RESILIENCE IN HIGHER ED: HELPING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FAIL FORWARD IN EDUCATION
Goals for students

- Push your comfort zone
- The Zone of Proximal Development
- The most learning happens at the edge of your competency
- College is about Hanging out on the EDGE
Outcomes for this fancy power point...

- Understand resilience
- Learn how resilience behaviors can be practiced and developed
- Start thinking about how resilience affects the HS to college transition
Outline of Presentation

- Background of resilience
- What we have noticed at UW
- Neuroplasticity
- Cultivating positive thinking
- Case study
- Mindsets
- Programming we have developed
- Where we are headed
Origins of Resilience

- Researchers studying youth
- Looked at risk factors: factors that lead to negative developmental outcomes
- A couple examples: violence in the home and/or community, family incarceration, family mental health, lack of social support, drug use
A surprising trend...

- Researchers noticed that some youth were thriving despite being surrounded by risk factors.
The Big Question

- Why do some people thrive amidst adversity?
- Folks who thrive exhibit highly developed resilience behaviors
Defining Resilience

- The ability to overcome adversity and continue to strive towards achieving positive outcomes regardless of life events or circumstances (Masten, 2001)

- I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed (Booker T. Washington)
At the UW – why resilience matters...

- Students “see the cliff and run right off it” rather than pausing to ask for help – Student Life Staff

- Issues of competitive majors
  - Protect your GPA at all costs
  - Do not take risks, path of least resistance

- When there are issues in dorms, students lack the skill to work out problems between each other – staff interventions are increasing

- Notion of being “failure deprived”
My Higher Ed story...

- Started working at UW in 2002 in athletics
  - Support students who arrived academic underprepared relative to their peers
- 2006 – shift to Undergraduate Academic Affairs
  - Run the Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment
  - Add supports for students on the ends of the spectrum
  - Academic Achievement Courses and Tutoring and Mentorship
- Resilience work is new, but it is foundational to broader conversation about Diversity, Inclusion and Retention
Good News!

- Resilience is learnable!
- We can change our behaviors, emotions and thinking
- 10,000 hours – Malcom Gladwell & Macklemore
- Neuroplasticity: change in neural pathways and synapses
How to develop resilience

- Control your thinking
- Regulate your emotions

(Yes, you have choice over what you think and how you react!)

- Engaging in neuro activities and thinking that embodies resilient qualities brings about changes in you
Optimism versus Pessimism

- Our reaction – half full or half empty – is dependent on us having developed faster pathways in one domain

- We have a tendency to believe our thoughts without question and allow them to affect our emotions and behaviors

- Take control of your thinking
Cultivate a Positive Lens

- Practicing Gratitude
  - What are you thankful for in your life?
  - Write people thank you letters
  - Keep a journal and write in it weekly
- Strengthen your neural pathways for positive thinking!
Let’s think about a Case Study

- A student gets a “bad” grade on an important midterm exam
  - Say, well below the mean on a chemistry exam...
- How do they react?
- Take 5 minutes to discuss with the folks near you
Reactions fall into Two Camps

- Viewed as feedback
  - Leads to:
    - How am I studying?
    - Do I get the concepts?
    - Where can I find help?
    - Should I form a study group?
    - What can I do differently to prepare for the next test?

- Viewed as a reflection of one’s ability
  - Leads to:
    - Do I belong in this major?
    - Can I still be a _____?
    - Do I belong here at all?
What those reactions mean

- **Feed back**
  - Mastery of the task
  - Focus on how hard you tried
  - Look at your performance against your previous performances

- **Reflection on ability**
  - Ego performance
  - Focus on whether or not you look competent
  - Judge your performance against others’
Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset

Based on the work of Dr. Carol Dweck

I believe that my [Intelligence, Personality, Character] is inherent and static. Locked-down or fixed. My potential is determined at birth. It doesn’t change.

I believe that my [Intelligence, Personality, Character] can be continuously developed. My true potential is unknown and unknowable.

Fixed Mindset

Avoid failure
Desire to look smart
Avoids challenges
Stick to what they know
Feedback and criticism is personal
They don’t change or improve

Growth Mindset

Desire continuous learning
Confront uncertainties.
Embracing challenges
Not afraid to fail
Put lots of effort to learn
Feedback is about current capabilities
Nurturing a Growth Mindset

- The key phrase: YET
  - I am not awesome at chemistry, yet.
  - I am not a math person, yet.
  - I haven’t felt good about speaking in front of groups, yet.

- When you hear the fixed mindset voice in your head, answer with a growth mindset voice
Grit versus Resilience

- A lot of language is used interchangeably, but...
  - Grit or grittiness puts the onus on the individual to rebound from hardship
    - Ignores the context and background
  - Resilience takes the context into consideration
    - Emphasis on exhibiting resilience behaviors rather than being resilient or not
What have you observed?

- Please take 5 minutes and talk with your colleagues about:
  - The resilience behaviors you have noticed your students exhibiting
  - What behaviors you have seen in your students that show a lack of growth mindset or resilience
  - How do your students manage stress?
May 2015 – brought members from Stanford’s Resilience Project to campus for two days of workshops aimed at staff and students

Reflections on Rejection – a panel of outstanding faculty members introduced by their typical “success” resumes, then they took turns reintroducing themselves with their failure resumes

- Profound results – need to share our “whole story”

Resilience has resonated with our community more than we anticipated
What’s next at UW

- Goal is to change the philosophy of the institution toward academic risk taking, exploration and learning from setbacks

- Three major points on development:
  - Build Resilience into pre-existing programming
  - Develop training for students, staff and faculty on themes developed from May programming
  - Establish a suite of new programming delivered throughout the year on an annual basis
Questions

- First, what questions do you have for me?
- Do you see resilience & work around developing a growth mindset as important at the high school level?
- What would you need to develop programming at your school / it integrate resilience work into your classrooms?
- THANK YOU!