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NEWS

For immediate release

It's about outcome: Look for colleges that care



By Ben R. Sells

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For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. — **Editorial Note:** *The following article originally appeared as guest article in the Arkansas-Democrat Gazette on March 29, 2019. [See the original here.](#)*

Now that spring break has come and gone, high school seniors and their parents will be finalizing a college choice for fall. They have more independent and objective information available to them to help make that choice than ever before.

One such resource is College Navigator. It's a free consumer information online tool that allows students and parents to easily and quickly compare and contrast institutions of higher learning. Published by the National Center for Education Statistics, this unbiased source can be accessed at nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator.

For example, College Navigator will allow you to examine student retention rates--including the percentage of freshmen who return as sophomores--which speaks to the quality of the first-year experience.

One can also explore graduation rates--the percentage of students who completed a degree in four years--which says much about a university delivering on its promise to prepare students for the future.

These factors are among the most important to consider when determining institutional effectiveness, but too many families don't access them, and too many universities don't promote them.

While these considerations are often unnoticed, there's an even more important factor that's overlooked and one you can't find on the College Navigator website. This one takes more research, but it's truly important for the long-term well-being of students.

The Gallup-Purdue Index, a survey of more than 30,000 U.S. college graduates, "found that those who were emotionally supported during college, and who had experiential and deep learning, were more likely to have high well-being."

Furthermore, the Gallup-Purdue Index reports that "graduates with at least one professor who made them excited about learning and cared about them as a person, while also having a mentor that encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams, have more than double the odds of being engaged at work and thriving in well-being."

College is about graduation, one's first job, and a career, but that's a starting point and not an ending point.

I'm a parent of three college graduates and a current college student. We've parented our children and invested in four years of college for them because we want to help them thrive for the rest of their lives.

And while human well-being involves much more than college choice, the Gallup-Purdue Index gives evidence of the important role of college through self-reported outcomes by adults.

The good news for Arkansans is that this kind of outcome can occur at a public or private university, or a highly selective or less selective institution. But it's not guaranteed. So how do we ferret out this factor in making a college choice?

Look for evidence from students and alumni of the college you're considering.

Quiz current students if they have teachers and staff who truly know them as individuals, who take time to listen to their hopes and concerns, and who care about their lives beyond the campus. Ask for examples of experiential, real-life learning outside the classroom that their college or university has provided.

Ask younger and older alumni to give specific names of faculty and staff, and cite specific ways they invested in them as students--and how that investment continues to shape their lives--whether it's been five years or 50 years since graduation.

Students must do their part to engage, but the university should also take a personal interest in, encourage and challenge, and inspire their students to dream a larger dream for their lives.

It's not just about four years, but 40 and more, of creating the conditions that will help our children thrive and flourish over the course of their lives. And, dare I say, to help assure a bright future for our state and country.

Students and parents, consider the data, and don't overlook the most important factor: finding faculty and staff who will take a personal interest in the most important people in the world--our children.

Now is the time to start!