

# Linking Institutional Policies to Student Success

(LIPSS)

[FYAP–supported foundational study]

### ABSTRACT

Institutional administrators often take an atomistic approach to student success initiatives, thereby overlooking their potentially compounding benefits. This study, using data from 5,905 students attending one of 33 institutions, tests the hypothesis that it is through the comprehensive adoption of complimentary policies and practices, more than any specific initiative, that an institution demonstrates a campus-wide commitment to student success and encourages behaviors that make a positive contribution to student outcomes. Results suggest that institutions taking a comprehensive approach to first-year student success likely experience some synergistic advantages, with students reporting higher levels of engagement and developmental gains during their first year.

### DISCUSSION

A large and growing literature on college effects documents dozens, perhaps hundreds, of effective educational practices in the first-year of college. Although each of these initiatives may contribute to students’ success, the effects of any particular initiative are typically restricted to those students who participate, for example, in a first-year seminar or residential learning community.

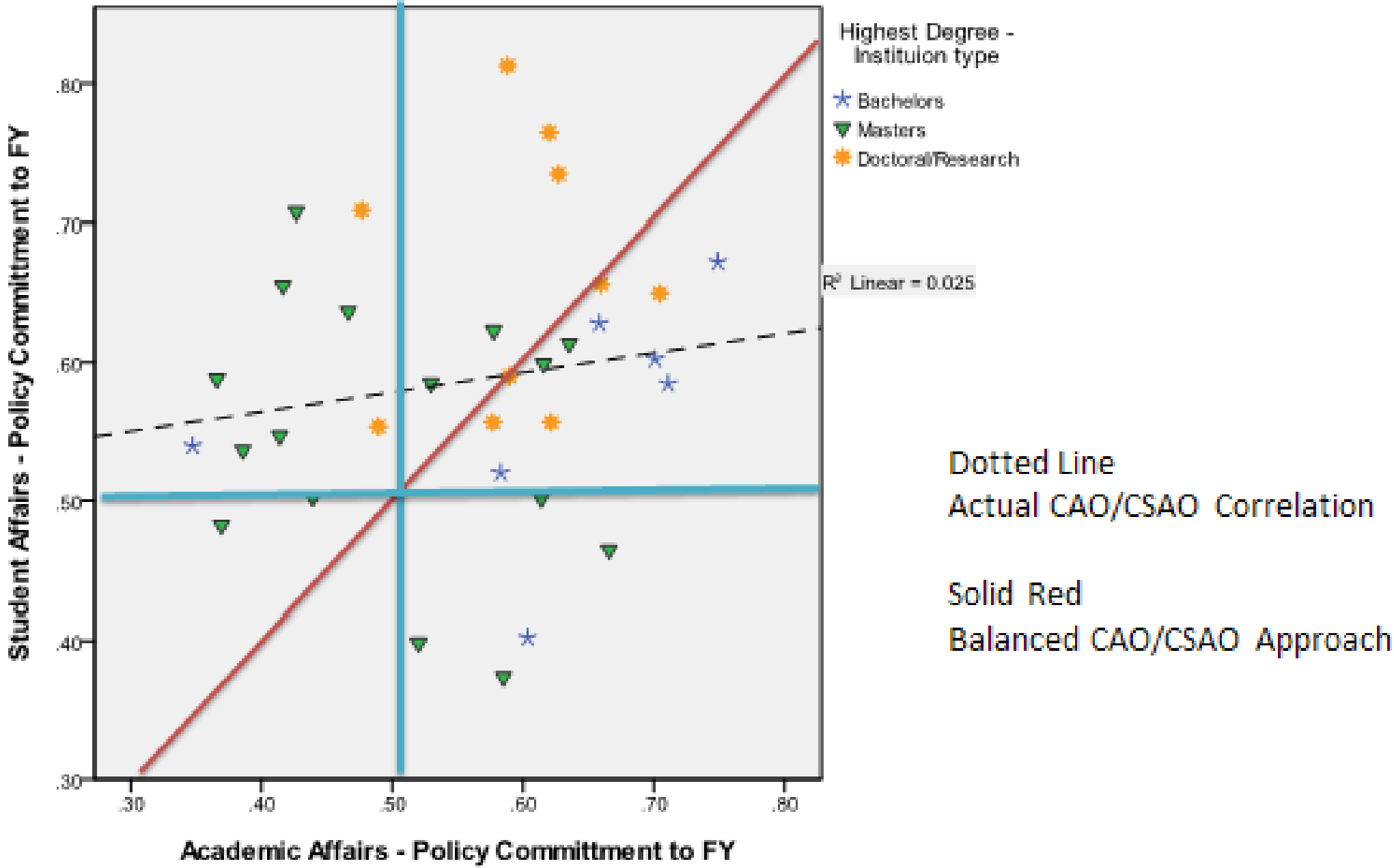
The current study, however, suggests that differences in student experiences and outcomes may be attributable, at least in part, to *differences in institution-level policies*. As the extent of CAO or CSAO policy support for the first year increases, so, too, do students’ level of engagement and self-reported gains. These policy effects occur beyond those attributable to students’ background characteristics, students’ residency status, or traditional measures of institutional differences.

Moreover, results suggest that institutions taking a comprehensive approach to first-year student success likely experience some synergistic advantages. Students at institutions with multi-faceted alignment of policies across student and academic affairs – thereby reflecting an institution-wide commitment to first-year student success – report gains in excess of what would be expected from the mere sum of independent CAO- and CSAO-specific policy effects. Thus, independent assessment of specific initiatives might not fully capture the effect of an institution’s broad commitment to student success. Moreover, although policy implementation typically occurs at the division or departmental level, border-crossing policy coordination appears likely to yield student gains not possible through a patchwork of piecemeal initiatives.

### EXTERNAL FUNDING

With the support from the FYAP program, this line of inquiry has already received external funding. For the 2011-12 school year, the LIPSS project has received a **\$153,323** grant from the TG Public Benefit Grants Program (<http://www.tgslc.org/publicbenefit/>).

### Results: Policy Coordination



### RESULTS


#### Student Self-Reported Gains

Independent Policy Scales	NSSE Gain Scores		
	General Education	Personal & Social	Practical Competence
% Variance at Level 2	4.6%	6.2%	3.1%
P-value of <b>Academic</b> Affairs Policy Variable	0.089	0.033	0.007
% Additional Reduction in L2 Variance	6.6%	11.4%	26.2%
P-value of <b>Student</b> Affairs Policy Variable	0.006	0.086	0.072
% Additional Reduction in L2 Variance	17.9%	7.3%	8.8%

Combined CAO/CSAO Scale	NSSE Gain Scores		
	General Education	Personal & Social	Practical Competence
% Variance at Level 2	4.6%	6.2%	3.1%
P-value of Additive Policy Variable	0.002	0.005	0.001
% Additional Reduction in L2 Variance	25.0%	21.0%	35.3%
P-value of <b>Multiplicative</b> Policy Variable	0.001	0.007	0.002
% Additional Reduction in L2 Variance	25.8%	19.4%	33.5%

Not much institutional variance

Policies explain a sizeable portion of institutional variance



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LIPSS - Linking Institutional Policies to Student Success

Linking Institutional Policies to Student Success (LIPSS) seeks to identify specific institution-wide policies that might be leveraged to increase college student engagement – a key predictor of student grades and persistence that is especially beneficial to Hispanic, African American, and academically under-prepared students (Kuh et al., 2008).

Although college graduation statistics are typically computed after four or six years of college attendance, the largest threat to eventual student graduation happens in the first year of college. Roughly 27% of students who start at a bachelor's-granting college or university do not return for their second year (ACT Inc., 2010). Campus initiatives designed to combat first-year attrition, however, are often costly and typically serve only a small group of students who participate directly in a given program (e.g., a first-year seminar or living-learning community). As a result, college and university leaders seek specific, resource-efficient ways to increase student engagement, persistence, and graduation across an entire campus. However, most studies of institution-level differences, what Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) call "between-college effects," speak broadly of organizational "environments" and "cultures" (for a review see Berger & Milem, 2000), concepts that are too abstract to provide academic administrators with practical guidance regarding specific institution-level policies that lead to improved student outcomes.



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