College Student Retention: A Primer

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Learning Objectives

• Learn the Basics About College Student Retention

• Identification of Retention/Attrition Issues

• Student and Retention Data

• Where to Find Retention Data

• College Choice Factors

• Deal Effectively With College/university Personnel
How Theory & Research Inform Higher Education Administrative Practice: Student Retention Initiatives

Students

• Academic and/or personal goal attainment

Colleges/Universities

• Fulfillment of mission
College Student Retention Continues To Be A Concern To Universities, U.S., State and Local Governments, Students, And Parents

- College/University Accountability
- Student/College Cost
- Student Debt
Why Worry About Retention?

Student Development Issues
- Develop Critical Thinking Skills
- Contribute To Society
- Preparation For The World Of Work
- Tolerance Of Individual Differences
- Appreciation of Life Long Learning Opportunities

Financial Issues
- Lost Tuition & Fee Revenue
- Campus & Community Spending
- Cost To Make Up Loss
- Burden To Parents & Students

Obligation To Students
- Reasonable Expectation For Success
- Loss Of Time The Non-Renewable Resource 168 Hours Per Week
- Turned Off To Future Educational Opportunities
- Upgrading Of Skills For Job Advancement or Skills For Another Job
- Unhappy Students Tell Others Of Their Experience
Tuition & Fees = $10,000 per year

(Three Year Loss Per Student = $30,000)

ONLY 10 STUDENTS

($50,000) ONE TERM

($300,000) THREE YEARS

This does not count auxiliary services money
"They may be your grades, but they're the return on my investment."
What You Should Know About Student Retention/Attrition

Retention Theories

How To Define Retention/Attrition?

Student Behaviors:

Reasons Students Noted As Very Important in Deciding to Go to College?

Reasons Students Noted As Very Important in Selecting College Attended

What The Data Does Or Does Not Tell Us

Action Steps To Help Solve The Retention/Attrition Problem
“I’m working on my pet theory.”
A Few Retention Theories

Astin's (1977, 1985) Theory of Involvement
The more involved a student is with the college, the higher likelihood of student retention.

Bean's (1980, 1983) Model of Work Turnover to Student Attrition
Used concepts from organizational studies of worker turnover. Examines how organizational attributes and reward structures affect student satisfaction and persistence.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) Nontraditional Student Attrition
Environmental factors have a greater impact on departure decisions of adult students than academic variables.

Kamens (1971, 1974)
Used multi-institutional data to demonstrate how colleges of greater size and complexity had lower attrition rates.

McNeely (1937) "College Student Mortality"
Examined many factors in college student retention including time to degree, when attrition was most prevalent in a student's education, impact of college size etc.

Seidman (2005, 2012)
Retention = Early Identification + (Early + Intensive + Continuous) Intervention

Spady Model (1971)
Interaction between student characteristics and campus environment

Summerskill (1962)
Personality attributes of students is the main reasons for persistence and leaving.

Tinto Model (1975, 1993)
Academic and social integration with the formal and informal academic and social systems of a college.

Witt & Handal (1984)
Person-environment fit.

Different Types of Student Departure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System:</th>
<th>From the educational system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional:</td>
<td>From a particular college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major:</td>
<td>A specific discipline/program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course:</td>
<td>A particular course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary:</td>
<td>A student leaves on his/her own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary:</td>
<td>A college lets a student go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defining Retention/Attrition

Defining Retention/Attrition: Terminology Not Always The Same or Simple

- **Attrition**: a student who fail to reenroll at an institution in consecutive terms
- **Dismissal**: a student who is not permitted to continue enrollment by the institution
- **Dropout**: a student whose initial educational goal was to complete at least a bachelor’s degree but did not complete it
- **Mortality**: failure of a student to remain in college until graduation
- **Persistence**: the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion
- **Retention**: ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation
- **Stopout**: a student who temporarily withdraws from an institution or system
- **Withdrawal**: departure of a student from a college campus

Defining Retention/Attrition

Federal Government Program Retention Definition:

Tracks the full-time, first-time student in a degree program over time (6yrs/4yr college, 3yrs/2yr college) to determine whether the student has completed the program.

Can colleges and universities exclude certain student populations from the data?
We Need to Pay Attention to What Students Tell Us

### Table: 2014 CIRP Freshman Survey

**Weighted National Norms—All Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>All Bacc Institutions</th>
<th>Baccalaureate Institutions</th>
<th>4-yr Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Black Colleges and Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to get a better job</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make me a more cultured person</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to make more money</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn more about things that interest me</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get training for a specific career</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To prepare myself for graduate or professional school</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Completing Non-Term**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>All Bacc Institutions</th>
<th>Baccalaureate Institutions</th>
<th>4-yr Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Black Colleges and Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not plan to graduate from this college</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**To how many colleges other than this one did you apply for admission this year?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Colleges</th>
<th>All Bacc Institutions</th>
<th>Baccalaureate Institutions</th>
<th>4-yr Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Black Colleges and Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 10</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 or more</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Were you accepted by your first choice college?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accepted</th>
<th>All Bacc Institutions</th>
<th>Baccalaureate Institutions</th>
<th>4-yr Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Black Colleges and Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Is this college your: **

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Level</th>
<th>All Bacc Institutions</th>
<th>Baccalaureate Institutions</th>
<th>4-yr Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Black Colleges and Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First choice</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second choice</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third choice</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than third choice</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2014, Prepared by the Staff of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), Higher Education Research Institute Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles*
# Reasons Were “Very Important” in College Selection

## 2014 CIRP Freshman Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>All Bacc Institutions</th>
<th>Baccalaureate Institutions</th>
<th>4-year Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Black Colleges and Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My parents wanted me to come here</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My relatives wanted me to come here</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher advised me</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This college has a very good academic reputation</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This college has a good reputation for its social activities</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was offered financial assistance</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of attending this college</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school counselor advised me</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private college counselor advised me</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to live near home</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not offered aid by first choice</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not afford first choice</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This college’s graduates gain admission to top graduate/professional schools</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This college’s graduates get good jobs</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was attracted by the religious affiliation/orientation of this college</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rankings in national magazines</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from a website</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was admitted through an Early Action or Early Decision program</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The athletic department recruited me</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A visit to this campus</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to take online courses</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The percentage of students that graduate from this college</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2014, Prepared by the Staff of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), Higher Education Research Institute Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.
Figure 1. Expectations of Needing More Time for Degree Completion and Transferring, by Institutional Control and Selectivity
(% Indicating “Some” or “Very Good” Chance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Need More Time</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Complete Degree</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend to Transfer</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Another Institution</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Least selective (SAT<1030)
- Moderately selective (SAT 1030–1200)
- Most selective (SAT>1200)
Figure 5. Six-Year Outcomes by Enrollment Intensity (N= 2,911,898)
Figure 10. Six-Year Outcomes by Age at First Entry and Gender (N=2,717,923)

Figure 19. Six-Year Outcomes and First Completion for Students Who Started at Two-Year Public Institutions by Enrollment Intensity (N=1,111,368)

Figure 14. Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Four-Year Public Institutions by Enrollment Intensity (N=1,186,780)

Figure 31. Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Four-Year Private Nonprofit Institutions by Age at First Entry and Enrollment Intensity (N=483,938)

Figure 35. Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Four-Year Private For-Profit Institutions by Gender and Age at First Entry (N=117,935)

“Sure, a ‘C’ is disappointing after straight ‘A’s, but wasn’t that a trend overdue for a correction?”
A Word About Retention Data

In the past, slides were included in this presentation to show retention rates from term to term and graduation rates after 3 years for the community college and 6 years for four-year colleges.

It was evident from the data then and now that retention from term to term and graduation rates have not improved appreciably over time. They have remained static. Besides, the data is useless unless the same retention and attrition definitions are used by you and your peers. In addition, if exceptions to the federal government data is allowed, then that too makes the data suspect.

That is why I have advocated that the accrediting agencies in consultation with the federal government develop and use a universally adapted retention attrition and graduation rate definitions with no exceptions or at the very least with the same exceptions that all use.

I also urge colleges and universities, especially peer institutions, to develop retention attrition and graduation definitions and share the data. This, then, may lead to best practices and allow all to benefit from each other's positive retention experiences.
Where to Find Retention Attrition & Graduation Data

ACT (American College Testing)
CCSSE (Community College Survey of Student Engagement)
Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRED)
Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)
Lumina Foundation for Education
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Postsecondary Education Opportunity
The Educational Trust
U.S. Census Bureau
Interchange Between a Student & College

A student wants a higher than high school education to acquire skills to perform a specific task. In exchange for tuition and fees a college provides the skills the student seeks.

What is the student willing to do to acquire these skills from the college?

How is the college going to provide these skills to the student?
So What Can You Do to Help A Student Achieve Her/his Academic and Personal Goals?

Seidman says,

“For Intervention Programs And Services To Be Successful They Must Be Powerful Enough To Effect Change”
A Retention Formula For Student Success

“FOR INTERVENTION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO BE SUCCESSFUL THEY MUST BE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO EFFECT CHANGE”

*RET = E_ID + (E + IN + C)_IV

*RETENTION = EARLY IDENTIFICATION + (EARLY + INTENSIVE + CONTINUOUS) INTERVENTION

*CSeidman2001
Notes:
The formula starts with the premise that the student comes first. The teaching learning process is essential for student academic and personal growth and development. The student enters the institution to acquire academic and personal skills necessary to achieve academic and personal goals. Assessment and interventions are a longitudinal process commencing at the time of acceptance and continuing throughout the student’s career at the institution and perhaps beyond. Although the formula appears to be for one term, it is, in essence for all terms a student is at the institution.
A Word About …

Developmental Courses

Financial Aid

Orientation

Career Services

Faculty

College Mission
Developmental Courses

Current Practice

- Student usually placed in a developmental reading, writing, math course
- Placement based on past academic record and/or standardized placement test
- Sometimes pre-test at the beginning of the developmental course
- Sometimes post-test at the end of the developmental course
- Student must obtain a specific grade to continue into the next level course
- Regardless of skill needs student is enrolled in a full term course
University Community

- Does your assessment identify specific skills in need of remediation?
- Does your developmental course skills line up with the skills needed for the next level course?
- Can you divide the developmental course into modules and have a student only take the one(s) he/she needs?
“Here’s my report card. I beat the street expectations.”
Financial Aid Offices

Current Practice

- Second (probably first in many instances) contact with student, in writing, web, telephone, in person
- Many mailings to students
- Bring in a lot of revenue to the college
- Assist students ability to attend
- Contact with students during each term
- May have the most contact with students during university career except for professors
- Not given much status in the university community
University Community

- Acknowledge and support the job the FA office and staff performs
- Help develop message given students when contacted (differentiate between adult, distance learning, residential students)
- Know the amount of revenue a FA office brings into the University
- Provide the appropriate staff and funding to allow the FA office to do its job efficiently and effectively
- Acknowledge different types of students receive FA such as adults and distance learning students
Orientation

Current Practice

• Bring students together in a relaxed atmosphere/begin the bonding process to the university and students
• Start to acculturate students to the university
• Help families understand what their son/daughter will experience at the university
• Acquaint students with administrative rules and regulations
• Help select and design academic programs
• Help students find information they need
Orientation

University Community

• Faculty and staff serve as mentors
• Have orientation groups meet at least once per term
• Continuous all years in the university

How can you facilitate this with the adult & distance learning student?
Career Services

Current Practice

• To receive FA a student must be in a degree program
• Are we making students choose programs too early in their university career
• Undecided students leave at a much greater rate than students with a defined goal
• Start the career exploration process early on and do not assume that a student knows what he/she wants to do simply since he/she chose a major.
• People change careers many times in their lifetime
Career Services

University Community

- Hold career exploration days
- Have career exploration part of orientation and/or on-going orientation
- Have career exploration built into the curriculum
- Use career exploration software
- Majors can have speakers talk about their careers
- Majors can hold informal student meetings

How can you facilitate this with the adult & distance learning student?
Faculty

University Community

• Faculty interaction with students outside the formal classroom setting is important for student success

• Encourage and promote faculty/student interaction

• Faculty mentors

• Club advisors

• Value faculty involvement in the evaluation/promotion system

How can you facilitate this with the adult & distance learning student?
Seidman Says:

“Be true to your university mission. Do not just have it printed, have faculty and staff know it, and use it to guide the university in its interaction with students.”

“Do not recruit students to your campus who will not be successful unless you are willing to provide programs and services to help overcome deficiencies.”

“Philosophy does not have to follow finance. Finance should follow philosophy.”
"What does he know, and how long will he know it?"
Post Script - Final Words

I hope this presentation was informative and thought provoking. Helping students attain their academic and personal goals is attainable. Colleges need not spend a lot of money to help students succeed, rather they need to look at the issue from a different prospective. The money spent upfront will be returned many times over with students staying longer and graduating and contributing to society. It takes a commitment on the part of the administration, faculty, students and staff to effect change. We all know how hard it is to make change in academia.

That is why I am available to provide a comprehensive lecture/seminar of the material in this presentation. We all know that a voice from the outside is often heard louder than those from within.

If interested, please visit the consulting page on the web site (www.cscsr.org) or contact me in confidence.

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Seidman says “Don’t make it harder than it really is”. 

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