Best Practices and Research (selection from the original QEP document)

In selecting the theme of "student engagement," the University Planning Council (UPC) noted that greater student engagement is an oft-cited prerequisite for student success. To implement that theme, the QEP Committee undertook a review of the current scholarship in higher education to assure that UHD's plan would reflect best practices. Although the members of the committee and the members of the three taskforces appointed by the committee consulted many sources, including articles from the journal *Active Learning in Higher Education*, all participants in the process acknowledged that the most productive resources were these two:

- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whit, E. J., and Associates (2005). *Student success in college: creating conditions that matter.* Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Area 1 – Transition: The focus on students' transition into the university is supported by research that concludes that rituals that acknowledge the new status of students as members of the university community are effective means of insuring affective and cognitive readiness for the learning process. (Tinto) These initial encounters for the incoming students influence the extent to which they become engaged in the "academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings, " and such interactions Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) consider to be "the critical determinant of the impact of college." Well-planned transition activities could help establish the bonds with the faculty and the educational community. This would be particularly important for first-generation college students (freshmen and transfer), since family-imparted knowledge that would aid college success would be missing, minimal, or faulty. Still, it is worth noting Gardner and Hansen's suggestion to include options for students' family involvement when possible. Jacoby (2004) urges involving parents and families in the process of assisting students.

Kuh et al. cite the need for universities to focus on student acculturation, and they encourage universities to establish partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs to ensure the collaboration of faculty, staff, and administration to support student transition programs. Smith and Brackin emphasize that the university-wide community must remain committed to orienting new students.

Gardner and Hansen recommend creating a stronger academic tone such as common readings and discussions between students and faculty, and they suggest some type of summer bridge program. The heavy emphasis on acting early in a student's academic career is supported by the research arising from the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) initiative, cited in Kuh et al. Successful universities were "especially good at effectively front-loading multiple resources to help students learn what it takes to succeed and to establish themselves as independent and then interdependent learners."

Area 2 – Intervention: Taking action to assist students in their studies is part of UHD commitment to its students. The UHD Mission Statement offers this pledge: "To facilitate the academic success of both its traditional and nontraditional students, the university offers a wide range of support

services and employs a faculty and staff who are dedicated to helping students meet the rigorous standards and requirements of its programs."

It is important to follow up the transition or orientation of students to the university with a program of monitoring student success. Smith and Brackin indicate that appropriate support services must accompany the high academic expectations a university maintains. These services include programs occurring prior to enrollment, the first semester, and middle of the first year. Kramer (2004) considers early intervention/alert an essential element in any student success program. Kuh et al. advocate that, following formal orientations, there should be programs for new students, and early warning systems. Tinto (p. 152) offers the following justification for universities to "frontload" resources in the first year for students: "…institutions should recognize that the first year, in particular, represents a strategic leverage point where the investment of scarce resources can yield substantial future benefits in both learning and persistence."

Among the institutions in the DEEP initiative, Kuh et al. found greater success in those schools where support mechanisms are aligned with student needs. Furthermore, certain styles of intervention to assist students prove valuable not only to the students being assisted but also to other students who have been enlisted to participate in offering the assistance. Tinto notes that new students interacting with previously enrolled students helps incorporate the new ones into the "fabric of student culture" (Tinto) and helps the new student understand the "informal character of institutional life" (Tinto) - clues on how to navigate the university.

Kuh et al. also cite the academic benefits to those students who serve as the paraprofessionals. These benefits come, in part, from student tutors, or "preceptors," reinforcing their own learning by being instructors but, perhaps more importantly, from their increased interaction with faculty members. Tinto considers interactions between faculty and students key to success: "The faculty are key links to the intellectual life of the institution. Rewarding contact with them is an essential element in student development."

Kuh et al. advocate allocating resources to activities that place students in para-professional roles like those required in study abroad, service learning, internships, etc. This places students in the role of tutor/leader as well as encourages interdisciplinarity.

Mcalpine (2004) offers guidance in designing active learning strategies in university settings. Properly designed learning offers an opportunity for students to engage in "deep" learning that leads to "persistent changes in performance," as opposed to "surface" learning, that is, reproducing what the teacher wants, not a permanent acquisition by the student. Deep learning takes time for reflection without distractions. Therefore, there is a danger in overloading students. Much learning in higher education takes place outside of class, and sometimes instructors do not have sufficient foresight about how much time assigned work might take.

Kuh et al. offer advice on creating successful integrative learning strategies. In the mix there must be pedagogical approaches that complement students' learning styles. For example, concrete learners benefit more from active, collaborative styles. In addition, there should be opportunities for student-teacher interactions in domains like discussing grades, career plans, and working committees or projects. Working on research projects with a faculty member is touted as a "life-altering" experience.