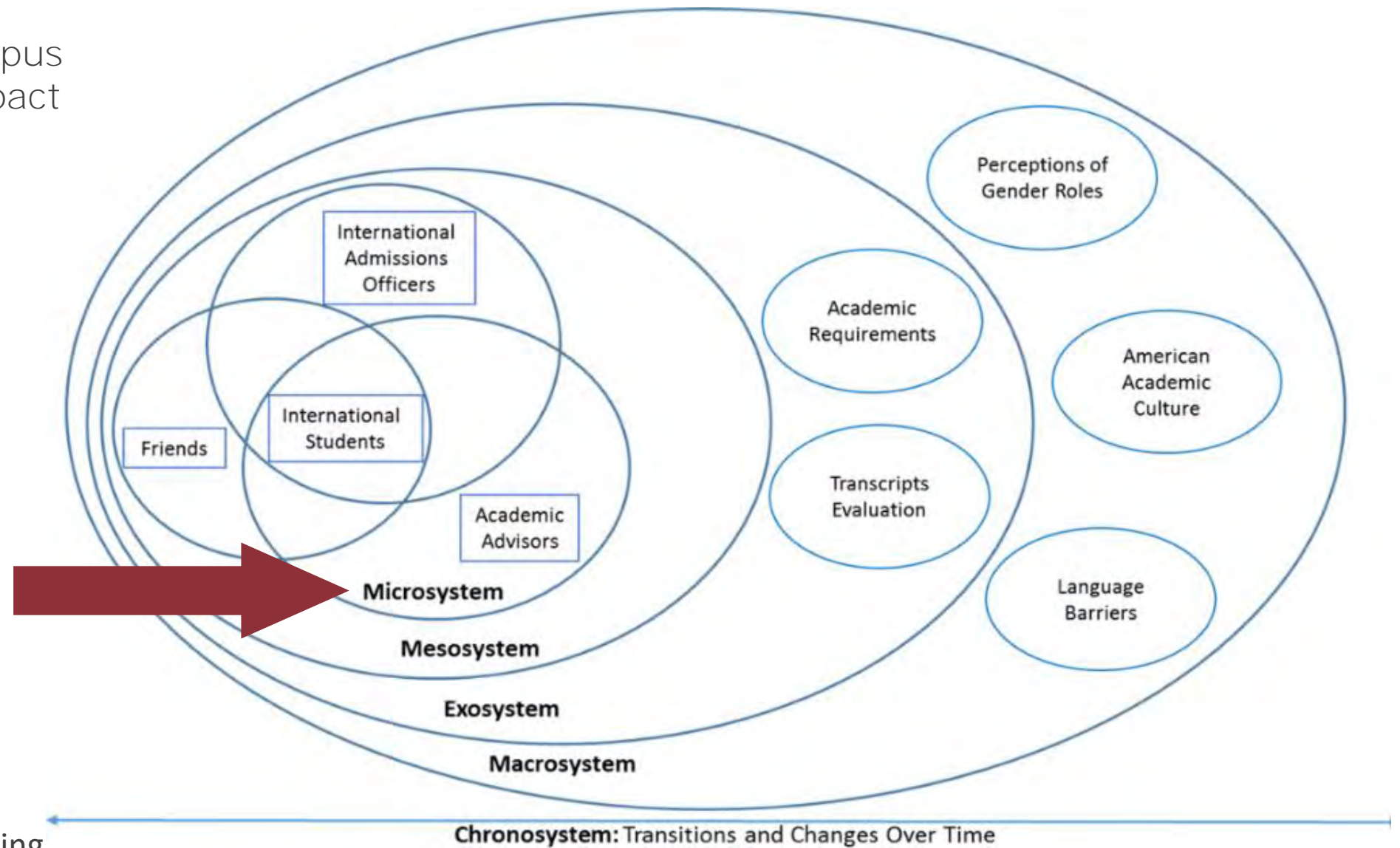


Figure 1 from Zhang (2018)  
Using Bronfenbrenner's  
Ecological Approach to  
Understand Academic Advising

# Microsystem: Lollipop Moments

1:1





Taking you back  
to 2006...



**Dr. Santa Ono, Emory University**

**Gwendolyn (Wendy) Yip Ono**  
and family



To 2015...



University of Cincinnati





And to 2024...



University of Michigan



# Navigating the Campus Environment to Impact Student Success

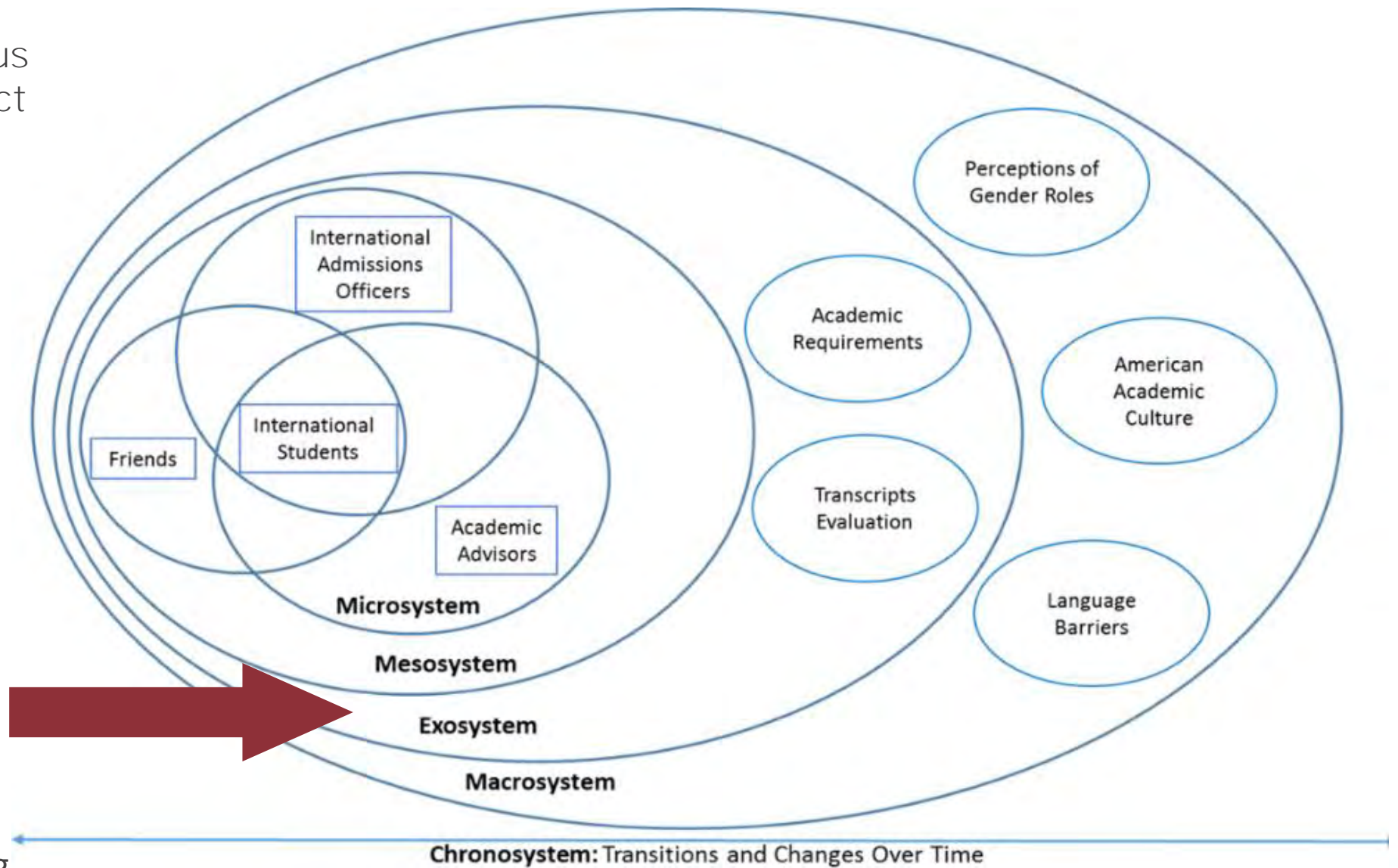


Figure 1 from Zhang (2018)  
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How do you define student success?



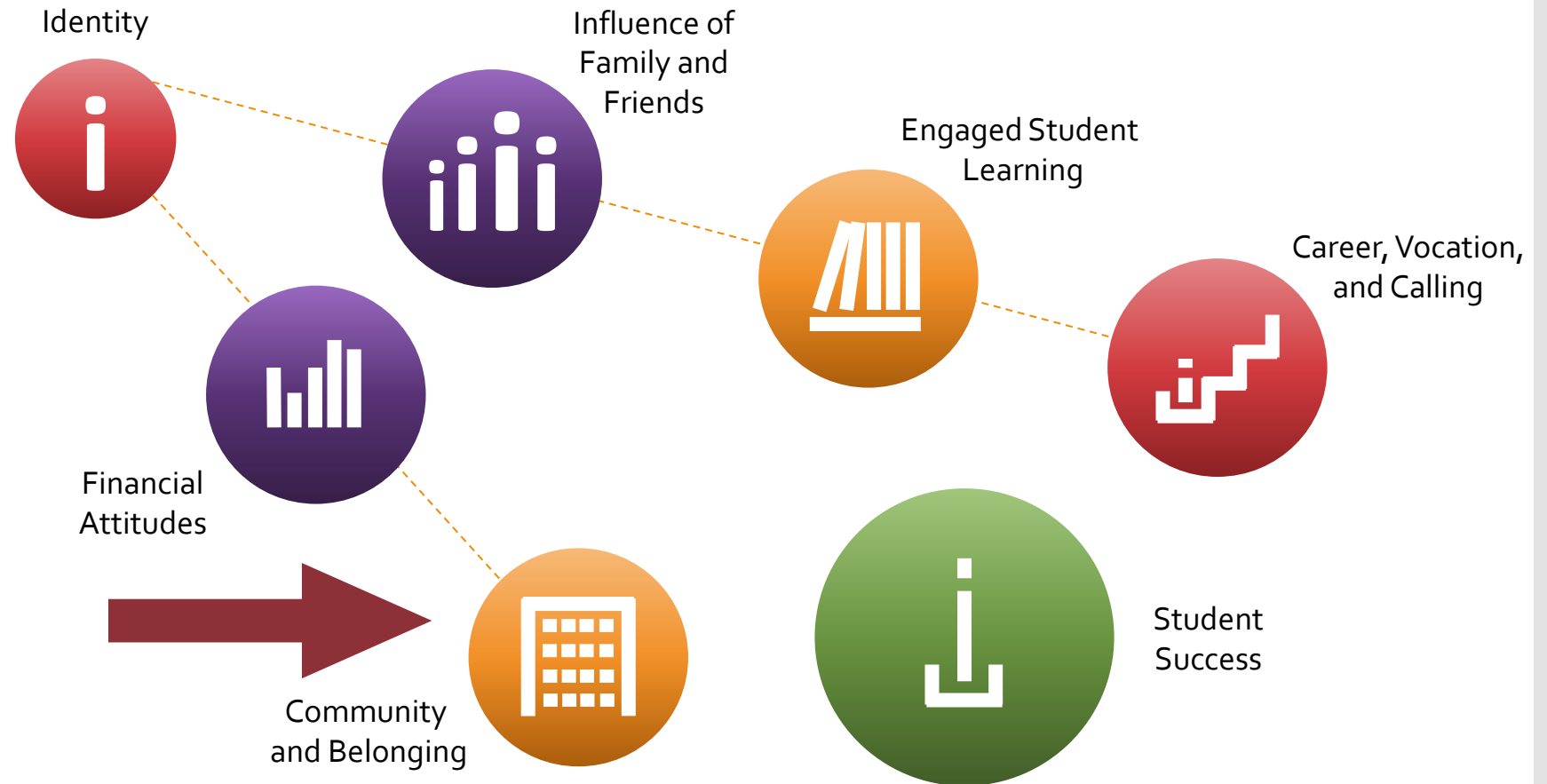
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# How We Think About Student Success





Why is student success so important to  
my institution?



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# Seven Legal Ways to Get Resources



- GROW: more new students, better retention (MORE net tuition revenue!)



- RAISE: annual fund, campaign, major gifts



- BORROW: bond issue, other forms of traditional financing



- SHIFT: (the hardest) – stop doing something to do something else



- FOCUS: create efficiencies with existing resources



- ALTERNATE: create new revenue streams



- PARTNER: cooperation through mergers and acquisitions



Landscape:

## The Enrollment Cliff

### Birth Rate Decline & Corresponding Enrollment Cliff

#### Number of 18-Year-Olds

When the Great Recession hit in 2008, the birthrate took a nosedive that many attributed to the economy. However, although the economy has rebounded in the decade since, the birthrate has not. **This has a direct implication for the number of potential high school graduates.**



#### Explore by Institution Type or Race/Ethnicity



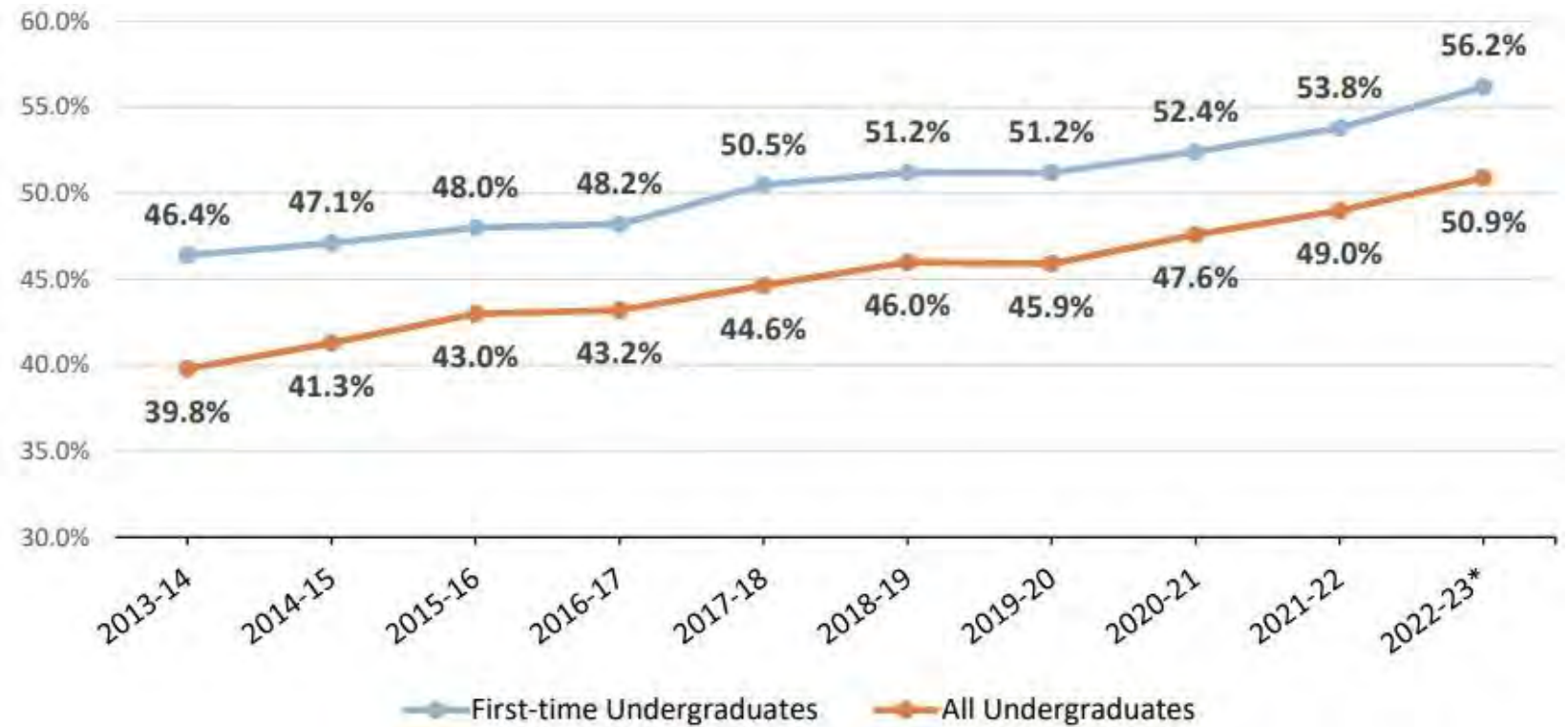
#### Four-Year College Enrollment

Although not all colleges and universities will see a decline in student enrollment, many of those that do will be hit hard. **Regional bachelor's institutions** are expected to lose more than 11 percent of their students by 2029, whereas demand for **elite institutions** may be up to 14 percent higher in 2029 than it was in 2012.

Landscape:

Cost &  
Affordability

Average Institutional Tuition Discount Rate, by Student Population



Discount Rate = Total institutional grant aid awarded to first-time, full-time, degree- or certificate-seeking first-year undergraduates as a percentage of the gross tuition and fee revenue the institution would collect if all students paid the sticker price.

A collage of various US dollar bills, including \$100, \$50, and \$20 bills, scattered across the top and bottom of the slide.

# Key Institutional Financial Measures

## Retention

Retention rate is the percentage of a school's first-time, full-time undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year. For example, a student who studies full-time in the fall semester and keeps on studying in the program in the next fall semester is counted in this rate.

*(National Student Clearinghouse)*

Unprecedented  
2+ % retention drop  
in pandemic

Recovered to 75%  
national average,  
still below pre-  
pandemic levels.

THIS MEANS:  
1 in every 4 college  
students leaves  
after their first year.

How do we drive the success of our students through these challenges while also improving institutional financial health?

As key measures of student success, persistence and retention must become a central focus of strategy, a core leadership orientation, and at the heart of culture and institutional momentum.

Persistence  
and  
Retention





# What's so challenging about student success?



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# The Problem:

## Persistence and Retention

76.5%

The national rate for fall 2022 first-time students returning for a second year to **any institution**

68.2%

The national rate for fall 2022 first-time students returning for a second year to their **initial institution**

### Racial equity gaps in first-time retention rates

76.0%

White students

72.1%

Latinx students

62.4%

Black students

66.9%


Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students

61.5%

Native American students

*Persistence and Retention.* (2024, June). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved October 2024 from [nscresearchcenter.org/persistence-retention](https://nscresearchcenter.org/persistence-retention)





## Pair & Share:

What challenges are you hearing about on your campus related to student success?

# Current Student Challenges

1st Gen Numbers Increasing

Connecting Education to Career

Student Mental Health Crisis

Increased Support Needs

- **22% rate overall mental health as “poor”**
- The majority of students entering college meet at least one criteria of a mental health issue.
- 20% struggled with suicidal ideation during pandemic

Ezarik, M. (2022, April). *Student mental health status report: Struggles, stressors and supports*. Inside Higher Ed.  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/04/19/survey-college-students-reflect-mental-health-and-campus-help>

Landscape:

National  
Narrative of  
Higher  
Education

## Is College Worth It?

*As economic outcomes for young adults with and without degrees have improved, Americans hold mixed views on the value of higher education.*

**Poll finds only 36% of Americans have confidence in higher education**

### **Public Opinion on Value of Higher Ed Remains Mixed**

New public opinion survey shows Democrats and Republicans alike are pessimistic of the long-term benefits of a college degree. Partisan divides still exist in solutions to address the rising cost of education and the role race plays in limiting access to college.

**Is College Worth It? Consider These Factors Before Enrolling**







# How Sense of Community Makes a Difference



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# How sense of community can make a difference in thriving students

“Thriving implies a student is fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and is experiencing a sense of well-being that contributes not only to his or her persistence to graduation, but also to **success in life**” (p.42).

Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson (2012)

Psychological sense of community is the strongest contributing pathway to thriving for all students!



# Sense of Community

## Membership

- Symbols, signs, rituals
- **Not just “welcome: but a full member of the community ---** leads to a sense of belonging and validation

## Relationship

- Opportunities for positive interactions
- Celebrations
- Shared emotional connections

## Ownership

- Student voice
- Contribution
- Mattering to the institution

## Partnership

- Interdependence
- Shared goals
- Reciprocity

McMillan & Chavis (1986); Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson (2026)



# Engaging Students in Meaningful Community-Building Opportunities



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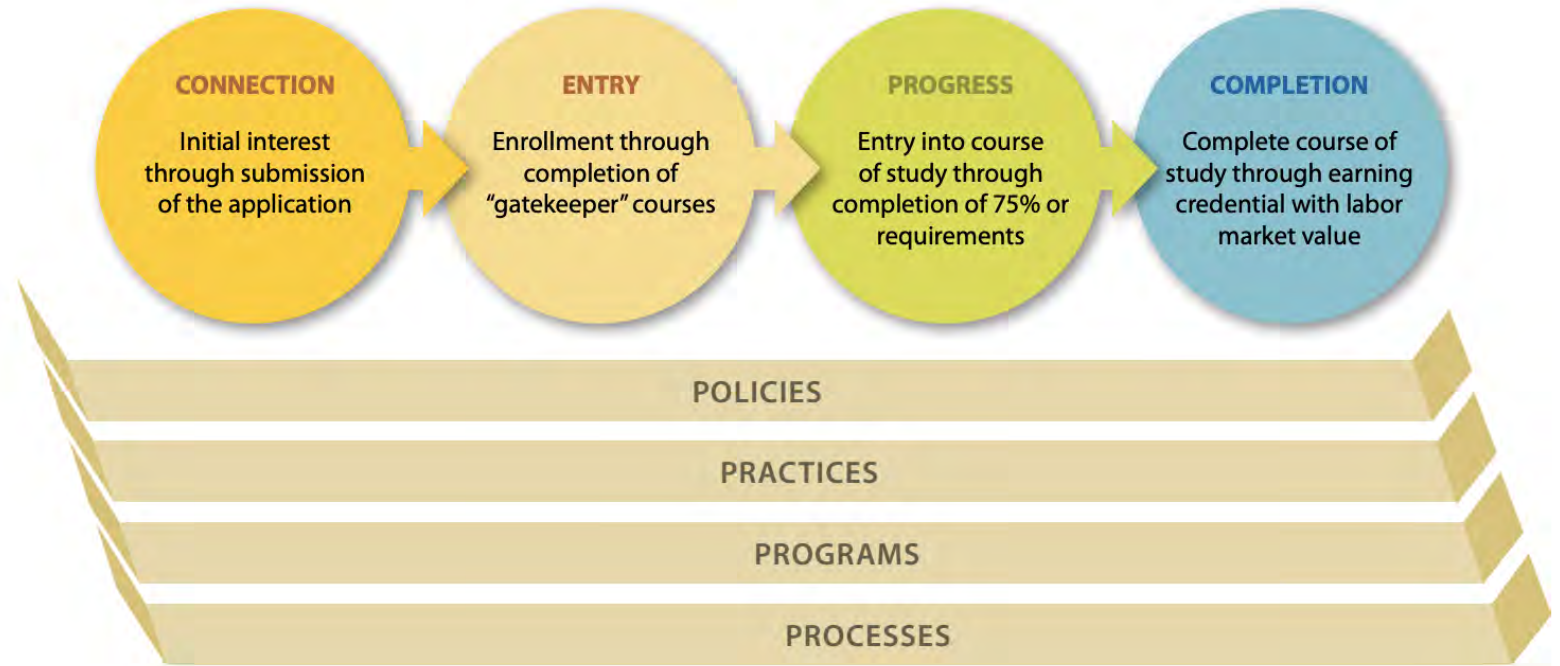
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# Engaging Students

## The Four Phases of the Preventing Loss, Creating Momentum Framework<sup>5</sup>



Rassen, Chaplot, Jenkins, & Johnston (2020). Understanding the student experience through the loss/momentum framework. Retrieved from: <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/understanding-student-experience-cbd.pdf>

# Engaging Students

## Populations and High Impact Areas:

First Generation Students

Civic and Democratic Engagement

Freshman Students

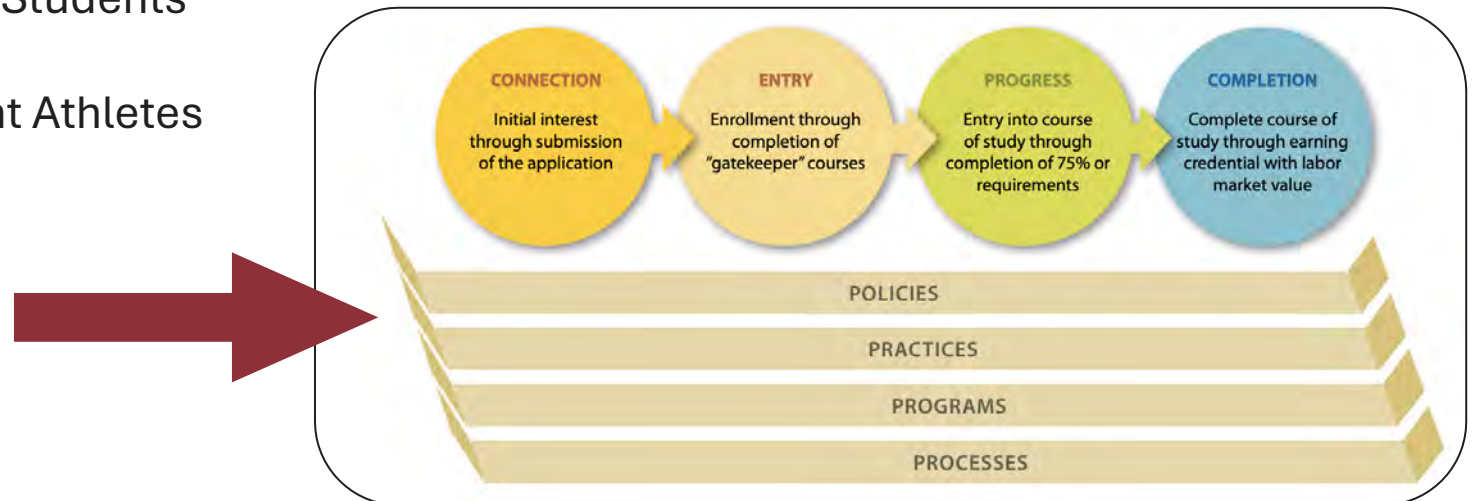
Mentoring Students

Supporting Diverse Student Groups

Student Leadership Programs

Senior Students

Student Athletes



# Roundtable Discussions

## Time for Lunch!

**Reflect on what you've learned in this session, and then** think specifically about the population or high impact area at your table and consider:

- What are some of the challenges that students are encountering on your campus?
- What are things happening that are working to support student success?
- What are some ideas could you envision being helpful to support this population or high impact area?

### *NOTE:*

Be sure to assign someone who can share insights with the larger group at around 12:15 p.m.





# Closing Reflection



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Thank you!

*Let's stay in connected:*

Alex Kappus: [akappus@credohighered.com](mailto:akappus@credohighered.com)

Joretta Nelson: [jnelson@credohighered.com](mailto:jnelson@credohighered.com)



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*Strayhorn, T.L. (2018). College Students' Sense of Belonging (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). London: Routledge.*

Zhang, Y. L. (2018). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to understand academic advising with international community college students. *Journal of International Students*, 8(4), 1764-1782.