

Residence Life and the Retention Puzzle

Jim A. Schlinsog, Director, Residence Life and Housing

A long-time concern amongst college student administrators has been, and will continue to be, retention of students within the institution. Nationally, only approximately two thirds of students who enroll at an institution will return the following year (Levitz and Noel, 1989). Similarly, only about one third of students who enroll in college as first time freshman will graduate. American College Testing suggests an even more bleak picture reporting that 25% of new entering freshman do not persist to their sophomore year and that only half of those who do enter their sophomore year will actually graduate (ACT, 1998, 2001, 2006). Retention, from an institutional perspective, is a key factor related to perceived effectiveness with direct implications for funding and accreditation.



Orientation leaders gearing up for summer orientation sessions

Complicating issues related to retention and graduation rates, approximately 43% of all students entering college in the late 1980s and early 1990s were identified as first-generation students. That is, these students' parents did not attend or complete postsecondary educational pursuits (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). First-generation students were more likely to enroll in two-year community colleges and were more likely to be working full-time in order to help pay for their education. Similarly, these students tended to be older than other first-year students and were less likely to complete the bachelor's degree. One report indicated that only approximately 10% of first-year students who began their college career at a community college were likely to transfer to a four-year institution and complete the bachelor's degree (Tinto, 2004).

One of the most important challenges facing first-generation college student is their expectation of college and preparation for the new complex social and academic environment. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) reported that first-generation students defined as those students for whom neither parent pursued any post-secondary education, were disadvantaged in terms of the type of institution they attended and their aspirations for degree attainment. Similarly, first-generation students

were less likely to complete as many credit hours, less likely to engage in campus and extracurricular activities, and showed smaller net gains in academic and personal development and growth areas than did their peers who had one or both parents with some postsecondary education. Thayer (2000) reports that first-generation students also exhibit lower pre-college critical thinking levels and had lower SAT scores and high school grade point averages than did other students.

The needs of first-year students and the difficulties in transition have been well documented as far back as the 1930s when Sheeder (1938) explored the importance of transition and the challenges facing first-year students at universities in the Northeastern portion of the United States. Elements of transition such as financing, freedom from parents, appropriate time management, academic preparation, social maturity, and decision-making are as much an issue for today's freshmen as they were for administrators in the 1930's.

Among one of the chief needs of first-year students, both first-generation and non-first-generation, is the need to make a successful transition and adjustment to the institution. Successful transition requires the new student to adjust to the institution in a number of dimensions including academic, social, personal, and emotional dimensions (Daddonna & Cooper, 2002; Baker & Syrik, 1984; Baker, McNeil, and Syrik, 1985).

One primary factor related to both adjustment and understanding the expectations of college relates to peer-to-peer and student-faculty interaction. Research succinctly summarized by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) indicate that first year students make the critical decision related to persistence based off of their first impressions of the institution and affiliated individuals. In most cases, the decision to enroll in the second semester is made within the first 2-4 weeks of the fall semester of the freshman year. Moreover, the more connected an individual becomes with one person affiliated with the institution within the first week of arrival on campus, the more likely that person will make a smoother transition to college. The same can also be said for the ways that first-year students begin to understand the expectations of college work and the college context.

Students who live on campus appear to have an edge in the persistence dilemma related to expectations of college and adjustment. The social nature of the residential community promotes interaction between students. The benefits of this interaction are greatest when students feel a common sense of camaraderie or that others

are "in the same boat" as them. The connections made with roommates, floor mates, and other students living in residence halls may contribute to greater retention rates. While the connections between students are powerful, equally powerful is the impact of connections that students make with faculty and staff at the institution. Staffing patterns and programming in the residence halls not only promote peer-to-peer interaction, but also provide a venue by which students can make connections with staff and faculty. Developing a more realistic understanding of college expectations can also be enhanced through social connections with upper-level students, Resident Assistants, and staff and faculty in the residential setting.

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From the Editor

Kimberly E. Clemens, Director, Campus Life

Dear Reader—

Thank you for picking up Volume 1, Issue 2 of the Student Affairs Periodical. Our last issue focused on how the work Student Affairs does supports the academic mission of the university. This issue will focus on a critical challenge faced by higher education in general and student affairs in particular.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Center for Educational Statistics, only 50% of those who enter higher education actually earn a bachelor's degree. Enrollment management and the persistence of students remain top priorities of federal and state government, colleges, universities, and parents of students who are attending college and of students themselves (Seidman, 2005). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence retention and developing effective strategies to reduce attrition are the focal points of this edition of the Student Affairs Periodical.

You may also read this issue at
<http://www.ius.edu/studentaffairs/newsletter.cfm>

Reference

Seidman, A. (2005). *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success. ACE/Praeger Series on Higher Education.*

Student Retention— Mentoring Matters

June Huggins, Director, Mentoring Programs

According to Lois J. Zachary, President of Leadership Development Services, LLC, “human beings thrive best when we grow in the presence of those who have gone before.” I am who I am because of the shoulders of others I have stood upon, is a familiar saying relative to people achieving their goals with the support of others. In most cases, we are able to reach our potential because of the engagement and presence of others. Mentors are a vital part of such support system.

Webster’s dictionary defines a mentor as a “trusted counselor or guide, a tutor or coach.” A mentor at a university can make a critical difference in a student’s ability to meet their educational and career aspirations. Mentors are not only important at the beginning and second year in a college student’s experience, they are important in assisting college students throughout their college career in reaching the highest level of achievement—graduation from college.

By admitting a student, institutions have a moral and ethical obligation to retain students by providing an appropriate level of support.

As V. Tinto (1993), and others have suggested, students’ social integration with the institution is an important factor in their ability to persist. The atmosphere and climate of the university, reflected by how the institution treats and supports students, and the positive nature of peer relationships on campus, is important to the self esteem and confidence a student generates.

Tinto developed three principles of an effective retention program. First, the program must be committed to the students it serves. Second, it may address the needs of all students for the institution to meet its mission of providing quality education

to all. Third, an effective retention program must be committed to the development of supportive, social, and educational communities on campus. Ensuring the social and academic integration of students is, according to Tinto, the most important issue to contend with in terms of student persistence.

Some factors related to retention of college students are:

- Academic preparedness—research shows between 30-40 percent of all entering freshmen are unprepared for college level reading and writing, the basic skills needed for college success
- Campus climate—Institutional and campus integration are important in retaining college students to degree completion
- Commitment to educational goals and the institution—The stronger the educational goal and institutional commitment, the more likely the student will graduate (Tinto 1993)
- Social and academic integration—The establishment of peer relations and the development of role models and mentors have been defined in literature as important factors in student integration, both academically and socially

There are five components of the student retention framework which include the following: Recruitment and Admissions, Academic Service, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Services, and Financial Aid.

In this model, mentoring is a part of the academic service component, whereby the faculty are encouraged to support the academic development of students outside the classroom. At Indiana University Southeast mentoring is a part of Student Affairs; any student enrolled can receive a mentor, and the role of mentors has been expanded to include university staff

and alumni. Over one hundred and fifty faculty, staff, alumni, and peer mentors from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds serve students from freshmen to graduates, including non-traditional students, Twenty First Century Scholars, and a large representation of our traditional student population.

Researchers have substantiated this out of classroom contact between students and faculty, staff, and alumni as an important factor in student persistence (Ugbah and Welbons 1989, Griffin 1992), with ramifications for the student’s personal, social, and intellectual development (Griffin 1992).

It is recommended that colleges strive to promote informal contact between the university community and students in order to build trust, support, and to serve as motivators and encourage students during the college experience. Out of classroom contact with students can create a bond and a sense of self-worth that can positively affect a student’s future decisions regarding college.

Research has shown that students who feel connected or identify with their university are more likely to remain and obtain their college degree. Mentors are an important link in establishing a positive lasting relationship with students. No matter how automated our universities may become, an extended human hand will always have the power to help students persist.

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- Lois J. Zachary (2000). *The Mentor’s Guide, Facilitating Effective Learning relationships. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco.*



Mentoring students giving items for food drive

Traditions

Megan Bottoms, Intern, New Student Programs

When a new student comes to campus the most important thing we can do for them as faculty and staff is to connect them with the campus. A new student who feels part of the campus community, is more likely to stay a part of that community and not leave. Student development theorist Nancy Schlossberg explains that when students feel like they matter to someone and that someone cares about them; they are not only more likely to excel, but become active in their campus environment. The more active and connected to their environment, the better the chances of them staying and graduating (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito; 1998). She said that students feel they matter more when they have feelings of belonging and feel connected to the environment and appreciate their environment. Schlossberg developed a theory of mattering versus marginality. Her theory emphasized that students who feel like they matter to someone; faculty, staff, or peer, the more invested they become in the community. Everyone wants to feel like they matter to someone, that they are special and an important part of the community. Opposing, if students come to campus and no one takes an interest in them and

all they do is attend classes, they will not feel a part of the community. Students who do not feel a part of the community often leave the institution before completing their degree, may become depressed and disconnected, and worse may sometimes lead to suicide. We know that our students are important to us here at Indiana University Southeast, but how do we communicate that to them and make them feel like they matter?

Schlossberg's theory of mattering emphasizes the importance of traditions on college and university campuses. Stories, traditions, and special events help students connect with the university and other students on campus and increase those feelings of mattering. They feel their participation in those traditions makes them a part of the community and important for the traditions to continue.

Since traditions are an integral part of students feeling like they matter and mattering is important for retention, what better than to start their new student experience exploring and learning about traditions at Indiana University Southeast? As many of you know, Orientation has changed from its past form into a new and different structure. One important focus is

not only sharing traditions, but creating traditions. Each new student will be given a Grenadier Guide which will give new students insight into the history, traditions, and special events that occur at Indiana University Southeast. As well, each of our Orientation Leaders has been learning about the history and traditions of the institution so that they can share this with the new students. Finally, Orientation will be starting some traditions with the new class of students including the New Student Induction Ceremony, the Movers & Groovers, and the Grenadier Guide. These new programs have been created with the idea that the more we can integrate and include our new Grenadiers, the better chance we have of keeping them here and watching them graduate. Our students matter to us at Indiana University Southeast. Why not show that by pumping up that school spirit and learning the traditions?

Reference

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Standards for Academic Progress

Kimberly Lewis & Sandy McShane, Financial Aid Counselors

The Financial Aid Office is dedicated to helping students achieve their educational potential by providing appropriate financial resources and to assist students in maintaining financial aid eligibility. A student must make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to be eligible for federal, state, and institutional aid. By monitoring progress, students are made aware of IU Southeast's academic expectations. Federal regulations (2008-2009 Federal Student Aid Handbook) require all schools to establish a policy to monitor the academic progress of students.

In order to remain eligible for financial assistance, a student must demonstrate satisfactory progress toward completion of their degree and meet specific standards in accordance with our policy. First, a cumulative grade-point average (GPA) of 2.0 is required. Also, students must complete at least 67% of total attempted coursework. Lastly, a student must complete their degree within a reasonable number of hours (180 for Bachelor, 90 for Associate, and 45 for Graduate). Incompletes and repeated courses are also included in the completion rate and total hours attempted calculations. Even though academic bankruptcy may help the student's GPA, it does not remove courses from the completion rate or total hours attempted.

The IU Southeast Financial Aid Office annually reviews all students receiving financial aid after the submission of spring grades. Our policy is published on the financial aid website under consumer information and is evaluated each year to ensure the student population is being monitored fairly.

Students who fail to meet these standards may appeal. Appeals must explain mitigating circumstances that led to adverse academic

progress and must be accompanied by supporting documentation. Students must also describe how they expect to overcome obstacles that contributed to past difficulties.



New inductee to the Chi Alpha Epsilon Honor Society being pinned

The committee reviews each appeal to determine student eligibility for continued financial aid. When a student has an appeal denied, he/she can regain eligibility by meeting the criteria for satisfactory progress. Students cannot regain eligibility simply by being out of school for a set amount of time or by paying for a set number of classes out-of-pocket.

First year students are required to appeal if they do not meet SAP. The Financial Aid office is working with faculty in the First Year Seminar classes to inform students of the importance of meeting SAP to prevent their financial aid from being jeopardized.

Completion rate is the most prevalent reason students do not meet policy standards. In the past 3 years, over 70% of students not meeting SAP show a completion problem. Students are often unaware of how dropping classes may affect their financial aid. "Stop Before You Drop" is a program created by the

Financial Aid, Bursar, and Registrar offices to inform students of the consequences of withdrawing from classes. This program is heavily promoted during the first two weeks of classes when the highest volume of withdrawals occurs. The Stop Before You Drop brochure provides information on keeping financial aid while maintaining an acceptable completion rate.

For the 2008-09 academic year, the SAP committee adjusted the completion rate to 67%, (previously 75%). By lowering the completion rate, we anticipate a 10% drop in appeals. This policy change should help retain that portion of the student body while maintaining the integrity of progress requirements. Another significant change made in retention efforts was the collaboration of the SAP committee and the academic advisors. A form was created that requires students to meet with their advisor to ensure progress toward their educational goals.

With the implementation of these initiatives we expect an increase in retention and persistence toward graduation. These changes have been made in part to provide students an opportunity to demonstrate their educational potential. While the Financial Aid Office is required to define and enforce the standards of SAP, we hope students will take a proactive role in maintaining their aid eligibility.

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The Impact of Athletics on Recruitment and Retention

Pat Mrozowski, Director, Athletics

Recruitment and retention are issues that concern all departments at IU Southeast. There are certainly many programs that play a role in the enrollment management process. Intercollegiate athletics is certainly one such program.

In an effort to assess the perception of student athletes concerning the athletic program, the department conducts an annual survey of the athletes. One question is directed toward the impact participation in athletics played in the decision to enroll at IU Southeast. The students were asked to respond to the statement "Athletics were a major factor in my decision to attend IUS." The students consistently responded that athletics did play a major role in the decision process.

Year	Avg. Rate (with 5 being strongly agree)
2004-05	3.85
2005-06	3.89
2006-07	4.27
2007-08	3.88

A second question was aimed at assessing the role athletics plays in the decision to stay at IU Southeast. Students were asked to respond to the statement "Participation in athletics is the reason I continue to attend IU Southeast."

Year	Avg. Rate (with 5 being strongly agree)
2004-05	3.88
2005-06	4.16
2006-07	4.33
2007-08	3.88

The above results demonstrate that the vast majority of the 125 student athletes who annually participate in athletics would not have attended, nor would they continue at, IU Southeast without the opportunity to participate in sports. Attending school, however, is not an end result. The real measure of success is the graduation rate of our students. The United States Department of Education requires that schools offering intercollegiate athletics measure and compare the graduation rates of athletes versus non-athletes. The most recent four-year average graduation rate for athletes is 45.2%. This compares favorably with the 28.3% graduation rate for the general student body.

Whether we are looking at recruitment, retention or persistence toward graduation, participation in athletics at IU Southeast is a positive variable. The results are another reason to support our student athletes.

Go Grenadiers!

— Residence Life cont.

These connections, when achieved early in the student's career, can promote social and personal adjustment to the institution and help to establish more realistic expectations of the college environment. The sooner this happens, the more committed the student becomes to both their academic goals and to the institution. This greater degree of initial commitment, according to Tinto (1994, 2004, 2006), should equate with greater commitment later on in college and increased persistence. The residence halls, within this retention equation, can be a powerful factor to promote the success of college students. But, the effectiveness and the value of the experience for the student is also contingent upon the involvement and investment of time and energy from faculty and staff across all areas of the university.

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