Faculty Engaging in Discussion (FED)
What the Best College Students Do: Chapter 1, “Roots of Success”

Summary of Chapter 1
Ken Bain shares the many insights he gained about successful students from his extensive research and in-depth interviews with former students and teachers. He views successful learning not through grades, but through visible signs of deep and creative learning. According to Bain, students who have learned something deeply will demonstrate a change in thinking and integrate that knowledge into the way they view themselves and their world.

These successful students exhibit some common characteristics and behaviors that Bain details in this book. Bain outlines these characteristics in Chapter 1, including students’ ability to find purpose and meaning for their learning, motivate themselves intrinsically, develop a flexible, growth mindset towards learning, comfort themselves and respond in healthy ways to failure or difficulty, find balance and diversity in their learning, and courageously tackle hard questions rather than avoid them.

Quotes
Pg. 8 - “Most students, however, clung to their old ideas. More important, the students’ grades in the course did not predict which ones really understood Newtonian concepts of motion...The top students were simply better at memorizing formulas, plugging the right number into the equation, and calculating the correct answer on the exam, but that performance reflected nothing about how well they really understood how motion works.”

Pg. 9 – “Imagine for a moment a different world, a place in which students find deep meaning in everything they learn. In that universe, learning changes who people are and how they view the world. It makes them into better problem solvers, more creative and compassionate individuals, more responsible and self-confident people. Students are able to think about the implications and applications of what they learn. Not afraid to make mistakes and full of questions and ideas, the citizens of this place easily and happily explore new areas with ease while possessing a deep humility about how complex their world can be. Learning remains an adventure. Someone may forget a few facts but still know how to find them when needed.”

Pg. 20 – “The best students also learned that nothing is easy. Growth requires hard work. The world is a complex place. We all become creatures of habit in the ways we think and act. To learn is to strip away those deeply ingrained habits of the mind. To do so requires that we push ourselves, that we keep building and rebuilding, questioning, struggling, and seeking.”
Possible Discussion Questions

1. On page 1, one of the students remarks that “I figured out very early that all schools are cultures, and my job was to go into that school and understand how that culture works.” How would you describe Chaffey’s culture (from our students’ perspective)? How do/can we help students understand how to navigate Chaffey’s culture of learning?

2. In response to the quote from page 8 above, how can we create assessments that measure deep learning and students’ ability to apply information correctly?

3. In response to the quote from page 9 above, has this world ever existed for you? In what way? How can we create this world for our students?

4. In the book, Paul Baker, one of the instructors interviewed, declares that “a lot of people I know died when they were juniors in high school...They’ve got the same concepts, the same ways of looking at conditions about them, the same answers, the same emotional and visual images and pictures that they’ve always had; there has been practically no change in them.” If many of our students have ‘died’ in this sense, how can we bring them back to life?

5. According to Bain’s observation of Paul Baker’s course, he observed that “for hundreds of others who took that magic course, the most powerful ideas emerged from a new vocabulary that Baker gave them, the validation of their own uniqueness, and the exercises they performed to explore those ideas” (pg. 16). What new vocabulary do/can you give your students that might accomplish some of these changes in students?

6. Bain discovered that the best college students were able to intrinsically motivate themselves towards their goals and find purpose in each course they took. How do/can you help students find intrinsic motivation in your classes?

7. Other questions that you would like to discuss.....