



The Career College Information Source

# Increase Student Retention With These 5 CER Articles

*Career education experts share student success practices.*

# Boost Retention While Building Community – Assess and Improve Institutional Retention

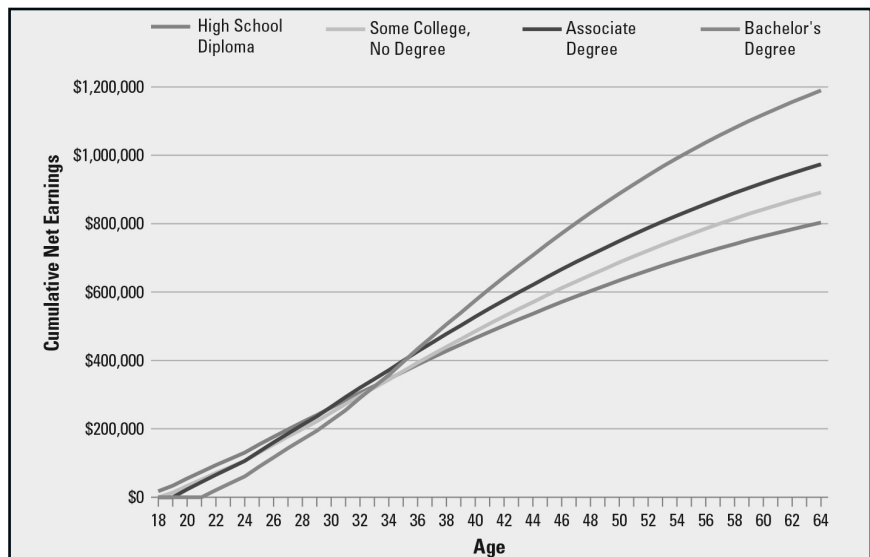
By Elizabeth Keifer Herron, VP - Solutions & Sales, Collegiate Admission and Retention Solutions (CARS)

Why do individuals pursue post-secondary education? Is it because they have nothing better to do than to apply to college, work really hard while in college, while juggling other responsibilities and accumulate student loan debt? No; individuals pursue post-secondary education to increase their short- and long-term-earning potential and to improve their lives. Many individuals are following a

dream, while others pursue post-secondary education out of necessity, looking for a new job or career.

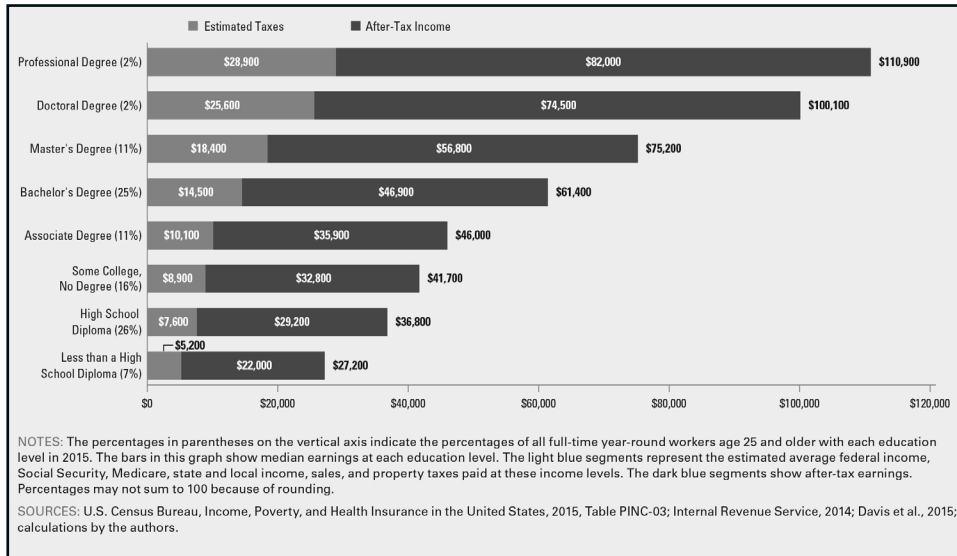
In a recent study by the College Board, “Education Pays 2016 – Benefits of Higher education for Individuals and Society,” one can see that both lifetime earnings and annual median earnings increase with each level of education attained.

**Estimated Cumulative Full-Time Earnings (in 2014 Dollars) Net of Forgone Earnings and Payment for Tuition and Fees and Books and Supplies, by Education Level**



Source: <https://trends.collegeboard.org/education-pays>

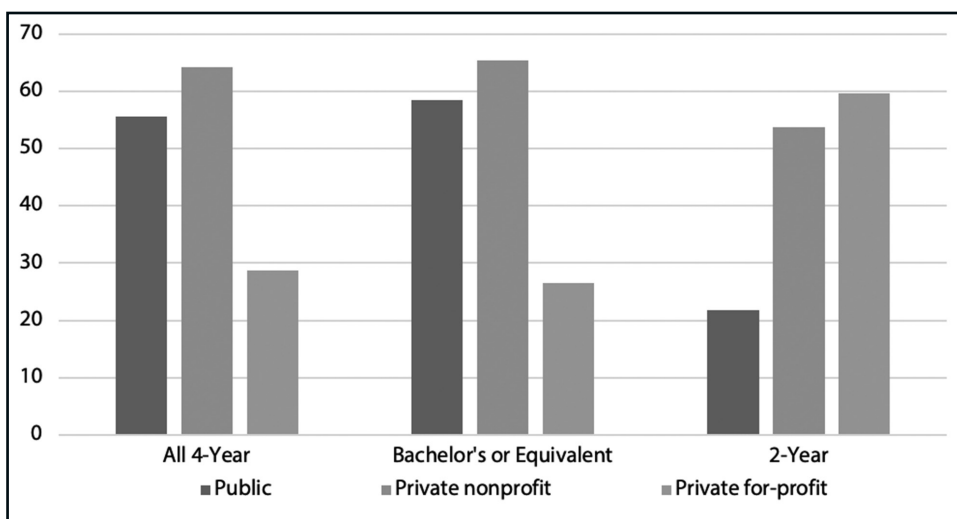
### Median Earnings and Tax Payments of Full-Time Year-Round Workers Age 25 and Older, by Education Level 2015



Source: <https://trends.collegeboard.org/education-pays>

With such obvious benefits, it should be easy to enroll and retain students through to graduation, right? Further, when they graduate and find work, it should be no problem for them to pay back their student loans, correct again? If only it were that easy. Let's take a look at a recent study from the National Center for Education Statistics "Graduation Rates for Selected Cohorts."

### Title IV starts with completion within 150 percent – 2008 and 2001 cohorts



Source: [www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015181.pdf](http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015181.pdf)

You can see the tremendous disparity between the completion rates across type and control of institution, as well as the length of the program. While private for-profit institutions boast the greatest completion rates for two-year programs, their success rate with four-year or bachelor's degrees is less than half their counterparts. What is the cause for attrition, and what can institutions do to stop it?

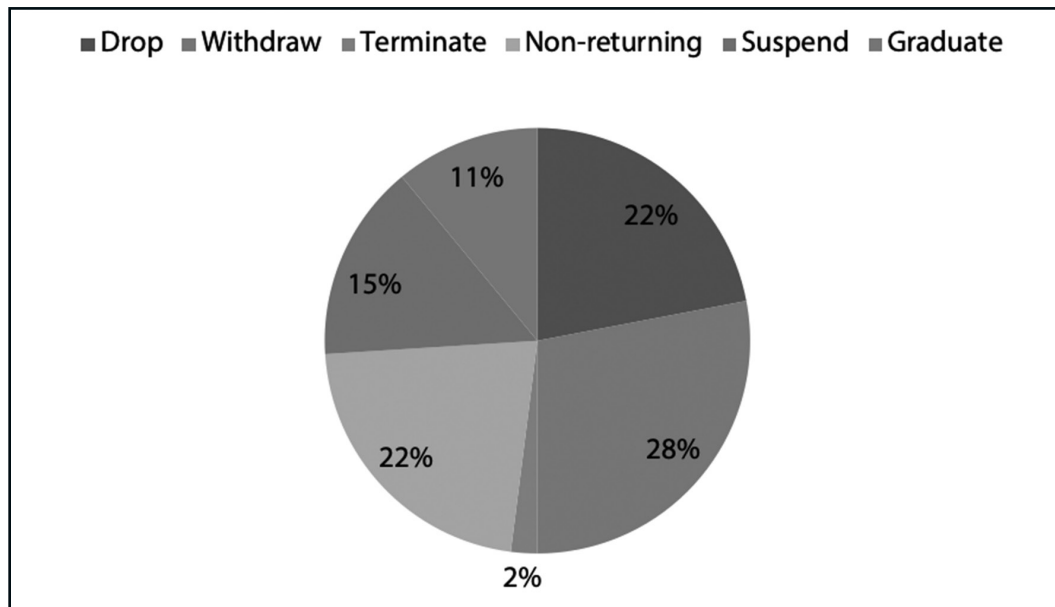
Institutions with selective application and enrollment processes will almost always have higher overall graduation or completion rates, but the population served by the institution weighs more heavily in the statistics. Students with one or more risk factors for attrition will be harder to retain through to graduation, more difficult to place in jobs, and are more likely to default on their student loans.

### The link between attrition and default

CARS analyzed the enrollment status upon separation of five thousand students who defaulted on their student loans (using data from its clients' FY2013 cohort default rates). Only 11 percent of the defaulters had a status of graduation/completion. The most recent "official" cohort default rates also show different outcomes by type and control, largely due to populations being served. The overall

national average FY2015 cohort default rate was 10.8 percent; the private for-profit average was 15.6 percent.

recommend you begin with a term one retention model, then later move to term-to-term retention.



Source: <https://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/defaultmanagement/schooltyperates.pdf>

While addressing retention will not “solve” your cohort default rate challenges, it will go a long way toward driving down those rates while your completion rates rise. To address retention, you will need to:

1. Assess and measure student retention
2. Identify two or three key initiatives you will adopt and implement
3. Design and implement your plan
4. Evaluate results and build a continuous improvement process

### Measuring retention – when, who and how?

When deciding how to improve retention, you must first establish a baseline so goals for improvement can be established. The most agile and adaptive model to deploy will provide quick feedback for your team and reduce the cycle time of the continuous improvement process as a term retention model. We strongly

### TERM 1 RETENTION MODEL

#### Net completers at the end of Term 1 Gross Enrollments in Term 1

Beyond the overall term one retention rate, many institutions will find it useful to evaluate by program, by start-date, by lead source/admissions representative, or perhaps even by instructor. By looking at a year or two of data, you may be able to see trends or problem areas that will guide you toward one or two key initiatives to adopt and implement. Creating a team with representation across all departments will improve the diversity of ideas and solutions presented.

#### Deploy a risk factor “scoring” for attrition

We have already discussed the population served by the institution affects the graduation and default rates. While financial, academic, work

conflict, commitment or dissatisfaction with the program are common reasons non-completers provided at exit, studies show that individual risk factors are more likely contributors to attrition. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the following are the primary risk-factors contributing to attrition (Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/2002169/risk.asp>):

- Delayed enrollment;
- Independent status;
- Number of dependents;
- Being a single parent;
- Lack of a high school diploma or GED in lieu of a high school diploma;
- Enrollment status (part-time is at higher risk than full-time); and
- Ethnicity (Caucasian and Asian heritage is a lower risk than African-American or Hispanic).

By working with many institutions to support retention, CARS has identified a larger list of indicators for attrition and has developed a risk factor “weighting” or scoring model (see the chart on next page). This chart also includes an “O” or “S” by the risk factor, to assist with determining if this is an *objective*,

data-driven factor, or a *subjective*, relationship-driven factor. The nature of the risk factor dictates the best approach for supporting the student.

When students have more than one risk factor, the level of effort required to prevent attrition increases exponentially. Consider a student who is a first-generation student in college, prior drop/re-enroll, has a low GPA, SAP problems and a lack of confidence/comfort in school; resulting in a weighted risk score of 3.4. This student may sound like many of your students, but that would fall into the “high” risk area and warrant a significant amount of additional support.

When we look at student population overall, there are those students who will succeed with little, if any, attention, some will withdraw regardless of what you do, and a significant portion are a medium- to high-risk and will require constant coaching and support to make it through to graduation. By evaluating the range in risk scores for your institution, you can determine how best to allocate resources and design your implementation model for both proactive and reactive counseling and intervention.



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on numerous higher education associations' committees, she is a much sought-after presenter at many workshops and conferences. Her presence in Washington, D.C. enables her to access up-to-the-minute information on a variety of legislative and regulatory issues affecting the post-secondary industry. A founding member of the CARS' family of companies, Elizabeth's

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Risk Reason	Score	Risk Reason	Score	Risk Reason	Score
Academic Background (O)	0.8	Financial Warning/SAP (O)	1.3	Language Barrier (O)	0.5
Academic Confidence (S)	0.5	First in family (O)	0.5	Missing School Supplies/Materials (O/S)	0.8
Academic Commitment (O)	0.5	GPA (O)	1	Non-traditional Household (O/S)	0.3
Active Military (O)	0.5	Grades (O)	1	Personal Issues (S)	0.8
Attendance History (O)	1	Health Issues (S)	0.8	Professional Issues (S)	0.8
Cultural Fit (S)	0.3	High Balance (O)	1	Socio-Economic Background (O)	0.5
Delayed Entrance (O)	0.3	Institutional Commitment (O/S)	0.8	Technology Knowledge (S)	0.5
Family Support (Personal/Social Support) (S)	0.5	Instructor/Class Problems (O/S)	1	Young Online (O)	0.5
Financial Support (S)	0.8	International Student (O)	0.3		
<b>0 – 1 = Low Risk; 1.1 – 3 = Medium; 3.1 – 5 = High; &gt; 5 Extreme</b>					

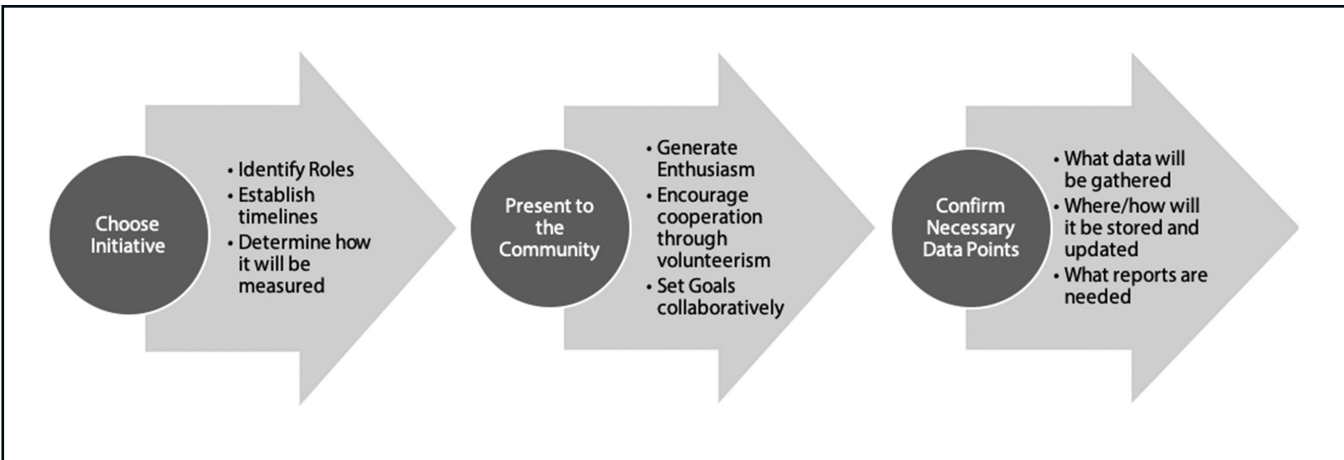
### Community-based student engagement model

When creating your cross-departmental team for student success, it is important to remember that if everyone is responsible, no one will be responsible. Roles must be clearly defined, goals must be outlined and metrics to evaluate success must be identified, monitored and evaluated. We cannot expect what we do not inspect!

At each point in the student life-cycle, members of your team will build a relationship with the student. Information about the student's goals,

fears, concerns and strengths will be gathered and should be documented. While objective risk factors are easy to see (grades and attendance), sometimes the underlying risk factors are what must be addressed to solve the problem (cultural fit, health issues or lack of family support).

As risk factors present themselves, different members of the team should be assigned to support and provide solutions, although there should be one primary student success advocate to whom the student can turn for guidance.



### Establishing a proactive outreach plan for all students

When building your community-based engagement model, it is critical to reach out to all students at key points to build rapport and show that you care. When a proactive plan is deployed, students are more likely to reach out when they need help and more receptive to interventions that become necessary. It is best to utilize a variety of methods to make contact, including email, calls, text and face-to-face meetings. CARS suggest the following proactive outreach schedule:

- **Future start welcome call** – to new students prior to term start, welcoming them and keeping them engaged while awaiting term start
- **Term introduction call** – to all students prior to term start, make sure they're ready; conduct risk assessment, build rapport, etc.
- **Orientation call (if applicable)** – to all students during orientation window, for curriculums that require an online orientation to stay enrolled; call to make sure they get it done in the allotted time
- **Check-in call** – good to conduct near midterm exams to ensure students are prepared, studying, don't have any issues; address risk factors and student profile notes, updates

- **Re-registration call** – announce registration for next term is open and encourage early re-registration
- **Check-in/end of term call** – check on preparation for finals, they've re-registered for the next term, and continue coaching plan by addressing risk factors

### Establishing a reactive or “risk-score flag” plan

Utilizing your ongoing risk-score assessment and feedback from members of your team (instructors, financial aid, student success coaches), other interventions may become necessary. CARS deploys reactive outreach in the following situations, to name a few:

- **Grades** – determine the threshold (grades below 65 percent) and contact to determine cause and address as needed, create awareness of academic warning/suspension possibility and effects
- **Attendance** – determine the threshold (CARS suggests missing three days - in the classroom or last login - and for online campuses also looking at inactivity of seven-plus days) and contact to address attendance requirements from the syllabus, determine cause and address as needed
- **Other/Instructor Identified/**

**Subjective** – may include behavioral, participation or other identified issues causing declined quality, frustration or possible withdrawal

- **Withdrawal** – upon withdrawal, contact student for up to 90 days to identify the cause, provide support and encourage re-enrollment

### **Evaluate results and continuous improvement plan**

What was your improvement goal from historic to post-implementation term one retention? Did you meet your goal? If so, celebrate your success with your entire community! Meet with your student success team and solicit feedback from the team members responsible for the implementation and delivery to identify success or hurdles with deployment. If the goal was not

reached or challenges were presented, plan how you address these shortcomings. Review the results and planned changes with the entire faculty and staff to build organizational awareness and to solicit other ideas. Finally, implement the changes and repeat the cycle.

The most important resource at any institution is its human capital. Each and every member of your team has the ability to build a relationship with your students that could mean the difference between graduations and a great career or withdrawal and student loan default. Take advantage of this resource, challenge them toward continuous improvement and see an improvement in your community and your retention rate.



# Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Factors to Predict Student Success

*By Larry Banks, Ph.D., Academic Dean and Art Waller, Ph.D., Campus Director, Vista College Online*

Are your applicants ready to be students? Do you want to improve student retention by 7 to 15 percent? The fact is applicants may have acceptable cognitive scores to be directly admitted into college programs, but they may not be ready to be college students.

Career colleges tend to attract first-generation students, yet within higher education, two-thirds of all first-

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**Career colleges tend to attract first-generation students, yet within higher education, two-thirds of all first-generation students will not graduate.**

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generation students will not graduate. To say it another way, if a career school enrolls 100 first-generation students, typically 33-35 will graduate. It is just the opposite with multi-generation students, where 65-70 will graduate. Given the propensity of first-generation students to drop, the question becomes "Is there an assessment that career schools can use to improve the probability of

graduation?"

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) put standards in place that require online schools and distance education programs to establish admissions processes that include an assessment of the student's technical skills, competencies, and access to technology; all necessary to succeed in a distance education environment. In addition, the assessment tool used needs to discern the student's capability to benefit from enrolling in the distance education program offered, and the school must demonstrate the validity and reliability of the assessment instrument used to assess a student's readiness for distance education online learning.

As a result, Vista College Online created and implemented an online readiness assessment instrument based on cognitive and non-cognitive risk factors. Research suggests that non-cognitive variables are potent *predictors* of school-based outcomes (e.g., academic performance and persistence), particularly for first-generation students. Non-cognitive factors refer to motivation,

adjustment, behaviors, and attitudes that are distinct from the traditional verbal and quantitative areas measured by ability or achievement tests. Examples: self-efficacy, goals, academic engagement, resiliency, social skills, and educational commitment.

When combined with cognitive

**When combined with cognitive measures (GPA, ACT/SAT), non-cognitive factors significantly add to our ability to predict student outcomes.**

measures (GPA, ACT/SAT), non-cognitive factors significantly *add* to our ability to predict student outcomes. A meta-analysis (Robbins et al., 2004)

suggests that there are approximately 10 non-cognitive variables that are strong predictors of student outcomes, that there are different predictors for retention versus performance, and approximately 4 – 6 of these offer significant incremental validity over standardized tests and GPA. Some significant non-cognitive factors for career colleges include:

<b>Academic Engagement</b>	The value an individual places on academics and attentiveness to school work.
<b>Academic Self-Efficacy</b>	An individual’s confidence in his or her ability to achieve academically and succeed in college.
<b>Educational Commitment</b>	An individual’s dedication to college and the value placed upon a college degree.
<b>Resiliency</b>	An individual’s approach to challenging situations and stressful events.
<b>Social Comfort</b>	An individual’s comfort in social situations and ability to communicate with others.

The following is an example of how Vista College Online assesses applicants for both cognitive and non-cognitive factors. In order to meet ACCSC’s standard for distance education programs, Vista College developed an online student readiness survey to assess the student’s capability to benefit from a distance education program prior to enrollment. The school utilizes the assessment instrument to determine if the student’s learning style is conducive to online learning and to identify other non-cognitive risk factors that may prevent the student from graduating. According to Dr. Banks, “Retention is an effect, not a cause. Students drop for many reasons. With first-generation students, it is particularly important to support them with prompt and frequent confidence building feedback. A non-cognitive assessment identifies risk factors, provides data to mentor students, and information to build relationships and interventions to enhance the probability of student success.”

From the literature on non-cognitive success factors, Vista College developed an assessment instrument that is administered while students complete the Wonderlic SLE, cognitive assessment.

**Vista College’s Non-Cognitive Online Readiness Survey**

**Internet and Comfort with Computers**

- Computer skills
- Have a computer
- Have access to the internet

**Study Skills**

- Ability to work independently
- Need face to face instruction
- Have a good place to study
- Dropped out of a class in the past

**Educational Commitment**

- I am willing to do whatever it takes to stay in college
- Graduating from college is necessary for me to achieve my career goals
- It is okay to miss deadlines by a day or two

**Academic Engagement**

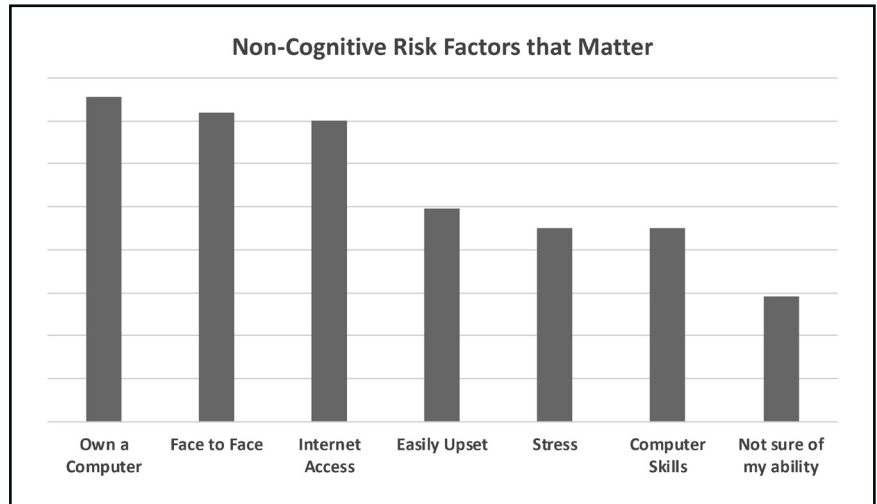
- I turn in my homework on time
- I wait until the last minute to get my assignments done

**Resiliency**

- I manage stress well
- Little things upset me
- I have support to finish my degree
- Not sure of ability to complete degree

Vista College Online is beginning to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the assessment to assess a student’s readiness for distance education online learning, academic progress, and student achievement data.

Like other studies in the first-year success studies, Vista College identified 4-6 non-cognitive factors that matter. As a result, the school is in the process of re-engineering its application process to improve retention.



Vista College Online has improved its retention by using the assessment data to design strategies and tactics that meet the needs of first-generation students. In the past, the school accepted students after they met a specified Wonderlic cognitive score. Now, five or more non-cognitive risk factors triggers a discussion between academics and enrollment. The administration is squarely focused on improving the probability of student graduation. As of today, the online school is retaining more students than the corporation’s ground campuses. Why? Faculty, staff, and administration are connecting with students to build relationships, to provide prompt, confidence building feedback, and to use non-cognitive risk factors to predict the probability of graduation.



**DR. BANKS** is highly experienced at implementing first-generation student retention strategies for ground, blended, and distance education schools. Currently, he is the Academic Dean for Vista Online. He has been Provost at Rocky Mountain University of Health

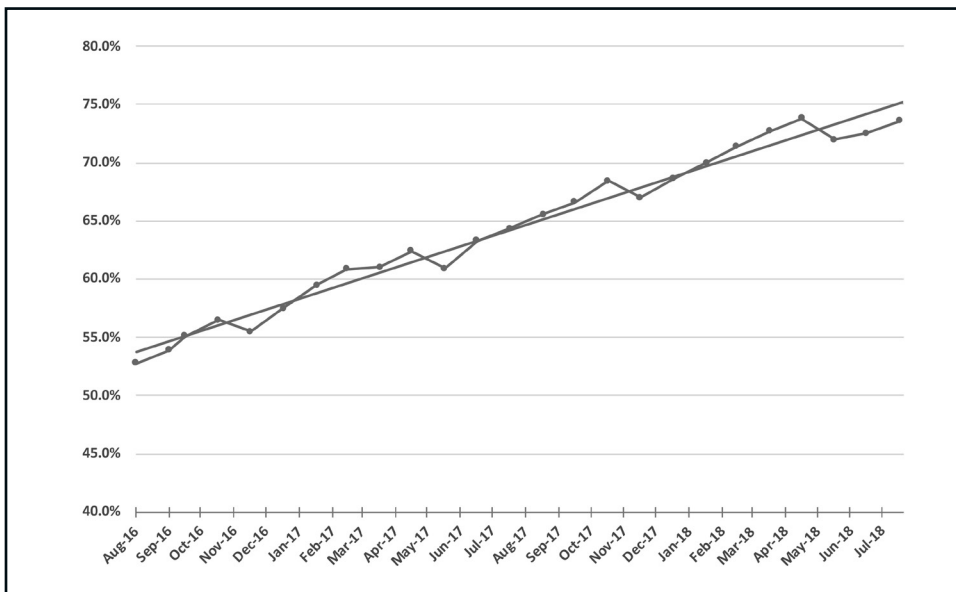
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**Retention Chart**



First-generation students may lack an appreciation for the value of the degree or confidence to complete a degree, need to feel supported, and need a relationship with their instructors and staff. According to Tinto (1993), "... Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic, social, and personal support, and students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide frequent and early feedback about their performance." In fact, "The

While it is easy to admit students based on cognitive scores, it is another thing to develop an assessment and use the data to increase the probability of student success. According to Dr. Waller, "In many ways, we are at the forefront in predicting student success for online programs in the career college space."

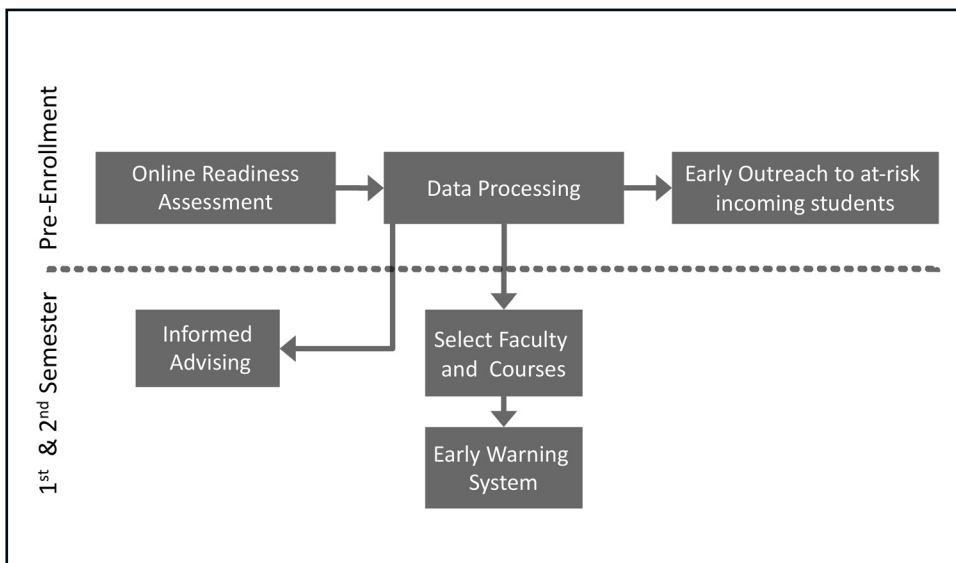
Vista College Online is intentionally developing a data driven student success model. Data is turned into information to mentor students.

frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and other students is an important independent predictor of student persistence." Vista College Online meets weekly to review continuing students. Student services, program directors, and administration collaborate and hold each other accountable to connect with students. Faculty, program directors, and administrators use the data to build confidence and relationships.

In today's career college landscape, it is imperative to be focused on student outcomes. One of the best ways to address this is on the front end of the application process, and early in the student's college experience – especially if the student is first-generation. Most schools have an admissions test to address the cognitive abilities of prospective students. Within the career college sector, few schools evaluate applicants for non-cognitive risk factors.

Vista College Online has

**Student Success Model**



improved its outcome by incorporating a data-driven student success model. Non-cognitive factors are important components of both **college** and **career** success. Many non-cognitive variables are malleable and can be supported, developed, and/or remediated. To improve retention career schools could assess for non-cognitive risk factors, use the data to design student success strategies, and deliberately advise first-generation applicants and students to build confidence.

**References**

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Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* 2nd.ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago.



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# Faculty Mentorship: a Tool for Student Retention

*By Isaiah Vianese, Liberal Arts and Sciences Department Chair and Sandra Monteiro, Assistant Dean of Student Services, Mandl School: the College of Allied Health*

**F**aculty mentorship at private sector institutions is a frontier of limited research but with great potential, especially when implemented as a formal school-wide mentorship program assessed with quantitative data. During 2017, Mandl School: the College of Allied Health in New York City ran a hands-on faculty mentorship program, while also tracking student retention rates over the course of the program. The academic team theorized that providing comprehensive faculty leadership training through a mentorship program would also have a positive effect on overall student retention rates. Essentially, retaining and training faculty helps an institution also retain students.

### **Defining mentorship**

Mentorship has varied definitions. In its Faculty Mentoring Handbook, the University of Rhode Island explains its definition by stating, “Mentoring involves not only career guidance and support but also personal, psychological and social aspects. The need for formal mentor training and effective mentoring is increasingly recognized as a critical component in the success of new

faculty and even mid-career faculty.” This definition shares a lot in common with Mandl’s mission. One of Mandl’s institutional goals is “to develop an outstanding faculty consisting of individuals who are highly qualified by experience and training, and who are dedicated to the individual development of their students.”

To enable the faculty to fulfill this goal at Mandl, the academic team sees

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**To enable the faculty to fulfill this goal at Mandl, the academic team sees mentorship as a team-based system of support that generates a culture of faculty appreciation, group problem-solving, proactive face-to-face interaction, and leadership training.**

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mentorship as a team-based system of support that generates a culture of faculty appreciation, group problem-solving, proactive face-to-face interaction, and leadership training. This vision inspired the college’s Mentorship Project.

**Mentorship Project overview**

Like the academic departments at most colleges, the Mandl faculty is composed of both adjunct and full-time professors. To improve overall

**To improve overall faculty satisfaction and student retention, Mandl recognizes that all faculty – especially adjunct faculty – need to feel engaged, supported, and part of a larger infrastructure that is at hand to sustain their efforts in providing quality education.**

faculty satisfaction and student retention, Mandl recognizes that all faculty – especially adjunct faculty – need to feel engaged, supported, and part of a larger infrastructure that is at hand to sustain their efforts in providing

quality education.

The Mentorship Project at Mandl occurred in two phases: an experimental pre-pilot, followed by a structured pilot of the project. Mandl runs on a trimester, with three 15-week terms in its academic year. The following phases were conducted over one term each.

**Project phase 1: pre-pilot**

With the goal of introducing and cultivating mentorship on campus, the academic team started phase 1: the pre-pilot of the Mentorship Project. This phase consisted of seven mentors working with two mentees each. These faculty mentees were mostly new instructors, and the

mentorship plan was a part of faculty onboarding.

The first step in the mentorship pre-pilot had each mentor meet with mentees on a biweekly basis for informal conversations addressing their concerns, including student attendance, classroom management, school policies and procedures, and general well-being and on-campus satisfaction. Though these meetings were informal, they allowed faculty to cultivate supportive relationships with peers, as well as have an accessible, immediate, and friendly outlet to consult when questions arose.

**Outcome of phase 1: pre-pilot**

Over the course of this first phase of the project, the academic team observed the following positive outcomes:

- Increased communication among faculty
- Quicker resolution of student concerns
- Overall boost in faculty morale and appreciation

These outcomes inspired a more focused approach, which led to phase 2: the mentorship pilot, a more structured implementation to mentorship, as well as a quantitative analysis of its effects on student retention.



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American Literature.” Before coming to Mandl, he taught at colleges and universities in the Midwest and New York. He is currently the Liberal Arts

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### Project phase 2: pilot program

Phase 2 sought to provide a more structured approach to faculty support by working with faculty in two specific academic departments at the college: Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting. These departments had the most significant student retention concerns at Mandl because of the size of each department. As in the previous phase, instructors worked in groups with a mentor group leader to report student issues, including attendance and behavior.

Mentors met with mentees on a weekly basis to collect data on student absences, academic concerns, and discipline issues. Mentors and mentees also followed up with students of concern via email and phone. When students returned, they met with an advisor who addressed attendance and academic issues before they returned to classes. These meetings, coupled with phone calls and academic advisement, created a network of support for both the students and faculty.

This pilot ran from week 3 to week 13 of the 15-week term. Mentors conducted a workshop for mentees on leadership and teamwork in the classroom during the semester, and the mentees were also recognized for their hard work at the end of the term with a certificate.

illness, school holidays or closings, personal and health issues, and travel challenges.

For the mentorship pilot, the faculty tracked 247 Medical Assisting students and 40 Dental Assisting students, totaling 287 tracked for the project. Students were tracked on a week-by-week basis from week 3 to week 13. Students who were absent for an entire week of class were contacted via phone, email, or text. Then faculty reported whether or not the missing students returned the following week, as well as new students who were also missing. This reporting was done via paper reports discussed at the brief weekly mentorship meetings.

The chart below reflects the data collected over the course of this pilot.

WEEK	ABSENCES*	RETURNING	% OF RETURNS
THREE (3)	75	65	86%
FOUR (4)	77	66	85%
FIVE (5)	80	67	84%
SIX (6)	85	49	57%
SEVEN (7)	87	56	65%
EIGHT (8)	96	58	60%
NINE (9)	52	44	85%
TEN (10)	71	48	67%
ELEVEN (11)	68	53	78%
TWELVE (12)	63	51	81%
THIRTEEN (13)	48	41	85%

### Mentorship project phase 2: examining the data

Over the course of phase 2 of the Mentorship Project, student absences and returns were tracked week-by-week for the participating Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting programs. Reasons for student absences were mainly child care,

Over the course of the term, some weeks (namely week 6 through week 8) saw an escalation in absences and decline in returns. Some reasons for this escalation may be the arrival of summer break in secondary public schools, meaning most students who were parents found challenges in



getting child care or coming to campus.

Overall, however, the return rates of the tracked students dramatically improved by week 13, as students prepared for final exams and the conclusion of the semester.

**Summary of results**

At the conclusion of the mentorship pilot, the academic team calculated the data for the Medical Assisting (MA) and Dental Assisting (DA) students tracked by the program. For

retention rate of just programs for one semester, the dramatic increase in the MA and DA retention rate was considered a great success. Such a significant change in the retention rate for the tracked programs was enough to encourage the administration to expand the Mentorship Program campus-wide. As Mandl is a small school, the college felt that retaining more students made an impact and was worth the effort.

**Outcomes**

Overall, the Mandl Mentorship Pilot Program had a positive impact on the college community. Including:

- Increased sense of community among faculty
- Closer working relationships between administrators and faculty
- Higher utilization of student resources, improving student outcomes

The hands-on approach was to the academic team’s benefit, as Mandl only occupies one campus. Faculty and administrations were able to address concerns one-on-one with students and faculty, giving personal attention to the issues at hand. Reaching out to students via emails, texting, and calls improved retention rates overall in both Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting programs.

Over the course of the mentorship

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**For the spring 2017 mentorship pilot, the MA and DA retention rate improved to 87.4 percent.**

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the spring 2017 mentorship pilot, the MA and DA retention rate improved to 87.4 percent. That means out of the

287 students tracked, 250 students returned for classes the following semester.

This retention rate is interesting when compared to the overall retention rate reported by the college in the previous year. For the year June 30, 2015, to July 1, 2016, Mandl’s overall retention rate for all programs was 76 percent, meaning that the spring 2017 mentorship pilot MA and DA retention rate marked an 11.4 percent increase above the overall retention rate reported by the college.

Though it strains the comparison to evaluate the overall student retention rate for an entire year with the



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pilot, the following benefits were observed:

- Students expressed confidence about finishing their academic program.
- Students in danger of withdrawal were guided towards resources that eventually retained them.
- Student satisfaction within the programs also improved, as reflected in student satisfaction surveys conducted on a semester-by-semester basis.
- Students felt supported because of open communication with faculty and administrators.
- Improved retention rates also had a positive impact on college revenues.
- Long-standing faculty developed leadership skills, became more independent; many of them have become mentors to new faculty.

However, there were challenges as well, including:

- Some long-standing faculty members were resistant to this project, including the paperwork involved.
- Some adjunct faculty found time management difficult for this additional responsibility, especially as they were not paid for the additional work.
- Students could be difficult to

track, and they would not always return when promised.

Despite these challenges, the Mandl faculty and administrators embraced the Mentorship Project and its many successes on campus.

#### **Future plans**

Mandl is currently conducting an expanded version of the Mentorship Project to include all academic programs at Mandl. Via the college Retention Committee, the project plans to become more interdepartmental, inviting administrators outside of academia for feedback and recommendations. Overall, Mandl is pleased with its progress through the Mentorship Project and will continue to invest in the program's expansion and development.

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# Retention Starts in Admissions

*By Theresa Miulli, Campus Director, Compass Rose Foundation*

**R**etention is a “hot topic” for all types of institution. Whether it is in a traditional university setting, or a vocational, career education arena, retention is a key area for all education organizations, as it is the most important determining factor of a school’s success. Without retention, there is no graduation. Without student completion, we must ask ourselves – what are we doing here? The following paragraphs aim to give you, school owners, leaders, administrators and faculty, a fresh perspective on retention initiatives. As a conference speaker, Campus Director, and previous member of the faculty, I have been witness to both incredible and disastrous retention discussions and programs. Almost every school continually looks for new ways to inspire students to attend and complete. Yet, as important as it is, it seems to be one of the most difficult areas for many institutions.

In order for schools to truly conquer retention problems, it is important that every institution think beyond their traditional initiatives and embrace more innovative techniques for retaining students. Often schools segregate themselves and there is a strong division seen between administration and faculty. While these silos are seen as traditional and a function of how education has always operated, this dissection

prohibits schools from building a cohesive culture that promotes unity amongst staff and students alike. In short, community builds retention. Without a culture of community, it is likely students will not feel accountable for the completion of their program. Community builds

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**Without a culture of community, it is likely students will not feel accountable for the completion of their program. Community builds relationships. Relationships build accountability.**

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relationships. Relationships build accountability. In a perfect world, a student would complete because it is important to them. However, we all know sometimes that is not enough! Sometimes, the “disappointment” factor is enough to push lingering students to recommit to their goals and continue their education. Think back on your own history. Was there ever a teacher or mentor that you felt would be “disappointed” in you if you didn’t finish something? Did that push you to go a little further? A strong culture of community builds a professional intimacy that inspires students to go the distance. But how does a school build that culture?

Break down those walls! In order for a school to successfully build a community culture, stakeholders must first see that they are *all* responsible for community-building. I visit many schools, and often I hear administrators say “retention is the job of the faculty,” or the faculty says things like “well if admissions would enroll better students, I could retain them.” This type of finger pointing and blaming will never lead to stellar graduation rates. Retention is

initiatives into all sectors of your school is a necessity when establishing your school community. Campus leadership cannot expect staff to meet new expectations if these expectations are not set clearly, and with guidelines to successfully achieve them. Blending departments together is a sticky, obstacle-burden task. However, when the transition is complete, and your process is universally understood, your campus will see great rewards in student outcomes, satisfaction, and graduation rates!

**Retention is everyone’s job. Every individual, from the janitor, to the president, plays a part in retaining students.**

*everyone’s* job. Every individual, from the janitor, to the president, plays a part in retaining students. Buy-in to a holistic process is

important if you expect your team to unite and work towards better student outcomes. Only as a single entity can a campus increase retention numbers. Working as a team has a much higher impact than working towards this goal as individuals.

How then, can you build a community where all departments are working towards one, holistic goal? Building and implementing retention

The first point of touch for the student is admissions – so let’s start here. How can your admissions department take part in the retention process? To tackle this, think outside of the normal admissions progression of a student applying, meeting with a representative, and learning about the program. Why not, instead, involve your faculty? Faculty-driven tours are one of the most effective recruitment tools, for a variety of reasons. First, nobody has the ability to sell your school or programs better than the people that teach the curriculum. A faculty member will show more passion than any admissions representative could because the



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instructor lives and breathes their program. Second, a faculty-driven tour provides an opportunity for faculty members to set expectations for prospective students. Having a clear understanding of the school's expectations will result in more committed, cognizant students. After all, we can't expect students to reach an expectation we haven't actually set for them. Sound familiar? Expectation setting is key in any educational environment. So start setting them from day one, in the admissions process! As a part of this campus tour, faculty can also provide students with a program review and answer student questions concerning the program, the structure, and what will be taught. Why not take advantage of all that knowledge?

I know what you are thinking. What if the faculty member messes up? What if they convince the student they aren't right for the program? What if the faculty member loses your potential enrollment? These could be risks if you don't train and prepare the right members of your faculty to deliver these tours. To prepare for this, provide guidelines for faculty and conduct mock tours with the admissions representatives so that the representatives have an idea about what information the faculty member can provide. If admissions and faculty work together, the partnership could boost enrollment, as well as secure students through graduation at your institution.

Another common department found in career-orientated schools is a student services division. Student services often provide resources in areas of concern, such as transportation, child care, health and wellness, and in many institutions, career placement. To successfully retain students, this department should be incorporated into all functions of a student's path.

Consider this – as part of the admissions process, schedule time for the prospective student to meet with a student services representative. By educating the forthcoming student about the available resources at the outset, they are likely to reach out for help when obstacles arise throughout their program. Additionally, faculty can partner with student services by

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**Additionally, faculty can partner with student services by having representatives enter the classrooms and provide workshops and information related to resume building, community resource seminars, or even host special guest speakers.**

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Once a student has made it through the admissions and financial aid process, the next step is typically some type of orientation. What does your orientation look like? Does it stitch students into your culture? Does it inspire them to start their education, or just provide an opportunity to get their identification card, tour the campus again, and perhaps review school policy? Orientation is your opportunity to impact the students and connect! This is your chance to blend students into your community, further bridging accountability measures between the student and the institution. Consider enhancing your orientation with creative, millennial driven engagement initiatives to include: unique hashtags, icebreaker activities, scavenger hunts, funny signs, and Instagram challenges. Students want something to talk about! Build your brand, engage students, and make them feel they are a part of your community.

In most institutions, once

orientation is complete, and classes have begun, administration bows out and it is up to the faculty to now retain the students that have been enrolled in their classrooms. I have to ask the question – why? Why shouldn't admissions take an active part in the retention of the student throughout their education? Why shouldn't financial aid be more engaged in student outcomes? Do we believe there is any correlation between student dropout rate and the level of institution community engagement throughout their program? I believe there is!

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**Admission representatives can easily be exercised into the classroom experience. Who better to teach customer service, professionalism, and networking skills?**

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Admission representatives can easily be exercised into the classroom experience. Who better to teach customer service, professionalism, and networking skills? Financial aid officers can also be inserted into the classroom arena, providing workshops on loan management, budgeting, and default management. Integrating the admissions and financial aid departments into the classrooms unifies your team, and shows students that from start to finish, your entire community is invested in their success. As mentioned above, student services have a plethora of opportunity in the classroom and can help improve student retention rates through resource knowledge and support. This effort takes creative scheduling and a prioritization of retention outcomes; however, these initiatives can ultimately boost graduation rates significantly.

I know, I know. How on earth are you going to convince an admissions

representative, a financial aid officers and a student services advisor to not only step into a classroom, but also build engaging, informative lessons? How will you convince a faculty member to step outside the teaching world, and insert themselves into the admissions process? If each team member prioritizes the mission of retention, then the answer is simple. If you have the right people in place, they should all be focused on one important mission – working as a team to provide the best environment and education for students. I have been lucky enough to be part of an epic transformation on my campus. For two years, we focused on training our team, unifying our efforts, and building a community. Some ugly decisions had to be made; however, I was able to witness our graduation rates jump 30 percent in a three-year time frame. We went from fighting to meet benchmarks, to reporting with ease. Even better though? We went from disgruntled students, to happy, smiling students. Your administration needs to trust that this blending of college departments will make a positive impact on students. I am a believer, as I have seen how unifying transforms student outcomes.

How about you? Have I made you a believer yet? I encourage you to meet with your teams immediately and discuss a plan for integration. How will you break down your walls between administration and faculty? What innovative ideas will you come up with to cross departments to retain students?

# Student Success is 10 STEPs Away!

*By John King, Ed.D., Independent Education Consultant*

In today's challenging educational environment when new students are hard to find, and outcomes are the measure of an institution's success, colleges today are challenged like never before to improve student outcomes. Rising college costs and student debt call into question not only the value of a college education in financial terms but also the amount of time a student spends completing their education. Students and other stakeholders are looking for a cheaper, faster way to get the education necessary to secure gainful employment and a rewarding career.

For as long as I have been in education (nearly 30 years) post-secondary education has been looking for the magic formula to ensure that students successfully complete their education, graduate and go on to a rewarding career in the field of their choice. The reality is that there is no magic formula ... that only a comprehensive coordinated program of academic and student services and programs will ensure that a student who starts, will stay and complete their education. We have developed a 10 STEP (Student Tactical Education Program) that has proven successful at two multi-campus post-secondary educational organizations in improving student retention, graduation and satisfaction rates. The most recent, a twenty-two-campus group, reached double-digit

improvement in student retention within two cohort starts. All but one campus showed some improvement in retention of new students with the greatest improvement at over 40 percent. The program produced a nearly 20 percent year over year

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**The reality is that there is no magic formula ... that only a comprehensive coordinated program of academic and student services and programs will ensure that a student who starts, will stay and complete their education.**

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improvement in student retention across all students. A part of the program focused on reducing the number of post enrollment cancellations is also showing positive results.

**The 10 STEPs are as follows:**

**1. Observation, analysis & planning** – what can you observe and what does your data tell you about your students' performance that will help you develop a plan to improve student outcomes? When you begin to take a close look at your data and your operations, you will find some key areas that you can begin to focus on. For example, when we looked at

our client’s data we saw that the majority of their student drops occurred in the first three terms. This gave us a timeframe to focus most of our efforts on. We also found out that drops occurred in a number of foundational classes which caused us to take a look at the instructor’s teaching those classes and the curriculum that was being delivered. One of the things that became clear as we evaluated these classes was that a portion of the curriculum in one of the classes was too challenging for new students and would be more effectively delivered if it was moved to a later point in the curriculum when they had mastered more of a basic foundation for the material. Classroom observations showed instructional inconsistencies within the same courses based on the

assigned instructor indicating a need for faculty development of basic instructional techniques was in order, especially for new instructors.

**2. Pre-start program** – How do you prepare students for learning before starting school and ensure that they actually do follow through and start? Our analysis and observations also showed us that an area where we could make a substantial improvement in the overall health and growth of the institution was in the area of cancellations of potential students after they have enrolled. We knew that a prospective student has a strong level of commitment to their education when they decided to enroll but somehow between the time they signed an enrollment agreement and were to begin classes they changed their mind. We decided to



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marketer, strategist and leader. John King is an independent strategic consultant based in Naples, Florida. Throughout his career, John has been focused on bring innovation and forward thinking to the organizations and institutions with which he has been associated, most recently as Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer at Lincoln Educational Services. In addition to serving as SVP and Chief Academic Officer of Lincoln Educational Services Inc., he has served as Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Career Education Corporation, Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs at Brown College in Minnesota, and Dean of Business & General Education at St. Paul Community & Technical College. John has also been both a full-time and adjunct instructor at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Prior to entering education in 1988, John worked in Marketing and Communications with such firms as Campbell-Mithun Advertising in Minneapolis, Tec Trans International Inc. in Minneapolis and Allied Stores Marketing

Corporation in New York. John also operated his own consulting firm for ten years and was a partner in The Creative Edge and Bijou, commercial and corporate video production companies.

Dr. King has served as chair or trustee for various colleges including Lincoln College of New England, Lincoln College of Technology – Columbia, MD, and McIntosh College in New Hampshire. John has also served on the Dakota County (Minnesota) Private Industry Council, the Eagan, Minnesota Economic Development Commission, the Small Business Management Program Advisory Committee of Dakota County Technical and Community College, the Employee Assistance Program Advisory Board of Family Service of Greater Saint Paul, and the Small Business Publicity Committee of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. John was also on the Board of Directors of the Twin Cities Marathon.

In 2010 Dr. King was featured in the cover story “Who Influenced Education This Year” in Career College Central Magazine.

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create a series of short online lessons that we would start the student in as soon as they enrolled, serving the dual purpose of letting them start school immediately and providing them with some lessons and skills helping them be better prepared when actual classes began. This also provided campus staff with a reason to follow up with conversations about their progress and learnings from the lessons. Topics included how to be a successful student, time management, student skills, goal setting, etc.

**3. New student at-risk inventory** – How can you secure information from prospective students before they start school to identify potential academic and life issues that can cause the student to stop or drop out? One thing that we know from experience is that life challenges and personal problems follow new students to school. A well designed new student at-risk inventory delivered before the student begins school provided campus staff with an opportunity to provide the new student with assistance in addressing and solving those problems and challenges before they become an impediment to the student persisting in school.

**4. New student orientation** – How do you get students started on the right foot on the second most important day of their educational career (graduation being the most important) and ensure that they understand their responsibilities as a student? Getting students started off right can be critical to their success. Once a student falls behind in school it is very difficult to catch up. Orientation is critical in setting the right tone and framework for the student so that they begin with the right mindset on day one. It is fair to say that most students would rather go right to work and skip school. They know, however, that an education is necessary for them to get the job in

the career they desire. Orientation is an opportunity to impress on the new student that their first day of school is no different than their first day on the job. The expectations that the employer will have is no different than those of the school. The skills, habits, and behaviors they develop in school will transfer directly to the job, and their success and competitiveness in realizing that job will be in direct proportion to their performance in school.

**5. Early student engagement** – How do you keep the student motivated and committed to their educational objectives and school work throughout their education, especially during those critical first few terms when hardship or unexpected challenges threaten their persistence in school?

How do you ensure that students develop and document the professional and academic skills that employers demand and education requires and is often not in the official curriculum? This may be one of the most important aspects of keeping a student engaged and active in school. Virtually every student will have some problem or challenge arise during their time in school. Studies have shown that the overriding reason why students leave school is that they feel that the institution does not care about them. Post-secondary education is a new experience for many of our students, and they have not been very successful in a traditional education environment. They do not know how to successfully navigate in school and require lots of assistance. Establishing an early relationship with these students and letting them know that there is an individual or individuals assigned to

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**Studies have shown that the overriding reason why students leave school is that they feel that the institution does not care about them.**

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assist them in this journey is critical. Having a well-known and trusted champion and ally can often be the difference between a student dropping out or staying in school.

One of the things that we constantly hear from our advisory committees is that graduates are not sufficiently skilled in the soft skills or professionalism that they are looking for in new employees. Schools attempt to build soft skills and professionalism into their curriculum, however, programs are extremely tight with required technical and

general education curriculum. We created a menu of 32 short professionalism and soft skills workshops that can be delivered to students either online or in class as teacher-led or

stand-alone units. The menu can be presented to advisory committees to review and sign off on a set curriculum, and upon completion, students receive a certificate that they can add to their portfolio along with their diploma.

**6. Faculty development & engagement program** – How do you ensure that your faculty, especially new faculty, possess the instructional know-how and skills to engage students and lead them to academic success? In career education, we hire instructors primarily because they are great practitioners of their particular trade or subject area. We hope that we can make them into great educators. It is critical that instructors, especially new instructors receive the proper support and training to become effective teachers. We created a series of faculty development workshops designed for both the new instructor

as well as for continuing education and development of existing faculty. This is more important than ever as instructional methodology and technology continue to advance at a rapid pace. Just as we tell our students, faculty must be life-long learners as well.

**7. Curriculum review** – How do you ensure that your curriculum and instruction is current, relevant, and engaging the students in the learning process and allowing you to keep your instructional methodology in tune with the ever-changing world and workplace? The curriculum is the lifeblood of any educational institution. As with anything, the curriculum can get stale and outdated if it is not constantly reviewed and updated. The traditional “Publishers” are now calling themselves content developers as technology and advances in learning methodology are becoming more advanced and digital. In a digital world, content can be updated on a daily basis. New technologies are changing the way that work is conducted and completed by workers. The curriculum must keep up with these changes if schools are to be competitive and relevant.

**8. Campus training** – How do you facilitate campus management, staff and faculty buy-in, support and ownership of your STEP program and ensure its success? No program or initiative will be successful if employees do not understand it or know how to implement it. Training is a critical component in the success of this program. Providing employees with a rationale, explanation, directions and a sense of ownership in the initiative will go a long way in ensuring its success. Everyone needs to know their role and the how and support to get the necessary steps successfully completed.

**9. Monitor results** – How do you

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**We created a menu of 32 short professionalism and soft skills workshops that can be delivered to students either online or in class as teacher-led or stand-alone units.**

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develop and monitor benchmarks to document success and/or provide data for program enhancement or modification? No program is ever perfectly executed. Monitoring results are important because it will let you know what is working and what is not. Quite often, monitoring results of a successful program can allow you to move faster than originally planned. Conversely, monitoring a sluggish program can provide you with a rationale for retraining or program modification. In any event, knowing what happens is critical for future planning.

10. Ensuring that your institution **STEPS up and makes a** difference in your students' lives by achieving total organizational commitment to the (STEP) Student Tactical Education Program! New programs or initiatives generally are not successful without total buy-in from the people expected to execute them. For that reason, selling the idea, program or initiative to the people involved is critical. When people feel that they are consulted and involved prior to implementation and are provided with

the rationale and thought process behind the initiative they are generally more supportive of the effort. What people dislike more than anything is when things are rammed down their throats without any explanation or opportunity for input. Getting the entire organization to buy into the initiative will go a long way to ensuring its success.

I know that many of the thoughts that I have expressed above are not new and many good schools do much of this automatically. My point is that there is no single thing that will lead to student success ... it is a combination of everything that you do to support students and their learning. Only a comprehensive approach will be successful. The approach I have outlined above has worked for two multi-campus organizations. Hopefully, something similar will work for you.

If you would like to learn more about this proven program and how it can work on your campus give us a call or email us.

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