

1-18-2018

A Teaching Method that Boosts UNLV Student Retention

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Recommended Citation

Calkins, Celeste and Winkelmes, Mary-Ann, "A Teaching Method that Boosts UNLV Student Retention" (2018). *UNLV Best Teaching Practices Expo*. 3.
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/btp_expo/3

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A Teaching Method that Boosts UNLV Student Retention

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The practice and the need it addresses

Transparent Instruction Boosts UNLV Retention

Nationally, underserved students are half as likely to graduate in 4 years as their white and Asian peers (US DoE 2014, Tough 2014, Ishitani 2006). UNLV proudly claims the most diverse undergraduate university population in the nation (US News 2017), including many first generation and low-income students. The majority of UNLV students fall into this underserved category, and our retention rates (re-enrollment rates after the 1st year) indicate that roughly 1/4 of our 1st-year students do not re-enroll the subsequent year.

Cohort Term	Cohort Headcount	Retained at UNLV	
		#	%
Fall 2007	2,774	2,106	75.9%
Fall 2008	3,021	2,211	73.2%
Fall 2009	3,078	2,395	77.8%
Fall 2010	2,920	2,230	76.4%
Fall 2011	2,701	2,061	76.3%
Fall 2012	2,986	2,309	77.3%
Fall 2013	3,564	2,735	76.7%
Fall 2014	3,716	2,754	74.1%
Fall 2015	3,658	2,821	77.1%
Fall 2016	3,752	2,793	74.4%

UNLV Office of Decision Support

The Practice:

UNLV faculty boosted student success and retention by using this framework to discuss academic work with students.

Transparent Assignment Design Template
Faculty/Instructors (in national study, 7 MSIs) agreed to discuss with students in advance:

Purpose

- Skills practiced } long-term relevance to students' lives
- Knowledge gained } connection to learning outcomes

Task

- What students will do
- How to do it (steps to follow, avoid)

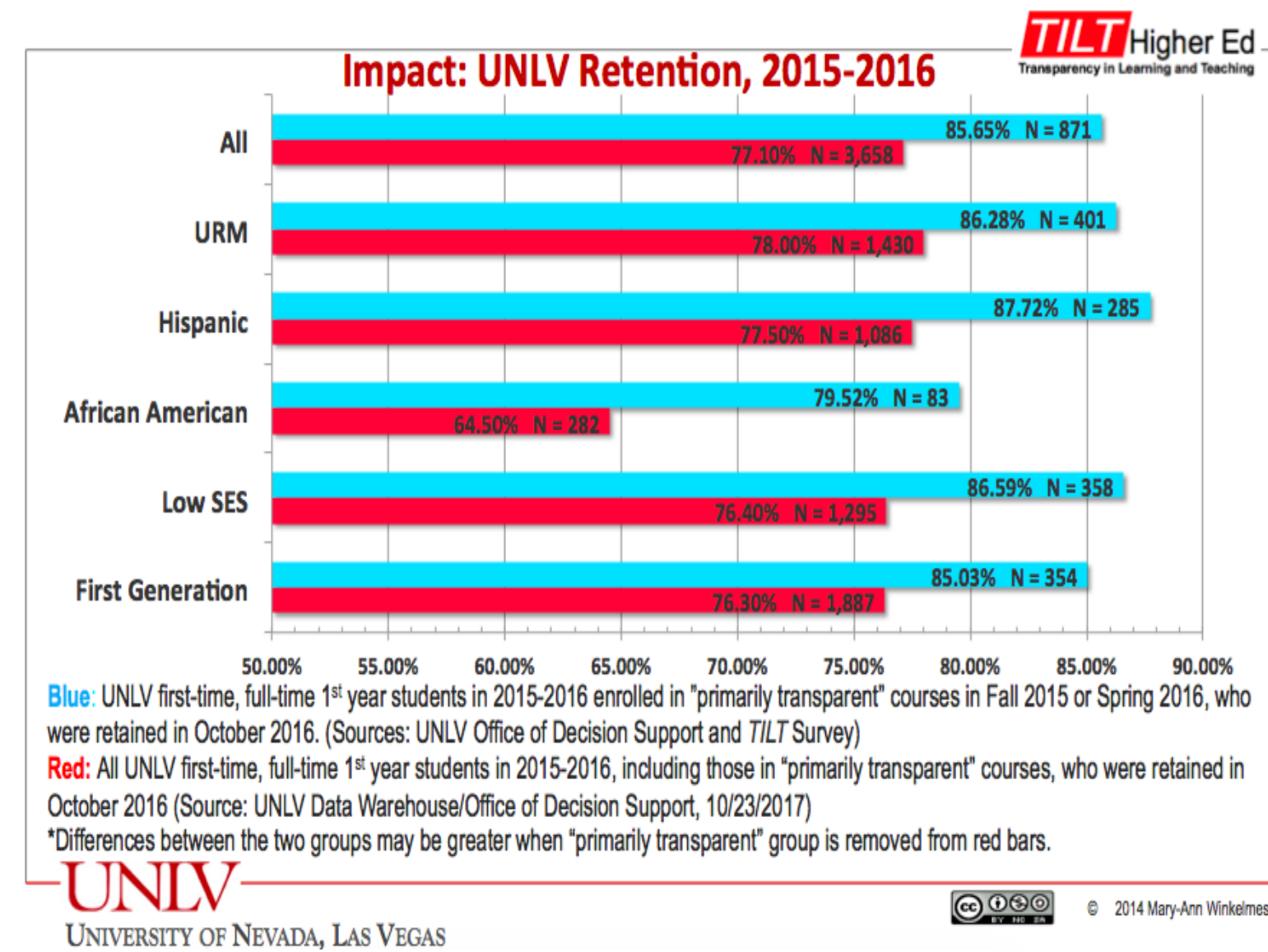
Criteria for success

- Checklist or rubric in advance so students can self-evaluate
- What excellence looks like (annotated examples where students/faculty apply those criteria)

Transparent teaching and learning methods explicitly focus on *how* and *why* students are learning course content in particular ways.

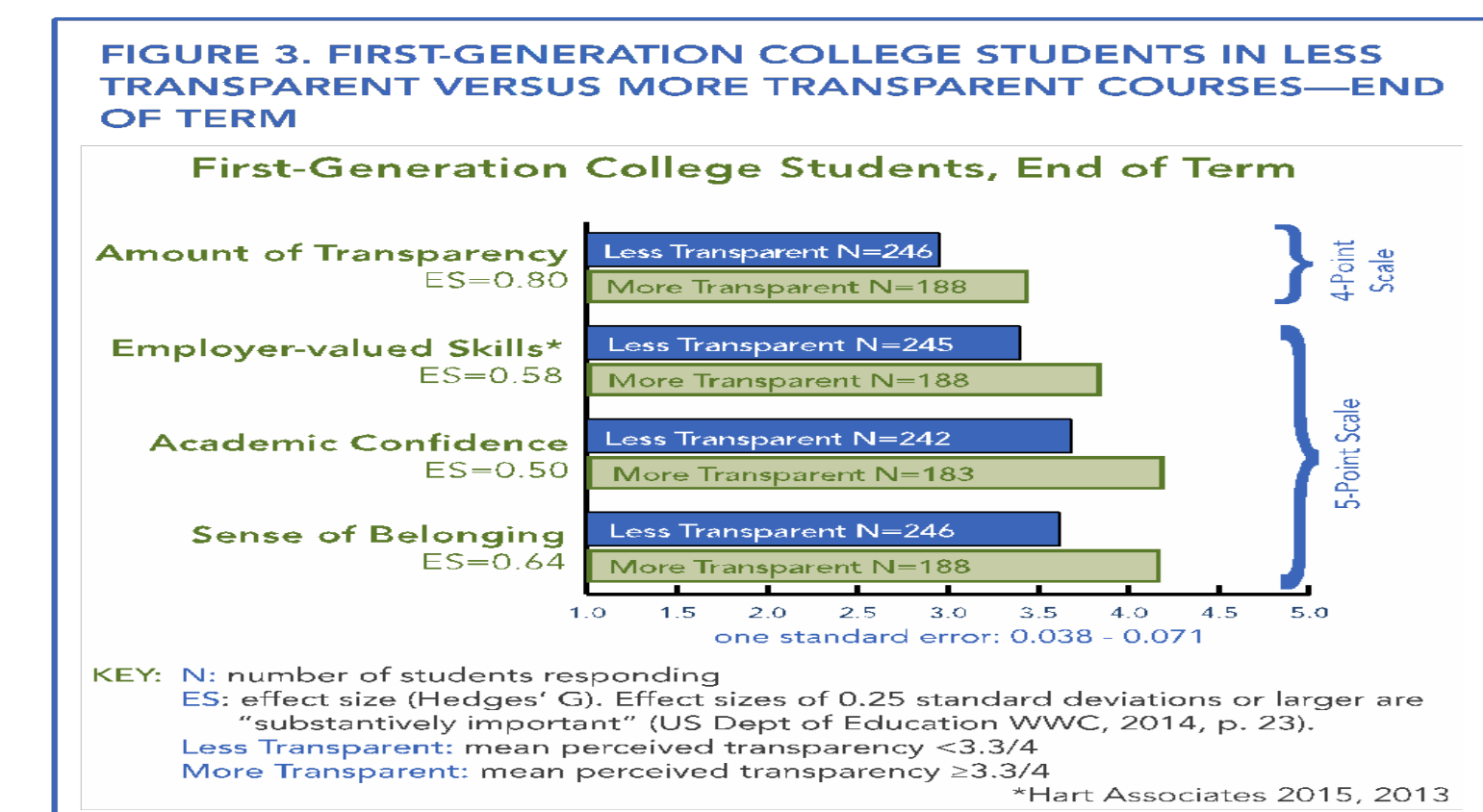
Evidence this practice benefits UNLV Students

Higher Retention rates for UNLV students who receive transparent instruction



Higher "Success Predictors" for Students across the US

Transparent instruction boosts two important predictors of student success nationally, with significant gains for all students and greater gains for underserved students: **confidence** and **sense of belonging** (Winkelmes 2016).



- Increased confidence and belonging correlate with higher grades and increased student persistence for college students (Walton and Cohen 2011, Hausman and Ye 2009).

Resources and where to find them

Examples and Resources available from [TILT Higher Ed](#) are free and downloadable, including:

- Slides and videos
- Sample assignments from multiple disciplines
- Publications
- Templates for transparent assignment design
- Self-guided checklist for transparent assignment design
- Example of various ways to offer transparent instruction
- Survey tools and free confidential reports to measure the impact on your students
- Student handout to frame class conversations about academic work:

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The Unwritten Rules:
Decode Your Assignments and Decipher What's Expected of You

Did you know?

- UNLV researchers demonstrated in a national study that transparency around academic assignments enhances students' success—especially that of first-generation, low-income and underrepresented college students—at statistically significant levels (with a medium-to-large sized magnitude of effect for underserved students). (Winkelmes et al., *Peer Review* 2016)
- When faculty make the purpose, tasks and criteria of an academic assignment clear before students begin to work on it, students are more likely to experience greater academic success with that assignment, developing the knowledge, disposition, and skills necessary to succeed both at school and in life (in comparison to when students experience less clarity around purpose, tasks and criteria for their academic work). (Winkelmes et al., *Peer Review* 2016)
- For UNLV students, benefits also included a significantly higher rate of returning to college the following year. (Gianoutsos and Winkelmes, *FADE Proceedings* 2016)
- An inclusive learning environment benefits all students and offers more equitable learning opportunities for underserved students. Research on student learning links college students' academic confidence and sense of belonging with higher GPAs, persistence and retention rates (Walton and Cohen, *Science*, 11 March 2011).
- College students increased their test scores when supported by a system that advocated the belief that intelligence is not fixed but rather malleable. A year later, these students were 80% less likely to drop out of college (Fronson et al., *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 2, 2002).

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO:

Before you begin working on an assignment or class activity, ask the instructor to help you understand the following. (Bring this document to help frame the conversation.)

Purpose

- Skills you'll practice by doing this assignment
- Content knowledge you'll gain from doing this assignment
- How you can use these in your life beyond the context of this course, in and beyond college

Task

- What to do
- How to do it (Are there recommended steps? What roadblocks/mistakes should you avoid?)

Criteria

- Checklist (Are you on the right track? How to know you're doing what's expected?)
- Annotated examples of successful work (What's good about these examples? Use the checklist to identify the successful parts.)

Aranson, J., Fried, C., & Good, C. "Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39 (2003): 113-125.
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Winkelmes, Mary-Ann, Matthew Bernacki, Jeffrey Butler, Michelle Zochowski, Jennifer Golanic, and Kathryn Harris Weavil. "A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success." *Peer Review* (Winter/Spring 2016).
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How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

Small Teaching Changes with Big Impact on Student Success

- Revise two existing assignments in a course to make them more transparent, using this [Self-guided Checklist](#) and this [Framework for Discussion with Students](#). A national study showed two revised assignments improved student success significantly (Winkelmes et al *Peer Review* 2016)
- Look at examples of transparent assignments across the disciplines: [TILT Higher Ed Examples and Resources](#)
- Apply transparent instruction to the syllabus.
- Follow [UNLV faculty examples](#) for providing transparent instruction exams
 - Rubrics for grading
 - Offer multiple successful examples so students don't cling to just one too closely
- Try any of a [variety of transparent methods](#), beyond assignment design:
 - Invite students to participate in class planning, agenda construction
 - Gauge students' understanding during class via peer work on questions that require students to apply concepts you've taught
 - Explicitly connect "how people learn" data with course activities when students struggle at difficult transition points
 - Engage students in applying the grading criteria that you'll use on their work
 - Debrief graded tests and assignments in class
 - Offer running commentary on class discussions, to indicate what modes of thought or disciplinary methods are in use

Citations

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