

# STUDENT SUCCESS COLLABORATIVE STUDENT RESEARCH STUDY & FINDINGS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## OVERVIEW

In order to better understand the student experience, EAB conducted a research study on 25 students across 3 institutions. The goal was to understand the concept of academic success by asking "How does the target audience organize their thinking around academic success and what factors do they think play a role when working towards that success?" In order to answer the larger question, our interviews with students focused on understanding the following smaller questions including:

How do participants go about planning their academic career?

What methods do participants prefer information related to their success?

How do participants think about external factors affecting that path to success?

How do they think about seeking help if they need it?

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## TARGET AUDIENCE

The students interviewed were spread across many student segments including freshmen through seniors, first generation, financial aid recipients, greek-affiliated, working/employed as well as those living both on- and off-campus.

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## FINDINGS

After careful analysis of our transcripts and an extensive mental model, we were able to distill the findings into a concept model that best represented the students' thoughts, feelings and beliefs towards our research topic. The theme heard repeatedly throughout the interviews was the topic of engagement. This included engagement with studies, engagement with other people and engagement within events or activities. These three areas formed the basis for our concept model. That model is described in detail on the following pages.

## THE MODEL

### PRIMARY SPHERES

In our model, there are three primary spheres– the people sphere, which includes individuals such as friends or peers, the academic sphere which includes learning-based areas such as grades and the events sphere which includes time-based activities such as graduation. To a student, these areas tend to overlap each other to form college-based experiences. This spherical overlap creates what we are terming, “Secondary Associations”.

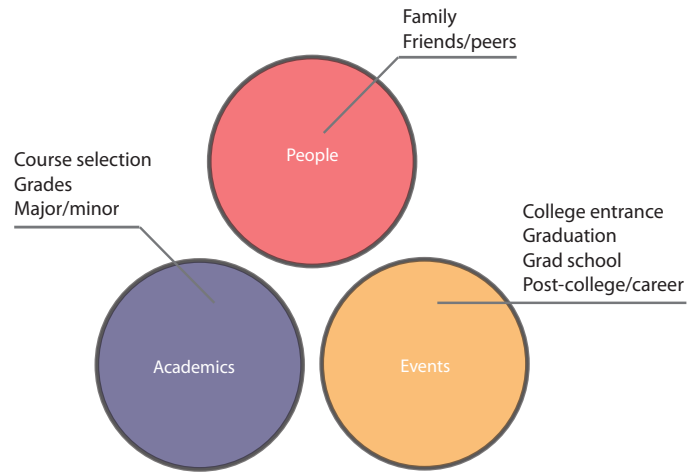


Fig 1. The primary spheres

### SECONDARY ASSOCIATIONS

The secondary associations are found by combining primary spheres and examining the interactions. Where people and academics come together, one can find a special “relationship” area which includes the people that the student associates with academic relationships. Where people and events overlap, we can find the “involvement” area which is the area encompassing a student’s involvement in such things as extra-curricular activities. Finally, where time based events and academics overlap, one can find the areas of academic events related to “learning”, both in and out of a class.

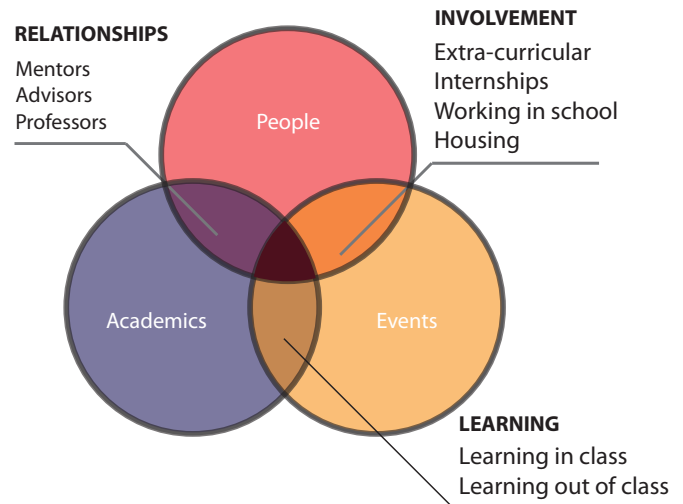


Fig 2. The secondary associations

### AREA OF ENGAGEMENT

Finally, where all of these areas come together, we have a unique middle space – the area of engagement. Engagement is at the very heart of a student’s definition of success – engagement with individuals, learning and events. For this reason, it is important to understand that this level of engagement comes from balancing all of these areas by communicating, managing time and growing through self-awareness. A student was at their best when all of these areas were able to work together in a manner that was most useful and considered balanced for that individual student.

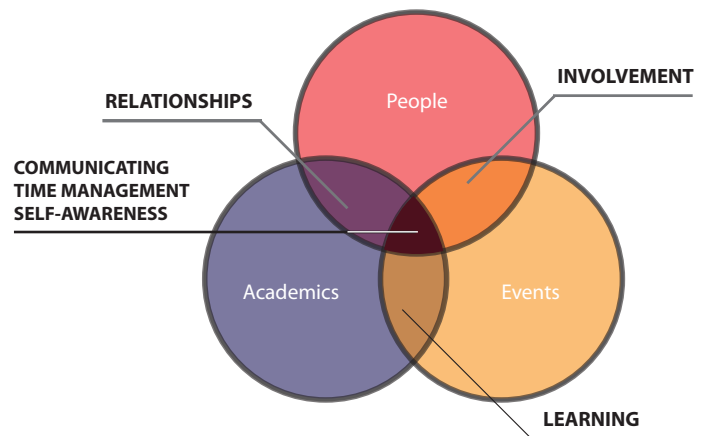


Fig 3. The area of engagement

## THE STUDENT MODELS

Figure 3 on the previous page represents a balanced student; however, research showed that students often go through periods of imbalance. Essentially, **students change over time**. In order to understand how they change it is necessary to modify the model to illustrate how students shifted and re-aligned their priorities. In the figures below, gray denotes missing entities while bold indicates heavy emphasis.

### THE HOMEBODY

This seems to be the most popular model of a student who is not in a balanced state because it is the typical freshman student. In this model, the student tends to place a high level of emphasis on maintaining a tie to family while staying somewhat removed from peers and professors in the institution. This student typically does not engage in many university activities. If this student is an upper classman, this is often due to working many hours, usually at an off-campus job. The majority of their free time is spent dealing with family issues and relationships and often they will have little time outside of their job to study.

#### Characteristics

- Few/no academic connections
- Very close family connections
- Low academic involvement
- Low learning

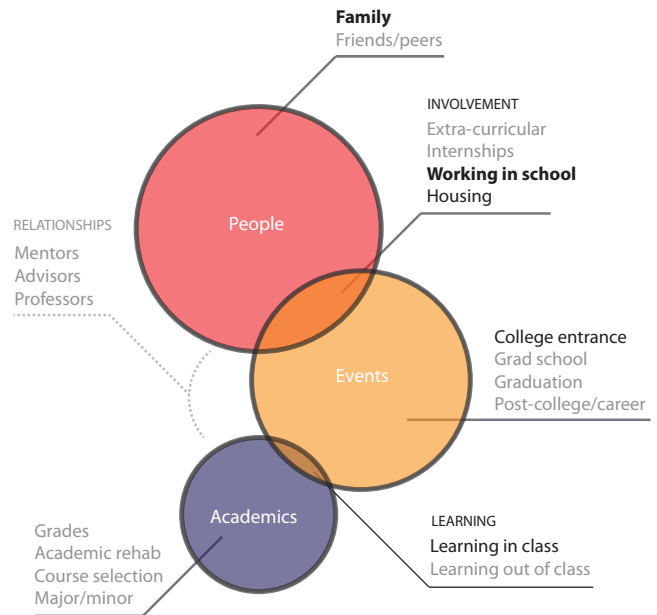


Fig 4. The Homebody

### THE SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

This model is also popular because this is the student who spends their time getting over-involved in social activities. They are members of many organizations and have a tremendous number of connections, including academic ones, however, their connections tend to be social in nature. Because of their extensive involvement, they typically do not have enough time to study and may skip class in order to meet the rising demand of a busy schedule. A student tends to stay in this model for a relatively short period of time because inevitably, their grades will start to drop. Once the grades drop the student will either drop out of school or jump into a period of academic rehab.

#### Characteristics

- Few academic connections, many social connections
- Low academic involvement
- Low/no learning

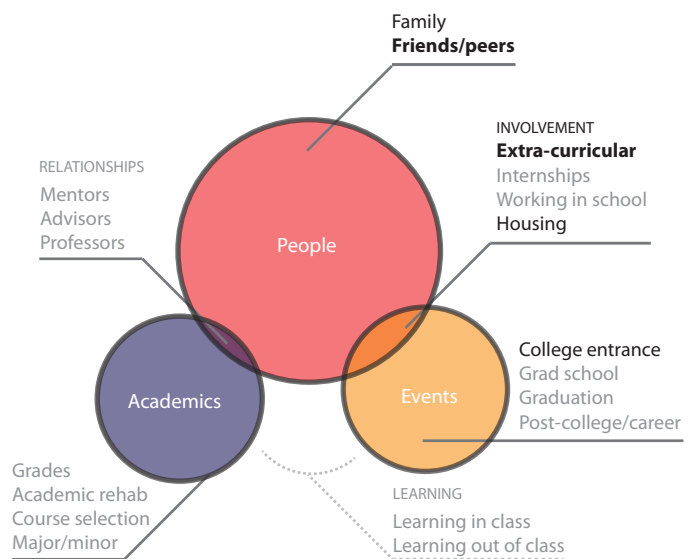


Fig 5. The Social Butterfly

## STUDENT RESEARCH STUDY & FINDINGS

### THE ACADEMIC BURNOUT

This student is often looked at by advisors as the “perfect” student. They are focused solely on their studies and they are spending most of their free time working towards a high GPA and very deep learning. Unfortunately, this period rarely lasts for two reasons – one, it’s too intense. Students who stay in this model for any extended period of time are missing the opportunities for self-awareness growth and communication maturation. Second, the majority of students who find themselves in this period as a result of academic rehab, will quickly tire of the isolation from the social activities that got them here to begin with – it conflicts with their own interests and needs.

#### Characteristics

- All academic connections
- High academic involvement
- Low/no extra-curricular involvement
- Very high learning

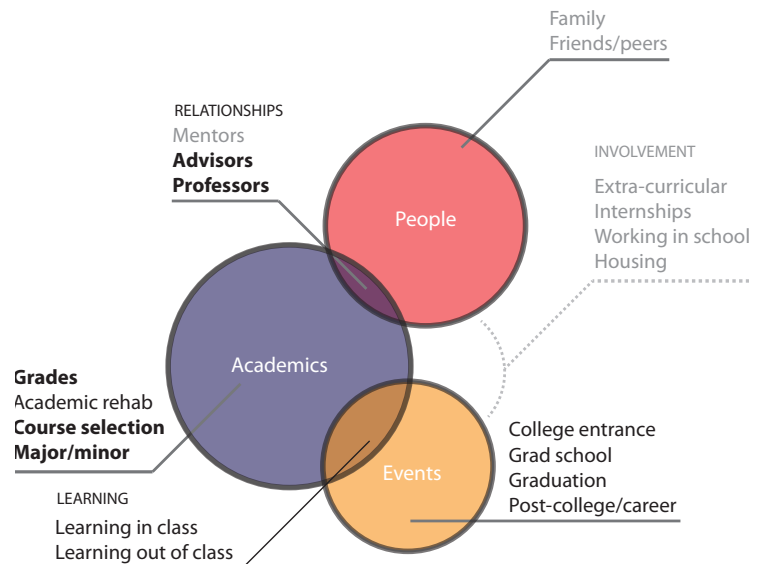


Fig 6. The Academic Burnout

### THE ADULT LEARNER/PART-TIMER

Finally, the student who is not a typical 4 year degree seeker may fall into this growing number of individuals. Because we did not specifically interview this type of student, this is more anecdotal research that is based on interviews with advisors, provosts and deans. These are the students who are working towards a degree but are working a full time job or have alternative higher priorities in their life. As such, they have little to no connection to faculty or peers within the institution and they do not get involved in extra-curricular activities. They come to campus to attend class and then leave. For the purposes of this research, they were included but not focused on.

#### Characteristics

- Few/no academic connections
- Low/no academic involvement
- High learning

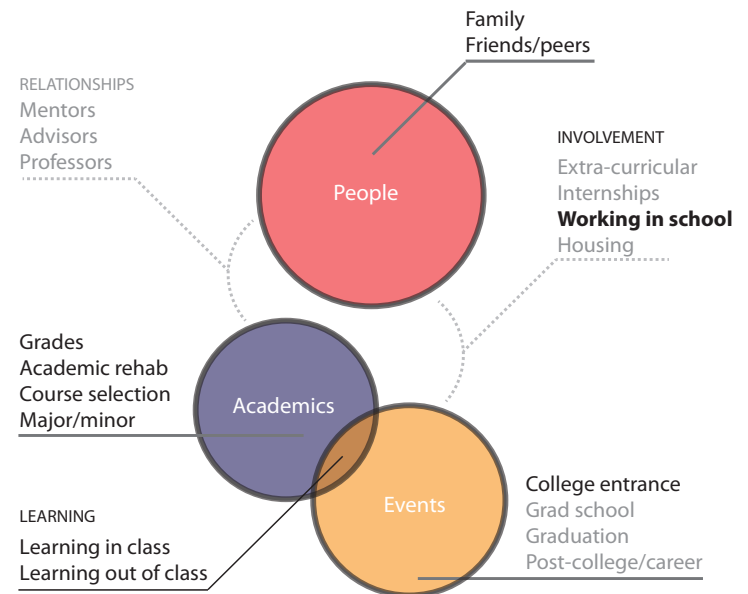


Fig 7. The Adult Learner/Part-Timer

## THE STUDENT MODELS OVER TIME

As previously mentioned, virtually every student will shift their priorities and alter their commitments at some point in their college career. They will move through various phases of the student model as they progress towards graduation. What's important to note is what events influence this transition and how the student reacts to those events. Below are several examples of how a student may shift over time. The goal is to get as balanced as possible for graduation.

### TIMELINE

In the example below, a student may react very differently to different events. Since they are still “finding their way” students may tend to make jarring changes whenever something occurs outside of their control. It’s more of a reactive instinct during the early years. They will attempt to compensate by pulling various “levers” of the student model in order to restore balance. These quick abrupt changes tend to become more moderate over time and usually move into a slower, smoother and less reactive action as they near graduation. The students who performed highest were those who were proactive and prepared for the occasional unexpected life event. This was also more common in junior and senior level classes than in freshmen and sophomores and was most likely due to a better understanding of the events along with a stronger institutional support system.

### IN CONCLUSION

With the concept model comes the ability to explore ways to create a tool that not only compliments the student’s thoughts and actions, but also works towards helping achieved this “balanced state”. When students are unbalanced, their productivity and learning tends to decline. There is a higher potential for dropout shortly after this disengagement. However, with a balanced state, the student is better able to focus on the important tasks and work to fix their issues, sooner and more efficiently while allowing the other areas to continue to thrive. The product needs to assist in this effort where feasible and practical. As such, there are possibilities and opportunities to fill this specific area of need.

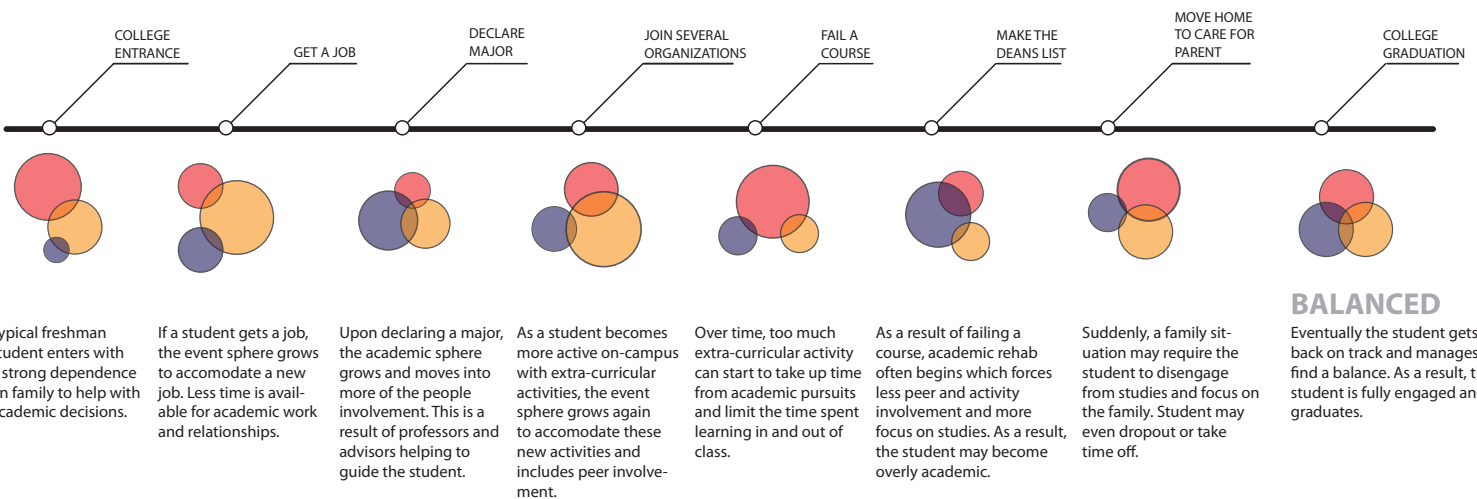


Fig 8. Student models over time