



CHALLENGING YOUR MINDSET

The University of Tennessee helps each scholar maximize their individual strengths and understand how their strengths contribute to their academic dreams, career paths, and personal well-being. A deficit mindset impedes our scholars' success by limiting their potential. To enhance our scholars' success, we encourage the shift from a deficit to a strengths-based mindset.

Conceptual Framework

Increase Deficit Mindset



Decrease Retention



Decrease Deficit Mindset



Increase in Retention

Deficit Mindset

Unintentionally imposes barriers to our scholars' success because of our high levels of expertise

Makes assumptions that a scholar who is underperforming is lazy, unmotivated, or underprepared for college

Oversimplifies the complexities of scholars' learning



Strengths-Based Mindset

Does not blame the scholar or their background for equity gaps

Asks you to avoid assuming that under preparation, lack of interest, or lack of effort are the most likely causes of academic struggle

Engages all scholars with the same intellectual curiosity we apply to complex problems

A strengths-based mindset means...

CONFIDENCE

We believe that all scholars can learn at high levels. We share this message often and consistently.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

We challenge every scholar intellectually. We believe high expectations are attainable.

EVERY STORY MATTERS

We will provide the structures necessary for every scholar to reach their potential.



A strengths-based mindset and approach clearly defines our high expectations of scholars and broadens opportunities for all scholars. Scholars should know we expect the very best of them and that they are capable of demonstrating their excellence. It is important to use language that promotes excellence and clarity.

Term	Strengths-Based Alternative
Students	Scholars
Improve, Support	Enhance, Enrich
Tutors.....	Learning Consultants
Increase.....	Sharpen, Hone, Perfect
Help	Facilitate, Benefit

Additional Resources

1. Dudley-Marling, C. (2015). The Resilience of Deficit Thinking. *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 10(1), 1-12. Available online: www.researchgate.net/publication/317797045_The_Resilience_of_Deficit_Thinking.
2. Jolly, E. J., P. B. Campbell, & L. Perlman, 2004. *Engagement, Capacity and Continuity: A Trilogy for Student Success*. Available online: www.campbell-kibler.com/trilogy.pdf.
3. Smit, R. (2012). Towards a clearer understanding of student disadvantage in higher education: problematizing deficit thinking. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(3), 369-380. Available online: open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11427/25370/Smit_Article.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y.
4. Weiner, L. (2006). Challenging Deficit Thinking. *Educational Leadership*, 61(1), 42-45. Available online: www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el200609_weiner.pdf.

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