

BEST PRACTICES

Compiled by UMD Student Success Work Team

Last updated on January 15, 2009

Improving Graduation Rates at the University of Minnesota Duluth

The following list of *best practices* represents a selection of successful retention efforts at other institutions. Please consider this a *living document*, one that will grow and expand as new ideas arise. This chart is sorted by primary core process area.

Recurring Themes within Best Practices
An overall campus culture that supports student success
Most are multi-faceted retention programs

<p>Intentional recruitment (recruitment with retention in mind)</p> <p>Assessment (identify at-risk populations, skill levels, course placement, educational/career paths, data-driven decision making)</p> <p>Extended orientation (pre-matric and orientation courses)</p> <p>Intentional advisement with an emphasis on the first year</p> <p>Early intervention</p>	<p>Improved course access</p> <p>Learning support (developmental courses, SI, and tutoring)</p> <p>Peer mentor programs</p> <p>Coordinated campus services, including simplified referral</p> <p>Building of relationships – student-to-faculty, student-to-staff, student-to-student, faculty-to-faculty</p>
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Core Process Area					Best Practice Summary	Source
Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
Fit			Support		Comprehensive freshman retention program (Bethany Lutheran College: small, private, liberal arts, MN): recruitment with retention in mind (adjusted admission standards); resources toward improvement of teaching; one-credit freshman seminar; coordinated through an enrollment management committee. Results: retention increased from 70% to 82%	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1995

Core Process Area					Best Practice Summary	Source
Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
Fit			Support		Student Academic Success Plan (Oakland Community College – Highland Lakes Campus: 2-year, MI): five main components: orientation, directed admission, college skills program, mentoring of high-risk students, and academic monitoring. Students are assessed for course placement – based on ASSET testing, past academic achievement and students’ statements of educational and career goals. Results: retention is more than 22% higher for students in mentoring program	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1992
	Financial				Seven practices that <u>could</u> provide undergraduate and graduate students with high-quality education more efficiently (some are obviously not appropriate for UMD): 1) outsource selected courses and programs; 2) expand opportunities for experiential learning credit; 3) give credit for programs offered by student services; 4) unbundled university education by providing more credential options than the traditional bachelor’s and master’s degrees; 5) adapt existing concurrent enrollment programs (such as PSEO) so students can graduate in fewer than four years; 6) use undergraduate teaching assistants for lower-division courses; 7) adopt an apprenticeship model for all doctoral programs.	Coplin, B. “Seven steps: Ways to reduce instructional costs and improve undergraduate and graduate education.” http://www.collegecosts.info/pdfs/solution_papers/Collegecosts_Oct2005.pdf
	Financial				The National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) sought to demonstrate how colleges and universities can redesign their instructional approaches by using technology to enhance quality and save money. Thirty institutions received grants of \$200,000 each. The “course-redesign” projects focus on large-enrollment, introductory courses: all 30 institutions reduced costs by an average of 37%. Common elements: 1. Whole course redesign (all sections); 2. Active learning (teaching-learning enterprise significantly more active and learner-centered); 3. Computer-based learning resources; 4. Mastery learning (student pace and progress are organized by the need to master specific learning objectives rather than by class meeting times; 5. On-demand help (expanded support system); 6. Alternative staffing (not all tasks require a faculty member’s time). Outcomes: most of the projects showed statistically significant improvements in overall students understanding of course content; 18 of the 24 projects that measured retention reported a noticeable decrease in DFW rates; allowed institutions to increase the number of students in courses without changing associated costs; more efficient use of classroom space; significant cost savings because multiple sections are consolidated; 18 of the 30 projects increased retention	Twigg, Carol A. “Improving Quality and reducing costs: The case for redesign.” http://www.collegecosts.info/pdfs/solution_papers/Collegecosts_Oct2005.pdf

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Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
	Financial				Topic: Textbooks - CALPIRG recommendations in reaction to the stat that the wholesale price of college textbooks has gone up 32.8 percent since 1998 (double the 18% increase of ordinary books). Recommendations: 1) publishers should pass on to students the cost savings achieved from creating online textbooks; 2) faculty should have the right to know how their textbook choices will affect students financially; 3) publishers should disclose to faculty how the newest edition of each textbook is different from the previous edition and this information should be posted where textbooks are sold; 4) each textbook edition should be kept on the market as long as possible; 5) publishers should give preference to creating paper or online supplements to current editions; 6) publishers should disclose the length of time they intend to produce the current edition; 7) faculty should give preference to the cheapest textbook when the educational content is equal; 8) colleges and universities should consider implementing rental programs (WI and IL have); 9) colleges and universities should encourage students to consider using online book swaps.	Fairchild, M. S. "Tipping point: Controlling college textbook prices." http://www.collegecosts.info/pdfs/solution_papers/Collegecosts_Oct2005.pdf
	Financial				<p>"Higher education will be hurt by the economy. Students will receive less aid, non-tenured faculty will be let go, and support staffs will shrink. But the key to mitigating these truly unfortunate financial realities will be communication and discussion between administrators, employees, graduates, and students."</p> <p>"Jake's university was proactive in sending out communications to students and parents about the financial status of the school and identified areas that may be put on hold or steps to be taken that would strengthen their position. They reassured that students and their learning would remain their first priority through this challenging time..."</p>	<p>Farkas, Brian (January 2009). "Higher Education Will Struggle Through the Recession." http://www.huggingtonpost.com</p> <p>Martha, Mary (November 200). "College costs and the economy." http://www.simpletuition.com</p>
		Learning	Support		Student Services, Catalyst for a Comprehensive Collegewide Retention Program (Saint Xavier University: private, IL): 1) all newly enrolled students take four assessments in English, math, reading, and the College Student Inventory; 2) new students are required to complete a six-week college success course; 3) Learning Assistance Center coordinates tutoring; 4) experiential learning through internships Results: overall increase of 2% with greater results with special populations	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1992

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Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
		Learning	Support	Culture	<p>“What Works in Student Retention? Four-Year Public Colleges” Survey results suggest that campus efforts should focus on high-impact, value-added retention interventions. Of the 82 retention interventions including in the survey, strategies cited by respondents as making the greatest contribution to retention fall into three main categories</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. first-year programs: including freshman seminars, learning communities, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs 2. academic advising: including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff, integration of advising with first-year programs, academic advising centers, and centers that combine academic advising and career-life planning 3. learning support: including supplemental instruction, a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, summer bridge program and tutoring program 	ACT 2004
		Learning	Support		<p>Late Course Drop interactive advising module (Penn State University) http://eLion.psu.edu (click on “eLion Demo”) Late Course Drop is a module within eLion, a Web-based service for students, faculty, and advisers. This module interacts with a student in much the same way that a well-informed expert adviser would interact with that student when discussing a late course drop. The "virtual adviser" (1) accesses the student’s academic records, (2) asks the student specific questions, (3) responds to the student’s answers, and (4) provides individualized advice (pros, cons, outcomes, and alternatives) based on the specific academic status of that student and the student’s answers. This module simulates an actual advising conversation with an expert adviser. Overall, PSU has seen a decline in course withdrawal since implementing this system.</p>	http://www.centss.org/showBestPractice.cfm?bpid=7
			Support		<p>Marymount College (CA): The course drop deadline is the end of the 12th week of the term; mandatory advisement for the following term takes place weeks 8-11 – advisers have mid-term grade information during these sessions and are able to address course improvement and/or withdrawal decisions.</p>	Joe Cuseo (October 2007)
		Learning	Support	Culture	<p>NIA Mentor Program: Nurturing Initiative and Achievement in Students (Buffalo State College: public, NY) (appears to be geared toward minority students) “Success in Six” – participants in the NIA program are matched with mentors according to career interest or major; activities include development of an individualized academic plan that draws upon the results of the Meyers-Briggs Personality Indicator and the College Student Inventory; Well-Made Student workshops that focus on self-actualization, balance, stress management, etc. Results: participant attrition rate of 3-11%</p>	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1996

Core Process Area					Best Practice Summary	Source
Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
		Learning	Support		Comprehensive Student Retention Program (Midlands Technical College: 2-year, SC): 1) an increasing emphasis on academic advisement through advising centers, degree audit software, advising manuals, and faculty training in developmental advising; 2) increased orientation activities; 3) identification of student educational plans at college entry for use in advisement and student tracking; 4) assessment linked to orientation and advising; 5) computer-based intervention system used to connect students with academic courses and student support services based on identified needs; 6) specific initiatives with targeted-risk groups Results: first to second year retention increased by 6.4%; retention of academically under prepared increased 16.9%	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1992
			Support	Culture	Comprehensive Advisement Center (Oral Roberts University: private, OK); program focuses on establishing personal advisement relationships between all freshman students and full-time faculty on an intentional basis (faculty are given three hours of release time and serve for 1-2 years); emphasizes early identification and classification of advisees and seeks to overcome the students' natural reluctance to seek help – all incoming freshmen visit their faculty advisors during the second or third week of their first semester (much more...) Results: fresh-to soph attrition have been cut from 48% to 15%	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1994
			Support	Culture	Integrated Student Retention Program (Sauk Valley Community College: 2-year, IL): 1) a campuswide “student centered” climate through structured staff development; 2) an extended orientation course for new students; 3) a comprehensive assessment and placement system; 4) a student database and tracking system with the capability to conduct retention research on targeted populations Results: 1 st sem to 2 nd sem retention increased from 46% to 62%	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1994
			Support	Culture	Retention Management Program (Suffolk University: private, Boston): pre-enrollment summer enrichment program; special faculty advisors assigned to work with high risk cohorts; intervention strategies; telemarketing – new students are contacted by staff and upperclass students throughout the first semester	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1993
			Support	Culture	“Expectations”, An Orientation Program for New Students (Trenton State College: public, NJ): 1) June Advisement Week: advisement, registration, presidents' address, parent program, summer readings, social interaction; 2) Welcome Week: social interaction, departmental orientation, convocation; 3) College Seminar: 10 week course, major and advisor connection. Results: 92% first to second year retention	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1991

Core Process Area					Best Practice Summary	Source
Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
			Support	Culture	Academic Advising Center (University of Central Arkansas): 1) centralized advising for all freshmen with both professional and faculty advisors; 2) individualized advising contacts; 3) intensive advising for at-risk students; 4) mid-term progress conferences; 5) additional services such as workshops, newsletter, etc. Results: 4.9% increase in freshman to sophomore retention	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 2000
Fit			Support		Transformational U (Utah State University): intentional student recruitment to find the right fit; student success by proactive tracking, advising, exit interviewing and recruiting back dropouts and stop-outs; advising center targeting undeclared students and high-risk students; freshman seminar; course clusters and priority registration Results: freshman to sophomore retention improved from 66% to 75%	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 2005
		Learning	Support	Culture	<p>AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study: reasons why some state-supported four-year colleges and universities do an unusually good job in retaining and graduating students; identified 12 AASCU institutions that are doing better than their peers in graduating students within six years. Highlights:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First-year experience programs: Goals include providing information on campus services and how to access them, strengthening planning and study skills, basic skills development, and curricular orientation. Some incorporate other proven “good practices” such as learning communities, peer mentorship, or service learning. Many require that students participate. 2. Intentional advising: Study campuses varied in advising models and scope; however, all used intentionality and intensiveness in approaching advising. Attention to the selection, training, evaluation, and reward of advisors; in most cases, advising is mandatory and often intrusive 3. Integrated services: Coordinated or integrated services for students – administrative (single unit coordinating a wide range of services) and/or physical (access all services at a single location) 4. Curricular features: Curricular features that are consciously designed to build greater student identification and engagement. Many curricular policies involve balancing student empowerment and intrusive intervention, simplifying the curriculum so that students can graduate promptly, ensuring students do not lose credits in transitions, engaging students in academic work and motivating them to continue. 	http://www.calpoly.edu/~acadse n/documents/AASCU-GRO_Report_093005.pdf

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		Learning	Support	Culture	<p>University of Connecticut – data driven retention effort; 20-member Graduation and Retention Task Force made up of faculty, staff, senior administrators, and students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Data indicated that students who do not make it to the sophomore year generally show signs of distress very early. UConn used to have a mid-term alert system; however, it wasn't soon enough. Under UConn's new early warning system, if a student is headed for a D or F in a class in the first six weeks, the student's FYE instructor is notified, as are the student's academic advisor and residence hall director. ▶ FYE course – improved resources so every student can take the one-credit FYE course; limited to 19 students and taught by a volunteer faculty or staff member. ▶ UConn is also using very specific data sets, like degree completion rates for black men in engineering or women in biology, to write new grants. (UConn has received more than \$2 million in federal grants to increase the number of graduates from underrepresented groups.) ▶ Targeted advising and engagement in community – at-risk advising and engagement in leadership programs ▶ UConn spent over \$3 million to hire new faculty and to get more seats in existing courses <p>Results from 1998-2004: freshman to sophomore retention increased from 86 percent to 92 percent and from 88 percent to 93 percent among minority students; four-year graduation rates increased from 44 percent to 54 percent</p>	http://insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2006/07/07/uconn
		Learning	Support		<p>Sophomore Program Clemson University</p> <p>Fall Events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophomore welcome back picnic • Study abroad fair • Internships workshop • Career fair • Faculty/sophomore dinner and brown bag lunch • Sophomores only career workshop <p>Also sent welcome back letter from President; launched sophomore web interactive portal; reality-based career planning; leadership and community service opportunities</p>	www.clemson.edu/studentaffairs/nssp/sye/index.php

Core Process Area					Best Practice Summary	Source
Fit	Financial	Progress	Support	Culture		
Fit			Support		<p>Beloit College – Sophomore Year Initiative Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist sophomores in making a successful transition from first year to second year Enhance sophomores' integration into the community Provide opportunities for sophomores to : develop relationships with faculty, staff, advisors, and peers; cultivate students' self knowledge; make informed and thoughtful decisions about their future; be aware of and utilize resources for academic and personal planning and growth Educate faculty, staff, and parents on the unique developmental needs of sophomore students 	www.beloit.edu/~syi/
			Support	Culture	<p>Leadership Ladder Program (Texas A & I University: public, more than 50% Hispanic): role model students assist in the development of all freshmen through mentoring and peer counseling: 1) provides peer and academic support for all new freshmen; 2) recognizes successful role-model students and encourages them to graduate Results: improved freshman retention (does not give %)</p>	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1992
			Support	Culture	<p>Strategic Retention Program (Texas State Technical College – Amarillo: 2-year, TX): 1) campuswide staff and student involvement; 2) individualized assessment and counseling before enrollment; 3) creation of support networks for each student; 4) training and placement of positive role models for at-risk students; 5) follow-up of retention activities Results: increased retention by 20%; minority retention increased by 17%; GPAs improved with 6% fewer students on probation</p>	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1994
		Learning	Support	Culture	<p>Institution-wide Retention Efforts (Walla Walla College: private): plan includes over 20 objectives and 70 activities: peer mentoring, career development program, faculty hosted potlucks, increased services for international and minority students, and community improvement projects Results: fall to spring retention increase of 12%</p>	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1996
			Support	Culture	<p>Freshman Retention Program (Xavier University: private, OH) 1) faculty mentoring of freshmen; 2) discipline-related freshman seminar courses; 3) parent participation program; 4) freshman intervention task force; 5) faculty feedback program (faculty ID and report high-risk students to the director of freshman programs); 6) comprehensive evaluation process Results: freshman retention increased from 81% to 88%</p>	Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award Winner 1992