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School-University partnership

1. Fundamental Premise

The responsibility of rearing responsible human beings is not exclusive to anyone group in particular but a shared responsibility. Building a special being is not an “over the wall” process but a collective and concurrent one.



The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that is the essence of inhumanity (G. B. Shaw)

The spectrum of players that influence the making of a productive, responsible citizen is wide-ranging. Walls no longer exist and information and influence, good and bad, is everywhere and anywhere.

- Family background - education, social, and economic - and value system;
- School: Academic preparation (rigor, relevance, alignment, expectations), mentoring, peer support, etc.
- Community: local and global, culture, values, role models, leaders, celebrating achievements, public debate, etc.
- Government: National policy, early intervention programs, training, school-university linkage, education statistics, awareness, etc.
- Media: Promoting citizenship, influencing positive public debate, upholding professional and ethical standards, etc.
- University: Academic rigor, student support programs, social integration programs, counselling, etc.

If we are serious about rearing those who will be entrusted to confront the challenges posed by the modern world, then all players must act collectively.

2. Preparedness for Life

By the time a student reaches the university, habits of the mind and attitudes are still evolving; the university has a role in how they are shaped. In a world that increases in complexity by the day, one has to be really prepared to confront the mounting existential threats.

Academic Preparation		Social/Emotional Intelligence		Productivity Traits
Math and Sciences	Integrated knowledge	Discipline	Drive	Problem solving skills
Critical Thinking		Behavioral dispositions		Organizational skills
Language	Technology	Empathy	Proactivity	Communication skills
Choice of major and career path		Interdependency		Study skills
		Awareness	Leadership	Adaptability

“In the space between chaos and shape there was another chance”
Jeanette Winterson

3. School-University Divide

Factors that contribute to the existing gap in students' readiness for academic rigor and life at the university include:

- Absence of a coherent social narrative or collective plan
- Lack of a college preparedness standard in the school systems
- Disparity in social and economic conditions among students
- Community that marginalizes the “role model” and symbols of success
- Influence of “virtual forces” of distraction that glorify instant gratification habits
- Weak collaboration between schools and universities
- Absence of a higher purpose, low academic expectations and feeble attention to performance
- Scanty guidance to making better personal choices
- Focus on schooling and rote memorization instead of learning and way of being
- Media that by-and-large promotes the sensational and marginal pervasiveness of corruption - intellectual, social, political, and economic.

4. Changes to contend with

- What is taught – from rote memorization to critical thinking
- How is taught – detailed explanations to independent learning
- Study Habits – Mostly in-class supervised work to mostly out-of-class independent studying
- Instructor availability – always available to specific office hours
- Expectations – clear and detailed expectations to drawing own expectations
- Peer influence – from limited to extended opportunity to connect with diverse groups
- Parental proximity – dependency to independency/interdependency

- Organizational skills – from predetermined order to having to manage time
- Activities: from limited organized activities to a myriad of possibilities
- Freedom to choose – strong supervision to loose supervision

5. Benchmark

Many transition programs have been established in the US. Goals and challenges are summarized in a report that may be downloaded at: (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hsinit/papers/trans.pdf>)

- Thousands of college transition programs (Upward Bound and Talent Search, GEAR UP, ..) with limited participation of the groups that need it most (less than 10% of eligible students) and limited effectiveness

The goals are to: make students aware of the benefits of pursuing a college degree; and provide academic and other support services to improve students' readiness for college

- Need is great for minorities, disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and students whose parents did not go to college

Students who participate in transition programs have nearly twice the odds of enrolling in a four-year college as non-participants.

6. What Do the Experts Say?

Problems associated with preparation systems include:

- Inadequate college resources and materials
- Inadequate college advising by counselors and teachers
- Inadequate college preparatory curricula
- General lack of teacher knowledge of college preparation issues
- Lack of understanding of the needs and preferences of the Millennials who are born in the midst of the digital age

- Lack of organizational skills and vision of those at the top!
- Absence of a system that “cares” enough

“Look on every exit as being an entrance somewhere else” Tom Stoppard

7. What do the experts recommend?

- Information sharing – educate parents about college options, testing and admission requirements, financial aid procedures, and campus life
- Peer Mentoring - educational and personal support
- Social enrichment programs – leadership, set goals, visit college campuses, and explore the arts
- Academic enrichment - tutoring, summer school, after-school programs, and extra coursework
- Constant attention from the top!

8. Five Effective Transition Practices^{*}

- Rigorous curriculum of college-preparatory courses
- Relevant content and delivery methods of course material and their connection to postsecondary education and career opportunities
- Align high school exit standards and skills with college-level entry requirements
- Educate students and parents about knowledge, performance standards, behavior, attitudes and skills expected to succeed in college
- Collaboration between secondary and postsecondary partners to:

^{*} Report published by the center for student success based on 122 studies and review of 25 programs (rpgroup.org/system/files/High-School-Transition-Brief_0.pdf)

- design academic and non academic programs and activities to support students during the transition period.
- provide integrated and articulated programs to facilitate student transition.

9. What most Lebanese universities do?

- School visits to acquaint specific school students with what a university provides
- Exhibitions where universities explain their programs and incentives to students
- Mobile apps that extend the university reach
- Social media outlets used by universities to communicate with prospective students
- Websites that specifically have a prospective students menu
- Orientation programs for newly admitted students to make them familiar with campus life and services
- Open house where high school students are invited to campus
- Workshops conducted at schools on contemporary topics

10. A Call to Action?

- The most important step is to articulate a coherent national narrative that promotes the fundamental principles of success and delineate expectations and responsibilities of all partners responsible for the rearing of responsible citizens. The narrative must be based on clear understanding of our context and must meet the aspirations of the youth.
- Build a sustained support system involving all social forces that care to advance the narrative to become an element of public discourse.
- Form an a National Committee under the auspices of the MEHE to include representatives and experts from universities, schools, educators, civic groups, parents, and students to articulate the narrative.

- Promote accountability, transparency and meritocracy to become the public norm.

-The role of the National Committee shall be to:

- Prepare course material (booklet) that covers important topics and facilitates transition to be given to all college bound students.
- Organize national competition among high school students on college preparedness related skills.
- prepare educational statistics to help plan for transition.
- Urge media outlets that target the youth to run articles, announcements, shows, etc. on pertinent issues.
- Offer summer camps at university campuses in collaboration with civic groups and community partners.
- Establish a hot line so students could inquire about anything anytime.
- Organize common activities that give students the chance to interact with university faculty and staff directly.

Working together for a community that cares



“History will have a record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people” Martin Luther King.

11. Thoughts to ponder

Higher Education presents the opportunity to hone students’ creative potential, problem solving skills, and innovative capacities and to ignite the spirit of lifelong learning and passion to serve. It is an ecosystem in which humanity’s most valuable resource experience

incremental growth and build confidence in their abilities to fashion a better world. However, by the time students arrive at the university's doorsteps, much of their personalities have been shaped by so many influencing factors beyond the school walls. While the university must meet the academic needs and wants of students, they must also play a role in amplifying the inherent good and suppressing potential destructive tendencies. If we agree that how people behave and express themselves in the real world is an extension of their experiences and if we recognize that the problems in our societies surpass our abilities to cope, then we must conclude that the experience we are offering to students is not as it should be. This realization serves as an impetus to fashion a collective course of action. What kind of men those students become is up to us, after all the sculpture molds the clay to an imagined form, perfect or imperfect.