

**Irvine Fellows and Graduate Students of Color Persistence:
Practical Approaches for Academic Success**
by Dean Campbell and William G. Tierney

Richard J. Light¹ wrote a book that synthesizes ten years of interviews of Harvard University seniors into practical approaches for academic and personal success in undergraduate study. Although the book relates to undergraduate education, we offer selected advice from the book useful for administration of the Irvine project.

Data from student interviews address two broad questions:

- (1) what choices can student themselves make to get the most out of college?; and
- (2) what are effective ways for faculty members and campus leaders to translate good intentions into practice?

Light identifies the following six themes from the interviews that are germane to the academic persistence for doctoral students of color:

1. Students care about improving their writing.
2. Students learn better in group work, not in individualized study.
3. Organized time around faculty-student interaction enhances student satisfaction with the learning experience.
4. Out-of-classroom experiences profoundly effect students' postgraduate and career life decisions.
5. Students expect campus diversity to include:
 - (a) a multicultural canon in the curriculum to advance diversity; and
 - (b) out-of-classroom experiences to enrich the overall academic experience on campus.
6. Senior-level institutional leadership collaborates with student ethnic organization leaders in administering diversity learning initiatives.

The following table outlines practical approaches based on suggestions from the author, and as appropriate for the three goals of the Irvine project:

Irvine Project Goal	Practical Approaches for Academic Success
Increase students of color who will go on to assume faculty positions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster out of classroom connections with community-based organizations to better inform student research interests and career decisions. • Suggest group study for graduate students of color. • Encourage writing activities shared between graduate and faculty of color.

¹ Light, R. (2001). *Making the most of college*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<p>Enhance the climate for faculty of color to engage in sustained intellectual dialogues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have faculty of color engage in on-going relationships with undergraduate ethnic groups, perhaps in advising capacity.• Have departments reward faculty service participation in student-run, campus-based speaker series.• Establish faculty of color seminars in which follow-on conversation from the classroom can continue informally.
<p>Enhance discussions of diversity on campus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have incoming students write an essay on diversity and how they will handle it before they come to campus.• Involve graduate and undergraduate ethnic organizations' group leaders in Center activities and research.• Create a space on campus for members of ethnic groups to gather, socialize, and promote academic and social events.