



CHALLENGING YOUR MINDSET

The University of Tennessee helps each student 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 student scholars' success by limiting their potential. To enhance our scholars' success, we encourage the shift from a deficit to a positive psychology approach.

Conceptual Framework

Increase
Deficit



Decrease
Persistence

Intervention
Positive
Psychology
Approach

Decrease
Deficit



Increase in
Persistence

Deficit Mindset

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

Makes assumptions that a scholar who is not performing is lazy, unmotivated, or underprepared for college

Oversimplifies the complexities of scholars' learning



Positive Psychology Mindset

Does not blame the scholar or their background for equity gaps

Avoid assuming that under preparation, lack of interest, or lack of effort are the most likely causes of academic struggle

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

A strengths-based mindset means...

CONFIDENCE

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

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

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

EVERY STORY MATTERS

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



A strengths-based mindset and approach clearly defines our high expectations of student scholars and broadens opportunities for all scholars. Student 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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