Academic Advising: Impacting Student Learning, Persistence, and Retention

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People will forget what you say. They will even forget what you do. But they never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

Making the simple complicate is commonplace. Making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.

Charles Mingus

Why Student Retention/Persistence Is Important?

✓ College retention, persistence, and graduation rates influence public perceptions of quality
✓ State legislatures and governing boards are increasingly concerned about graduate rates
✓ Focusing on student success is programmatically responsible
✓ Improved student persistence towards graduation can provide additional resources to invest in people and programs

Improving Student Success Must Be Based On Careful Analysis Of:

✓ The research in the field of student success, retention, and persistence
✓ The institution and the students
✓ The changes in the student experience we want to make on our campus

Students who completed their degrees at the same institution within 5 years

Students who completed their degrees within 6 years after attending two or more institutions

Berkner et al., 2002
NCES 1995-96 Cohort
Graduation Rates: Baccalaureate Degree Seeking Students
Cohort Year: 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time To Degree</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private Non-Profit</th>
<th>Private For-Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES First Look FY 2008 April 2010

Graduation Rates: 2-Year Institutions
100%, 150%, 200%
Cohort Year: 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private Non-Profit</th>
<th>Private For-Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation within 100% Normal Time</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation within 150% Normal Time</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation within 200% Normal Time</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES First Look FY 2008 April 2010

Fall to Fall Retention Rates – 2007-2008

4-Year: 66%
2-Year: 54%

Key Literature/Research In the Field
- Page 6-11 in Pocket Guide
- Glenn (2007)
- Schwartz/Washington (2007)
- Swail (2004)
- Tinto (2007)
- Bean/Eaton (2002)
- Seidman (2004, 2007)
- Kuh (2007)

Academic Advising is viewed as a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them.

George Kuh
Student Success in College (2005)

Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience.

Richard Light
Making the Most of College (2001)
Advisors are interpreters who help students navigate their new world. As such, academic advisors have to make connections.

Nancy King
Kennesaw State University

In a 2004 Pell Institute Report, Tinto states the campuses that support student retention must have programs that:

- Teach students how to make decisions effectively
- Teach students how to investigate and make decisions on careers and majors
- Teach students how to maneuver higher education channels and to identify and utilize support services

In another Pell Institute Study (Dec 2004), common elements of ten institutions with higher than expected graduation rates were identified:

- Intentional, focused, and intrusive academic planning programs existed
- High student participation in programs that provide academic advising and academic support
- Educational innovations to assist students with ease to college, adjustment to college, and maneuvering higher education from entrance to graduation.

WHAT DO STUDENTS WANT FROM ADVISORS?

- Accurate Information  “Do they know?”
- Accessibility  “Are they there?”
- Caring Attitude  “Do they care?”

Student Engagement

The intersection of student behaviors and institutional conditions over which colleges and universities have at least marginal control.

Kuh et al
2007

Educationally effective institutions channel student energy toward the right activities.
HIGH IMPACT ACTIVITIES are those initiatives identified by practitioners such as Kuh, Gardner, Tinto, and the AAC&U’s Leap Initiatives, that have had positive impact on students’ educational experiences, and, in turn, their retention and persistence.

- First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects

Engagement in HIGH IMPACT ACTIVITIES leads to gains in

- Deep Learning
- General Gains
- Personal Gains
- Practical Gains

What matters most is what students do and the effort they expend, not who they are.

But Who They Are Affects What Students Do and the Effort They Expend

And

Understanding This is Important to Designing Academic Advising Programs

Good advising should link a student’s academic capabilities with his or her choice of courses and major, access to learning resources, and a belief that the academic pathway a student is traveling will lead to employment after college.

Advising should be done well so students recognize their abilities and make informed choices.

Bean, 2005
Five Strategies for Advisors to Focus on Student Success

1. Adopt a Talent Development Approach to Advising
   - Know your students
     - Who are they? What are they telling you?
     - An entitlement mentality
     - Cumulative deficits in attitudes, study habits, academic skills
     - More diverse than previous groups
     - Techno-savvy “NetGens”
   - Meet students “where they are”—academically, socially, psychologically, culturally
   - Set high expectations—challenge, implore, cajole, and support

2. Make Advising a Tag Team Activity
   - Share responsibility for student success
   - Draw on multiple sources of expertise and perspectives on students

3. Help Students Map Out a Path to Success
   - Draw a Map for student success
   - Teach newcomers about the campus culture
   - Emphasize student initiative
   - Point students to programs, resources, and activities that work

4. Make Every Interaction Meaningful
   - Participate and connect before college and during orientation
   - Provide accurate information
   - Push students to THINK!!
   - Develop peer mentoring programs
   - Imbed advising into a first-year program
- Encourage students to experience diversity early

5. Focus on Culture Sooner Than Later
- Identify cultural properties that impede advisor effectiveness and student success
- Expand the number of cultural practitioners in advising
- Install an ethic of positive cultural communication

- While retention programs and initiatives are found everywhere at all types of institutions, most institutions have not truly taken retention seriously or had significant effects on their attrition concerns—why?

- They have “tinkered” with the margins of institutional life (adding courses or programs) but not analyzed the organization of the educational activities
- They have not faced the fact that retention issues lie not only in their students and the situations they face but also in the very character of the institution and its educational settings

Institutional Changes for Retention
- Focus on student learning and the places in which students are asked to learn
- Stress shared, connected learning, and the importance of the educational community—involving all campus personnel and students
Advising and Retention

- Provide all levels of assistance in a manner which is connected to learning, not isolated from it—assistance is provided in ways that enable students to utilize assistance for learning and collaboration with the learning experiences.

**Condition #1 for Student Retention**

- Expectations for Student Achievement and Success
- "No one rises to low expectations"
- Too many institutions do not expect enough of their students, demanding too little with regard to student learning.

**Condition #2 for Student Retention**

- Quality Academic Advising and Guidance is expected and provided
- Students must understand the “road map” to completion of their academic goals and know how to use it and the campus resources to achieve personal goals.

**Condition #3 for Student Retention**

- Academic and Personal Support
- Students need academic, social, and personal support
- Structured bridge programs, mentor programs, student clubs, intentional interaction with other students and faculty in the learning environment and the co-curricular environment.

**Condition #4 for Student Retention**

- Involvement at all levels in the institution and in educational experiences
- Providing, even requiring, this involvement is essential during the first term of enrollment and throughout the first year when students’ attachments to their college experience is least certain and the pull of the college most weak.

**Condition #5 for Student Retention**

- The educational experience is focused on student learning – not teaching
- Students must be involved in the learning process
- Learning cannot be experienced as a “spectator sport” or one of passivity—or passive aggression.
Students do not learn in isolation from their peers.
Courses are not detached, individual units separated from one another in content and unrelated to all other courses or content.

In Conclusion:
Developing strong advising programs and building a campus-wide focus on retention is essential to the academic success and retention of students at institutions of higher education.

References
Lowenstein, M. Fall, 2005. "If teaching is advising, what do advisors teach?" www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW30_2.htm
Tinto, V. “Taking Student Retention Seriously.” Retrieved April 24, 2007 from http://soeweb.syr.edu/Faculty/Vtinto/46