UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
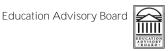

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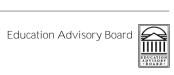
Priya Kumar

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Identifying Areas of Improvement for Retention

- What is the average retention rate at contact institutions? How do other administrators define retention?
- What metrics do administrators use to benchmark retention (e.g., Fall to Fall retention, four-year graduation rate, six-year graduation rate)?
- How do administrators use data to identify at-risk students based on demographic factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, international students, and financial need)?
- How do administrators use data to identify at-risk students based on their student profile (e.g., tuition-free students, students in specific majors, or student-athletes)?
- What metrics indicate that these students are at risk of withdrawal (e.g., grades, language proficiency)?
- Are there any segments of the student population that administrators exclude from retention data?
- How do administrators determine what factors present impediments to student success (e.g., hold focus groups with at-risk students, analyze NSSE survey data)?
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Centralizing Access to Retention Data

- What offices collect retention data (e.g., academic units, admissions offices)? How do administrators centralize retention data?
- What retention software do administrators use (e.g., Starfish Retention Solutions ™ or Student Early Alert Systems)? Was it developed internally or purchased from a third-party vendor?
- How did administrators implement retention software? Did administrators task the IT office with integrating retention data into the software program or did the vendor provide staff who integrated data into the software program?
- How much have administrators invested in retention software? What was the implementation timeframe? Are administrators satisfied with the investment?

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Retention Strategies

- How effectively do data systems help administrators identify at-risk students?
- What strategies have administrators implemented to increase student retention among at-risk populations? What success have institutions achieved by implementing these strategies?

	Region	Classification	Approximate Total Enrollment	Type
	South	Research Universities (high research activity)		

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Source: Consortium Alpha

In this report, *student retention team* refers to senior administrators, such as the vice president of institutional effectiveness, registrar, director of academic success centers, and provost, who serve on retention taskforces at all profiled institutions. The term also refers to support staff for these administrators.

In this report, *at-risk students* are those who administrators or faculty identify as more likely than typical students to withdraw from the university before they graduate.

With the exception of **University A**, the provost at all profiled institutions mandates that faculty report at-risk students to the retention team or the academic advising center. The provosts at **University B** and **College C** also require that faculty track and report absences in freshman courses. Faculty use the following indicators to determine if a student is at-risk:

- More than three absences
- Symptoms of personal issues (e.g., sleeping in class)
- Failure to submit important assignments
- Low or erratic grades on assignments

If certain faculty members fail to identify at-risk students or report absences, retention team members
of undergraduate education sends an email to the department chair of the recalcitrant faculty member; the chair then contacts that faculty member in-person and encourages him or her to report at-risk students. Although the provost at **University A** does not mandate that faculty report at-risk students, the dean of the college of arts and sciences contacts faculty who teach freshman courses and do not report at-risk students.

Administrators across profiled institutions use student engagement surveys, such as National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) or internally developed surveys, to indentify academically at-risk students. Surveys include quantitative ranking questions and qualitative questions, such as open-ended questions about student instructor interaction. Graduate students synthesize the data for senior administrators. The director of institutional research at **College C** found that students who score low on five of the six academic factors outlined in Noel-Levitz student engagement survey are more than 500 percent likelier to withdraw than the average student.

- Would you recommend **University D** to a friend from your hometown? Why or why not?

- On a scale of one to ten, how challenging is your current course load?

- Do you feel there are adequate support services if you are having trouble in a course? Why or why not?

The student retention taskforce at **University D** conducted a telephone survey in 2005 to understand what academic and social factors distinguish students who return as sophomores from students who withdraw. Staff spoke with about 40 students who withdrew and found that most students 0 03. 180.02 192.86 0 00 percent likel

in Registrar's Office

s office maintains   time in college, from
admissions data pertinent to course placements to final transcripts of students who graduate.
Therefore, contacts recommend that staff in the registrar   collect and synthesize
retention data or coordinate closely with counterparts in the institutional research office to
centralize data.

Administrators experience the most success with retention strategies when they create a small
taskforce of senior administrators from offices that use retention data. Four to five senior
administrators serve on these taskforces. The provost at **University A** created a large team of
faculty and administrators focused on increasing the retention rate from the low eighties to the
low nineties. The large taskforce generated interest and support from faculty but made few
substantive decisions due to its size. The provost then convened a smaller taskforce composed
of the following:

- Vice provost of institutional effectiveness
- Assistant vice provost for academic enrollment
- Director of activities
- Student financial aid director
- Dean of campus living and learning

This new taskforce implements strategies to identify and assist at-risk students; it taskforce
also selects retention data management vendors.

Staff should receive training on how to properly document all actions they take to notify and
assist at-risk students. Contacts at **Consortium Alpha** explain that faculty notify pertinent
offices of an at-risk student at much higher rates if faculty can observe

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Retention team members primarily refer academically at-risk students to academic success centers. Contacts advise against the development of many programs aimed at different student subpopulations because faculty and staff will not know where to refer at-risk students. Rather, faculty and staff should refer all at-risk students to the student success center, where advisers are trained to triage students depending on   .

Students whose admissions data indicates a low predicted GPA receive emails from counselors in the academic success center and their academic advisor that encourage them to visit the academic success center. Resident assistants at **University B** meet with students in-person and encourage them to visit the center. Administrators do not inform resident

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Retention team members at **University D** discovered that freshman who do not receive housing with other freshman withdraw from the institution at a much higher rate regardless of academic or financial factors. Freshman who live among more senior students cannot form friendships easily and often decide that the institution is not a strong fit for them. Administrators have revised housing policies to keep freshman in the same buildings; some upperclassmen residence halls contain sections of freshman housing.

The financial aid office at **College C** awards academic scholarships to students who succeed academically but have high unmet financial need, Students receive, $500 for a cumulative GPA of 2.0 to 2.5, $1000 for a cumulative GPA of 2.5 to 3.0, and $3,000 for a cumulative GPA of 3.4 or higher. Administrators at **University D** modified academic scholarship policies to include more students with high unmet financial need in an effort to increase their retention.

First-generation students often fail to identify and apply for all the financial aid available to them. These students withdraw at higher levels because they do not fully recognize the value of a four-year degree and do not obtain all available financial aid . Financial aid counselors should contact these students and set up an appointment to ensure they have applied for all available financial aid.