Early Identification and Intervention for At-Risk Students

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Applying What You Learn Today

- Every institution is different in a variety of ways
  - Size, governance, organizational structure, culture, etc.

- Your students are different in a variety of ways
  - Academic profile, socio-economic background, etc.

- The information presented today can be adapted to fit your institution
Agenda

• Retention – a tough nut to crack!
  • What do we mean by retention?
  • What causes attrition?
• Diminishing retention rates.
  • Institutional implications.
  • Why isn’t retention a higher priority?
• Retention and identifying at-risk students
  • How do we define “at-risk?”
  • Who is at-risk?
• Impediments to success.
• Identifying at-risk students.
Retention is a Tough Nut to Crack

• From the onset, let’s understand that improving retention rates is challenging and very complex given all the variables that impact it.

• That might make you feel better...or not!
No Silver Bullet

There is no “silver bullet” for improving retention. There are, however, many silver “BBs” we can use!
What Do We Mean by Retention?

- There are two extremes of student retention:

  1) Normal progression, typical of a *stayer, persister, or retained student*, occurs when a student enrolls each semester until graduation, studies full-time, and graduates in about four to five years.

  2) A *dropout, non-persister, or leaver*, is a student who enters college but leaves before graduating and never returns to that or any other school.

- Between these two extremes are *transfers*, students who begin studies at one institution and then transfer to another. From the student's perspective, transferring is a normal progress. From the perspective of the institution where the student first enrolled, the student has dropped out.

- Retaining a student is fundamental to the ability of an institution to carry out its mission. A high rate of attrition (the opposite of retention) is not only a fiscal problem for schools, but a symbolic failure of an institution to achieve its purpose.
What Causes Attrition?

- There are literally hundreds of specific reasons a student might leave college prior to graduation - some we can control, but many we cannot.

- The specific factors affecting retention decisions at colleges and universities vary institution to institution and from student to student.

- The following groupings on the next slide are selected factors that are often looked at when doing retention studies of traditional students. When these factors are viewed positively by students they enhance retention, and when viewed negatively they increase attrition:
What Causes Attrition?

Selected Factors:

1. **Background Variables.** These include parental support, parents' education, parents' income, educational goals, precollege academic success (high class rank, grade point average, standardized test scores), college preparatory curriculum, and friends attending college.
What Causes Attrition?

Selected Factors continued:

4. **Social Factors.** Among the social factors affecting retention are close friends on campus, peer culture, social involvement, informal interactions with faculty, identification with a group on campus, and social integration.

5. **Environmental Factors.** These include continued parental support, little opportunity to transfer, financial resources, significant other elsewhere, family responsibilities, getting married, employment on or off campus more than twenty hours per week.

6. **Attitudes, Intentions, and Psychological Processes.** These include self-efficacy as a student, sense of self-development and self-confidence, internal locus of control, strategies of approach, motivation to study, need for achievement, satisfaction, practical value of one's education, stress, alienation, loyalty, sense of fitting in, and intention to stay enrolled.
Diminishing Retention Rates
Diminishing Retention Rates

- Retention is at its lowest level since ACT data-gathering began in 1983 in five of the eight types of postsecondary institutions surveyed including all private colleges and PhD public, PhD private, MA private, BA/BS private, and two-year private institutions. 1

- On average, 50% of the students who enter a four-year institution will leave before earning a degree from that institution.

- Nearly one in three college freshmen will not enroll for the following year of study compared to one in five in the 1960’s.2

- A total of 66% of first-year college students returned to the same institution for their second year of college in the 2007–2008 academic year, the lowest percentage since 1989. This figure is down from 68% in 2006–2007 and 69% in 2005–2006.1

- It is estimated that 40% of college students will leave higher education without getting a degree, with 75% of these students leaving within their first two years of
Diminishing Retention Rates
Institutional Implications

- Pressure to recruit more students to compensate
- Higher attrition rates jeopardizes recruiting efforts
- Impact on the institution’s bottom line
- Institution common data implications (IPED)
- Morale buster for the campus
Diminishing Retention Rates
Why Isn’t Retention A Higher Priority?

- Fewer than half (47%) of all college officials responding to an ACT survey say they have established a goal for improved retention of first-year students.

- Only a third (33%) say they have established a goal for improved degree completion.

- Approximately half (52%) say they have an individual on staff that is responsible for coordinating retention efforts.1
“The goal is not just to recruit a student but to graduate him or her...the school must make a concerted effort to keep the student in school so he or she finally walks across the stage to get the diploma. It is not just the students responsibility. It is the school’s as well.”

- Neal Raisman
Retention Starts with Identifying At-Risk Students
How Do You Define “At-Risk?”

- Give me your thoughts...

- At-risk students are those who have a high propensity for “dropping out” during their first year of college.

- These students affect the retention and graduation rates of their respective institutions.

- These students are not from one particular group—they come from a variety of backgrounds.
Who is “At-Risk?”

Academically, socially, or financially disadvantaged students who enroll and are not identified for proactive intervention.

(Notice the use of term “proactive” as opposed to reactive)

We all know the FIRST year is the most critical in helping a student succeed and persist.

Who is at-risk at your college?
Impediments to Success

They are as varied as the students we serve.

Here are four primary impediments:

1) Lack of knowledge about the “college process.”

   Student don’t know what they don’t know! Freshmen, transfer students, and first-generation college students are three groups that are unfamiliar with the university environment and struggle to adjust to university terminology, regulations and policies.

2) Lack of financial support.

   About two-thirds of incoming students said they had “some” or “major” concern about their ability to pay for their education. The percentage of those with “some” concern — 55.4 — was at its highest level since 1971. The number of students taking out loans was at its highest in nine years, at 53.3 percent. 1
Impediments to Success (continued)

3) Academic Failure.

- Class absenteeism and failing just one or two courses in the first year of college dramatically reduces the chances for graduation. 1

- Lack of sufficient academic support resources and services.

- Specific courses and faculty who are infamously known as obstacles to students.

4) The “teaching-learning-grading” process.

- Class teaching-learning-grading process is inconsistent between institutions and individual faculty and contributes to academic failure and lower graduation rates. 2

- Lack of effective academic advising.

- Lack of progressive grading process.
Impediments to Success

• “You can’t fix what you don’t acknowledge.”

What are the impediments at your institution?

• Name them / list them at this time
Early Alert May, in Fact, Be Late!

By the time a student is identified and referred to an “early alert” system, she/he already has one foot out the door – maybe both!

How many have an Early Alert system?
Identifying At-Risk Students

Before they arrive and before referral to Early Alert:

- Admissions/Financial Aid identifies and prepares lists of students they know are:
  - Academically underprepared (admits at the margin)
  - Socially disadvantaged
  - Financially challenged (large aid gaps or out of pocket expenses)
  - First generation students
  - Parent has provided “alert” concerns

- Lists are shared with Early Alert team.
Identifying At-Risk Students
After they arrive and within the first TWO weeks:

• Orientation leaders need to be “alert” and refer to Early Alert.

• Resident hall directors and student resident assistants look and listen for at-risk students and refer them to Early Alert.

• Show parents at orientation/registration days how to refer their own student to Early Alert.

• Ask faculty to refer class “no shows” using Early Alert.

• Ask academic advisors to meet with new students and refer to Early Alert if necessary.

• Every student is connected to a peer group (team/club)
Identifying At-Risk Students

After they arrive and within first SIX weeks:

- Faculty/course feedback to students early in the semester.
  - Mid-semester grades are too late. Progressive grading is needed.

- Student employment office identifies and refers students who are unsuccessful in gaining campus employment.

- HDs and RAs continue to look and listen for at-risk students and refer them to Early Alert.

- Reminder email/letter to parents about using Early Alert as necessary.

- Business office identifies students unpaid or late in payments to Early Alert.
At-Risk Intervention

• Early Alert Team is critical as well as an Early Alert System

• If a student wishes to “drop out” they are directed to a key person on Early Alert team who conducts exit interviews to:
  • Have discussion/counseling
  • Solve problems with student
  • Start the official withdrawal process (data is tracked)

• Advisors/mentors/coaches need to be aware of at-risk students and meet with them on regular basis.
Early Alert Systems

• Early Alert Team can include representatives from:

  • Counseling Services
  • Academic Support
  • Financial Aid
  • Residential Life
  • Health Services
  • Multicultural Affairs
  • Athletics
  • Dean/Director of Enrollment
SuccessNet
Student Referral

Thank you for your concern and willingness to refer a student to the SuccessNet team for intervention purposes.

In an effort to assist students in working through any problematic issue that may be impeding their success, we will follow up as quickly as possible with the most appropriate person.

This is not a confidential referral; information from this referral may be used in our outreach to assist the student.

Please fill out the following information and click Submit. All fields are required.

Student’s first name: 
Student’s last name: 
Your first name: 
Your last name: 
Cougar Success
Early Alert Referral

Thank you for your concern and willingness to refer a student to the Cougar Success team. Please fill out and submit this form so that we can assist the student in working through any issues that may impede his or her success.

The information that you provide on this form is vital and will aid us in helping the student as quickly as possible. This form will be sent to the most appropriate person for intervention.

Please note that the information you provide is not confidential and will be used in our outreach effort to assist the student.

Please fill out the following information and click SUBMIT. All fields are required.

Student’s first name:  
Student’s last name:  
Your first name:  
Your last name:  
Your e-mail:  

I am a:  
Faculty Member  

Early Alert Systems

Why these two referral systems work:

• Referral is immediate and goes to the right Early Alert team member.

• All team members see the referral and cross-communicate by email.
  • Team members meet weekly to discuss active referrals.

• Intervention takes place within 24 hours (48 at most)

• Faculty, staff, coaches, parents, and students are taught and consistently reminded to use it.
Contact Me!

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