

## **What is the Most Important Factor in Determining Student Success?**

### **Executive Summary**

The goal of this exploratory endeavor is to gain insight into how different constituents define student success in order to contribute to, among others, CFR 2.2, 2.2a, and 2.2b of the upcoming WASC accreditation. Accordingly, students, alumni, faculty, and staff were asked via a multiple-choice survey question to select the most important factor in determining student success, based on an adapted list of commonly used measures identified in a recent literature review of academic success measures (e.g., York & Rankin, 2015). The most important factors for each group are shaded green in Table 1 below, and least important are shaded orange. The top three factors were: Conceptual knowledge, Workforce skills, and Career success. Conceptual knowledge was most popular among faculty and MPP, and lowest among students. Furthermore, importance of this factor actually decreased over time across alumni from older graduating classes. Conversely, workforce skills increased in importance as years from graduation increased. Likewise, career success was the dominant success factor according to not only alumni, but also lower division students, PBAC/grad students, and faculty from the College of Education. The overall results of this inquiry about student success will help support assessment efforts and actions to increase institutional effectiveness.

### **Academic Success Factors**

Table 1. Alumni, Students, Faculty, and Staff Responses

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Staff</b>
	-	491	112	94	145	140
Increasing/Broadening conceptual knowledge & perspectives	<i>Conceptual knowledge</i>	24%	19%	16%	34%	23%
Acquisition of workforce skills & competencies	<i>Workforce skills</i>	19%	23%	17%	12%	26%
Career success	<i>Career success</i>	18%	26%	13%	17%	17%
Satisfaction (overall college experience, program satisfaction, etc.)	<i>Satisfaction</i>	11%	7%	19%	8%	12%
Persistence (retention & graduation)	<i>Persistence</i>	10%	11%	14%	8%	8%
Other	<i>Other</i>	5%	4%	4%	8%	5%
Academic achievement	<i>Academic achievement</i>	5%	6%	5%	6%	4%
Student engagement	<i>Student engagement</i>	4%	2%	5%	6%	4%
Cost-effectiveness of education (college was worthwhile financially)	<i>Cost-effectiveness</i>	3%	3%	6%	3%	1%

Note: overall response rate was less than 3%.

### **Between-Group Differences & Similarities**

Overall, the most important factors were: Conceptual knowledge (24%), Workforce skills (19%), Career success (18%), and Satisfaction (11%). Interestingly, however, each subgroup favored a different factor. While career success was the most popular factor in determining student success according to alumni (26%), only 13% of current students preferred this option over the others. Rather, satisfaction was the most popular selection for students (19%), which was among the least important factors for alumni (7%), faculty (8%), and staff (12%). Moreover, most faculty (34%) considered conceptual knowledge as the most important factor, which is considerably higher than students (16%) and alumni (24%). Although conceptual knowledge was also a common selection among staff members (23%), most staff selected workforce skills (26%).

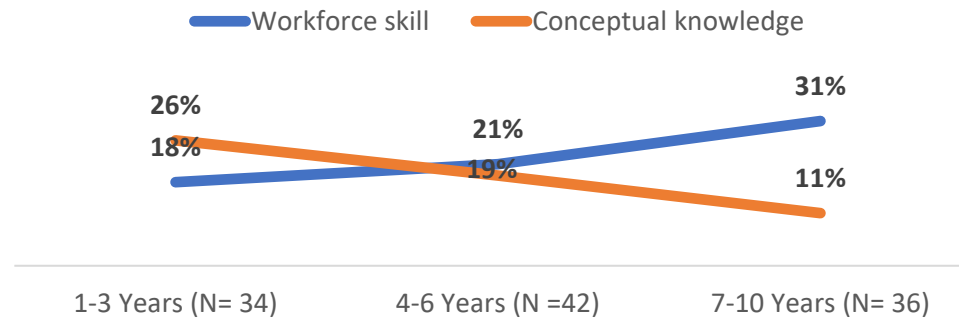
## What is the Most Important Factor in Determining Student Success?

### Within-Group Differences & Similarities

#### Alumni

The most important factors for alumni were: Career success (26%), Workforce skills (23%), and Conceptual knowledge (19%). However, some interesting differences begin to emerge if we look at responses by years from CSUSB graduation. Shown in Figure 1 below, alumni from older graduating classes selected workforce skills as the most important factor in determining student success more often compared to recent graduates. The opposite trend was found with regard to conceptual knowledge.

Figure 1. Responses by Years from Graduation



#### Students

The most important factors for students were: Satisfaction (19%), Workforce skills (17%), and Conceptual knowledge (16%). For the most part, these were the predominant factors even when responses were observed separately by class level (LD = 22, 23%; UD= 51, 54%; PBAC= 21, 22%), gender (male= 21, 22%; female= 73, 78%), Underrepresented minority (URM) status (URM= 56, 60%; non-URM=38, 40%), first-generation (FG) status (FG= 66, 70%; non-FG= 20, 21%), and Pell status (Pell= 48, 51%; non-Pell= 46, 49%). The table below shows the most important factor in determining student success by demographic group.

Table 2. Most Important Factor for Determining Student Success by Demographic Group

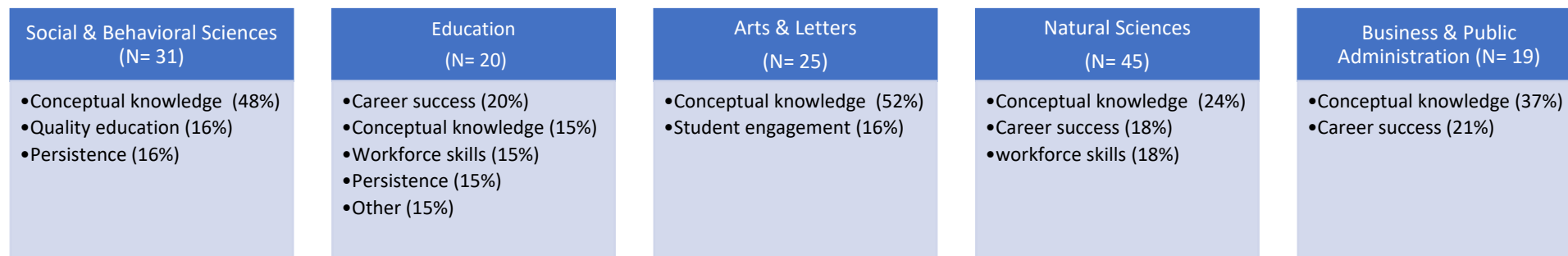
Success Factor	Class Level	Sex	URM (Y/N)	PELL (Y/N)	FG (Y/N)
Satisfaction	LD (23%)	F (21%)	Y (21%)	Y (19%)	Y (20%)
Workforce skills	UD (22%), PBAC (19%)	-	N (26%)	N (20%)	N (35%)
Conceptual knowledge	-	M (19%)	-	Y (19%)	-
Career success	LD (23%), PBAC (19%)	M (19%)	-	-	-

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### Faculty

The most important factors for faculty were: Conceptual knowledge (34%), Career success (17%), and Workforce skills (12%). Furthermore, illustrated in Figure 2, conceptual knowledge tended to be the most popular response across colleges (24%-52%), with the exception of the College of education. Another interesting finding was that student engagement was one of the least common responses for every college (<8%) but Arts & Letters (16%).

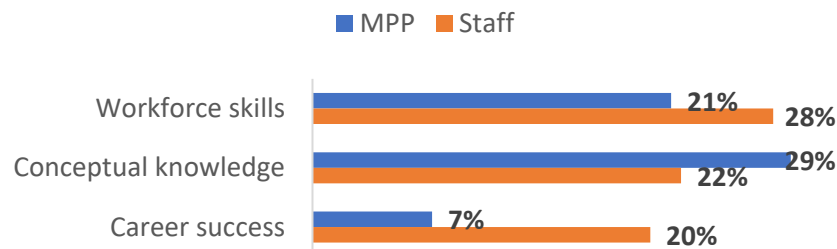
Figure 2. Top Responses by College



### Staff

The most important factors for staff were: Workforce skills (26%), Conceptual knowledge (23%), and Career success (17%). However, as seen in Figure 3, staff and MPP did not particularly agree on the relative importance of these items. The biggest disagreement was in terms of career success.

Figure 3. Top 3 Success Factors by Staff and MPP



### References

York, T. T., Gibson, C., & Rankin, S. (2015). Defining and measuring academic success. *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation*, 20(1), 5.