

60-Second SoTL

Episode 88 – What Students Value in College

Featured Article

Humphrey, Dana, and Ashley Finley. 2026. *What Students Value in College*. LearningWell Coalition, AAC&U, and Morning Consult. <https://www.aacu.org/research/what-students-value-in-college>

Transcript

(Music)

0:10

Jessie L. Moore:

What do students value most in college? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In *What Students Value in College*, Dana Humphrey and Ashley Finley share findings from a national survey of 872 undergraduate students conducted by the LearningWell Coalition, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and Morning Consult. Their report is available as a free download on AAC&U's website.

0:46

While career preparation mattered to many students, the researchers found that students also highly valued personal growth, identity exploration, and opportunities to contribute to their communities. The report highlights two experiences that students consistently described as especially meaningful: mentoring and faculty relationships, and opportunities to apply learning in real-world contexts.

1:11

76% of students indicated that having a mentor was "very" or "extremely" valuable. Unfortunately only 54% of students reported having a faculty or staff mentor

Applying learning to the real world can happen through internships, service-learning, and employment, and 78% of students indicated internships are "very" or "extremely" valuable, even though only 39% of students reported participating in an internship. Students who had experiences with internships, service-learning, or mentoring also reported higher levels of wellbeing than students who didn't have these experiences.

1:49

Consistent with other studies on meaningful college experiences, the report also identifies a participation gap. The experiences associated with the strongest wellbeing outcomes—internships and mentoring—often reach fewer students than more common classroom-based practices.

The authors argue that colleges should intentionally expand access to these high-impact, high-value experiences to better support students' learning, wellbeing, and long-term sense of purpose.

2:19

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access report. In the show notes, you'll also find links to the Center's own surveys of recent college graduates on their experiences in higher education and those experiences' application to students' post-graduation lives.

2:35

(Music)

2:42

Jessie L. Moore:

Join us for our next episode of 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

(Music)