

MENU

## DEVELOPMENTS

STIMULATE YOUR THINKING. ENHANCE YOUR WORK.

### Teaching Strategies to Enhance the Accessibility of How College Affects Students

**John M. Braxton**

Professor Emeritus of Leadership, Policy and Organizations

Higher Education Leadership and Policy Program, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University

Resident Scholar, Tennessee Independent College and University Association

Affiliate Scholar, USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice

Email: [john.m.braxton@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:john.m.braxton@vanderbilt.edu)

The selection of course readings constitutes an important choice in planning for a course. Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) posits that the objectives for a course play a key part in the selection of course readings. The effects of college on students is a possible topic for inclusion in a course on the college student experience offered in a student affairs program at either the masters or doctoral degree level. Faculty members who teach such a course may choose to include the effects of college on students as one of the topics covered in their course. Because of this choice, a knowledge and understanding of the effects of college on students constitutes an important objective for such a course. Faculty members who delineate such a course objective may also designate familiarity with existing research on the effects of college on students as a course objective.

*How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works* by Matthew J. Mayhew, Alyssa N. Rockenbach, Nicholas A. Bowman, Tricia A. Seifert, and Gregory C. Wolniak with Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini stands as volume that would assist faculty members teaching a course on the college student experience to achieve these two course objectives by assigning it as required or optional course reading.

However, the choice of this book as a course reading presents challenges to faculty members. In my review of this book published in the *Journal of College Student Development* (2016) I asserted that "*How College Affects Students: Volume 3* presents a formidable challenge for scholars and practitioners to navigate its contents" (2016, p. 1060). This assertion also pertains to the previous two volumes of this trilogy: *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research* (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and to *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research* (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Accordingly, I will refer to all three volumes as *How College Affects Students* in this article.

The use of *How College Affects Students* as a course reading presents a challenge to both the course instructor and to students enrolled in the course because it is in the form of a review of literature rather than that of a traditional textbook. As a review of literature, the content of the chapters of this volume consist of descriptions of the methods and results of different empirical studies rather than the synthesis of knowledge and conclusions about content typically presented by textbooks. While the open-ended framing of the text presents great flexibility for instructors and students to leverage the empirical findings as is most applicable for their practice and scholarship, this form presents the challenge of leaving it to readers find ways to both learn from and make use of the content of this book for their own research and practice.<sup>[1]</sup>

Given the challenge in using *How College Affects Students* as a required text, what strategies do faculty members who use this book in their courses use to make this volume more accessible or comprehensible and user-friendly to their students? Stated another way: what strategies do faculty members use to help students learn from and make use of the quantity of empirical studies that comprise the chapters of this volume?

## Approach to the Identification of Strategies

I emailed faculty at a range of higher education and student affairs programs to gather the strategies they or their colleagues used to make *How College Affects Students* more accessible to students in their current or past classes. The use of an email message as method of gathering such strategies is appropriate given the type of information I requested. More specifically, my questions were straightforward and were not measuring concepts derived from theory or literature. I did not use a random sampling approach. Convenience sampling best depicts the approach I used. I did not use a listserv but rather sent email messages directly to each individual. I personally know some of the faculty members I emailed. Some of these individuals directed me to a colleague who was teaching a course on the college student experience. Given the information I requested in my email message, personal relationships with the emailed individuals would have little or no biasing influence on their responses.

In my email message, I asked faculty: "Do you use *How College Affects Students* in any of the courses you teach? If yes, what strategies do you use to teach from it given its enormity and complexity? I am working on a manuscript that will describe strategies faculty use to teach it." I received responses to my email message from 20 faculty members who provided me with various strategies pertinent to different aspects of course design and course delivery. Most of these responding individuals hold the academic rank of associate or full professor. These responding individuals teach at colleges or universities located in various geographic regions of the United States. I arrayed these aspects of course design and course delivery into the following categories: Overview of the Use of the Book, Lectures, Course Readings, Course Assignments, and In-Class Activities.

The categories listed above provide the basis for the organization of the compilation of strategies obtained from faculty members who either currently use or have used *How College Affects Students* in their courses. I obtained permission from these faculty members to attribute their suggestions to them in the text of this article. For each strategy, I indicate the name of the individual and their college or university. The designation of the individuals by names and by institutions provides readers with more information about the faculty members who responded to my email request. Such information includes the name of their college or university, which indicates the geographic region of their institution. In developing these strategies, I modified the text of their suggestions to fit the format of declarative statements of a strategy.

## The Strategies

In this section, I describe strategies for instructors to follow in their use of *How College Affects Students* (HCAS) to make more accessible to students. I organize this presentation of strategies according to the

following categories of course design and course delivery: Overview of the Book to the Class, Lectures, Course Readings, Course Assignments, and In-Class Activities. These strategies function as an equivalent to an instructor's guide to HCAS.

## Overview of the Use of the Book

Faculty members frequently provide introductory remarks about the textbooks or other assigned reading to students in their classes. Accordingly, faculty members who assign HCAS as either required or optional reading may provide their students with an overview of the ways students should use this volume. Some uses include its role as a resource for participation in class discussions and in completing course assignments. Examples of an overview of HCAS are as follows:

- It is unrealistic for students to read the entire book during a semester. Students need to become familiar enough with its format and content to use it as resource (Robert Reason, Iowa State University)
- Introduce the book as a resource book for other research and summary of research ideas (Vasti Torres, The University of Michigan).
- Use Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcomes Model to frame discussion and use HCAS to discuss outcomes (Ann Gansemer-Topf, Iowa State University).
- Tell students that they are expected to read HCAS thoroughly and critically so that they can participate fully in the course, as well as to achieve its course learning outcomes (Laurie Schreiner, Azua Pacific University)
- Encourage students to use HCAS as a resource and as a reference by having students use the index and table of contents of HCAS to locate summaries pertinent to the theme of week. For example, if the week was going to be on faculty-student interaction, have students learn more about the relationship between faculty-student relationships by referencing HCAS (Kimberly Griffin, University of Maryland).
- Use HCAS to encapsulate the student experience (Nathaniel Bray, The University of Alabama).
- Use sections of HCAS related to student engagement and retention as supplemental reading to support the contents of other textbooks by providing a broad sense of research related to student engagement (Brenda McKenzie, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University).
- Use HCAS as a resource manual for students to understand how types of colleges, student characteristics, experiences, etc. may influence the outcomes of attending college (Ann Gansemer-Topf, Iowa State University).

## Lectures

These strategies pertain to the organization of a lecture rather than the content of lectures. Such strategies include a short lecture on the use of HCAS, lectures augmented by a schema such as a Mind Map, or lectures that provide students with guidance on the use of HCAS to frame class activities and class discussion. The underlying purpose of these strategies is to help students understand how each of the specific research studies described fit into a broader pattern of findings from which some conclusions may be drawn. These strategies are as follows:

- Give a small lecture on how to read HCAS by outlining the various categories of research (e.g., "Change during college;" "Net effects of college") so that students understand what is being assessed and so that they recognize the importance of the distinctions between these broad categories (Robert Reason, Iowa State University).
- Construct a mind map of a portion of the chapter for reference during class discussion. For example, start with the Conditional Effects of College portion of the chapter and create spheres for each student group (African Americans, Latino/as, Students of Color, etc.). Next, branch out from each sphere to connect factors that were demonstrated to support students' success — or other observations that are important to

- highlight. Repeat this process for one or two of the sub-sections in the Within-College Effects section of the chapter and have students overlay the student characteristic spheres (Jennifer Tharp, Messiah College).
- Direct students to relevant sections of HCAS as needed. Direct students to relevant section in one of two ways: topical focus or effect focused. Topical focus – the class would find an outcome of interest and explore all the different things that may be contributing to it by reading a single chapter with a particular emphasis on one outcome rather than all the outcomes in the chapter. (2) Effect focused – the class would use both the index and an understanding of where a particular conjuring factor or independent variable might show up within their framework (e.g., conditional effects) and then look through each of the chapters to find what outcomes might be affected by that intervening variable (Bradley Cox, Florida State University).

## Course Readings

As I previously stated in this article, HCAS presents a daunting challenge for scholars and practitioners to navigate its contents (Braxton, 2016, p. 1060). This section offers suggestions on the assignment of course reading of HCAS. These suggestions offer ways to scale down the contents of HCAS into more manageable parts for students to acquire a knowledge and understanding of the effects of college on students and to use its content to complete course assignments. These suggestions are as follows:

- Assign sections rather than entire chapters. At the end of the semester assign them chapter 10 the summary chapter of HCAS by Mayhew et al. (Vasti Torres, The University of Michigan).
- Avoid assigning entire chapters for students to read. Students are overwhelmed by the individual research studies and miss the key points (Ann Gansemer-Topf, Iowa State University).
- Assign Chapter 10 of HCAS by Mayhew et. al. and then ask students to read the summary section for specifically assigned chapters. (Alberto Cabrera, The University of Maryland).
- Assign only chapter 10 of HCAS by Mayhew et al. Discuss with students the research methods used to develop the book and recommend that they read chapters based on their interests in a particular topic (Jungmin Lee, University of Kentucky).

Encourage students to skim all chapters and read the introductory, the concluding chapters and their chosen outcome chapter for one of the course's graded assignments (Susan Longerbeam, University of Louisville).

- Assign a group of students to read one chapter from chapters 2 to 9 in HCAS by Mayhew et al. Only the students in each group reads this focal chapter. Instruct students to select their chapter based on their research or professional interests. (Laurie Schreiner, Azua Pacific University).

## Course Assignments

This category of strategies includes a range of assignments for which students receive a grade that counts toward the grade they receive for the course. These graded assignments include research papers, discussion and reflection papers, group class presentations, and course examination questions. These assignments require students to engage in deep level learning as these assignments require a higher order understanding of course content as contrasted with rote memorization of course content (Entwistle, Hanley, & Ratcliff, 1979). These course assignments are as follows:

- Write a paper on the outcome area you selected that synthesizes the findings of Mayhew et al. and those of the journal articles you located. In this discussion paper, provide a brief summary and critique of the journal articles you located (e.g., What was the research question(s)? What methods were used? What were the findings of the study? What are the conclusions or implications of the study? What is your critique of the study?) Compare and contrast the findings from your journal articles to the research contained in HCAS by

Mayhew et al. related to your chosen outcome. Based on the findings from Mayhew et al. and the journal articles you read, identify at least three practical suggestions/implications to improve student success in your chosen outcome area that are derived from the findings reviewed in Mayhew et al. and/or the articles of your choice to support those suggestions/implications (Laurie Schreiner, Azusa Pacific University).

- Make a group class presentation. Ask students choose a chapter, based upon their interests. Students then group into teams of 3-4, study the chapter in-depth, and present to the full class a chapter synopsis, incorporating active learning such as a Jeopardy quiz on key chapter outcomes (Susan Longerbeam, University of Louisville).
- Write a final research paper on a topic related to student outcomes, present in the final class, and submit as the summative assignment. Students are required to review and cite original research articles referenced in HCAS (Susan Longerbeam, University of Louisville).
- Write a blog with a classmate about a collegiate environment (e.g., living-learning community, study abroad, diversity courses) covered in HCAS. This blog should be based on an extraction of relevant information from chapters of HCAS related to your and your partner's chosen environment (Matthew Mayhew, Ohio State University).
- Write a paper that describes citations since the publication of HCAS to specific articles referenced in HCAS concerning the relationship between an experience/environment and outcome of interest. This assignment provides students with a sense of the intellectual trajectory of this relationship and understand the opportunities to contribute to the literature (Tricia Seifert, Montana State University).
- Develop a list in response to the question: "What should a college graduate know, be able to do, and value?" With this list, you will articulate your own definition of what it means to be a college-educated person. As you develop this list imagine that you now work for BuzzFeed.com. After you complete your list, share it with at least three peers or professional colleagues and ask for their feedback on your list. What was their initial reaction? Do they agree? Do they disagree? What would they have added or subtracted from the list? Also consider sharing your list on social media to solicit feedback from a broader group of people who do not work in higher education. How do perspectives between higher education professionals and others converge or diverge? Come to class prepared to discuss your list and the perspectives and feedback others shared with you. (Assignment developed by Dr. Tiffany Davis and provided by Alyssa Rockenbach, North Carolina State University).
- Identify two or three recent news articles (e.g., in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Huffington Post*, or other news source) that relate in some way to one of the outcome categories described in HCAS. Write a three-page reflection to critically analyze the issues raised in the articles. What problems or perspectives are introduced in the news articles? How might the issues be addressed using evidence from the research related to the particular outcome category? What do you recommend to higher education professionals and faculty contending with such issues on campus? (Alyssa Rockenbach, North Carolina State University).
- Propose an Educational Intervention and Assessment Project. The project is designed to help you accomplish the following: (1) articulate the value and significance of a particular category of student outcomes; (2) evaluate and synthesize research devoted to the category of student outcomes, with attention to nuances for diverse student sub-populations; (3) identify an opportunity within a unit of the Division of Academic and Student Affairs(DSA) to strengthen student outcomes in the category of outcomes you are studying; and (4) develop an "intervention" informed by your thorough evaluation of current research that may help the DASA unit facilitate student learning and development in the category of outcomes you have identified. Using your knowledge of relevant assessment frameworks and approaches, create an assessment plan that could be implemented to determine whether your intervention "works" in facilitating the outcomes in the specified category of outcomes you selected (Alyssa Rockenbach, North Carolina State University).
- Write a paper that uses HCAS as its resource. In this paper focus on a particular (E)Environment (within or between), and trace the influence of this selected environment across the O's (Outcomes) and among the I's (Inputs) with attention to conditional effects (Greg Wolniak, New York University).

- Write a paper that entails the application of theory and research on the effects of college on students to policy and practice. This assignment takes the form of a 2 to 3 page, double-spaced, typewritten paper that describes a policy, program, or activity/activities that uses theory and research on the effects of college on students as a foundation. This paper must not exceed 3 double-spaced pages. References are not included in this page limitation (Nathaniel Bray, The University of Alabama).
- Complete a take home examination that requires a paper of 3 to 5 double-spaced typewritten pages. The maximum length for this paper is six double-spaced, typewritten pages. This page limit does not include references. The question is as follows: An undergraduate college education may be viewed as socialization to the role of an educated person in society. Merton defines socialization as "the process through which individuals acquire the attitudes, values, norms, knowledge, and skills needed to exist in a given society. Given this definition of the socialization process, what are the values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills that undergraduate students acquire as the consequence of attending college (net effects)? In responding to this question, clearly identify the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that you have identified from your course readings. Do these outcomes of socialization vary across different types of colleges and universities (between college effects)? Your written response should address these two questions (John M. Braxton, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University).

## In-Class Activities

This category of strategies consists of activities faculty members assign to groups of students to complete during class time. These strategies constitute forms of active learning. Active learning involves any class activity that "involves students doing things and thinking about the things that they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 2). Research shows that active learning activities increase the knowledge and understanding of course content acquired by students (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991; and McKechnie, Pintrich, Yi-Gang & Smith, 1986). The following in-class activities require groups of students to actively engage with the content of HCAS.

- Direct class discussion towards larger questions than the findings of specific studies reviewed in HCAS. For example, instead of focusing on the private returns to a college degree direct the class discussion to why a bachelor's degree confers an earnings premium in developed countries and how its indirect effects are mediated by how college graduates live their lives (Ernest Pascarella, The University of Iowa).
- Assign small groups the task of distilling key findings from each type of analysis (i.e., net effects, within college effects, between college effects, conditional effects) in a given chapter of HCAS and then share highlights as key take aways with the class as a whole (Rosemary Perez, Iowa State University).
- Ask a group to identify the "secret sauce" of promoting cognitive growth by selecting up to five mechanisms for promoting such growth. Instruct the group to provide empirical support for that mechanism across various studies (Nicholas Bowman, The University of Iowa).
- Assign small groups to provide a summary of a section of a chapter of HCAS. The whole class and the instructor ask probing questions of these groups (Steve Desjardines, The University of Michigan).
- The instructor and the class produce an I-E-O model for each chapter of HCAS that reflects the evidence discussed in the chapter. This activity leads to a diagram for each chapter that summarize the kinds of I's (conditional effects) and E's (within or between effects) that appear to foster development in that chapter's O's (Greg Wolniak, New York University).
- Assign groups the task of designing a campus-wide student success plan for a new institution using HCAS as a basis for this design. Create groups by institutional type such as a religiously affiliated liberal arts college, commuter campus of a regional public university, a community college and a selective research university (Nicholas Bowman, The University of Iowa).
- Begin class with a reflection activity that gets students to think about what parts of their college experiences contributed towards movement or achievement of a particular outcome described in HCAS. This reflection

- activity generates a narrative to affirm what is known from the research, to challenge it, and to consider how it might be extended (Rosemary Perez, Iowa State University).
- Assign students to one of three groups. Students are instructed to use HCAS as a resource for addressing the task of the group. The three groups are as follows:
    1. A consulting firm hired to help admissions counselors articulate the benefits of a college education to the families of diverse traditional-aged students. Their attention span is short, so you want to highlight 3-5 of the most well-researched benefits that would matter to these families. Keep in mind that some of the families are very affluent, some are quite poor, some are well-educated, some are less so. What are the benefits of a college education for their student?
    2. A higher education lobbying firm that is meeting with Congressional leaders to convince them not to add additional regulations on higher education for accountability, because there's already good evidence that what we're doing works. Congressional leaders' attention spans are even shorter, so focus on the 3-4 most solid areas that you "know" impact students' lives. Your lobbying firm represents private higher education institutions of varying selectivity.
    3. President's Cabinet making budget decisions in a tough year. You have resources to increase funding to only 2-3 key programs or areas of campus that have the most potential to impact students, and it will be at the cost of other programs – so you want to base your decision on solid research about what aspects of college are most beneficial. (This strategy is a modification of Jigsaw Learning used by Laurie Schreiner, Azusa Pacific University).
  - Divide the class into five groups. Ask each group to use findings described in HCAS to inform various public and institutional policies. The assignments for each of the five groups are as follows:
    1. A commuter institution is considering building some residence halls. What would your group recommend?
    2. A college or university is considering the elimination of social fraternities and sororities. What would your group recommend?
    3. A state is considering the level of its funding to its state-supported HBCUs. What would your group recommend?
    4. A college or university is concerned about the level of moral development of its students. What institutional policies or practices would your group recommend furthering the moral development of its students?
    5. Other than the goal of increasing the diversity of undergraduate college students, what are the benefits to students of diversity? A college or university wishes to catalogue the benefits of enrolling a diverse student body (John Braxton, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University).
  - Assign groups the task of using research derived from HCAS to advocate for higher education and additional resources to improve some academic outcomes. This task also involved the groups providing rationales for their requests that were grounded in the research described in HCAS (Rosemary Perez, Iowa State University).

## Closing Thoughts

As previously stated, the use of *How College Affects Students* as a required text presents a stiff challenge to faculty members. Given its enormity and complexity, how can faculty members make it more accessible to their graduate students? This article addresses this question by describing an array of teaching strategies that pertain to such categories of course design and course delivery as an overview of the book to the class, lectures, course readings, course assignments, and in-class activities. Faculty members requiring *HCAS* can select the strategies described herein that best meet their goals and objectives for the course as well as those of the graduate students enrolled in the course.

Two issues remain that require some attention by faculty members who require or make optional *HCAS*.

Because these two issues lie outside the scope of this article, I close by posing two reflection questions for faculty members to consider. These questions are as follows:

*Question One: Are some of these strategies more appropriate for doctoral level students than for master's degree level students?*

*Question Two: Do any of these strategies inspire you to develop your own strategies?*

Author: Dr. John M. Braxton is Professor Emeritus of Leadership, Policy and Organizations, Higher Education Leadership and Policy Program of Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. My research interests include the study of college and university faculty members and the college student experience. I am a recipient of the Research Achievement Award bestowed by the Association for the Study of Higher Education and the Contribution to Knowledge Award given by ACPA – College Student Educators International. Both awards are for outstanding contributions to knowledge that advance the understanding of higher education. I served as the 9th Editor of the *Journal of College Student Development* for seven years from 2008 to 2015. I also served as an ACPA Senior Scholar from 2013-2017. I am also a past President of the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

## References

Anderson, J. A. & Adams, M. (1992). Acknowledging the learning styles of diverse student populations: Implications for instructional design. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, (49), 19-31.

Astin, A. W. (1993) *What Matters in College?* San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

Bonwell, C. &Eison, J. (1991). *Active Learning: Creating excitement in the classroom*. AAHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.

Braxton, J.M. (2016). Book Review of *How College Affects Students Volume 3. 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works*. *The Journal of College Student Development*, 57 (8), 1059-1061.

Entwistle, N. J., Hanley, M., & Ratcliffe, G. (1979). Approaches to learning and levels of understanding. *British Educational Research Journal*, 5(1), 99-114.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (1991). *Active learning: cooperation in the college classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Mayhew, M.J.,Rockenbach, A.N., Bowman, N.A., Seifert, T.A. and C. Wolniak, G.C. with Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. (2016). *How college affects students. 21<sup>st</sup> century evidence that higher education works* (Vol. 3). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McKeachie, W. J., Pintrich, P. R., Lin, Y. G., & Smith, D. A. F. (1986). *Teaching and learning in the college classroom: A review of the research literature*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: JosseyBass.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005) *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San



Svinicki, M. & McKeachie, W. J. (2014). *McKeachie's teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning

[1] I asked Jenna W. Kramer, who earned her PhD student in Leadership and Policy Studies with a specialization in higher education from Vanderbilt University, to comment on the challenge that *How College Affects Students* presents to both the instructor and student. I asked for her comments because she enrolled in my course on the college student experience that required *How College Affects Students* as a text. I wish to acknowledge and express my appreciation to Dr. Kramer for her comments that provided clarity and keen insight on the challenge presented by this volume.

13 September 2019 / Volume 17

---

PREVIOUS

## **Stuck in the Middle: How Student Affairs in Community Colleges Can Manage the Completion Agenda**

---

NEXT

## **The Myth and Practice of Grief in Student Affairs**

---

---

### **RECENT ARTICLES**

- [Health Coaching for Graduate Students: Promoting Academic Success and Well-Being– Duke D. Biber & Dena Kniess](#)
  - [What They Don't Tell You About Year Two – Xianwen "Wen" Xi](#)
  - [Building a Case for Cross Racial Intergroup Dialogues for Multiracial Students in American Higher Education Institutions–Victoria K. Malaney Brown](#)
  - [Practicing the Art of Moneyball in Student Affairs – Brian W. Janssen](#)
  - [Using Games to Create Shared Experiences – Alison Fecher](#)
- 

### **DEVELOPMENTS ARCHIVES**

Select Month 

---

**ACPA MEMBER LOGIN**

---

## SEARCH



---

## SHOP ACPA APPAREL



---

[Home](#)

---

[Read Developments](#)

---

[Guidelines to Publication](#)

---

[Submit an Article](#)

---

