# Handout # 1 - Practical Strategies: Approaches for Promoting Students' Resilience and Grit

## from *Becoming Self-Determined: Creating Thoughtful Learners in a Standards-Driven, Admissions-Frenzied Culture* (Field & Parker, 2016; Association on Higher Education and Disability)

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Given the increasing demand for colleges and universities to provide dynamic living/learning environments that address all aspects of a student's academic, psychological, and physical/emotional well-being, and the very real need to answer the call for expanded and targeted mental health support, it seems we are at a critical juncture in higher education.

We contend that campuses will be well served to shift towards a more holistic, strengths-based culture that incorporates practices that promote resilience and grit among today's college students.

The beauty of this approach is that there is no "one size fits all" set of practices.  Rather, we are learning from emerging research that there are certain skills, abilities, knowledge, and beliefs that can be taught and reinforced in a variety of ways. This is freeing. While one campus may choose to utilize a more proscribed program, another might embed resilience and grit practices within existing resources and programming. Even small, purposeful inclusion of guiding principles – in the campus mental health center, in the Disability Services Office, in orientation and transition programs, in the classroom – can further the process of developing self-deter- mined students who can manage the day-to-day stresses and challenges; who *can* persist towards long-term and personally fulfilling goals such as degree attainment.

What follows is a summary, in list form, of specific strategies described thus far that readers can utilize to promote greater resilience, grit, and self-determination in college.

**In-Class Strategies**

• Teach students to develop strong problem-solving skills in the classroom to ultimately encourage resilience.

• Build in low-stakes, formative assessments that challenge students but allow for feedback, deliberative practice, and opportunities to learn from errors.

• Provide a supportive classroom environment for students to explore challenging learning. Highlight the *process* of learning. Encourage a growth mindset.

• Provide opportunities for team-based problem solving that extends in and out of the classroom. Create communities for students to rely on one another, practice challenging concepts, collectively and independently problem solve, and offer one another feedback (blogs, group chats, online forums).

• Help students see that frustration and confusion are part of the learning process –not emotions to be avoided, but emotions to be expected. Highlight your own examples.

• Invite students who improved throughout a course to come back and speak to the class the following semester/year about what efforts and strategies allowed them to build towards success.

• Incorporate progressive grading. Improvement on latter assign- ments or later in the course can bear additional weight on the grade rather than "perfect performance" from the start.

• Structure low-stakes opportunities to take risks in the classroom.

• Build in real-world projects and service learning opportunities aligned with students' interests and goals. Set parameters and expectations but allow students to drive the process.

• Normalize mistakes or let downs as learning opportunities and "desirable difficulties."

**Campus Strategies**

• Teach students strategies for reducing stress and managing their emotions (i.e., exercise, deep breathing, time management, and study skills).

• Incorporate voices from continuing students during orientation programming, allowing first year students to hear that older students have experienced uncertainty, not-knowing, and doubts about belonging during the transition.

• Utilize peer mentoring, peer coaching, and peer tutoring pro- grams, offering both parties opportunity for connectedness, relatedness, autonomy, learning, and reflecting.

• Encourage first year student participation in courses that identify and focus on academic and career goals and strengths.

• Introduce students to campus resources at multiple points prior to and during their first year experience. Use language that not only normalizes the experience of seeking assistance, but specifically encourages this practice.

• Encourage campus health and wellness resources to provide out- reach to faculty and staff, providing education and understanding of how to talk to students about health concerns and make appropriate referrals. Invite faculty and staff to be part of the conversation.

• Develop learning communities (with or without residential com- ponent) and other campus-wide opportunities for students to connect and learn based on shared interests and passions.

• Develop proactive cited groups through Counseling Centers, Stu- dent Wellness Centers, Health Center, and/or Co-Recs with a focus on

preventative health and wellness efforts.

• Provide faculty and staff mentors within the campus residential program, allowing for important out-of-class connections and development of important relationships with school personnel.

• Use assessment tools to create baselines and post-intervention measures of students' resilience and/or grit.

• Help students create events or web-based content to build a community of practice on your campus to address these issues.

**Interpersonal Strategies**

• Encourage college students to develop a strong supportive social network (family, friends, teachers, and mentors) to increase resilience.

• Convey a strong belief in students' capacity to change in positive ways.

• Direct conversations towards students and encourage how important it is to hear "their voice" since college will be their experience   (while still acknowledging parent input).

• Help students develop an assertive communication style. Model assertive communication. Teach students how to say "no" respectfully and offer a framework for autonomous decision-making.

• Teach students to own their successes. Invite students to reverse engineer their successes so they understand and appreciate their own agency in the process.

• Invite students to "interview" themselves, thinking about authen- tic wants and goals in the short-term and long run. Help students connect proximal efforts and striving towards long-term outcomes. How do goals align with current efforts?

- Conversely, help students understand when enough is enough. Ask the student to make a list of priorities and responsibilities. Encourage personal permission to "drop the ball without guilt."  What can they let go of in order to maintain balance?

- Help students "notice." Invite them to reflect on a situation they resolved or a solution they generated. Ask questions that promote a sense of competence and autonomy, "How did you manage that?" "How did you come up with that?" "How do you think you would handle that in the future?"

- Give students (and yourselves) permission to be imperfect or, as Jason Connell (2015) says, "the gift of acceptance that we are human." Share examples and times when things did not go as planned or when you perceived failure. Invite others to share examples. Reflect on these outcomes. What do they tell your students (and you)?

- Help students develop intentional habits – study habits, time management habits, work habits – because habits require self-control and grit.

- Talk about finding balance between academic pursuits and per- sonal pursuits. Teach students the importance of self-care. Invite students to share strategies that have been successful (or haven't) with one another. Develop self-care lists with students.

- Explicitly incorporate the language of resilience and grit into conversations, group environments, and activities. "Show and tell" real-world examples. Connect back to students' lives and help them recognize times when they have overcome or persevered.

- Help students cope with stress by learning how to use positive self- talk as a problem-solving tool.

- Encourage students to journal about or create a written list ("resilience map") of how they can respond to adversity.

- Share links to TED Talks, YouTube videos, and campus-based on- line content about resilience and grit resources.

- Offer college courses on themes related to resilience and grit.