

College Student Retention: A Primer

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A Little Bit About Me

Executive Director: Center for the Study of College Student Retention (www.cscsr.org)

Founding Editor: *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, Sage

Author:

- ***College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success*, Roman & Littlefield (3rd ed)**
- ***Crossing the finish line: Retaining and graduating your students*, Roman & Littlefield**
- ***Minority Student Retention: The Best of the Journal of College Student Retention*, Baywood Publishing**

Professor Emeritus, Walden University

Recipient :

- **Extraordinary Faculty Award, Walden University Richard W. Riley College of Education & Leadership**
- **Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service, State University of New York (SUNY)**

Learning Outcomes

- **Retention Theories**
- **How To Define Retention/Attrition?**
- **Student Behaviors:**
 - **Reasons Noted As Very Important in Deciding to Go to College?**
 - **Reasons Noted As Very Important in Selecting College Attended**
- **What The Data Does Or Does Not Tell Us**
- **Action Steps To Help Solve The Retention/Attrition Problem**

How Theory & Research Should Inform Higher Education Administrative Practice: Student Retention Initiatives

For Students

- **Academic and/or personal goal attainment**
- **Student/College Cost**
- **Student Debt**

For Colleges/Universities

- **Fulfillment of mission**
- **Accountability**

Why Worry About Retention?

Student Development Issues

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

College Financial Issues

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

College Obligation To Students

- **Reasonable Expectation For Success**
- **Loss Of Time The Non-Renewable Resource 168 Hours Per Week**
- **Turned Off To Future Educational Opportunities**
- **Upgrading Of Skills For Job Advancement or Skills For Another Job**
- **Unhappy Students Tell Others Of Their Experience**

A Few Retention Theories/Models: Some Oldies But Still Goodies

Astin (1977, 1985)

The more involved a student is with the college, the higher likelihood of student retention.

Bean (1980, 1983)

Model of Work Turnover to Student Attrition. Used concepts from organizational studies of worker turnover. Examines how organizational attributes and reward structures affect student satisfaction and persistence.

Bean and Metzner (1985)

Nontraditional Student Attrition. Environmental factors have a greater impact on departure decisions of adult students than academic variables.

Kamens (1971, 1974)

Used multi-institutional data to demonstrate how colleges of greater size and complexity had lower attrition rates.

Kuh (2008)

integration and engagement model posits that students' participation in "certain high-impact educational practices correlates to higher level of student performance" (Kuh, 2008, p. 27)

Meyer (1970)

Argued that institutions of higher education were socializing organizations and that they had the ability to influence values, personality needs, and social roles or identities,

More Theories/Models: Some Oldies But Still Goodies

McNeely (1937)

Examined many factors in college student retention including time to degree, when attrition was most prevalent in a student's education, impact of college size etc.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005)

Does not specifically address student retention but does address students' experiences and how college affects students

Seidman (2005, 2012)

Retention = Early Identification + (Early + Intensive + Continuous) Intervention

Spady (1971)

Interaction between student characteristics and campus environment

Summerskill (1962)

Personality attributes of students is the main reasons for persistence and leaving.

Tinto Model (1975, 1993)

Academic and social integration with the formal and informal academic and social systems of a college.

Witt & Handal (1984)

Person-environment fit.

Types of Student Departure

System:	From the educational system
Institutional:	From a particular college
Major:	A specific discipline/program
Course:	A particular course
Voluntary:	A student leaves on his/her own
Involuntary:	A college lets a student go

Defining Retention/Attrition

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

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

Defining Retention/Attrition

Federal Government Program Retention Definition:

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

Are there flaws in the Federal Government Definition?

Can colleges and universities exclude certain student populations from the data?

We Need to Pay Attention to What Students Tell Us

It is important that we understand why students choose a specific college, number of colleges applied and graduation rates. Instead of listing data since data changes from year to year a few websites are listed where pertinent data can be found.

- **CIRP Freshman Survey ([CIRP Freshman Survey – HERI](#))**. For over 50 years, the CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS) has provided data on incoming college students' background characteristics, high school experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and expectations for college.
- **IPEDS (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>)**. Is a system of 12 interrelated survey components conducted annually that gathers data from every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that participates in the federal student financial aid programs
- **The National Student Clearinghouse[®] (<https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/>)**. Provides year-round comprehensive reports on the evolving educational landscape.
- **The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<https://nces.ed.gov>)** The primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education.
- **U.S. Census Bureau (<https://data.census.gov>)**

MY Word About Retention Data

In the past, slides were included in this presentation to show retention and graduation rates for four-year colleges and the community college. Data from student surveys were also included. Since data changes from year to year, the previous slide provides the location where this type of data can be found.

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

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

I also urge colleges and universities, especially peer institutions, to develop like retention, attrition and graduation definitions and share the data. This, then, may lead to best practices and allow all to benefit from each others positive retention experiences.

The Interchange Between a Student & College



A student seeks a higher education to acquire competencies to perform specific tasks. In exchange for tuition and fees a college provides the competencies the student seeks.

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

How does a college provide these competencies to the student?

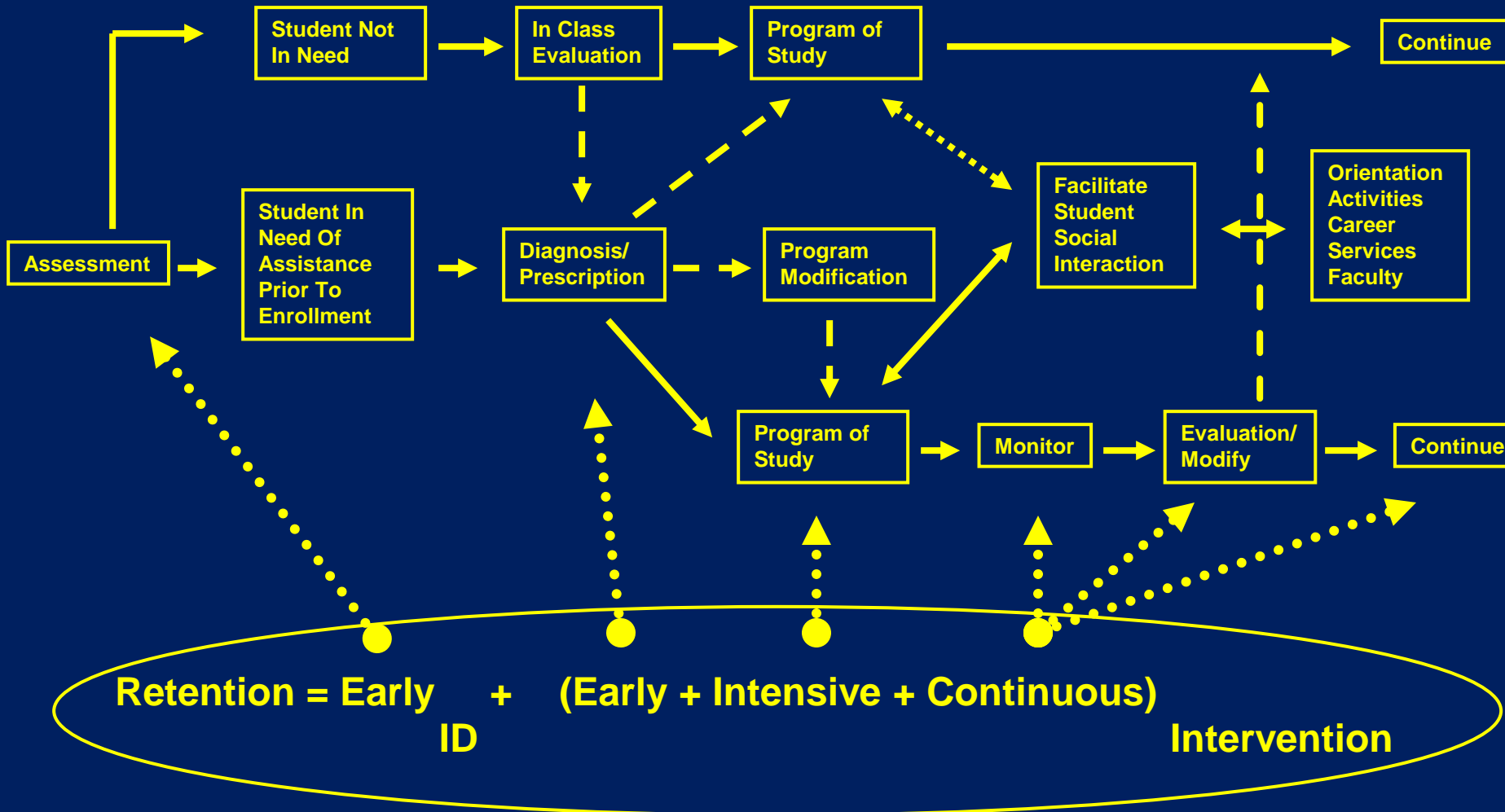
A Retention Formula For Student Success

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

$$*RET = E_{ID} + (E + IN + C)_{IV}$$

$$*RETENTION = EARLY_{IDENTIFICATION} + (EARLY + INTENSIVE + CONTINUOUS)_{INTERVENTION}$$

Seidman Student Success Model



The formula starts with the premise that the student comes first. The teaching learning process is essential for student academic and personal growth and development. The student enters the institution to acquire academic and personal competencies necessary to achieve academic and personal goals.

Assessment and interventions are a longitudinal process commencing at the time of acceptance and continuing throughout the student's career at the institution and perhaps beyond. Although the formula appears to be for one term, it is, in essence for all terms a student is at the institution

Formula & Model Interpretation

To fully understand the Seidman formula and model you can view these suggested resources.

Seidman, A. (2024). *College student retention: Formula for student success* (3rd ed.), New York, NY: ACE/Rowman & Littlefield.

Seidman, A. (2018). *Crossing the finish line: How to retain and graduate your students*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.

Retention Consulting, for presentations/consultations contact Dr. Seidman aseidman@cscsr.org and/or telephone (603)471-1490 USA, or on the web at www.cscsr.org

A Word About ...

Developmental Courses

Financial Aid

Orientation

Career Services

Faculty

College Mission

Developmental Courses

Current Practice

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

Developmental Courses

University Community

- Does your assessment identify specific competencies in need of remediation?
- Have you identified competencies in foundation courses?
- Does your developmental course competencies line up with the skills needed for the next level course?
- Can you divide the developmental course into modules and have a student only take the one (s) they need?

Developmental Course Suggestion

In this example, faculty have identified 5 writing competencies a student needs to be successful writing essays.

Although the student knows competencies 1, 2 & 5 and only needs to acquire competencies 3 & 4 the student is currently put into a course that starts with competency 1.

No wonder students complain that they already know the work, earn no college credit and must pay for the course.

Foundation Course Competencies (faculty determined example)

Writing competencies

- competency 1
- competency 2
- competency 3
- competency 4
- competency 5

Develop a module for each writing competency. Only have a student take the competency(s) that they are lacking.

Developmental Course (0 college credit, 3 charged credits)					
	competency 1	competency 2	competency 3	competency 4	competency 5
Student	Start		Needs	Needs	

Pre-college/Early Enrollment Activities

- **Pre-college programs for special interest groups (students who need competency development, first generation, students of color etc) to begin to remediate academic deficiencies and/or social interaction.**
- **Continue throughout student enrollment at the institution. In addition to remediating academic deficiencies, which not all students will need, the socialization process into college life is important especially for first generation and underrepresented groups in predominantly white institutions.**
- **Residential Life Programs. Advisors check student rooms often to see if the student is making their room their “home away from home”.**
- **Commuter Students. Commuter lounge with food, showers etc.**

Financial Aid Offices

Current Practice

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

Financial Aid Offices

College Community

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

Orientation

Current Practice

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

Orientation

College Community

- Faculty and staff serve as mentors
- Orientation continuous all years in the college (2nd year with 1st year, 3rd year with 2nd year, 4th year with 3rd year)
- Have orientation groups meet at least once per term

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

Career Services

Current Practice

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

Career Services

College Community

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

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

Faculty Engagement With Students

Faculty interaction with students outside the formal classroom setting is important for student success. Faculty should be encouraged and rewarded for out-of-class interaction with students.

Faculty are not trained to be teachers, rather they are trained to be experts in their chosen field. They do not have to be certified, pass any tests and once they receive tenure are usually not observed by the administration for teaching effectiveness.

Set scripts for positive student contact and interaction:

- Prior to enrollment (major)
- After enrollment (major)
- By professors prior to the start of classes
- Each week through census date
- Mid-term
- End of term

Can these be developed by AI?

Create Centers for Faculty Excellence to teach faculty methods of student learning (learning styles).

Faculty Engagement With Students

What teaching practices and/or methodologies can be used to accommodate different student learning styles?

Types of Learners:

- Visual learner
- Auditory learner
- Tactile or Kinesthetic learner
- Group learner
- Individual learner

Faculty Classroom Practice:

- Group work
- Individual work
- Combination Group/Individual
- Faculty availability

Center for Faculty Excellence

Can you use AI to help develop classroom activities?

College Mission Statement as the Guiding Principle

Seidman Says:

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

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

“Philosophy does not have to follow finance. Finance should follow philosophy.”

Postscript-Final Words

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

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

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

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Seidman says, "Don't make it harder than it really is".