College Student Retention: A Primer

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Learning Objectives

- **Learn the Basics About College Student Retention**

- **Identification of Retention/Attrition Issues**

- **Student and Retention Data**

- **Where to Find Retention Data**

- **College Choice Factors**

- **Deal Effectively With College/university Personnel**

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

Students

- **Academic and/or personal goal attainment**

Colleges/Universities

- **Fulfillment of mission**

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

- **College/University Accountability**

- **Student/College Cost**

- **Student Debt**
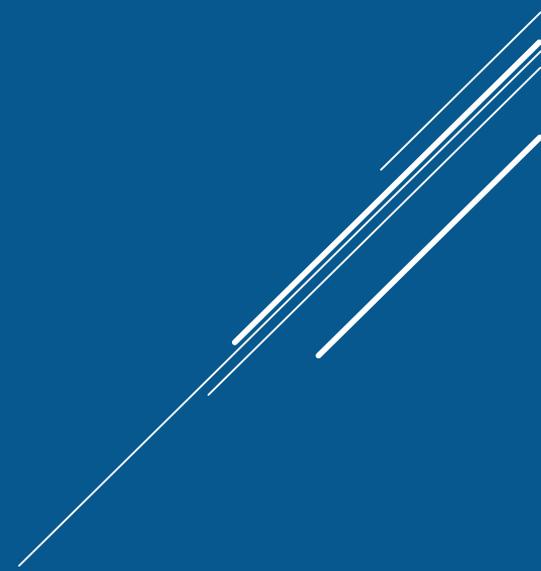
Why Worry About Retention?

Student Development Issues

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

Financial Issues

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

Obligation To Students

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

Retention is Cost Effective For Colleges

Tuition & Fees = $10,000 per year
_____
(Three Year Loss Per Student = $30,000)

X

ONLY
10
STUDENTS

=

($50,000) ONE TERM

($300,000) THREE YEARS

This does not count auxiliary services money
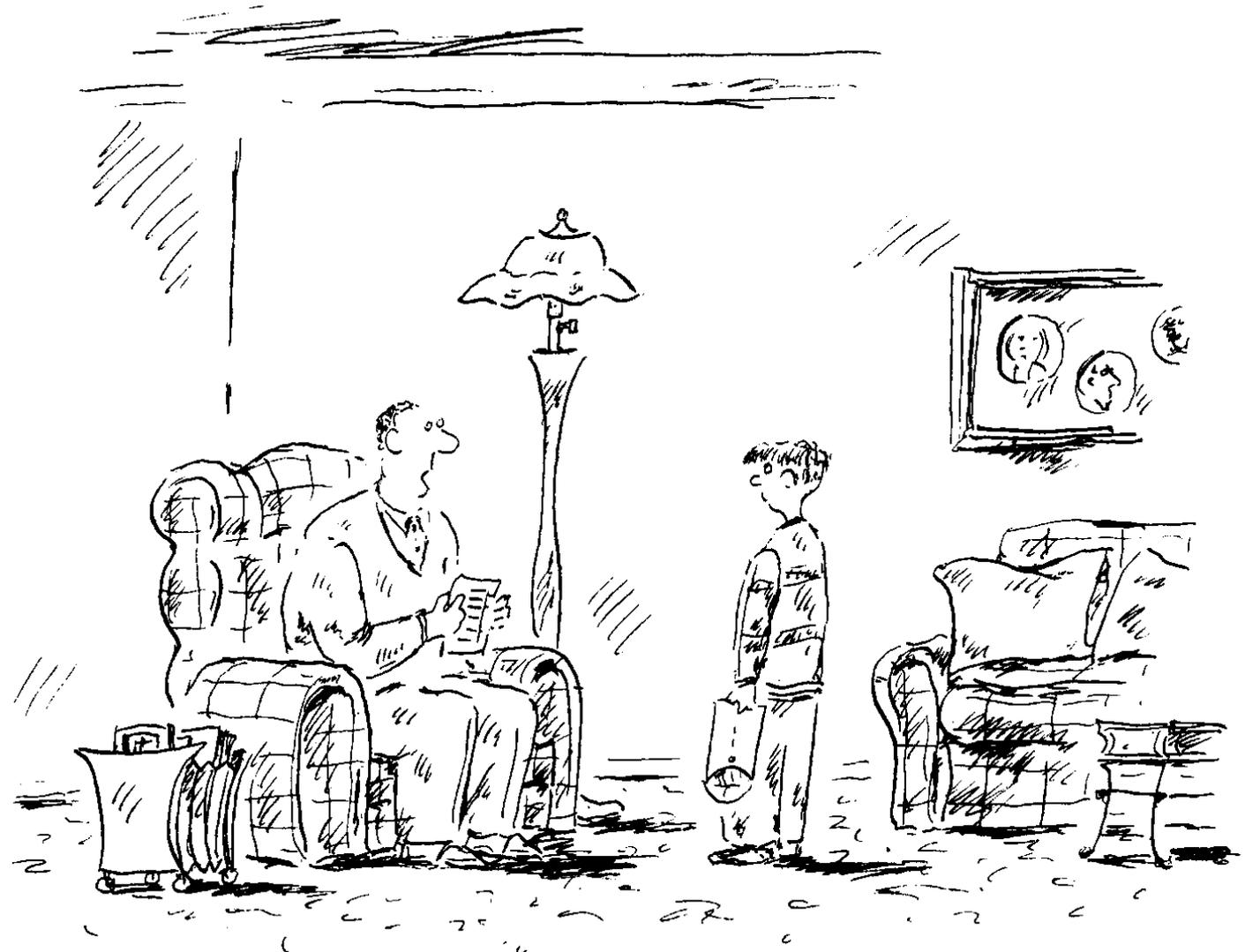
"They may be your grades, but they're the return on my investment."

What You Should Know About Student Retention/Attrition

Retention Theories

How To Define Retention/Attrition?

Student Behaviors:

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

    Reasons Students Noted As Very Important in Selecting College Attended

What The Data Does Or Does Not Tell Us

Action Steps To Help Solve The Retention/Attrition Problem

A Look At A Few Retention Theories

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

BENITA EPSTEIN

"I'm working on my pet theory."

A Few Retention Theories

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

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

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

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

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

Seidman (2005, 2012)
$$Retention = Early_{Identification} + (Early + Intensive + Continuous)_{Intervention}$$

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

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

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

Witt & Handal (1984)
Person-environment fit.

Most of these theories have been taken from: Berger, J. B., & Lyons, S. (2005). Past to present: A historical look at retention. In Seidman, A. (Ed.). *College student retention: Formula for student success.* ACE/Praeger Press.
Braxton, J. M. & Hirschy, A. S. (2012). Theoretical Developments in the study of college student departure. In Seidman, A. (Ed.). *College student retention: Formula for student success.* ACE/Praeger Press.

Different 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**

Berger, J. B., & Lyons, S. (2012). Past to present: A historical look at retention. In Seidman, A. (Ed.). *College student retention: Formula for student success*. Praeger Press.

Defining Retention/Attrition

Federal Government Program Retention Definition:

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

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

We Need to Pay Attention to What Students Tell Us

2014 CIRP Freshman Survey
Weighted National Norms—All Respondents

	All Bacc Institutions	Baccalaureate Institutions		4-year Colleges					Universities		Black Colleges and Universities		
		4-yr Coll	Universities	Public	Private	Nonsec	Catholic	Oth Relig	Public	Private	All HBCU	Public	Private
The following reasons were "Very Important" in deciding to go to college:													
To be able to get a better job	86.1	86.0	86.2	87.2	84.4	83.7	90.1	82.4	86.1	86.7	90.7	91.2	89.9
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	70.6	70.8	70.5	69.2	73.0	74.7	75.2	70.1	69.4	74.7	81.9	82.3	81.3
To make me a more cultured person	46.6	45.6	47.7	42.4	49.9	51.3	50.3	48.3	45.6	55.8	59.3	56.6	64.1
To be able to make more money	72.8	74.0	71.4	77.0	69.9	69.4	76.4	67.3	71.9	69.4	87.4	88.5	85.3
To learn more about things that interest me	82.2	81.6	82.9	80.8	82.7	84.2	82.7	81.3	82.5	84.5	84.2	83.2	86.0
To get training for a specific career	77.1	79.5	74.5	81.6	76.5	73.1	81.9	77.4	75.1	72.4	87.3	87.7	86.5
To prepare myself for graduate or professional school	59.7	59.5	60.0	59.8	59.2	59.1	65.6	56.1	60.1	59.3	80.5	79.0	83.2
How many years do you expect it will take you to graduate from this college?													
1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0
2	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.5	0.7	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.6	0.5
3	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.6	2.7	2.3	1.8	3.5	2.2	1.7	3.2	2.6	4.4
4	84.7	84.4	85.0	80.7	89.2	88.5	88.6	90.2	85.8	82.1	85.3	86.0	84.0
5	9.4	9.5	9.3	13.4	4.2	4.5	5.4	3.2	8.5	12.3	6.4	7.6	4.3
6 or more	2.2	1.9	2.5	1.9	2.0	2.5	2.9	0.9	2.3	3.3	2.9	1.7	5.1
Do not plan to graduate from this college	1.1	1.5	0.7	1.8	1.1	0.8	0.9	1.6	0.8	0.4	1.5	1.5	1.7
To how many colleges other than this one did you apply for admission this year?													
None	9.8	10.7	8.7	10.5	11.0	10.4	8.2	12.9	9.5	5.6	7.5	7.3	7.7
1	7.7	7.9	7.5	8.0	7.7	6.9	5.7	9.5	8.3	4.1	5.8	5.9	5.7
2	10.1	10.8	9.2	11.2	10.4	8.9	8.3	12.9	10.1	5.4	12.0	13.4	9.5
3	13.7	15.7	11.6	16.9	14.1	12.4	12.7	16.5	12.3	8.6	17.3	17.9	16.0
4	12.9	14.6	11.1	15.4	13.4	12.4	13.3	14.5	11.4	10.0	17.4	18.6	15.2
5	10.5	10.8	10.1	10.7	11.0	10.8	12.0	10.8	9.9	10.6	12.7	12.9	12.2
6	8.6	8.0	9.2	7.7	8.3	8.7	10.4	6.8	8.9	10.4	8.6	8.3	9.2
7 to 10	20.1	16.8	23.7	16.5	17.2	20.4	21.8	11.7	22.2	30.2	12.4	11.0	15.0
11 or more	6.7	4.7	8.9	3.1	6.9	9.1	7.5	4.4	7.5	15.0	6.3	4.6	9.5
Were you accepted by your first choice college?													
Yes	72.7	75.6	69.6	71.8	80.7	77.7	80.5	83.9	70.2	67.1	74.2	73.7	75.0
No	27.3	24.4	30.4	28.2	19.3	22.3	19.5	16.1	29.8	32.9	25.8	26.3	25.0
Is this college your:													
First choice	55.0	55.2	54.8	51.6	60.1	59.2	57.3	62.3	54.6	55.5	41.7	38.4	47.8
Second choice	27.2	28.5	25.9	30.7	25.5	25.8	27.8	24.0	26.0	25.5	32.7	35.1	28.2
Third choice	11.0	10.6	11.5	11.6	9.4	9.6	9.9	8.9	11.5	11.4	14.6	15.4	13.0
Less than third choice	6.7	5.7	7.8	6.2	5.1	5.4	5.0	4.8	7.9	7.6	11.1	11.2	10.9

Reasons Were "Very Important" in College Selection

2014 CIRP Freshman Survey
Weighted National Norms—All Respondents

The following reasons were "Very Important" in deciding to go to this particular college:	All Bacc Institutions	Baccalaureate Institutions		4-year Colleges					Universities		Black Colleges and Universities		
		4-yr Coll	Universities	Public	Private	Nonsec	Catholic	Oth Relig	Public	Private	All HBCU	Public	Private
My parents wanted me to come here	17.2	18.6	15.5	18.7	18.4	17.4	21.1	18.2	15.6	15.4	22.2	19.2	27.7
My relatives wanted me to come here	8.0	9.0	6.9	8.9	9.2	8.4	10.3	9.5	7.0	6.6	16.0	13.9	19.9
My teacher advised me	7.2	8.4	5.8	8.4	8.5	8.7	8.6	8.2	5.8	6.1	11.2	10.4	12.8
This college has a very good academic reputation	65.4	60.7	70.6	56.2	66.8	68.5	71.2	63.1	69.5	74.8	55.0	49.1	65.8
This college has a good reputation for its social activities	42.8	40.3	45.6	38.5	42.8	42.3	44.4	42.5	45.1	47.6	47.6	46.3	50.0
I was offered financial assistance	46.9	51.0	42.2	40.1	65.8	63.2	69.1	67.0	39.3	53.2	52.6	53.5	50.9
The cost of attending this college	44.9	48.0	41.4	53.5	40.5	40.4	46.3	37.8	43.8	32.2	47.8	51.7	40.7
High school counselor advised me	10.4	11.8	8.8	11.9	11.7	12.7	13.2	9.9	8.3	10.6	15.5	15.6	15.3
Private college counselor advised me	4.6	5.4	3.8	4.1	7.1	7.1	6.7	7.2	3.2	6.2	8.2	7.5	9.5
I wanted to live near home	20.7	24.4	16.4	27.9	19.7	17.5	26.2	18.7	16.8	14.8	19.6	20.3	18.2
Not offered aid by first choice	10.6	10.9	10.3	10.9	10.8	10.1	13.6	10.1	10.5	9.2	16.4	16.5	16.4
Could not afford first choice	14.1	14.9	13.2	16.9	12.1	11.6	15.4	11.1	14.2	9.4	19.2	20.7	16.5
This college's graduates gain admission to top graduate/professional schools	32.9	29.1	37.1	25.1	34.6	35.9	40.1	30.7	35.9	41.6	36.8	27.8	53.1
This college's graduates get good jobs	53.4	50.1	57.2	45.4	56.5	56.8	64.0	52.5	54.8	65.9	51.9	46.0	62.5
I was attracted by the religious affiliation/orientation of this college	7.3	9.6	4.6	4.3	16.8	7.1	19.0	25.6	3.0	10.8	15.4	13.0	19.7
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college	36.6	39.4	33.4	30.7	51.1	49.4	52.3	52.3	30.9	43.0	33.9	31.0	39.2
Rankings in national magazines	18.0	12.7	23.9	10.5	15.7	17.3	18.0	13.1	23.3	26.3	16.6	10.5	27.7
Information from a website	18.8	17.6	20.1	15.7	20.2	21.9	20.2	18.6	19.2	23.3	24.9	23.0	28.3
I was admitted through an Early Action or Early Decision program	15.7	12.9	18.8	9.5	17.5	19.4	20.2	14.3	17.4	24.1	13.9	11.9	17.7
The athletic department recruited me	9.1	12.8	4.8	7.0	20.7	18.6	14.8	25.5	4.5	6.2	12.9	13.8	11.2
A visit to this campus	42.4	43.8	40.8	36.4	53.9	54.8	51.5	54.2	38.3	50.3	42.5	42.3	42.8
Ability to take online courses	4.1	5.2	3.0	6.0	4.0	3.1	4.5	4.7	3.0	2.8	10.4	10.8	9.8
The percentage of students that graduate from this college	31.1	32.7	29.2	28.3	38.7	37.8	44.2	37.0	28.0	33.8	39.9	35.9	47.1

The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2014, Prepared by the Staff of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), Higher Education Research Institute Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

Figure 1. Expectations of Needing More Time for Degree Completion and Transferring, by Institutional Control and Selectivity (% Indicating "Some" or "Very Good" Chance)
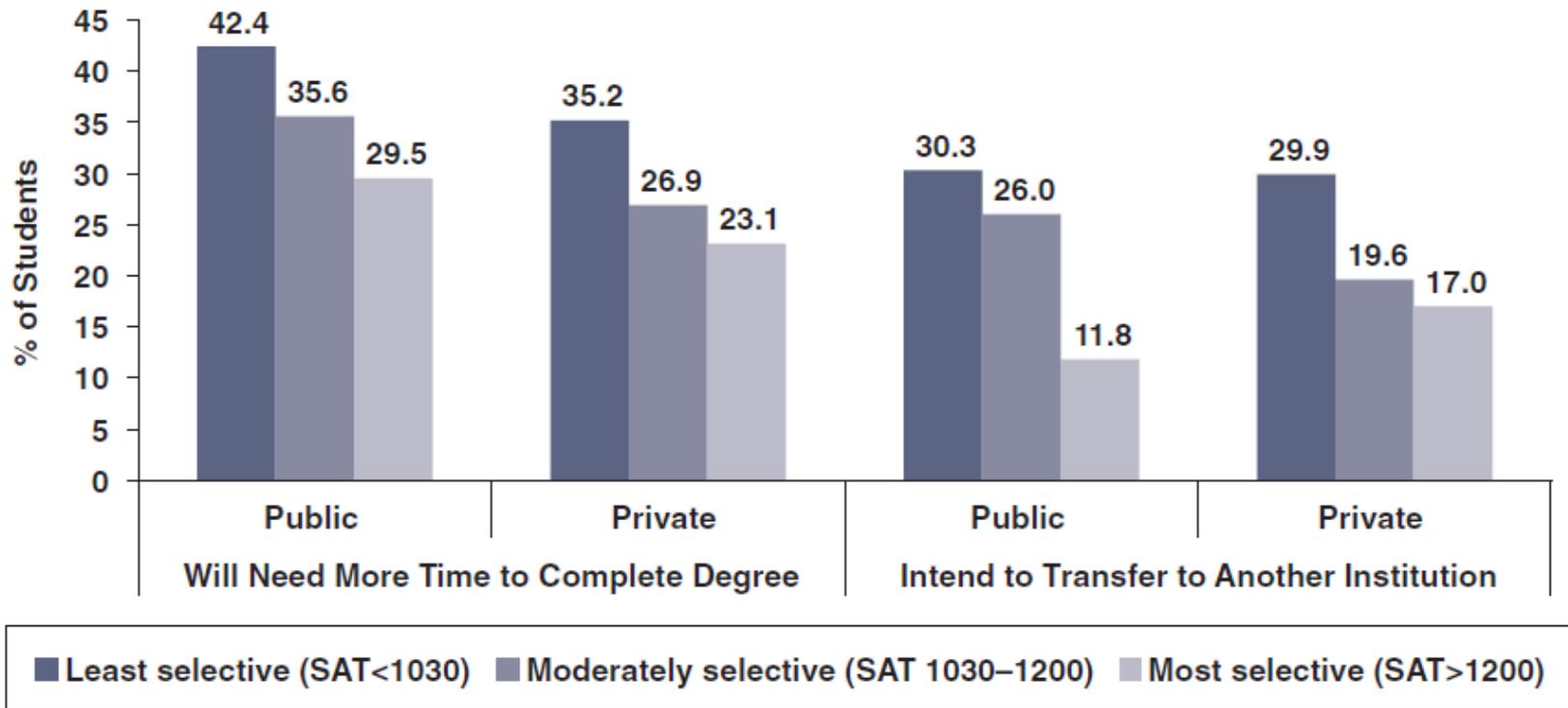
# Figure 5. Six-Year Outcomes by Enrollment Intensity (N= 2,911,898)

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (2015, November). Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2009 Cohort (Signature Report No. 10). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
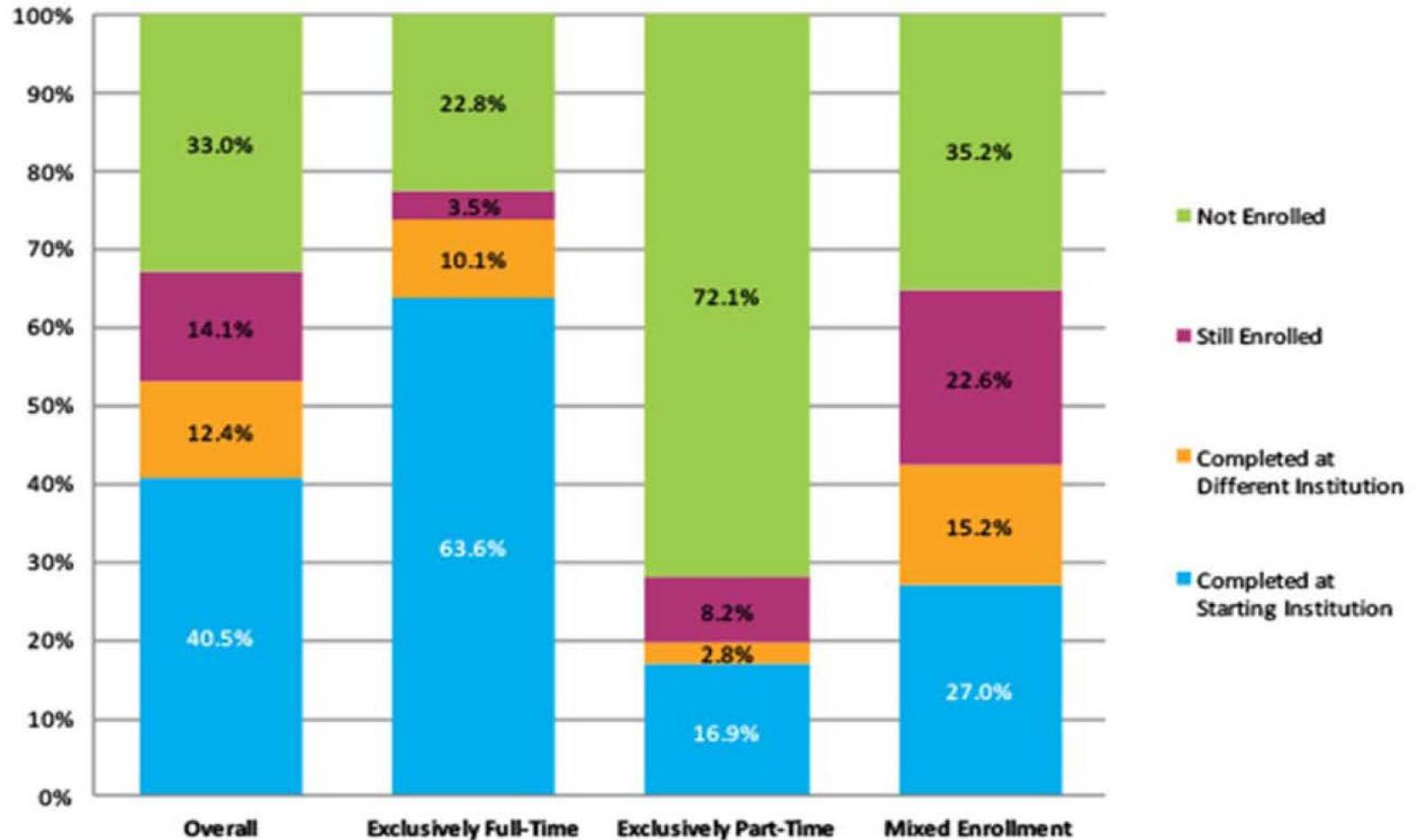
Figure 10. Six-Year Outcomes by Age at First Entry and Gender (N=2,717,923)

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (2015, November). Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2009 Cohort (Signature Report No. 10). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

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

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (2015, November). Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2009 Cohort (Signature Report No. 10). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
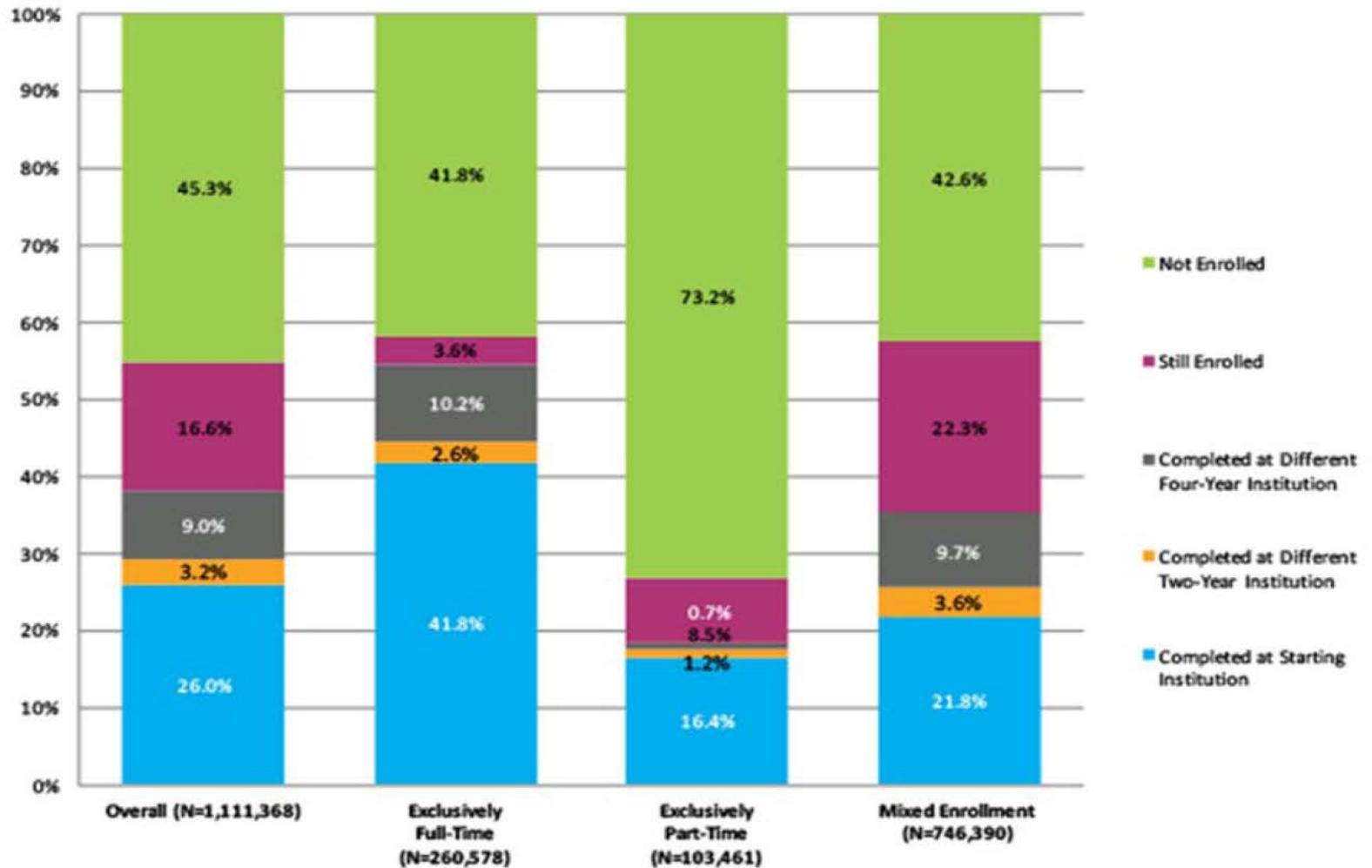
Figure 14. Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Four-Year Public Institutions by Enrollment Intensity (N=1,186,780)

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (2015, November). Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2009 Cohort (Signature Report No. 10). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
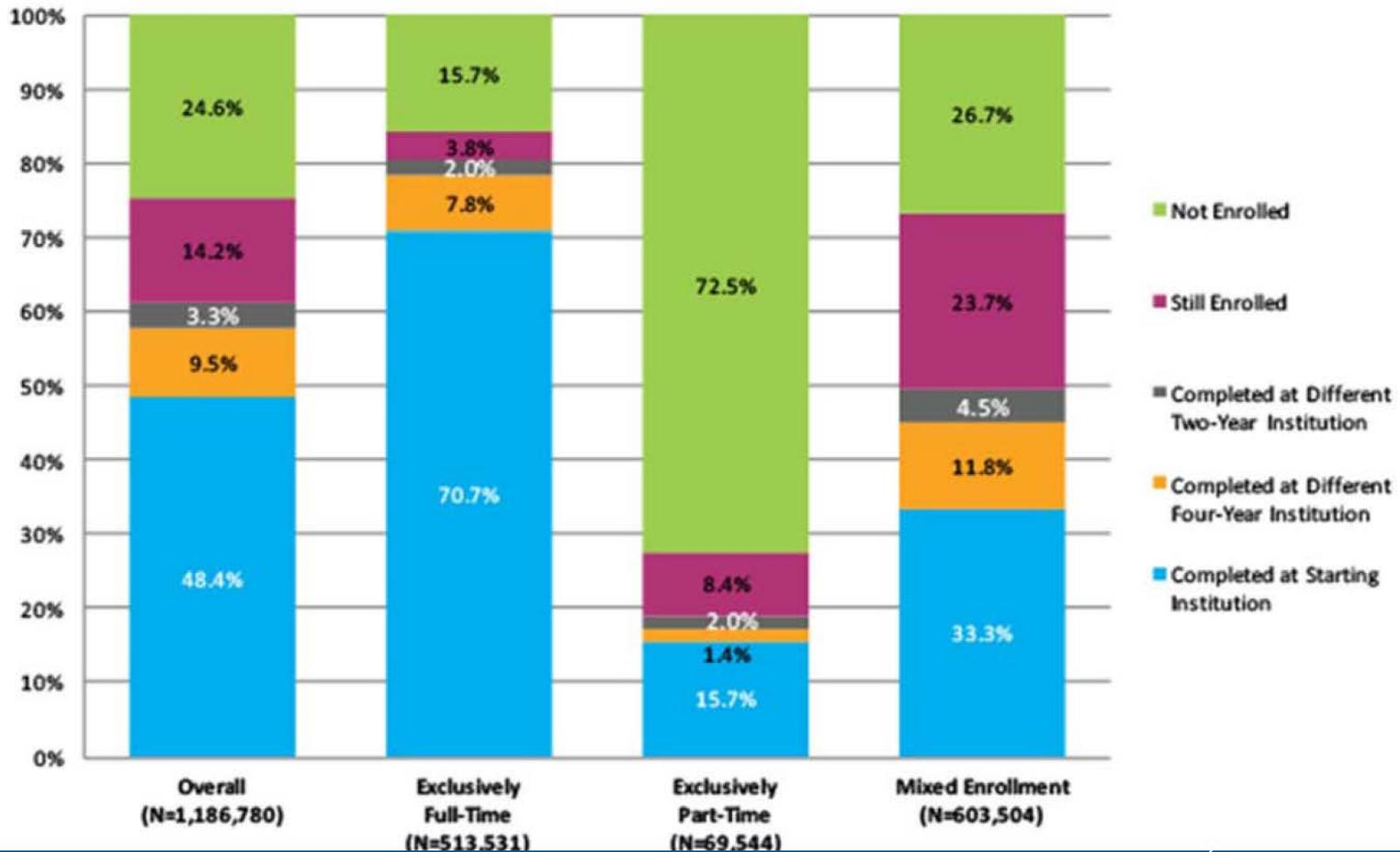
Figure 31. Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Four-Year Private Nonprofit Institutions by Age at First Entry and Enrollment Intensity (N=483,938)
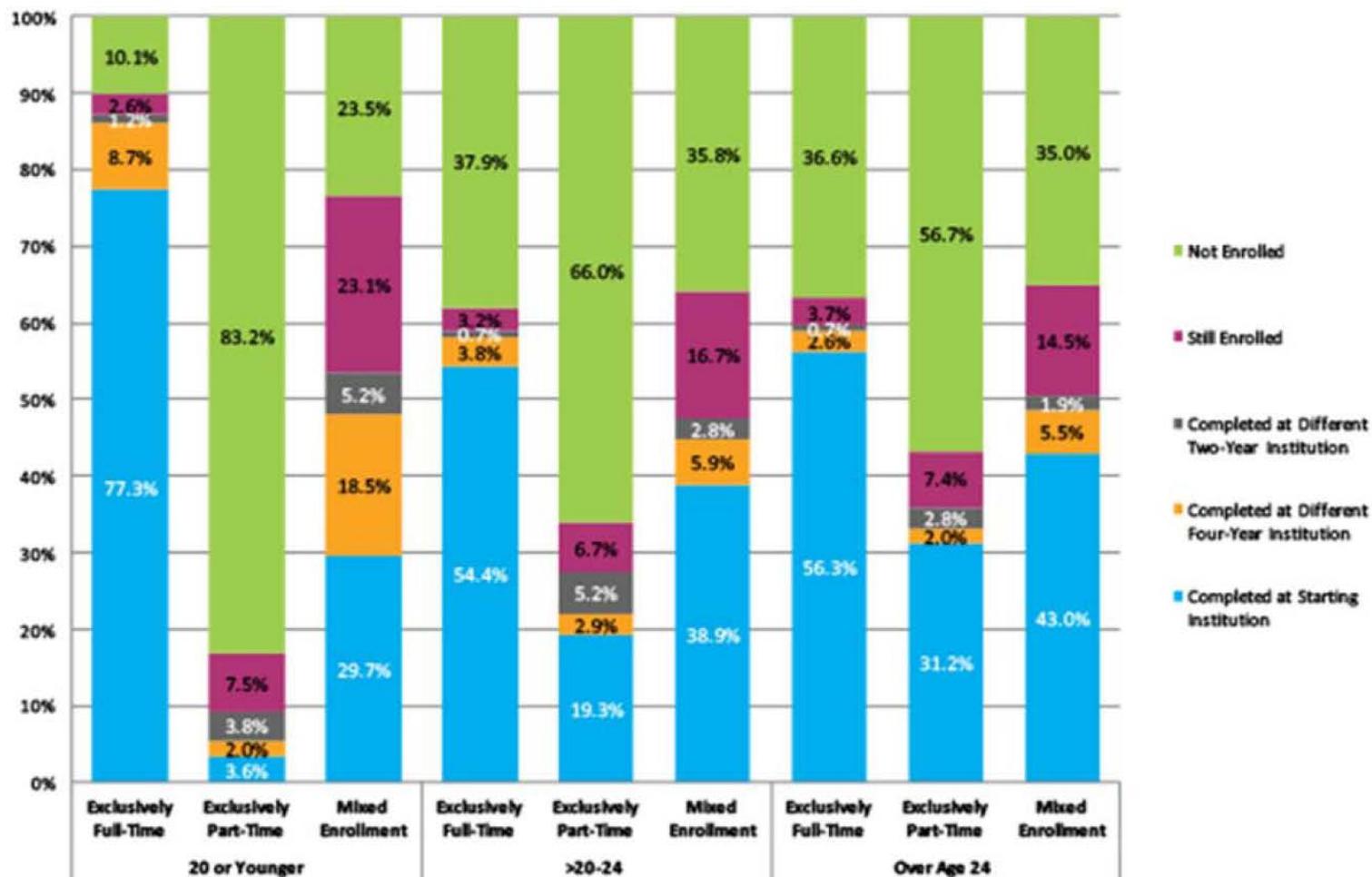
Figure 35. Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Four-Year Private For-Profit Institutions by Gender and Age at First Entry (N=117,935)

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (2015, November). Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2009 Cohort (Signature Report No. 10). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
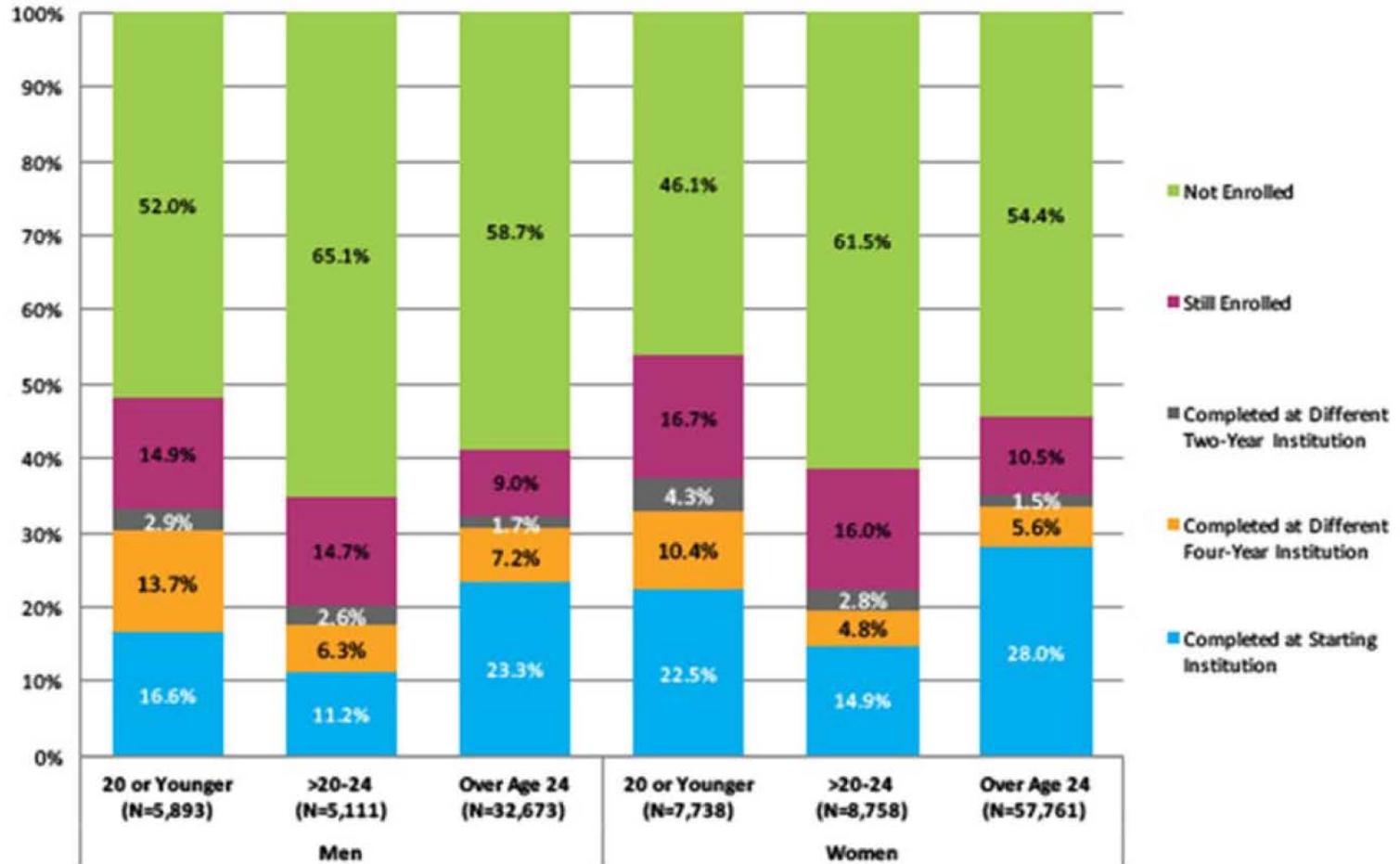
"Sure, a 'C' is disappointing after straight 'A's, but wasn't that a trend overdue for a correction?"

A Word About Retention Data

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

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

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

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

Where to Find Retention Attrition & Graduation Data

ACT (American College Testing)

CCSSE (Community College Survey of Student Engagement)

Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRED)

Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)

Lumina Foundation for Education

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Postsecondary Education Opportunity

The Educational Trust

U.S. Census Bureau

Interchange Between a Student & College

Student → **College**

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

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

How is the college going to provide these skills to the student?

So What Can You Do to Help A Student Achieve Her/his Academic and Personal Goals?

Seidman says,

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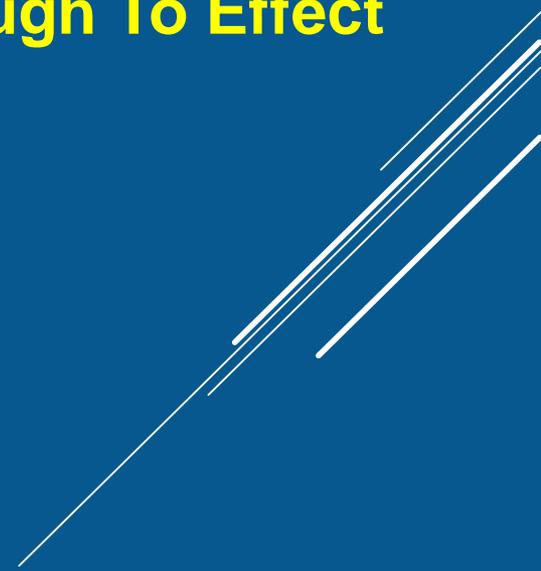
A Retention Formula For Student Success

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

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

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

*©Seidman2001

Seidman Student Success Model

Assessment → Student Not In Need → In Class Evaluation → Program of Study → Continue

Assessment → Student In Need Of Assistance Prior To Enrollment → Diagnosis/Prescription → Program Modification → Facilitate Student Social Interaction

Orientation Activities Career Services Faculty

Program of Study → Monitor → Evaluation/Modify → Continue

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

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

A Word About …

Developmental Courses

Financial Aid

Orientation

Career Services

Faculty

College Mission
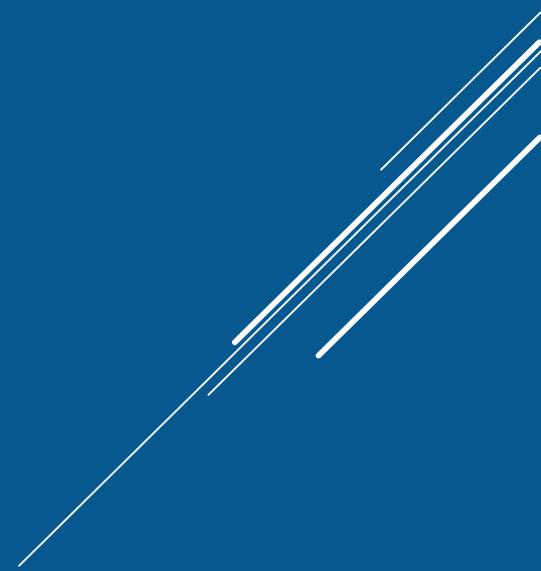
Developmental Courses

Current Practice

- **Student usually placed in a developmental reading, writing, math course**

- **Placement based on past academic record and/or standardized placement test**

- **Sometimes pre-test at the beginning of the developmental course**

- **Sometimes post-test at the end of the developmental course**

- **Student must obtain a specific grade to continue into the next level course**

- **Regardless of skill needs student is enrolled in a full term course**

Developmental Courses

University Community

- **Does your assessment identify specific skills in need of remediation?**

- **Does your developmental course skills line up with the skills needed for the next level course?**

- **Can you divide the developmental course into modules and have a student only take the one (s) he/she needs?**
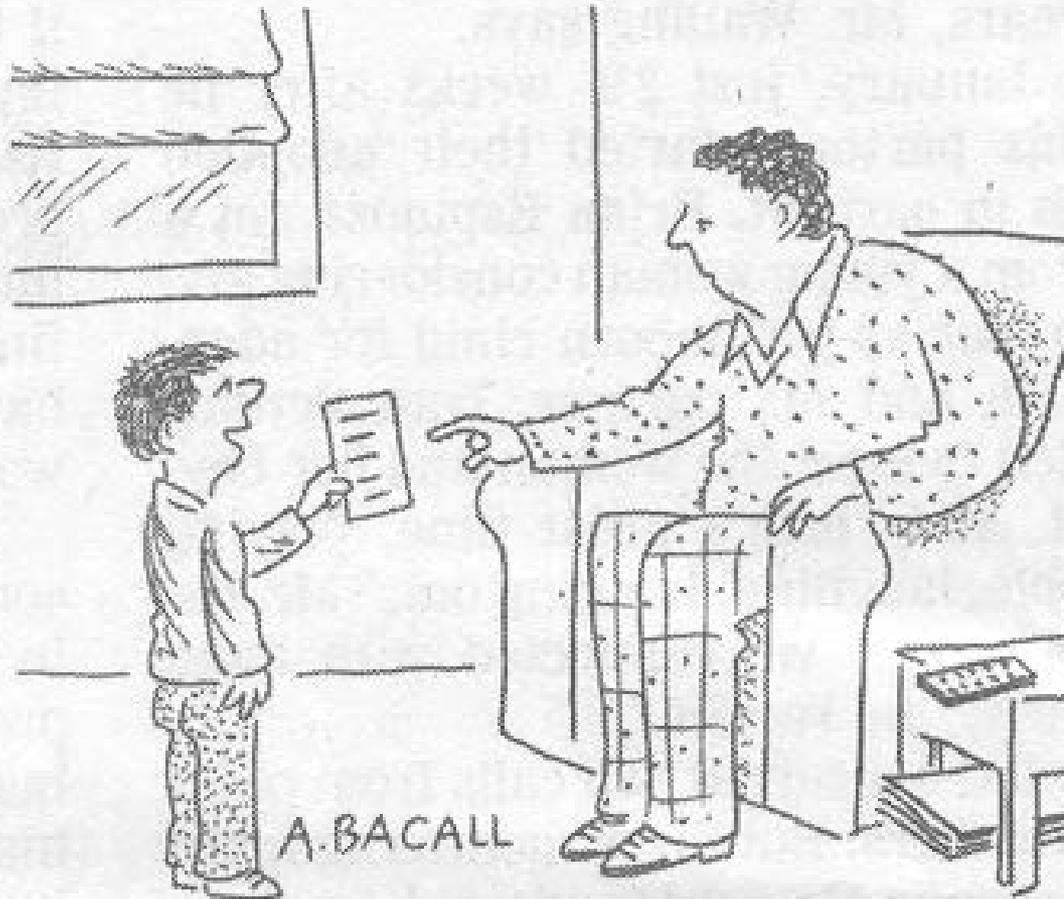
"Here's my report card. I beat the street expectations."

Financial Aid Offices

Current Practice

- **Second (probably first in many instances) contact with student, in writing, web, telephone, in person**

- **Many mailings to students**

- **Bring in a lot of revenue to the college**

- **Assist students ability to attend**

- **Contact with students during each term**

- **May have the most contact with students during university career except for professors**

- **Not given much status in the university community**

Financial Aid Offices

University Community

- **Acknowledge and support the job the FA office and staff performs**

- **Help develop message given students when contacted (differentiate between adult, distance learning, residential students)**

- **Know the amount of revenue a FA office brings into the University**

- **Provide the appropriate staff and funding to allow the FA office to do its job efficiently and effectively**

- **Acknowledge different types of students receive FA such as adults and distance learning students**
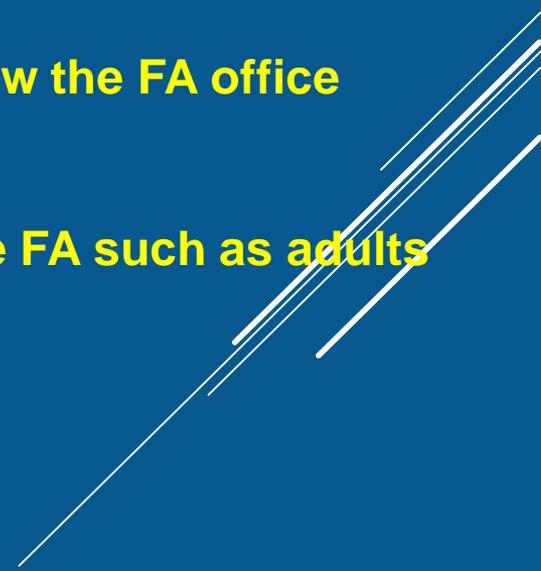
Orientation

Current Practice

- **Bring students together in a relaxed atmosphere/begin the bonding process to the university and students**

- **Start to acculturate students to the university**

- **Help families understand what their son/daughter will experience at the university**

- **Acquaint students with administrative rules and regulations**

- **Help select and design academic programs**

- **Help students find information they need**

Orientation

University Community

- **Faculty and staff serve as mentors**

- **Have orientation groups meet at least once per term**

- **Continuous all years in the university**
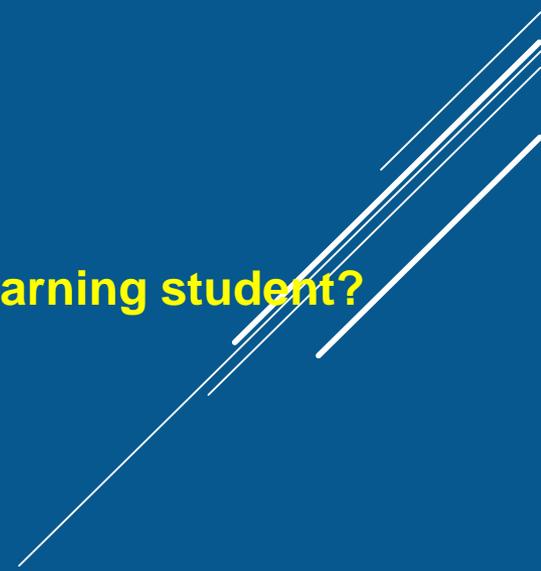
How can you facilitate this with the adult & distance learning student?

Career Services

Current Practice

- To receive FA a student must be in a degree program

- Are we making students choose programs too early in their university career

- Undecided students leave at a much greater rate then students with a defined goal

- Start the career exploration process early on and do not assume that a student knows what he/she wants to do simply since he/she chose a major.

- People change careers many times in their lifetime
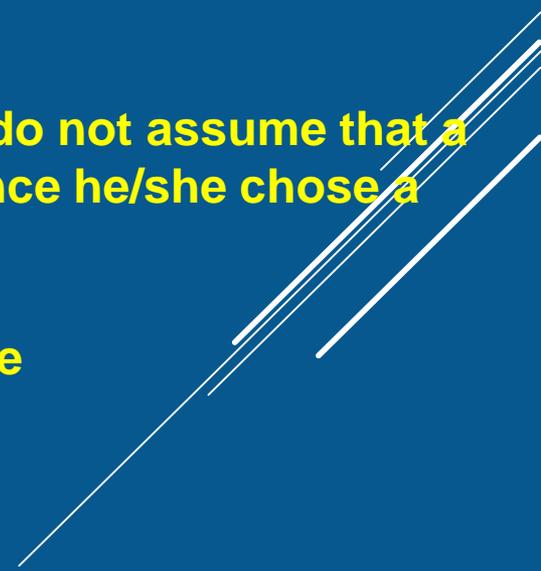
Career Services

University Community

- **Hold career exploration days**

- **Have career exploration part of orientation and/or on-going orientation**

- **Have career exploration built into the curriculum**

- **Use career exploration software**

- **Majors can have speakers talk about their careers**

- **Majors can hold informal student meetings**

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

Faculty

University Community

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

- **Encourage and promote faculty/student interaction**

- **Faculty mentors**

- **Club advisors**

- **Value faculty involvement in the evaluation/promotion system**

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

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 university in its interaction with students."

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

"Philosophy does not have to follow finance. Finance should follow philosophy."

"What does he know, and how long will he know it?"

Post Script-Final Words

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

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

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

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