What Works in Student Retention?

All Survey Colleges

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Acknowledgments

It has been quite some time since ACT has engaged in a comprehensive study of college student retention practices. This study would not have been possible, however, without the earlier efforts of ACT staff members Lee Noel and Susan Cowart, who conducted “What Works in Student Retention” studies and published results in 1980 and 1987, respectively. And, this study could not have been completed without the continuing support of Jon Erickson, ACT Vice President of Educational Services.

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Finally, I acknowledge the readers of this report, particularly those who recognize that there is much at stake and much to be done if college students are to be successful. If this report in some small way provides a stimulus and creates a resolve to for you to enhance campus retention practices, then it will have served its purpose.

Wesley R. Habley, ACT

INTRODUCTION: All Survey Colleges

This report reflects ACT's three-decade commitment to assist colleges and universities to better understand the impact of campus practices on college student retention and degree completion. During that time, ACT has conducted many research projects that demonstrate that commitment. Below are selected examples of this effort.

Six National Surveys on Academic Advising Practices

ACT believes that academic advising plays a pivotal role in student retention. That belief is clearly borne out by the findings of the survey discussed in this report. Beginning in 1979 ACT, in collaboration with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), has conducted six national studies of campus practices in academic advising. The latest of these, *The Status of Academic Advising: Findings from the ACT Sixth National Survey*, is published in the NACADA monograph series. That monograph may be ordered through the NACADA website: www.nacada.ksu.edu.

What Works in Student Retention (1980)

The first *What Works in Student Retention* study (Beal and Noel, 1980) was a joint project of ACT and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). Staff of NCHEMS and ACT developed and piloted the survey. In the complete study, surveys were sent to 2,459 two-year and four-year colleges with a response rate of 40.2%. As a part of this study, the authors collected information about 17 student characteristics and 10 institutional characteristics that contributed to attrition and retention. In addition, respondents were asked to select from a list of 20 action programs that had been implemented to improve retention. In the conclusions reached in the final report (now out of print), the authors cited the following three action program areas as critical to retention.

- *Academic stimulation and assistance*: challenge in and support for academic performance
- *Personal future building*: the identification and clarification of student goals and directions
- *Involvement experiences*: student participation/interaction with a wide variety of programs and services on the campus

ACT Dropout and Graduation Rate Tables (1983–2003)

In 1982, ACT began collecting institutional data on first to second year retention and on degree completion rates through the Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). The IDQ is an annual survey of 2,500–2,800 colleges and universities. Each year since 1983 ACT has published the *ACT National Dropout and Degree Completion Tables*. The most recent reports can be found on ACT's website: www.act.org/path/postsec/index.html.

What Works in Student Retention (1987)

In what was essentially a content replication of the earlier survey, ACT collaborated with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to produce the monograph *What Works in Student Retention in State Colleges and Universities* (Coward, 1987). (Unfortunately, this monograph too is out of print.) The 370 members of AASCU were included in the survey population, and responses from 190 (51.7%) were included in the analyses. When asked about strategies employed to improve retention since 1980, the following groupings of practices were cited by more than 50% of the colleges: improvement/redevelopment of the academic advising program (72.1%), special orientation program (71.0%), establishment of early warning systems (65.6%), and curricular innovations in credit programs (61.7%).

The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention (2004)

This policy report (Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth, 2004) provides information from ACT's major technical study on the influence of non-academic factors alone and, combined with academic factors, on student performance and retention at four-year colleges and universities. It highlights examples of successful retention practices and concludes with four recommendations:

1. Determine student characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and implement a formal comprehensive retention program that best meets institutional needs.
2. Take an integrated approach in retention efforts that incorporates both academic and non-academic factors into the design and development of programs to create a socially inclusive and supportive academic environment that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.
3. Implement an early alert, assessment, and monitoring system based on HSGPA, ACT Assessment scores, course placement tests, first semester college GPA, socioeconomic information, attendance records, and non-academic information derived from formal college surveys and college student inventories to identify and build comprehensive profiles of students at risk of dropping out.
4. Determine the economic impact of college retention programs and student time to degree completion rates through a cost-benefit analysis of student dropout, persistence, assessment procedures, and intervention strategies to enable informed decision-making with respect to types of interventions required—academic and non-academic including remediation and financial support.

This 30-page policy report is available at: www.act.org/research/policy/index.html

About This Study

When ACT study design staff began meeting in the summer of 2003, the intention was to replicate the surveys conducted in 1980 and 1987. That intention was soon abandoned. First, it was clear that the retention literature had grown exponentially since the first survey was constructed and that much more now was known about student characteristics and institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition. Also, far more institutional interventions contributed to student retention and degree completion. In view of this changed landscape, the design team conducted thorough analyses of the retention literature and, as a result, expanded the original list of institutional characteristics from 10 to 24 and the list of student characteristics from 17 to 20. But it was in the area of institutional interventions that the most significant expansion in number of items took place. Whereas the 1980 survey identified only 20 action programs as contributing to retention, after first brainstorming and then refining a list that included more than 100 interventions, the design team settled on 82 strategies that became the basis for Section D of the survey.

The design team also concluded that it was important to assess not only the prevalence of particular practices at colleges and universities but also the impact of those programs. Hence, Section D was constructed to include both of these measures. Three survey drafts were reviewed for content and structure and revised accordingly by staff of the Survey Research Department and the Office for the Enhancement of Educational Practices.

The first mailing associated with the survey was a pre-survey letter to chief academic officers at 2,995 colleges. The mailing list included all accredited, degree-granting, two-year and four-year public and private colleges. The purpose of the letter was to announce the survey and to allow the

chief academic officers to identify an individual (other than themselves) to whom the survey should be mailed. Response cards identifying such a person were received from 807 institutions.

The survey was then mailed to the 807 individuals identified through the postcards and to the chief academic officers at the remaining 2,188 colleges. Within a six-week period, two additional survey mailings took place.

Table 1 provides an overview of the responses to the survey.

Table 1

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Colleges	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Returned	Return Rate
All	2,995	1,061	35.4%
Two-year public	991	386	39.0%
Two-year private*	197	46	23.4%
Four-year public	536	228	42.5%
Four-year private	1,271	401	31.5%

*Note: Several responding institutions in this group could not be categorized as both two-year and private colleges. This factor, combined with a low response rate, precluded meaningful analysis of data. As a result, no additional analyses were conducted.

This document includes the following sections:

- Introduction
- Executive Summary
- Survey Section A: Campus Coordination and Retention/Completion Goals
- Survey Section B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services
- Survey Section C: Student Characteristics
- Survey Section D: Retention Practices
- Recommendations
- Appendices
 1. Review of the Retention Literature
 2. Bibliography
 3. The Survey

This report focuses on the data provided by all survey colleges.

Reports for the other institutional types can be found on the ACT website:

www.act.org/path/postsec/droptables/index.html

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: All Survey Colleges

In spite of the attention paid to college student retention:

- Only 51.7% of campuses have identified an individual responsible for coordinating retention strategies.
- Only 47.2% of campuses have established an improvement goal for retention of students from the first to second year.
- Only 33.1% of campuses have established a goal for improved degree completion.

Institutions are far more likely to attribute attrition to student characteristics than they are to attribute attrition to institutional characteristics.

- Of 24 institutional characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified only two factors that made a moderate or higher contribution: amount of student financial aid available and student-institution fit.
- Of 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition respondents identified, there were 13 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, inadequate preparation for college, and poor study skills.

Retention practices responsible for the greatest contribution to retention in all survey colleges fall into three main categories:

- *First-year programs*: including freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, learning communities, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- *Academic advising*: including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff, integration of advising with first-year transition programs, academic advising centers, and centers that combines academic advising with career/life planning
- *Learning support*: including a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, supplemental instruction, and required remedial/developmental coursework

When asked to identify three campus retention practices that had the greatest impact on student retention, all survey respondents identified:

- freshman seminar/university 101 for credit (13.1%)
- tutoring program (13.1%)
- advising interventions with selected student populations (12.6%)
- mandated course placement testing program (10.7%)
- comprehensive learning assistance center/lab (10.4%)

The remaining practices were cited by less than 10% of all colleges.

Recommendations:

- Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.
- Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.
- Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.
- Carefully review the high impact strategies identified in the survey.
- Do not make first-to-second-year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.
- Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals.
- Orchestrate the change process.
- Implement, measure, improve!

SECTION A: All Survey Colleges

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide information on the coordination of retention services and the goals (if any) the campus had set for both retention and degree completion. The questions from section A include the following.

<p>1. Is there an individual designated to coordinate retention activities on your campus?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 2.)
No ☐ (Skip to item 3.)</p> <p>2. What is this individual's title?
_____</p> <p>3. Have you established a goal for the retention of students from the first to second year?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 4.)
No ☐ (Skip to item 6.)</p> | <p>4. Based on your current first to second year retention rate, what percentage increase have you established as your retention goal?
_____ %</p> <p>5. In how many years do you intend to reach this retention goal?
_____ # of year(s)</p> <p>6. Have you established a goal for student degree completion at your institution?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 7.)
No ☐ (Skip to Section B.)</p> | <p>7. Assuming a 6-year timeframe for 4-year institutions and a 3-year timeframe for 2-year institutions, what percentage increase have you established as your student degree completion goal?
_____ %</p> <p>8. In how many years do you intend to reach this student degree completion goal?
_____ # of year(s)</p> |
|--|--|--|

A summary of responses to items 1, 2, 3, and 6 for all survey colleges is provided below. Unfortunately, an analysis of the ranges of responses to items 4 and 5 (retention goal) and 7 and 8 (degree completion goal) yielded confounding results. Some survey participants responded to the request for *percentage increase* (items 4 and 5) by reporting an overall retention or degree completion goal. Some of the survey participants answered “Yes” to items 3 and/or 6, but did not answer items 4 and/or 7. And finally, some survey participants responded to items 4 and/or 7, but did not respond to items 5 and/or 8. As a result of these inconsistencies, it was inappropriate to include these data in the final report.

Coordination of Retention Activities

Of the 1,015 survey responses, 525 (51.7%) indicated that there was an individual designated to coordinate campus retention activities. A review of the various titles of individuals responsible for coordination of retention efforts resulted in the following.

- At 153 colleges (29.1%), the terms Director, Coordinator, or Executive Director were included in the title.
- At 32 colleges (6.1%), the terms Associate Provost, Associate Vice President, or Associate Vice Chancellor were included in the title.
- At 74 colleges (14.1%), the terms Provost, Vice President, or Vice Chancellor were included in the title.
- At 48 colleges (9.1%), the term Dean was included in the title.
- At 30 colleges (5.7%), the term Associate Dean was included in the title.

- At 5 colleges (1.0%), the terms Assistant Provost, Assistant Vice President, or Assistant Vice Chancellor were used.
- At 113 colleges (21.5%), the term retention was included in the title.
- At 83 colleges (15.8%), the term enrollment was included in the title.
- At 104 colleges (19.8%), the terms student affairs, student services, student development, or student success were included in the title.

Retention and Degree Completion Goals

Of the 1,015 Survey Colleges responding to the survey:

- 479 colleges (47.2%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the first to second year retention rate.
- 336 colleges (33.1%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the five-year degree completion rate.

SECTION B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services for All Survey Colleges

In Section B of the Survey, respondents were asked to the following question.

*To what degree is each of the following **institutional** issues, characteristics, or services a factor **contributing to attrition** on your campus?*

Respondents were asked to rate each of 24 characteristics according to the following five-response scale.

Means for each of the 24 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major factor), 4 (between major and moderate factor), 3 (moderate factor), 2 (between moderate factor and not a factor), and 1 (not a factor).

See Summary Table B (page 10) for mean scores for all 24 institutional issues, characteristics, and services.

Table 2

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Amount of Financial Aid Available to Students (6)	3.46
Student-Institution Fit (9)	3.13
Student Involvement in Campus Life (12)	2.96
Social Environment (21)	2.92
Curriculum Issues (3)	2.86

Table 3

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE LEAST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Other On-campus Housing (18)	1.61
Extracurricular Programs (2)	2.10
Personal Counseling Services (10)	2.21
Rules and Regulations Governing Student Behavior (16)	2.23
Quality of Teaching (4)	2.25
Admissions Practices/Requirements (8)	2.30

Summary Table B

**INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SERVICES
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Survey Question: To what degree is each of the following institutional issues, characteristics, or services a factor contributing to attrition on your campus?

	Mean* All Colleges
1. Student employment opportunities	2.67
2. Extracurricular programs	2.10
3. Curriculum issues	2.86
4. Quality of teaching	2.25
5. Academic advising	2.79
6. Amount of financial aid available to students	3.46
7. Financial aid services	2.73
8. Admissions practices/requirements	2.30
9. Student-institution "fit"	3.13
10. Personal counseling services	2.21
11. Career exploration services	2.31
12. Student involvement in campus life	2.96
13. Attitude of faculty toward students	2.46
14. Attitude of staff toward students	2.42
15. Academic support services (learning centers, similar resources)	2.55
16. Rules and regulations governing student behavior	2.23
17. Residence halls	2.30
18. Other on-campus housing	1.60
19. Personal contact between students and faculty	2.51
20. Cultural environment	2.69
21. Social environment	2.92
22. Intellectual stimulation or challenge	2.54
23. Student engagement in classroom (active learning)	2.72
24. The number and variety of courses offered	2.84

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION C: Student Characteristics for All Survey Colleges

In Section C of the Survey, respondents were asked the following question.

To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

Respondents were asked to rate each of 20 characteristics according to the following five-response scale:

Means for each of the 20 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution), 4 (between major and moderate contribution), 3 (moderate contribution), 2 (between moderate contribution and no contribution), and 1 (no contribution).

See Summary Table C (page 12) for mean scores for all 20 Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services.

Table 4

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION ALL SURVEY COLLEGES

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Lack of Motivation to Succeed (10))	4.17
Inadequate Financial Resources (8)	4.17
Inadequate Preparation for College-Level Work (1)	3.85
Poor Study Skills (19)	3.67
Lack of Educational Aspirations and Goals (2)	3.31
Too Many Job Demands (15)	3.27
Socio-Economic Disadvantage (5)	3.21
Weak Commitment to Earn a Degree (9)	3.18
Inadequate Personal Coping Skills (20)	3.18
First-Generation to Attend College (3)	3.16
Poor Academic Integration (17)	3.12

Table 5

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE LEAST
CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Distance from Permanent Home (18)	2.17
Physical Health Problems (11)	2.30
Mental or Emotional Health Problems (12)	2.48
Lack of Support from Significant Others (3)	2.78
Poor Social Integration (17)	2.85

Summary Table C

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Survey Question: To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

	Mean* All Colleges
1. Inadequate preparation for college-level work	3.85
2. Lack of educational aspirations and goals	3.31
3. First-generation to attend college	3.16
4. Commuting/living off campus	2.71
5. Socio-economic disadvantage	3.21
6. Indecision about major	3.00
7. Indecision about career goal	3.02
8. Inadequate financial resources	4.17
9. Weak commitment to earning a degree	3.18
10. Lack of motivation to succeed	4.17
11. Physical health problems	2.30
12. Mental or emotional health problems	2.48
13. Lack of support from significant others (e.g., spouse, parents, peers)	2.78
14. Too many family demands	2.96
15. Too many job demands	3.27
16. Poor social integration (peer group interaction, extracurricular activities)	2.85
17. Poor academic integration	3.12
18. Distance from permanent home	2.17
19. Poor study skills	3.67
20. Inadequate personal coping skills	3.18

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION D: Retention Practices at All Survey Colleges

In Section D, respondents were given the following instructions.

*Listed below is a series of programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that **may make a contribution to retention on your campus**. First indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus.*

The format of Section D items follows.

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Offered at Your Institution? No Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)	

Section D included 82 on-campus practices. See Summary Table D (pages 15-17) for a breakdown of all 82 practices at All Survey Colleges.

Table 6

MOST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES ALL SURVEY COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses Reporting the Practice
Tutoring Program (41)	87%
Academic Clubs (67)	84
Instructional Use of Technology (55)	83
Individual Career Counseling Service (28)	83
Internships (26)	82
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	82
Recreation/Intramurals (66)	78
Cultural Activities Program (68)	78
Classroom Assessment (14)	77
Course Placement Testing (Mandated) (15)	76
Career Development Workshops or Courses (25)	76
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	75
Library Orientation, Workshop, and/or Course (81)	73
Advisor Training (7)	70

Table 7

**LEAST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses Reporting the Practice
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	8%
Community Member Mentoring (52)	8
Degree Guarantee Program (46)	10
Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS) (62)	11
Motivation Assessments (20)	12
Organized Study Groups (47)	13
Social Skills Course/Program (79)	17

Means for each of the 82 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution to retention), 4 (between major and moderate contribution to retention), 3 (moderate contribution to retention), 2 (between moderate and no contribution to retention), and 1 (no contribution to retention).

Table 8 reports on-campus retention practices receiving the highest mean ratings, and Table 9 reports on-campus retention practices with the lowest mean ratings.

Table 8

**PRACTICES WITH THE GREATEST MEAN CONTRIBUTION TO RETENTION
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	3.9
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	3.8
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	3.8
Increased Advising Staff (8)	3.8
Integration of Advising with First-Year Programs (9)	3.8
Academic Advising Center (10)	3.8
Reading Center/Lab (39)	3.8
Center that Combines Advisement and Counseling with Career Planning and Placement (11)	3.7
Learning Communities (31)	3.7
Supplemental Instruction (32)	3.7
Remedial/Developmental coursework (required) (34)	3.7
Program for Honors Students (75)	3.7

Table 9

**PRACTICES WITH THE LOWEST MEAN CONTRIBUTION TO RETENTION
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Degree Guarantee Program (46)	2.7
Personality Tests (24)	2.8
Parent Newsletter (59)	2.8
Advisor Manual/Handbook (12)	2.9
Learning Styles Inventories (19)	2.9
Values Inventories (21)	2.9
Interest Inventories (22)	2.9
Vocational Aptitude Tests (23)	2.9
Parent Advisory Group (61)	2.9
Health and Wellness Course/Program (77)	2.9
Library Orientation, Workshop, and/or Course (81)	2.9

Summary Table D

**RETENTION PRACTICES
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

Survey Question: Of the programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that may make a contribution to retention on your campus., indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus.

	All Survey Colleges	
	% Report	Mean*
First-Year Programs		
1. Pre-enrollment orientation	82	3.5
2. Extended freshman orientation (non-credit)	27	3.6
3. Extended freshman orientation (credit)	26	3.6
4. Freshman seminar/university 101 (non-credit)	8	3.5
5. Freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	51	3.8
Academic Advising Program		
6. Advising interventions with selected student populations	75	3.8
7. Advisor training	70	3.4
8. Increased advising staff	30	3.8
9. Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	41	3.8
10. Academic advising centers	47	3.8
11. Centers that combine advisement and counseling with career planning and placement	33	3.7
12. Advisor manual/handbook	56	2.9
13. Application of technology to advising	58	3.2

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**RETENTION PRACTICES
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges	
	% Report	Mean*
Assessment Programs		
14. Classroom assessment	77	3.1
15. Course placement testing (mandated)	76	3.6
16. Course placement testing (recommended)	30	3.3
17. Outcomes assessment	66	3.0
18. Diagnostic academic skills test(s)	46	3.2
19. Learning styles inventory(ies)	37	2.9
20. Motivation assessment(s)	12	3.0
21. Values inventory(ies)	24	2.9
22. Interest inventory(ies)	50	2.9
23. Vocational aptitude test(s)	34	2.9
24. Personality test(s)	32	2.8
Career Planning and Placement Programs		
25. Career development workshops or courses	76	3.1
26. Internships	82	3.6
27. Cooperative education	43	3.5
28. Individual career counseling services	83	3.3
29. Computer-assisted career guidance	67	3.0
30. Job shadowing	32	3.1
Learning Assistance/Academic Support/Intervention Programs		
31. Learning communities	34	3.7
32. Supplemental instruction	51	3.7
33. Summer bridge program	27	3.6
34. Remedial/developmental coursework (required)	69	3.7
35. Remedial/developmental coursework (recommended)	35	3.5
36. Comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	57	3.9
37. Mathematics center/lab	54	3.6
38. Writing center/lab	68	3.6
39. Reading center/lab	31	3.8
40. Foreign language center/lab	30	3.1
41. Tutoring program	87	3.8
42. Study skills course, program, or center	70	3.6
43. Early warning system	61	3.5
44. Mid-term progress reports	64	3.3
45. Performance contracts for students in academic difficulty	38	3.4
46. Degree guarantee program	10	2.7
47. Organized student study groups	13	3.5
48. Service learning programs	41	3.2

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**RETENTION PRACTICES
ALL SURVEY COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges	
	% Report	Mean*
Mentoring Programs		
49. Peer mentoring	42	3.5
50. Faculty mentoring	43	3.6
51. Staff mentoring	22	3.5
52. Community member mentoring	8	3.3
Faculty Development Programs		
53. Teaching techniques	62	3.4
54. Assessing student performance	30	3.4
55. Instructional use of technology	83	3.2
56. Writing across the curriculum	50	3.2
57. Interdisciplinary courses	48	3.1
58. Enhanced/modified faculty reward system	31	3.0
Parent Programs		
59. Parent newsletter	20	2.8
60. Parent orientation	52	3.1
61. Advisory group	22	2.9
Campus Programs		
62. Freshman interest groups (FIGS)	11	3.6
63. Diversity information/training	50	3.0
64. Residence hall programs	59	3.4
65. Fraternities/sororities	31	3.1
66. Recreation/intramurals	78	3.1
67. Academic clubs	84	3.2
68. Cultural activities program	78	3.1
69. Leadership development	72	3.4
Programs for Sub-populations		
70. Adult students	38	3.3
71. Commuter students	28	3.2
72. Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender students	29	3.0
73. Women	39	3.2
74. Racial/ethnic minorities	56	3.4
75. Honor students	64	3.7
Additional Activities		
76. Time management course/program	46	3.2
77. Health and wellness course/program	58	2.9
78. Personal coping skills course/program	33	3.1
79. Social skills course/program	17	3.1
80. Required on-campus housing for freshmen	35	3.6
81. Library orientation, workshop, and/or course	73	2.9
82. Motivation and goal setting workshop/program	29	3.2

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION E: Programs with Greatest Impact on Retention

In this section, respondents were asked to review all 82 retention programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions and identify the three practices having the greatest impact on student retention. Reported below are the percentage of campus respondents who identified a particular practice among those three choices.

Table 10

PROGRAMS WITH THE GREATEST IMPACT ON RETENTION ALL SURVEY COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of All Institutions Reporting
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	13.1%
Tutoring Program (41)	13.1
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	12.6
Course Placement Testing (mandated) (15)	10.7
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	10.4
Remedial/Development Coursework (required) (34)	9.7
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	9.2

RECOMMENDATIONS — All Survey Colleges

The recommendations for enhancing student retention practices discussed in this section include several that are obvious and affirm the “common wisdom” on retention practices, but nevertheless warrant careful consideration by campus practitioners. Several other recommendations, however, may not be as obvious to the casual reviewer of the data and also deserve careful attention by campus practitioners. While each of these recommendations reflects the opinions of the author, many are supported by survey data.

1. Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.

Considering the fact that student retention and degree completion have been touted as critical elements in institutional effectiveness and accountability, it is disheartening to note that just over half of all colleges (51.7%) in the survey have designated an individual to coordinate retention activities. Of further concern are the findings on the levels and titles of the individuals identified as coordinating retention activities. Only 15.7% of all colleges assign coordination at the dean level or higher, and a mere 11.1% of all colleges include the term “retention” in the title of that individual. When focusing only on those colleges that have appointed an individual to coordinate retention efforts, those percentages rise to 30.3% and 21.5%, respectively. The position level and title of the individual responsible for coordinating campus retention practices send a message to the entire campus community about how high a priority campus leaders place on retention issues.

Equally important is the appointment of a campus-wide retention planning team. Each college is unique in its history and precedents, and its culture is owned by all and controlled by all. While it may be true that everyone on the campus is responsible for retention, relying on each individual to independently determine the scope, direction, and intensity of that contribution

is unsystematic and potentially counterproductive. No single individual or small group of individuals can bring about lasting enhancements in retention programs. Given that everyone on campus is responsible for retention, it follows that a broad-based campus planning team should engage in the study of student needs and the development of recommendations to enhance retention—as well as in the implementation and assessment of those recommendations.

2. Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.

Though most campuses have access to data on student characteristics, many campuses could be characterized as data rich and information poor. Although attrition decisions involve the complex interplay of many variables, two fundamental questions must be addressed for a college to design effective strategies to improve student persistence:

- *Who are our students?*
- *What differentiates students who stay from students who leave?*

To answer the first question, the retention planning team should review student data in the following areas.

- *Demographics:* including, but not limited to, sex, race/ethnicity, age, size of high school, parental level of education, socioeconomic status, etc.
- *Academic performance:* including, but not limited to, admission test scores, high school rank and grade point average, placement test scores, etc.
- *Academic plans:* including, but not limited to, choice of major, level of highest degree aspiration, etc.
- *Non-academic variables:* including, but not limited to, academic goals, achievement motivation, self-concept, social involvement, interest patterns, etc.
- *Self-reported needs:* including, but not limited to, expressed need for instructional support (writing, math, reading, study skills, etc.) and expressed need for non-instructional support (choice of major, disability support, personal counseling, co-curricular involvement, etc.)
- *Student opinions and attitudes:* including a broad-based assessment of student opinions and attitudes on instructional and non-instructional programs, services, and policies

Even though data in many of these categories are already collected through the admission, orientation, and course placement processes on the campus, it may be necessary for the planning team to recommend the use of additional sources to complete the data set. It is also recommended that, whenever possible, the data be disaggregated by student characteristics (e.g., undecided, at-risk, race/ethnicity) and by existing program interventions (e.g., supplemental instruction, first-year seminar, learning community).

Answering the second question is merely an extension of answering the first. Many of the data elements required for the answer reside in the campus database (e.g., demographics, admission test scores, high school academic performance). As a result, these variables can be studied almost immediately by separating last year's first-year students into two groups, those who persisted to a second year and those who did not—and studying the differences between them. Data on student involvement, opinions, and attitudes however, must be collected while students are enrolled in the first year and, thus, cannot be completely analyzed until the following fall.

3. Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.

Although it is inappropriate and counterproductive to lay the blame for student attrition at the feet of either the students or the institution, respondents to this survey are far more likely to cite student characteristics as causal factors in student attrition than they are to cite institutional factors. Of the 24 institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition, respondents identified only two as making a moderate or higher contribution: amount of financial aid available and student-institution fit. Yet, of the 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified 13 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were: lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, inadequate preparation for college, and poor study skills. Although the nexus between student characteristics and institutional characteristics (retention interventions) on each campus will most certainly vary from the results of this survey, the planning team must recognize that improvements to student retention will accrue only if enhanced or new interventions are undertaken. Improved retention evolves from quality programs and services to students.

4. Carefully review high-impact strategies identified through the survey.

This survey provides three significant insights into retention practices that make a difference. First, the survey does clearly identify retention practices that work. Second, it is important to note that virtually *none* of the most common retention practices cited by survey respondents are among those cited as having the greatest impact on retention. This phenomenon suggests that few gains in student retention result from conducting business as usual. Finally, survey results strongly suggest that campus efforts should focus on high-impact, value-added retention interventions. Of the 82 retention interventions included in our survey, strategies cited by respondents as making the greatest contribution to retention fall into three main categories.

- *First-year programs*: including freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, learning communities, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- *Academic advising*: including advising interventions with selected student populations, integration of advising with first-year programs, academic advising centers and centers that combine academic advising and career-life planning
- *Learning support*: including a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, supplemental instruction, and required remedial/developmental coursework

Since programs in each of these three categories exist to some degree at every college, the planning team should first focus on assessing the degree to which these interventions address identified student needs. In some situations this assessment will lead to recommendations for minor changes in the definition and delivery of these interventions. In other cases, however, significant program changes or realignments may be indicated. One of the primary reasons to have a retention planning team is to provide broad-based campus support for some of the more significant program changes or realignment that may be needed.

5. Do not make first to second year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.

While it is true that the majority of student departures occur between the beginning of the first year and the beginning of the second year, significant attrition does occur after students enter the second year. It is also true that many campuses have deployed a front-loading strategy that commits significant resources to first to second year retention interventions, only to experience no concomitant increase in degree completion rates. In fact, just over 15% of

the campuses participating in this survey were identified as high performing institutions in both first to second year retention *and* in degree completion rates. Certainly students must survive to the second year to complete a degree, but first to second year survival is simply the first benchmark in a continuous process that leads to degree completion. The second benchmark is progression rate. Progression is defined as the percentage of first-time, full-time students who are retained for a second year *and* have achieved academic standing as second year (sophomore) students. Students who are retained but fail to progress in academic standing are far more likely to drop out during the second and subsequent years. Progression rates to the third and subsequent years should also be studied. And the final benchmark is degree completion rate. If a campus is to improve on these three benchmarks, it is necessary that retention interventions be sustained throughout a student's enrollment and be systematically applied to all facets of the student experience.

6. Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals.

Success or failure in retention, progression, and degree completion often rests on the establishment of realistic short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals that are set too high often result in frustrated faculty and staff, and goals that are set too low may be achieved but result in nothing more than blips on the data radar screen. Short-term goals for retention, progression, and degree completion should focus on incremental but meaningful improvement.

Setting long-term goals can be a slippery slope for a number of reasons. First, although the conventional wisdom suggests that about one-third of all first-year students fail to return for a second year, establishing an institutional goal to beat that figure is as inappropriate for an open-admissions community college as it is for a highly selective private college. Second, though it is tempting to establish long-term goals based on national averages, there is a problem with citing national averages when determining goals for retention, progression, and degree completion. On some campuses, being "above average" provides a convenient rationale for maintaining the status quo; on "below average" campuses, getting to "average" may prove unrealistic.

Comparisons with peer institutions may provide more realistic benchmarks. Yet, these comparisons may not reflect the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics that exists on a specific campus. The goal should not be to be "average," for even if all campuses miraculously improved retention, progression, and degree completion rates, "below average" campuses would still exist. The goal to stay above average is really not a goal at all; long-term goals should be improvement goals.

Where possible, institutional goals should include target goals for selected programs and for selected student groups. For example, within an overall institutional goal to improve first to second year retention, the planning team might establish subgoals for at-risk students, undecided students, or students who participate in supplemental instruction. Or, as the result of the implementation of a particular program strategy, the planning team might establish a target goal for students who participate in that program strategy.

A corollary to setting realistic goals is to allow ample time for interventions to have an impact on student retention. It is unreasonable to assume that a new or enhanced retention strategy will be flawlessly implemented in its first incarnation. It is equally unreasonable to assume that a retention intervention will meet or exceed its retention goal in the first year of implementation. Certainly, program adjustments will have to be undertaken. Because of these

factors, patience is required. Goals for first to second year retention and progression are not likely to be achieved for at least two years or, in some cases, longer. The impact on degree completion may not be fully realized for five to seven years.

7. Orchestrate the change process.

The planning team may encounter resistance to some, and perhaps all, of its recommendations. Accomplishing change on a college campus is not easy. It involves changing the attitudes and opinions of multiple constituencies because it is unlikely that all constituencies will immediately and uncritically embrace the recommendations of the planning team. For some individuals, change poses a threat to status, to notions of competency, to routines, and to both formal and informal influence among colleagues. While there is no surefire formula for gaining constituent buy-in, several strategies such as the following may be helpful.

- Carefully consider the composition of the planning team. In addition to the broad-based involvement discussed in the first recommendation, care should be taken to include individuals from all levels of the campus hierarchy. These individuals bring important insights and perspectives that are often excluded from the discussion. Although it might be tempting to populate the planning team with proponents for change, it is imperative that the planning team include skeptics and critics. These individuals may slow the process somewhat, but their support for team recommendation is essential to gaining campus-wide acceptance.
- Provide frequent reports to, and structured opportunities for input from, the entire campus community. Regardless of its size and scope, a planning team that operates in a closed environment over a period of time is likely to encounter significant resistance when its recommendations, no matter how thoughtful, are finally unveiled to the campus community.
- Be ready to provide *proof of concept* in support of planning team recommendations. Proof of concept provides evidence that the recommendations are likely to succeed. It may be established through the literature and research or result from site visits to peer institutions that have successfully implemented a particular intervention. If significant resources or a major shift in normative behavior are involved, persuasive proof of concept may be gained only through a pilot program.

8. Implement, measure, improve!

Designing and implementing retention strategies is not a process with a clear beginning and end. It is a complex and continuous process that involves analysis, implementation, and assessment. And assessment, in turn, leads to new strategies, implementation, and further assessment. While it is not possible to achieve perfection (if such a condition exists) in student retention, progression, and completion, it is always possible to improve.

What Works in Student Retention?

Four-Year Private Colleges

Wesley R. Habley
Randy McClanahan

Acknowledgments

It has been quite some time since ACT has engaged in a comprehensive study of college student retention practices. This study would not have been possible however, had it not been for the earlier efforts of ACT staff members Lee Noel and Susan Cowart who conducted “What Works in Student Retention” studies and published results in 1980 and 1987, respectively. And, this study could not have been completed without the continuing support of Jon Erickson, ACT Vice President of Educational Services.

No study of this magnitude could be complete without efforts of a multi-talented team. The staff of ACT’s Survey Research Area, directed by Michael Valiga, was the backbone of this team. This team was supportive, creative, thorough, and responsive. Specific thanks go to the following people:

- Peggy Loveless provided statistical analysis and responded promptly to requests for just one more data run.
- Vi Bitterman managed a multilevel, complex mailing and return strategy.
- Elizabeth McBride handled data entry and far more. Elizabeth had the magical ability to massage, manipulate, and mine the database to produce a never-ending stream of charts and tables.
- Randy McClanahan (co-author) served all phases of this study. She was instrumental in the design of the survey. She supervised the data collection. She wrote the review of the literature and assembled the bibliography. She critiqued the manuscript mercilessly, and necessarily. In an undertaking as major as this survey, one could simply not ask for a better colleague.

Deb Anderson is responsible for the production of the final manuscript. Whether interpreting my scribbled notes, gently suggesting changes that should have been obvious, adjusting the size and or tables, and producing unknown number of drafts, Deb has been unflappable and unerring. Deb has always been, and continues to be, my right arm.

Finally, I acknowledge the readers of this report, particularly those who recognize that there is much at stake if college students are to be successful. If this report, in some small way, provides the stimulus and creates a resolve to for you to enhance campus retention practices, then it will have served its purpose.

Wesley R. Habley, ACT

INTRODUCTION: Four-Year Private Colleges

This report reflects ACT's three-decade commitment to assist colleges and universities to better understand the impact of campus practices on college student retention and degree completion. During that time ACT has conducted many research projects that demonstrate that commitment. Below are selected examples of this effort.

Six National Surveys on Academic Advising Practices

ACT believes that academic advising plays a pivotal role in student retention. That belief is clearly borne out by the findings of the survey discussed in this report. Beginning in 1979 ACT, in collaboration with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), has conducted six national studies of campus practices in academic advising. The latest of these, *The Status of Academic Advising: Findings from the ACT Sixth National Survey*, is published in the NACADA monograph series. That monograph may be ordered through the NACADA website: www.nacada.ksu.edu.

***What Works in Student Retention* (1980)**

The first *What Works in Student Retention* study (Beal and Noel, 1980) was a joint project of ACT and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). Staff of NCHEMS and ACT developed and piloted the survey. In the complete study, surveys were sent to 2,459 two-year and four-year colleges with a response rate of 40.2%. As a part of this study, the authors collected information about 17 student characteristics and 10 institutional characteristics that contributed to attrition and retention. In addition, respondents were asked to select from a list of 20 action programs that had been implemented to improve retention. In the conclusions reached in the final report (now out of print), the authors cited the following three action program areas as critical to retention.

- *Academic stimulation and assistance*: challenge in and support for academic performance
- *Personal future building*: the identification and clarification of student goals and directions
- *Involvement experiences*: student participation/interaction with a wide variety of programs and services on the campus

***ACT Dropout and Graduation Rate Tables* (1983-2003)**

In 1982, ACT began collecting institutional data on first to second year retention and on degree completion rates through the Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). The IDQ is an annual survey of 2,500-2,800 colleges and universities. Each year since 1983 ACT has published the *ACT National Dropout and Degree Completion Tables*. The most recent reports can be found on ACT's website: www.act.org/path/postsec/index.html.

***What Works in Student Retention* (1987)**

In what was essentially a content replication of the earlier survey, ACT collaborated with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to produce the monograph *What Works in Student Retention in State Colleges and Universities* (Coward, 1987). (Unfortunately, this monograph too is out of print.) The 370 members of AASCU were included in the survey population, and responses from 190 (51.7%) were included in the analyses. When asked about strategies employed to improve retention since 1980, the following groupings of practices were cited by more than 50% of the colleges: improvement/redevelopment of the academic advising program (72.1%), special orientation program (71.0%), establishment of early warning systems (65.6%), and curricular innovations in credit programs (61.7%).

The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention (2004)

This policy report (Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth, 2004) provides information from ACT's major technical study on the influence of non-academic factors alone and, combined with academic factors, on student performance and retention at four-year colleges and universities. It highlights examples of successful retention practices and concludes with four recommendations:

1. Determine student characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and implement a formal comprehensive retention program that best meets institutional needs.
2. Take an integrated approach in retention efforts that incorporates both academic and non-academic factors into the design and development of programs to create a socially inclusive and supportive academic environment that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.
3. Implement an early alert, assessment, and monitoring system based on HSGPA, ACT Assessment scores, course placement tests, first semester college GPA, socioeconomic information, attendance records, and non-academic information derived from formal college surveys and college student inventories to identify and build comprehensive profiles of students at risk of dropping out.
4. Determine the economic impact of college retention programs and student time to degree completion rates through a cost-benefit analysis of student dropout, persistence, assessment procedures, and intervention strategies to enable informed decision-making with respect to types of interventions required—academic and non-academic—including remediation and financial support.

This 30-page policy report is available at: www.act.org/research/policy/index.html

About This Study

When ACT study design staff began meeting in the summer of 2003, the intention was to replicate the surveys conducted in 1980 and 1987. That intention was soon abandoned. First, it was clear that the retention literature had grown exponentially since the first survey was constructed and that much more now was known about student characteristics and institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition. Also, far more institutional interventions contributed to student retention and degree completion. In view of this changed landscape, the design team conducted thorough analyses of the retention literature and, as a result, expanded the original list of institutional characteristics from 10 to 24 and the list of student characteristics from 17 to 20. But it was in the area of institutional interventions that the most significant expansion in number of items took place. Whereas the 1980 survey identified only 20 action programs as contributing to retention, after first brainstorming and then refining a list that included more than 100 interventions, the design team settled on 82 strategies that became the basis for Section D of the survey.

The design team also concluded that it was important to assess not only the prevalence of particular practices at colleges and universities but also the impact of those programs. Hence, Section D was constructed to include both of these measures. Three survey drafts were reviewed for content and structure and revised accordingly by staff of the Survey Research Department and the Office for the Enhancement of Educational Practices.

The first mailing associated with the survey was a pre-survey letter to chief academic officers at 2,995 colleges. This mailing included all accredited, degree-granting, two-year and four-year, public and private colleges. The purpose the letter was to announce the survey and to allow the chief academic officers to identify an individual (other than themselves) to whom the survey should be mailed. Response cards identifying such a person were received from 807 institutions.

The survey was then mailed to the 807 individuals identified through the postcards and to the chief academic officers at the remaining 2,188 colleges. Within a six-week period two additional survey mailings took place.

Table 1 provides an overview of the responses to the survey.

Table 1

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Colleges	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Returned	Return Rate
All	2,995	1,061	35.4%
Two-year public	991	386	39.0%
Two-year private*	197	46	23.4%
Four-year public	536	228	42.5%
Four-year private	1,271	401	31.5%

*Note: Several responding institutions in this group could not be categorized as both two-year and private colleges. This factor, combined with a low response rate, precluded meaningful analysis of data. As a result, no additional analyses were conducted.

This document includes the following sections:

- Introduction
- Executive Summary
- Survey Section A: Campus Coordination and Retention/Completion Goals
- Survey Section B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services
- Survey Section C: Student Characteristics
- Survey Section D: Retention Practices
- Recommendations
- Appendices
 1. Review of the Retention Literature
 2. Bibliography
 3. The Survey

This report focuses only on the data provided by four-year private colleges. Reports for the other institutional types can be found on the ACT website: www.act.org/path/postsec/droptables/index.html

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Four-Year Private Colleges

In spite of the attention paid to college student retention:

- Only 64.1% of campuses have identified an individual responsible for coordinating retention strategies.
- Only 59.4% of campuses have established an improvement goal for retention of students from the first to second year.
- Only 38.7% of campuses have established a goal for improved degree completion.

Respondents at four-year private colleges are as likely to attribute attrition to student characteristics than they are to attribute attrition to institutional characteristics.

- Of 24 institutional characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified only three factors that made a moderate or higher contribution: amount of student financial aid available, student-institution fit and social environment.
- Of 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition respondents identified 6 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Those student characteristics were inadequate financial resources, lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate preparation for college level work, poor study skills, inadequate personal coping skills, and lack of educational goals and aspirations.

Retention practices responsible for the greatest contribution to retention in four-year private colleges fall into three main categories:

- *First-year programs*: including freshman seminars/university 101 either for credit or not for credit, learning communities, extended orientation programs and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- *Academic advising*: including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff and integration of advising with first-year transition programs
- *Learning support*: including a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, tutoring program, and summer bridge program

Several retention practices at high-performing (retention and degree completion) four-year private colleges differentiate those colleges from low-performing colleges. See page 16 of complete report for definitions of high-performing and low-performing colleges. Those practices are:

- integration of academic advising with first-year transition programs,
- increased advising staff,
- academic advising center,
- learning communities,
- faculty mentoring,
- non-credit extended freshman orientation,
- summer bridge program,
- program for honors students,
- peer mentoring, and
- writing center/lab.

When asked to identify three campus retention practices that had the greatest impact on student retention, four-year private college respondents identified

- freshman seminar/university 101 for credit (16.5%),
- advising interventions with selected student populations (16.2%),
- internships (13.5%),

- integration of academic advising with first-year transition programs (12.7%),
- pre-enrollment orientation (10.5%),
- early warning system (10.5%), and

The remaining practices were cited by less than 10% of the colleges.

Recommendations:

- Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.
- Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.
- Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.
- Carefully review the high impact strategies identified in through the survey.
- Do not make first to second year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.
- Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals
- Orchestrate the change process.
- Implement, measure, improve!

SECTION A: Four-Year Private Colleges

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide information on the coordination of retention services and the goals (if any) the campus had set for both retention and degree completion. The questions from section A included the following.

<p>1. Is there an individual designated to coordinate retention activities on your campus?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 2.)
No ☐ (Skip to item 3.)</p>	<p>4. Based on your current first to second year retention rate, what percentage increase have you established as your retention goal?
_____ %</p>	<p>7. Assuming a 6-year timeframe for 4-year institutions and a 3-year timeframe for 2-year institutions, what percentage increase have you established as your student degree completion goal?
_____ %</p>
<p>2. What is this individual's title?
_____</p>	<p>5. In how many years do you intend to reach this retention goal?
_____ # of year(s)</p>	<p>8. In how many years do you intend to reach this student degree completion goal?
_____ # of year(s)</p>
<p>3. Have you established a goal for the retention of students from the first to second year?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 4.)
No ☐ (Skip to item 6.)</p>	<p>6. Have you established a goal for student degree completion at your institution?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 7.)
No ☐ (Skip to Section B.)</p>	

A summary of responses to items 1, 2, 3, and 6 for four-year private colleges is provided below. Unfortunately, an analysis of the ranges of responses to items 4 and 5 (retention goal) and 7 and 8 (degree completion goal) yielded confounding results. Some survey participants responded to the request for **percentage increase** (items 4 and 5) by reporting an overall retention or degree completion goal. Some of the survey participants answered “Yes” to items 3 and/or 6, but did not answer items 4 and/or 7. And finally, some survey participants responded to items 4 and/or 7, but did not respond to items 5 and/or 8. As a result of these inconsistencies, it was inappropriate to include these data in the final report.

Coordination of Retention Activities

Of the 401 four-year private college responses, 257 (64.1%) indicated that there was an individual designated to coordinate campus retention activities. 183 different titles were identified, the most common of which were Dean of Students (13) and Dean of Enrollment Management (5). A review of the various titles of individuals responsible for coordination of retention efforts resulted in the following:

- At 69 colleges (26.8%), the terms Director, Coordinator, or Executive Director were included in the title.
- At 46 colleges (17.9%), the terms Provost, Vice President, or Vice Chancellor were included in the title.
- At 27 colleges (10.5%), the term Dean was included in the title.
- At 12 colleges (4.7%), the terms Associate Provost, Associate Vice President, or Associate Vice Chancellor were included in the title.
- At 9 colleges (3.5%), the term Associate Dean was included in the title.

- At 7 colleges (2.7%), the term Assistant Dean was included in the title.
- At 45 colleges (17.5%), the term retention was included in the title.
- At 43 colleges (16.7%), the term enrollment was included in the title.
- At 39 colleges (15.2%), the terms student affairs, student services, student development, or student success were included in the title.

Retention and Degree Completion Goals

Of the 401 four-year public colleges responding to the survey:

- 238 colleges (59.4%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the first to second year retention rate.
- 155 colleges (38.7%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the five-year degree completion rate.

SECTION B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services in Four-Year Private Colleges

In Section B of the Survey, respondents were asked to the following question.

*To what degree is each of the following **institutional** issues, characteristics, or services a factor **contributing to attrition** on your campus?*

Respondents were asked to rate each of 24 characteristics according to the following five-response scale:

Means for each of the 24 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major factor), 4 (between major and moderate factor), 3 (moderate factor), 2 (between moderate factor and not a factor), and 1 (not a factor).

See Summary Table B (page 11) for mean scores for all 24 institutional issues, characteristics, and services.

Table 2

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Amount of Financial Aid Available to Students (6)	3.68
Student-Institution Fit (9)	3.48
Social Environment (21)	3.05
Student Involvement in Campus Life (12)	2.97
Curriculum Issues (3)	2.89
The Number and Variety of Courses Offered (24)	2.81
Residence Halls (17)	2.78

Table 3

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE LEAST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Other On-Campus Housing (18)	1.70
Personal Counseling Services (10)	2.09
Quality of Teaching (4)	2.12
Student Employment Opportunities (1)	2.15
Career Exploration Services (11)	2.18
Attitude of Staff Toward Students (14)	2.25
Attitude of Faculty Toward Students (13)	2.26

Summary Table B

INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SERVICES

Survey Question: To what degree is each of the following institutional issues, characteristics, or services a factor contributing to attrition on your campus?

	Mean*	Mean Rating
	All Colleges	4-Yr Private
1. Student employment opportunities	2.67	2.15
2. Extracurricular programs	2.10	2.56
3. Curriculum issues	2.86	2.89
4. Quality of teaching	2.25	2.12
5. Academic advising	2.79	2.57
6. Amount of financial aid available to students	3.46	3.68
7. Financial aid services	2.73	2.76
8. Admissions practices/requirements	2.30	2.32
9. Student-institution "fit"	3.13	3.48
10. Personal counseling services	2.21	2.09
11. Career exploration services	2.31	2.18
12. Student involvement in campus life	2.96	2.97
13. Attitude of faculty toward students	2.46	2.26
14. Attitude of staff toward students	2.42	2.25
15. Academic support services (learning centers, similar resources)	2.55	2.48
16. Rules and regulations governing student behavior	2.23	2.62
17. Residence halls	2.30	2.78
18. Other on-campus housing	1.60	1.70
19. Personal contact between students and faculty	2.51	2.20
20. Cultural environment	2.69	2.74
21. Social environment	2.92	3.05
22. Intellectual stimulation or challenge	2.54	2.53
23. Student engagement in classroom (active learning)	2.72	2.48
24. The number and variety of courses offered	2.84	2.81

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION C: Student Characteristics in Four-Year Private Colleges

In Section C of the Survey, respondents were asked the following question:

To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

Respondents were asked to rate each of 20 characteristics according to the following five-response scale:

Means for each of the 20 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution), 4 (between major and moderate contribution), 3 (moderate contribution), 2 (between moderate contribution and no contribution), and 1 (no contribution). See Summary Table C (page 13) for mean scores for all 20 Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services.

Table 4

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Inadequate Financial Resources (8)	4.25
Lack of Motivation to Succeed (10)	4.25
Inadequate Preparation for College Level Work (1)	3.45
Poor Study Skills (19)	3.38
Inadequate Personal Coping Skills (20)	3.08
Lack of Educational Goals and Aspirations (2)	3.02

Table 5

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE LEAST
CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Too Many Family Demands (14)	2.17
Commuting/Living Off-Campus (4)	2.36
Distance from Permanent Home (18)	2.38
Physical Health Problems (11)	2.46
Lack of Support from Significant Others (13)	2.47
Mental or Emotional Health Problems (12)	2.55
Too Many Job Demands (15)	2.63

Summary Table C

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Survey Question: To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

	Mean*	Mean Rating
	All Colleges	4-Yr Private
1. Inadequate preparation for college-level work	3.85	3.45
2. Lack of educational aspirations and goals	3.31	3.02
3. First-generation to attend college	3.16	2.71
4. Commuting/living off campus	2.71	2.36
5. Socio-economic disadvantage	3.21	2.85
6. Indecision about major	3.00	2.77
7. Indecision about career goal	3.02	2.77
8. Inadequate financial resources	4.17	4.25
9. Weak commitment to earning a degree	3.18	2.86
10. Lack of motivation to succeed	4.17	4.25
11. Physical health problems	2.30	2.46
12. Mental or emotional health problems	2.48	2.55
13. Lack of support from significant others (e.g., spouse, parents, peers)	2.78	2.47
14. Too many family demands	2.96	2.17
15. Too many job demands	3.27	2.63
16. Poor social integration (peer group interaction, extracurricular activities)	2.85	2.79
17. Poor academic integration	3.12	2.93
18. Distance from permanent home	2.17	2.38
19. Poor study skills	3.67	3.38
20. Inadequate personal coping skills	3.18	3.08

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION D: Retention Practices in Four-Year Private Colleges

In Section D, respondents were given the following instructions.

*Listed below is a series of programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that **may make a contribution to retention on your campus**. First indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus.*

The format of Section D items follows.

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Offered at Your Institution?	Major Contribution to Retention				
	No Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)	Moderate Contribution to Retention				
		No Contribution to Retention				
		5	4	3	2	1

Section D included 82 on-campus practices. See Summary Table D-3 (pages 18-20) for a breakdown of all 82 practices at four-year private colleges.

Table 6

MOST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses Reporting the Practice
Internships (26)	90%
Tutoring Program (41)	84
Recreation/Intramurals (66)	84
Fraternities/Sororities (65)	82
Individual Career Counseling Services (28)	81
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	79
Mid-Term Progress Reports (44)	79
Instructional Use of Technology (55)	79
Classroom Assessment (14)	78
Library Orientation, Workshop, or Course (81)	78
Academic Clubs (67)	78
Cultural Activities Program (68)	75
Advising Interventions with Selected Populations of Students (6)	74
Leadership Development (69)	74
Career Development Workshops/Courses (25)	73

Table 7

**LEAST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses Reporting the Practice
Degree Guarantee Program (46)	5%
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	8
Community Member Mentoring (52)	9
Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS) (52)	10
Motivation Assessment (20)	12
Social Skills Course/Program (79)	16
Summer Bridge Program (33)	18
Enhanced/Modified Faculty Reward System (58)	19

Means for each of the 82 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution to retention), 4 (between major and moderate contribution to retention), 3 (moderate contribution to retention), 2 (between moderate and no contribution to retention), and 1 (no contribution to retention).

Table 8 reports on-campus retention practices receiving the highest mean ratings, and Table 9 reports on-campus retention practices with the lowest mean ratings.

Table 8

**PRACTICES WITH HIGHEST MEAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RETENTION
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	3.9
Integration of Advising with First Year Transition Programs (9)	3.9
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	3.8
Increased Advising Staff (8)	3.8
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	3.8
Internships (26)	3.7
Learning Communities (31)	3.7
Reading Center/Lab (39)	3.7
Tutoring Program (41)	3.7
Faculty Mentoring (50)	3.7
Extended Freshman Orientation (non-credit) (2)	3.6
Extended Freshman Orientation (credit) (3)	3.6
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	3.6
Summer Bridge Program (33)	3.6
Program for Honors Students (75)	3.6
Required On-Campus Housing for Freshmen (80)	3.6

Table 9

**PRACTICES WITH LOWEST MEAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RETENTION
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Advisor Manual/Handbook (12)	2.7
Vocational Aptitude Tests (23)	2.8
Personality Test(s) (24)	2.8
Computer-Assisted Career Guidance (29)	2.8
Parent Newsletter (59)	2.8
Library Orientation, Workshop, and/or Course (81)	2.8
Health and Wellness Course/Program (77)	2.8
Application of Technology to Advising (13)	2.9
Learning Styles Inventories (19)	2.9
Values Inventories (21)	2.9
Interest Inventories (22)	2.9
Foreign Language Center/Lab (40)	2.9
Diversity Information/Training (63)	2.9

Definition of High-Performing and Low-Performing Four-Year Private Colleges

Data to determine high-performing and low-performing campuses were drawn from ACT's 2003 Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). ACT annually requests information from all two-year and four-year public and private institutions through its IDQ. Four-year private institutions are asked to provide first to second year attrition rates and five-year degree completion rates for all Bachelor's Degree seeking students. In 2003, 2,530 colleges and universities returned the IDQ and provided data on attrition and degree completion rates. Of these colleges, 1,154 were four-year private colleges.

The data for four-year private colleges were broken into two groups: 1. those performing in the top quartile in both retention and degree completion rates (hereinafter called High-Performing Campuses), and 2. those performing in the bottom quartile in both retention and degree completion rates (hereinafter called Low-Performing Campuses). Of the 401 four-year private colleges responding to the survey, 62 were identified as high-performing and 52 were identified as low-performing.

Table 10 combines two variables: 1. on-campus practices where the percentage of high-performing four-year private college campuses reporting the use of the practice exceeds the percentage of low-performing campuses reporting the use of the practice by 10% or more, and 2. the institutional type contribution mean is reported at 3.5 or higher.

Table 10

**DIFFERENTIAL PRACTICES IN HIGH-PERFORMING VS. LOW-PERFORMING CAMPUSES
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Institutional Mean	Percent of High- Performing Campuses Reporting Use of This Practice	Percent of Low- Performing Campuses Reporting Use of This Practice
Integration of Academic Advising with First- Year Transition Programs (9)	3.9	65%	46%
Increased Advising Staff (8)	3.8	36	20
Academic Advising Center (10)	3.8	39	16
Learning Communities (31)	3.7	45	14
Faculty Mentoring (50)	3.7	70	33
Extended Freshman Orientation (non-credit) (2)	3.6	40	28
Summer Bridge Program (33)	3.6	36	8
Program for Honors Students (75)	3.6	61	43
Peer Mentoring (49)	3.5	56	42
Writing Center/Lab (38)	3.5	89	54

Summary Table D

**RETENTION PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

Survey Question: Of the programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that may make a contribution to retention on your campus, indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus. (Response scale: 5=major contribution to 1=no contribution)

	All Survey Colleges		4-Year Private Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
First-Year Programs						
1. Pre-enrollment orientation	82	3.5	79	3.5	81	81
2. Extended freshman orientation (non-credit)	27	3.6	38	3.6	40	28
3. Extended freshman orientation (credit)	26	3.6	24	3.6	10	36
4. Freshman seminar/university 101 (non-credit)	8	3.5	8	3.6	8	13
5. Freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	51	3.8	55	3.9	58	58
Academic Advising Program						
6. Advising interventions with selected student populations	75	3.8	74	3.8	89	84
7. Advisor training	70	3.4	69	3.3	87	56
8. Increased advising staff	30	3.8	24	3.8	36	20
9. Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	41	3.8	48	3.9	65	46
10. Academic advising centers	47	3.8	29	3.8	39	16
11. Centers that combine advisement and counseling with career planning and placement	33	3.7	21	3.6	18	22
12. Advisor manual/handbook	56	2.9	54	2.7	72	42
13. Application of technology to advising	58	3.2	49	2.9	66	38
Assessment Programs						
14. Classroom assessment	77	3.1	78	3.0	74	86
15. Course placement testing (mandated)	76	3.6	64	3.2	64	73
16. Course placement testing (recommended)	30	3.3	32	2.9	46	35
17. Outcomes assessment	66	3.0	68	3.0	71	67
18. Diagnostic academic skills test(s)	46	3.2	42	3.1	42	52
19. Learning styles inventory(ies)	37	2.9	34	2.9	35	42
20. Motivation assessment(s)	12	3.0	12	3.0	16	6
21. Values inventory(ies)	24	2.9	24	2.9	31	14
22. Interest inventory(ies)	50	2.9	42	2.9	41	41
23. Vocational aptitude test(s)	34	2.9	26	2.8	34	23
24. Personality test(s)	32	2.8	31	2.8	39	26

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**RETENTION PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges		4-Year Private Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
Career Planning and Placement Programs						
25. Career development workshops or courses	76	3.1	73	3.0	94	70
26. Internships	82	3.6	90	3.7	94	94
27. Cooperative education	43	3.5	24	3.5	30	21
28. Individual career counseling services	83	3.3	81	3.2	94	71
29. Computer-assisted career guidance	67	3.0	57	2.8	74	43
30. Job shadowing	32	3.1	34	3.1	48	16
Learning Assistance/Academic						
31. Learning communities	34	3.7	23	3.7	45	14
32. Supplemental instruction	51	3.7	46	3.5	48	58
33. Summer bridge program	27	3.6	18	3.6	36	8
34. Remedial/developmental coursework (required)	69	3.7	52	3.5	26	61
35. Remedial/developmental coursework (recommended)	35	3.5	29	3.3	33	32
36. Comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	57	3.9	47	3.8	48	56
37. Mathematics center/lab	54	3.6	39	3.4	52	39
38. Writing center/lab	68	3.6	64	3.5	89	54
39. Reading center/lab	31	3.8	21	3.7	23	29
40. Foreign language center/lab	30	3.1	30	2.9	63	12
41. Tutoring program	87	3.8	84	3.7	87	85
42. Study skills course, program, or center	70	3.6	66	3.5	73	71
43. Early warning system	61	3.5	67	3.5	69	71
44. Mid-term progress reports	64	3.3	79	3.4	87	84
45. Performance contracts for students in academic difficulty	38	3.4	43	3.3	42	47
46. Degree guarantee program	10	2.7	5	2.7	5	4
47. Organized student study groups	13	3.5	28	3.4	34	27
48. Service learning programs	41	3.2	46	3.1	68	44
Mentoring Programs						
49. Peer mentoring	42	3.5	49	3.5	56	42
50. Faculty mentoring	43	3.6	44	3.7	70	33
51. Staff mentoring	22	3.5	26	3.5	31	26
52. Community member mentoring	8	3.3	9	3.3	11	13
Faculty Development Programs						
53. Teaching techniques	62	3.4	57	3.3	78	56
54. Assessing student performance	30	3.4	29	3.3	71	58
55. Instructional use of technology	83	3.2	79	3.1	90	80
56. Writing across the curriculum	50	3.2	53	3.2	70	44
57. Interdisciplinary courses	48	3.1	67	3.0	82	61
58. Enhanced/modified faculty reward system	31	3.0	19	3.0	37	10

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**RETENTION PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges		4-Year Private Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
Parent Programs						
59. Parent newsletter	20	2.8	31	2.8	46	28
60. Parent orientation	52	3.1	66	3.1	79	61
61. Advisory group	22	2.9	25	2.5	45	8
Campus Programs						
62. Freshman interest groups (FIGS)	11	3.6	10	3.5	20	14
63. Diversity information/training	50	3.0	46	2.9	79	28
64. Residence hall programs	59	3.4	82	3.4	94	76
65. Fraternities/sororities	31	3.1	34	3.3	56	39
66. Recreation/intramurals	78	3.1	84	3.3	98	96
67. Academic clubs	84	3.2	78	3.2	87	71
68. Cultural activities program	78	3.1	75	3.1	92	70
69. Leadership development	72	3.4	74	3.4	87	68
Programs for Sub-populations						
70. Adult students	38	3.3	40	3.3	38	46
71. Commuter students	28	3.2	36	3.1	35	32
72. Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender students	29	3.0	30	3.0	62	12
73. Women	39	3.2	40	3.2	68	26
74. Racial/ethnic minorities	56	3.4	58	3.3	87	38
75. Honor students	64	3.7	57	3.6	61	43
Additional Activities						
76. Time management course/program	46	3.2	45	3.2	65	34
77. Health and wellness course/program	58	2.9	58	2.8	74	44
78. Personal coping skills course/program	33	3.1	32	3.2	52	33
79. Social skills course/program	17	3.1	16	3.1	23	15
80. Required on-campus housing for freshmen	35	3.6	63	3.6	85	78
81. Library orientation, workshop, and/or course	73	2.9	78	2.8	92	76
82. Motivation and goal setting workshop/program	29	3.2	26	3.2	31	26

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION E: Programs with Greatest Impact on Retention

In this section, respondents were asked to review all 82 retention programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions, and to identify the 3 practices having the greatest impact on student retention. Reported below are the percentage of campus respondents who identified a particular practice among those three choices.

Table 11

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IDENTIFYING RETENTION PRACTICES AMONG THE TOP THREE CHOICES FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	16.5%
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	16.2
Internships (26)	13.5
Integration of Academic Advising with First-Year Transition Programs (9)	12.7
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	10.5
Early Warning System (43)	10.5
Faculty Mentoring (50)	9.7
Tutoring Program (41)	9.5
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	8.7
Residence Hall Programs (64)	7.0

RECOMMENDATIONS: Four-Year Private Colleges

The recommendations for enhancing student retention practices discussed in this section include several that are obvious and affirm the “common wisdom” on retention practices, but nevertheless warrant careful consideration by campus practitioners. Several other recommendations, however, may not be as obvious to the casual reviewer of the data and also deserve careful attention by campus practitioners. While each of these recommendations reflects the opinions of the author, many are supported by survey data.

1. Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.

Considering the fact that student retention and degree completion have been touted as critical elements in institutional effectiveness and accountability, it is heartening to note that 64.1% of four-year private college campuses in the survey have designated an individual to coordinate retention activities. Of concern are the findings on the levels and titles of the individuals identified as coordinating retention activities. Only 21.1% assign coordination at the dean level or higher, and a mere 11.2% of all colleges include the term “retention” in the title of that individual. When focusing only on those colleges that have appointed an individual to coordinate retention efforts, those percentages rise to 33.1% and 17.5%, respectively. The position level and title of the individual responsible for coordinating campus retention practices send a message to the entire campus community about how high a priority campus leaders place on retention issues.

Equally important is the appointment of a campus-wide retention planning team. Each college is unique in its history and precedents, and its culture is owned by all and controlled by all.

While it may be true that everyone on the campus is responsible for retention, relying on each individual to independently determine the scope, direction, and intensity of that contribution is unsystematic and potentially counterproductive. No single individual or small group of individuals can bring about lasting enhancements in retention programs. Given that everyone on campus is responsible for retention, it follows that a broad-based campus planning team should engage in the study of student needs and the development of recommendations to enhance retention—as well as in the implementation and assessment of those recommendations.

2. Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.

Though most campuses have access to data on student characteristics, many campuses could be characterized as data rich and information poor. Although attrition decisions involve the complex interplay of many variables, two fundamental questions must be addressed for a college to design effective strategies to improve student persistence:

- *Who are our students?*
- *What differentiates students who stay from students who leave?*

To answer the first question, the retention planning team should review student data in the following areas.

- *Demographics:* including, but not limited to, sex, race/ethnicity, age, size of high school, parental level of education, socioeconomic status, etc.
- *Academic performance:* including, but not limited to, admission test scores, high school rank and grade point average, placement test scores, etc.
- *Academic plans:* including, but not limited to, choice of major, level of highest degree aspiration, etc.
- *Non-academic variables:* including, but not limited to, academic goals, achievement motivation, self-concept, social involvement, interest patterns, etc.
- *Self-reported needs:* including, but not limited to, expressed need for instructional support (writing, math, reading, study skills, etc.) and expressed need for non-instructional support (choice of major, disability support, personal counseling, co-curricular involvement, etc.)
- *Student opinions and attitudes:* including a broad-based assessment of student opinions and attitudes on instructional and non-instructional programs, services, and policies

Even though data in many of these categories are already collected through the admission, orientation, and course placement processes on the campus, it may be necessary for the planning team to recommend the use of additional sources to complete the data set. It is also recommended that, whenever possible, the data be disaggregated by student characteristics (e.g. undecided, at-risk, race/ethnicity) and by existing program interventions (e.g. supplemental instruction, first-year seminar, learning community).

Answering the second question is merely an extension of answering the first. Many of the data elements required for the answer reside in the campus database (e.g., demographics, admission test scores, high school academic performance). As a result, these variables can be studied almost immediately by separating last year's first-year students into two groups, those who persisted to a second year and those who did not—and studying the differences between them. Data on student involvement, opinions, and attitudes however, must be collected while students are enrolled in the first year and, thus, cannot be completely analyzed until the following fall.

3. Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.

Although it is inappropriate and counter-productive to lay the blame for student attrition at the feet of either the students or the institution, respondents to this survey are somewhat more likely to cite student characteristics as causal factors in student attrition than they are to cite institutional factors. Of the 24 institutional characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified only three factors that made a moderate or higher contribution: amount of financial aid available, student-institution fit, and social environment. Of the 20 student characteristics that contribute to attrition, respondents identified six as making a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, inadequate preparation for college, lack of educational goals and aspiration, inadequate personal coping skills, and poor study skills. Although the nexus between student characteristics and institutional characteristics (retention interventions) on each campus will most certainly vary from the results of this survey, the planning team must recognize that improvements to student retention will accrue only if enhanced or new interventions are undertaken. Improved retention evolves from quality programs and services to students.

4. Carefully review high-impact strategies identified through the survey.

This survey provides three significant insights into retention practices that make a difference. First, the survey does clearly identify retention practices that work. Second, it is important to note that virtually *none* of the most common retention practices cited by survey respondents are among those cited as having the greatest impact on retention. This phenomenon suggests that few gains in student retention result from conducting business as usual. Finally, survey results strongly suggest that campus efforts should focus on high-impact, value-added retention interventions. Of the 82 retention interventions included in our survey, strategies cited by respondents as making the greatest contribution to retention fall into three main categories.

- *First-year programs*: including freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, non-credit freshman seminar/university 101, learning communities, extended orientation, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- *Academic advising*: including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff and integration of advising with first-year programs
- *Learning support*: including a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, summer bridge program and tutoring program

These three categories also characterized the practices that differentiate high-performing (retention and degree completion) from low-performing four-year private colleges. Finally, when asked to identify the three strategies (of 82) that made the greatest contribution to retention, only six practices were cited by more than 10% of the respondents: (1) freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, (2) advising interventions with selected student populations, (3) internships, (4) integration of advising with first-year transition programs, (5) early warning system, and (6) pre-enrollment orientation.

Since programs in each of these three categories exist to some degree at every college, the planning team should first focus on assessing the degree to which these interventions address identified student needs. In some situations this assessment will lead to recommendations for minor changes in the definition and delivery of these interventions. In other cases, however, significant program changes or realignments may be indicated. One of the primary reasons

for having a retention planning team is to provide broad-based campus support for some of the more significant program changes or realignment that may be needed.

5. Do not make first to second year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.

While it is true that the majority of student departures occur between the beginning of the first year and the beginning of the second year, significant attrition does occur after students enter the second year. It is also true that many campuses have deployed a front-loading strategy that commits significant resources to first to second year retention interventions only to experience no concomitant increase in degree completion rates. In fact, only 19% of the four-year public college campuses participating in this survey were identified as high-performing institutions in both first to second year retention *and* in degree completion rates. Certainly students must survive to the second year to complete a degree, but first to second year survival is simply the first benchmark in a continuous process that leads to degree completion. The second benchmark is progression rate. Progression is defined as the percentage of first-time, full-time students who are retained for a second year *and* have achieved academic standing as second year (sophomore) students. Students who are retained, but fail to progress in academic standing are far more likely to drop out during the second and subsequent years. Progression rates for the third and subsequent years should also be studied. And the final benchmark is degree completion rate. If a campus is to improve on these three benchmarks, it is necessary that retention interventions be sustained throughout a student's enrollment and that those interventions be systematically applied to all facets of the student experience.

6. Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals.

Success or failure in retention, progression, and degree completion often rests on the establishment of realistic short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals that are set too high often result in frustrated faculty and staff, and goals that are set too low may be achieved but could result in nothing more than blips on the data radar screen. Short-term goals for retention, progression, and degree completion should focus on incremental, but meaningful improvement.

Setting long-term goals can be a slippery slope for a number of reasons. First, although the conventional wisdom suggests that about one-third of all first-year students fail to return for a second year, establishing an institutional goal to beat that figure is as inappropriate for an open-admissions community college as it is for a highly selective private college. Second, though it is tempting to establish long-term goals based on national averages, there is a problem with citing national averages when determining goals for retention, progression, and degree completion. On some campuses, being "above average" provides a convenient rationale for maintaining the status quo; on "below average" campuses, getting to "average" may prove unrealistic.

Comparisons with peer institutions may provide more realistic benchmarks. Yet, these comparisons may not reflect the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics that exist on a specific campus. The goal should not be to be "average," for even if all campuses miraculously improved retention, progression, and degree completion rates, "below average" campuses would still exist. The goal to stay above average is really not a goal at all; long-term goals should be improvement goals.

Where possible, institutional goals should include target goals for selected programs and for selected student groups. For example, within an overall institutional goal to improve first to

second year retention, the planning team might establish sub-goals for at-risk students, undecided students, or students who participate in supplemental instruction. Or, as the result of the implementation of a particular program strategy, the planning team might establish a target goal for students who participate in that program strategy.

A corollary to setting realistic goals is to allow ample time for interventions to have an impact on student retention. It is unreasonable to assume that a new or enhanced retention strategy will be flawlessly implemented in its first incarnation. It is equally unreasonable to assume that a retention intervention will meet or exceed its retention goal in the first year of implementation. Program adjustments will most assuredly need to be undertaken. Because of these factors, patience is counseled. Goals for first to second year retention and progression are not likely to be achieved for at least two years or, in some cases, longer. The impact on degree completion may not be fully realized for five to seven years.

7. Orchestrate the change process.

The planning team may encounter resistance to some and perhaps all of its recommendations. Accomplishing change on a college campus is not easy. It involves changing attitudes and opinions of multiple constituencies because it is unlikely that all constituencies will immediately and uncritically embrace the recommendations of the planning team. For some individuals, change poses a threat to status, to notions of competency, to routines, and to both formal and informal influence among colleagues. While there is no surefire formula for gaining constituent buy-in, several strategies such as the following may be helpful.

- Carefully consider the composition of the planning team. In addition to broad-based involvement discussed in the first recommendation, care should be taken to include individuals from all levels of the campus hierarchy. These individuals bring important insights and perspectives that are often excluded from the discussion. Although it might be tempting to populate the planning team with proponents for change, it is imperative that the planning team includes skeptics and critics. These individuals may slow the process somewhat, but their support for team recommendation is essential to gaining campus-wide acceptance.
- Provide frequent reports to and structured opportunities for input from the entire campus community. Regardless of its size and scope, a planning team that operates in a closed environment over a period of time is likely to encounter significant resistance when its recommendations, no matter how thoughtful, are finally unveiled to the campus community.
- Be ready to provide *proof of concept* in support of planning team recommendations. Proof of concept provides evidence that the recommendations are likely to succeed. It may be established through the literature and research or result from site visits to peer institutions that have successfully implemented a particular intervention. If significant resources or a major shift in normative behavior are involved, persuasive proof of concept may be gained only through a pilot program.

8. Implement, measure, improve!

Designing and implementing retention strategies is not a process with a clear beginning and a clear end. It is a complex and continuous process that involves analysis, implementation, and assessment. And assessment, in turn, leads to new strategies, implementation, and further assessment. While it is not possible to achieve perfection (if such a condition exists) in student retention, progression, and completion, it is always possible to improve.

What Works in Student Retention?

Four-Year Public Colleges

Wesley R. Habley
Randy McClanahan

Acknowledgments

It has been quite some time since ACT has engaged in a comprehensive study of college student retention practices. This study would not have been possible however, had it not been for the earlier efforts of ACT staff members Lee Noel and Susan Cowart who conducted “What Works in Student Retention” studies and published results in 1980 and 1987, respectively. And, this study could not have been completed without the continuing support of Jon Erickson, ACT Vice President of Educational Services.

No study of this magnitude could be complete without efforts of a multitalented team. The staff of ACT’s Survey Research Area, directed by Michael Valiga, was the backbone of this team. This team was supportive, creative, thorough, and responsive. Specific thanks go to the following people:

- Peggy Loveless provided statistical analysis and responded promptly to requests for just one more data run.
- Vi Bitterman managed a multilevel, complex mailing and return strategy.
- Elizabeth McBride handled data entry and far more. Elizabeth had the magical ability to massage, manipulate, and mine the database to produce a never-ending stream of charts and tables.
- Randy McClanahan (co-author) served all phases of this study. She was instrumental in the design of the survey. She supervised the data collection. She wrote the review of the literature and assembled the bibliography. She critiqued the manuscript mercilessly, and necessarily. In an undertaking as major as this survey, one could simply not ask for a better colleague.

Deb Anderson is responsible for the production of the final manuscript. Whether interpreting my scribbled notes, gently suggesting changes that should have been obvious, adjusting the size and or tables, and producing unknown number of drafts, Deb has been unflappable and unerring. Deb has always been, and continues to be, my right arm.

Finally, I acknowledge the readers of this report, particularly those who recognize that there is much at stake if college students are to be successful. If this report, in some small way, provides the stimulus and creates a resolve to for you to enhance campus retention practices, then it will have served its purpose.

Wesley R. Habley, ACT

INTRODUCTION: Four-Year Public Colleges

This report reflects ACT's three-decade commitment to assist colleges and universities to better understand the impact of campus practices on college student retention and degree completion. During that time ACT has conducted many research projects that demonstrate that commitment. Below are selected examples of this effort.

Six National Surveys on Academic Advising Practices

ACT believes that academic advising plays a pivotal role in student retention. That belief is clearly borne out by the findings of the survey discussed in this report. Beginning in 1979 ACT, in collaboration with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), has conducted six national studies of campus practices in academic advising. The latest of these, *The Status of Academic Advising: Findings from the ACT Sixth National Survey*, is published in the NACADA monograph series. That monograph may be ordered through the NACADA website. www.nacada.ksu.edu.

***What Works in Student Retention* (1980)**

The first *What Works in Student Retention* study (Beal and Noel, 1980) was a joint project of ACT and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). Staff of NCHEMS and ACT developed and piloted the survey. In the complete study, surveys were sent to 2,459 two-year and four-year colleges with a response rate of 40.2%. As a part of this study, the authors collected information about 17 student characteristics and 10 institutional characteristics that contributed to attrition and retention. In addition, respondents were asked to select from a list of 20 action programs that had been implemented to improve retention. In the conclusions reached in the final report (now out of print), the authors cited the following three action program areas as critical to retention.

- *Academic stimulation and assistance*: challenge in and support for academic performance
- *Personal future building*: the identification and clarification of student goals and directions
- *Involvement experiences*: student participation/interaction with a wide variety of programs and services on the campus

***ACT Dropout and Graduation Rate Tables* (1983-2003)**

In 1982, ACT began collecting institutional data on first to second year retention and on degree completion rates through the Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). The IDQ is an annual survey of 2,500-2,800 colleges and universities. Each year since 1983 ACT has published the *ACT National Dropout and Degree Completion Tables*. The most recent reports can be found on ACT's website: www.act.org/path/postsec/index.html.

***What Works in Student Retention* (1987)**

In what was essentially a content replication of the earlier survey, ACT collaborated with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to produce the monograph *What Works in Student Retention in State Colleges and Universities* (Coward, 1987). (Unfortunately, this monograph too is out of print.) The 370 members of AASCU were included in the survey population, and responses from 190 (51.7%) were included in the analyses. When asked about strategies employed to improve retention since 1980, the following groupings of practices were cited by more than 50% of the colleges: improvement/redevelopment of the academic advising program (72.1%), special orientation program (71.0%), establishment of early warning systems (65.6%), and curricular innovations in credit programs (61.7%).

The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention (2004)

This policy report (Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth, 2004) provides information from ACT's major technical study on the influence of non-academic factors alone and, combined with academic factors, on student performance and retention at four-year colleges and universities. It highlights examples of successful retention practices and concludes with four recommendations:

1. Determine student characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and implement a formal comprehensive retention program that best meets institutional needs.
2. Take an integrated approach in retention efforts that incorporates both academic and non-academic factors into the design and development of programs to create a socially inclusive and supportive academic environment that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.
3. Implement an early alert, assessment, and monitoring system based on HSGPA, ACT Assessment scores, course placement tests, first semester college GPA, socioeconomic information, attendance records, and non-academic information derived from formal colleges surveys and college student inventories to identify and build comprehensive profiles of students at risk of dropping out.
4. Determine the economic impact of college retention programs and student time to degree completion rates through a cost-benefit analysis of student dropout, persistence, assessment procedures, and intervention strategies to enable informed decision-making with respect to types of interventions required—academic and non-academic—including remediation and financial support.

This 30-page policy report is available at: www.act.org/research/policy/index.html

About This Study

When ACT study design staff began meeting in the summer of 2003, the intention was to replicate the surveys conducted in 1980 and 1987. That intention was soon abandoned. First, it was clear that the retention literature had grown exponentially since the first survey was constructed and that much more now was known about student characteristics and institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition. Also, far more institutional interventions contributed to student retention and degree completion. In view of this changed landscape, the design team conducted thorough analyses of the retention literature and, as a result, expanded the original list of institutional characteristics from 10 to 24 and the list of student characteristics from 17 to 20. But it was in the area of institutional interventions that the most significant expansion in number of items took place. Whereas the 1980 survey identified only 20 action programs as contributing to retention, after first brainstorming and then refining a list that included more than 100 interventions, the design team settled on 82 strategies that became the basis for Section D of the survey.

The design team also concluded that it was important to assess not only the prevalence of particular practices at colleges and universities but also the impact of those programs. Hence, Section D was constructed to include both of these measures. Three survey drafts were reviewed for content and structure and revised accordingly by staff of the Survey Research Department and the Office for the Enhancement of Educational Practices.

The first mailing associated with the survey was a pre-survey letter to chief academic officers at 2,995 colleges. This mailing included all accredited, degree-granting, two-year and four-year, public and private colleges. The purpose the letter was to announce the survey and to allow the chief academic officers to identify an individual (other than themselves) to whom the survey should be mailed. Response cards identifying such a person were received from 807 institutions.

The survey was then mailed to the 807 individuals identified through the postcards and to the chief academic officers at the remaining 2,188 colleges. Within a six-week period two additional survey mailings took place.

Table 1 provides an overview of the responses to the survey.

Table 1

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Colleges	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Returned	Return Rate
All	2,995	1,061	35.4%
Two-year public	991	386	39.0%
Two-year private*	197	46	23.4%
Four-year public	536	228	42.5%
Four-year private	1,271	401	31.5%

*Note: Several responding institutions in this group could not be categorized as both two-year and private colleges. This factor, combined with a low response rate, precluded meaningful analysis of data. As a result, no additional analyses were conducted.

This document includes the following sections:

- Introduction
- Executive Summary
- Survey Section A: Campus Coordination and Retention/Completion Goals
- Survey Section B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services
- Survey Section C: Student Characteristics
- Survey Section D: Retention Practices
- Recommendations
- Appendices
 1. Review of the Retention Literature
 2. Bibliography
 3. The Survey

This report focuses only on the data provided by four-year public colleges. Reports for the other institutional types can be found on the ACT website: www.act.org/path/postsec/droptables/index.html

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Four-Year Public Colleges

In spite of the attention paid to college student retention:

- Only 48.7% of campuses have identified an individual responsible for coordinating retention strategies.
- Only 59.6% of campuses have established an improvement goal for retention of students from the first to second year.
- Only 45.6% of campuses have established a goal for improved degree completion.

Respondents from four-year public colleges are far more likely to attribute attrition to student characteristics than they are to attribute attrition to institutional characteristics.

- Of 24 institutional characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified only five factors that made a moderate or higher contribution: amount of student financial aid available, student-institution fit, student involvement in campus life, academic advising, and social environment.
- Of 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition respondents identified 16 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were inadequate financial resources, lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate preparation for college level work, poor study skills, and too many job demands.

Retention practices responsible for the greatest contribution to retention in four-year public colleges fall into three main categories:

- *Academic advising:* including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff, academic advising center, integration of academic advising with first-year transition programs and centers that combine advising and counseling with career/life planning
- *First-year programs:* including freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, non-credit freshman seminar/university 101, learning communities, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- *Learning support:* including supplemental instructions, a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, summer bridge program, and tutoring program

Several retention practices at high-performing (retention and degree completion) four-year public colleges differentiate those colleges from low-performing colleges. (See page 16 of the complete report for definitions of high-performing and low-performing colleges.) Those practices are:

- advising interventions with selected student populations,
- increased advising staff,
- comprehensive learning assistance center/lab,
- integration of advising with first-year programs,
- center that combines academic advising with career/life planning,
- summer bridge program,
- non-credit freshman seminar/university 101,
- recommended course placement testing,
- performance contracts for students in academic difficulty,
- residence hall programs, and
- extended freshman orientation for credit.

When asked to identify three campus retention practices that had the greatest impact on student retention, four-year public college respondents identified:

- freshman seminar/university 101 for credit (20.2%),
- learning communities (18.4%),
- advising interventions for selected student populations (12.3%), and

The remaining practices were cited by less than 10% of the colleges.

Recommendations:

- Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.
- Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.
- Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.
- Carefully review the high impact strategies identified in through the survey.
- Do not make first to second year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.
- Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals
- Orchestrate the change process.
- Implement, measure, improve!

SECTION A: Four-Year Public Colleges

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide information on the coordination of retention services and the goals (if any) the campus had set for both retention and degree completion. The questions from section A included the following.

1. Is there an individual designated to coordinate retention activities on your campus?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 2.)
No ☐ (Skip to item 3.) | 4. Based on your current first to second year retention rate, what percentage increase have you established as your retention goal ?

_____ % | 7. Assuming a 6-year timeframe for 4-year institutions and a 3-year timeframe for 2-year institutions, what percentage increase have you established as your student degree completion goal ?

_____ % |
| 2. What is this individual's title?

_____ | 5. In how many years do you intend to reach this retention goal ?

_____ # of year(s) | 8. In how many years do you intend to reach this student degree completion goal ?

_____ # of year(s) |
| 3. Have you established a goal for the retention of students from the first to second year ?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 4.)
No ☐ (Skip to item 6.) | 6. Have you established a goal for student degree completion at your institution?
Yes ☐ (Go to item 7.)
No ☐ (Skip to Section B.) | |

A summary of responses to items 1, 2, 3, and 6 for four-year public colleges is provided below. Unfortunately, an analysis of the ranges of responses to items 4 and 5 (retention goal) and 7 and 8 (degree completion goal) yielded confounding results. Some survey participants responded to the request for **percentage increase** (items 4 and 5) by reporting an overall retention or degree completion goal. Some of the survey participants answered “Yes” to items 3 and/or 6, but did not answer items 4 and/or 7. And finally, some survey participants responded to items 4 and/or 7, but did not respond to items 5 and/or 8. As a result of these inconsistencies, it was inappropriate to include these data in the final report.

Coordination of Retention Activities

Of the 228 four-year public college responses, 111 (48.7%) indicated that there was an individual designated to coordinate campus retention activities. 97 different titles were identified, the most common of which was Director of Enrollment Management (3). A review of the various titles of individuals responsible for coordination of retention efforts resulted in the following.

- At 38 colleges (34.2%), the terms Director, Coordinator, or Executive Director were included in the title.
- At 20 colleges (18.0%), the terms Associate Provost, Associate Vice President, or Associate Vice Chancellor were included in the title.
- At 13 colleges (11.7%), the terms Provost, Vice President, or Vice Chancellor were included in the title.
- At 9 colleges (8.1%), the term Dean was included in the title.

- At 6 colleges (5.4%), the term Associate Dean was included in the title.
- At 5 colleges (2.7%), the terms Assistant Provost, Assistant Vice President, or Assistant Vice Chancellor were used.
- At 23 colleges (20.7%), the term retention was included in the title.
- At 23 colleges (20.7%), the term enrollment was included in the title.
- At 20 colleges (18.0%), the terms student affairs, student services, student development, or student success were included in the title.

Retention and Degree Completion Goals

Of the 228 four-year public colleges responding to the survey:

- 136 colleges (59.6%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the first to second year retention rate.
- 104 colleges (45.6%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the five-year degree completion rate.

SECTION B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services in Four-Year Public Colleges

In Section B of the Survey, respondents were asked to the following question.

*To what degree is each of the following **institutional** issues, characteristics, or services a factor **contributing to attrition** on your campus?*

Respondents were asked to rate each of 24 characteristics according to the following five-response scale.

Means for each of the 24 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major factor), 4 (between major and moderate factor), 3 (moderate factor), 2 (between moderate factor and not a factor), and 1 (not a factor).

See Summary Table B (page 11) for mean scores for all 24 institutional issues, characteristics, and services.

Table 2

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Amount of Financial Aid Available to Students (18)	3.45
Student-Institution Fit (9)	3.30
Student Involvement in Campus Life (12)	3.18
Academic Advising (5)	3.12
Social Environment (21)	3.12

Table 3

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE LEAST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (item Number)	Mean for Factor
Other On-Campus Housing (18)	1.87
Rules and Regulations Governing Student Behavior (16)	2.00
Personal Counseling Services (10)	2.15
Career Exploration Services (11)	2.22
Extracurricular Programs (2)	2.32
Quality of Teaching (4)	2.37
Attitude of Staff Toward Students (14)	2.46

Summary Table B

INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SERVICES

Survey Question: To what degree is each of the following institutional issues, characteristics, or services a factor contributing to attrition on your campus?

	Mean*	Mean Rating
	All Colleges	4-Yr Public
1. Student employment opportunities	2.67	2.84
2. Extracurricular programs	2.10	2.32
3. Curriculum issues	2.86	2.99
4. Quality of teaching	2.25	2.37
5. Academic advising	2.79	3.12
6. Amount of financial aid available to students	3.46	3.45
7. Financial aid services	2.73	2.66
8. Admissions practices/requirements	2.30	2.45
9. Student-institution "fit"	3.13	3.30
10. Personal counseling services	2.21	2.15
11. Career exploration services	2.31	2.22
12. Student involvement in campus life	2.96	3.18
13. Attitude of faculty toward students	2.46	2.66
14. Attitude of staff toward students	2.42	2.46
15. Academic support services (learning centers, similar resources)	2.55	2.52
16. Rules and regulations governing student behavior	2.23	2.00
17. Residence halls	2.30	2.67
18. Other on-campus housing	1.60	1.87
19. Personal contact between students and faculty	2.51	2.75
20. Cultural environment	2.69	2.87
21. Social environment	2.92	3.12
22. Intellectual stimulation or challenge	2.54	2.61
23. Student engagement in classroom (active learning)	2.72	2.90
24. The number and variety of courses offered	2.84	2.83

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION C: Student Characteristics in Four-Year Public Colleges

In Section C of the Survey, respondents were asked the following question.

To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

Respondents were asked to rate each of 20 characteristics according to the following five-response scale:

Means for each of the 20 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution), 4 (between major and moderate contribution), 3 (moderate contribution), 2 (between moderate contribution and no contribution), and 1 (no contribution).

See Summary Table C (page 13) for mean scores for all 20 Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services.

Table 4

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Inadequate Financial Resources (8)	4.08
Lack of Motivation to Succeed (10)	4.08
Inadequate Preparation for College Level Work (1)	3.81
Poor Study Skills (19)	3.65
Too Many Job Demands (15)	3.46
Lack of Educational Aspirations and Goals (2)	3.28
Poor Academic Integration (17)	3.27

Table 5

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE LEAST
CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Physical Health Problems (11)	2.08
Distance from Permanent Home (18)	2.23
Mental or Emotional Health Problems (12)	2.42
Lack of Support from Significant Others (13)	2.71
Poor Social Integration (16)	3.00
Indecision About a Major (6)	3.02
Commuting/Living Off-Campus (4)	3.08
Inadequate Personal Coping Skills (20)	3.08
Weak Commitment to Earning a Degree (9)	3.12

Summary Table C

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Survey Question: To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

	Mean*	Mean Rating
	All Colleges	4-Yr Public
1. Inadequate preparation for college-level work	3.85	3.81
2. Lack of educational aspirations and goals	3.31	3.28
3. First-generation to attend college	3.16	3.22
4. Commuting/living off campus	2.71	3.08
5. Socio-economic disadvantage	3.21	3.21
6. Indecision about major	3.00	3.02
7. Indecision about career goal	3.02	3.05
8. Inadequate financial resources	4.17	4.08
9. Weak commitment to earning a degree	3.18	3.12
10. Lack of motivation to succeed	4.17	4.08
11. Physical health problems	2.30	2.08
12. Mental or emotional health problems	2.48	2.42
13. Lack of support from significant others (e.g., spouse, parents, peers)	2.78	2.71
14. Too many family demands	2.96	3.14
15. Too many job demands	3.27	3.46
16. Poor social integration (peer group interaction, extracurricular activities)	2.85	3.00
17. Poor academic integration	3.12	3.27
18. Distance from permanent home	2.17	2.23
19. Poor study skills	3.67	3.65
20. Inadequate personal coping skills	3.18	3.08

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION D: Retention Practices in Four-Year Public Colleges

In Section D, respondents were given the following instructions.

*Listed below is a series of programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that **may make a contribution to retention on your campus**. First indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus.*

The format of Section D items follows.

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Offered at Your Institution?	Major Contribution to Retention				
	No Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)	Moderate Contribution to Retention No Contribution to Retention				
		5	4	3	2	1

Section D included 82 on-campus practices. See Summary Table D (pages 18-20) for a breakdown of all 82 practices at four-year public colleges.

Table 6

MOST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses Reporting the Practice
Academic Clubs (67)	93%
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	92
Individual Career Counseling Services (28)	92
Recreation/Intramurals (66)	92
Internships (26)	91
Cultural Activities Program (68)	91
Tutoring Program (41)	87
Career Development Workshops or Courses (25)	87
Instructional Use of Technology (55)	86
Residence Hall Programs (64)	86
Writing Center/Lab (38)	81
Program for Honors Students (75)	81
Classroom Assessment (14)	78
Programs for Racial/Ethnic Minorities (74)	78
Computer-assisted Career Guidance (29)	77
Course Placement Testing (mandated) (15)	77

Table 7

**LEAST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES AT
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses reporting the practice
Community Member Mentoring (52)	8%
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	11
Degree Guarantee Program (46)	13
Motivation Assessment (20)	17
Social Skills Course/Program (42)	20
Parent Advisory Group (61)	24
Enhanced/Modified Faculty Reward System (58)	24
Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS) (62)	27
Assessing Student Performance (54)	27
Centers that Combine Advising and Career/Life Planning (11)	27
Motivation and Goal-Setting Workshop/Program (82)	28

Means for each of the 82 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution to retention), 4 (between major and moderate contribution to retention), 3 (moderate contribution to retention), 2 (between moderate and no contribution to retention), and 1 (no contribution to retention).

Table 8 reports on-campus retention practices receiving the highest mean ratings, and Table 9 reports on-campus retention practices with the lowest mean ratings.

Table 8

**PRACTICES WITH HIGHEST MEAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RETENTION
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Advising Interventions with selected student populations (6)	4.0
Increased Advising Staff (8)	4.0
Academic Advising Centers (10)	3.9
Supplemental Instruction (32)	3.9
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	3.9
Reading Center/Lab (39)	3.9
Program for Honors Students (75)	3.9
Integration of Advising with First Year Transition Program (9)	3.8
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	3.8
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	3.8
Centers that Combine Advising and Counseling with Career/Life Planning (11)	3.8
Internships (26)	3.8
Learning Communities (31)	3.8
Summer Bridge Program (33)	3.8
Tutoring Program (41)	3.8

Table 9

**PRACTICES WITH LOWEST MEAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RETENTION
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Personality Tests (24)	2.7
Degree Guarantee Program (46)	2.7
Vocational Aptitude Tests (23)	2.8
Outcomes Assessment (17)	2.9
Interest Inventories (22)	2.9
Learning Styles Inventories (19)	2.9
Values Inventories (21)	2.9
Library Orientation, Workshop, and/or Course (81)	2.9

Definition of High-Performing and Low-Performing Four-Year Public Colleges

Data to determine high-performing and low-performing campuses were drawn from ACT's 2003 Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). ACT annually requests information from all two-year and four-year public and private institutions through its IDQ. Institutions are asked to provide first to second year attrition rates and five-year degree completion rates for all Bachelor's Degree seeking students. In 2003, 2,530 colleges and universities returned the IDQ and provided data on attrition and degree completion rates. Of these colleges, 554 were four-year public colleges.

The data for four-year public colleges were then broken into two groups: 1) those performing in the top quartile in both retention and degree completion rates (hereinafter called High-Performing Campuses); and 2) those performing in the bottom quartile in both retention and degree completion rates (hereinafter called Low-Performing Campuses). Of the 228 four-year public colleges responding to the survey, 33 were identified as high-performing and 24 were identified as low-performing.

Table 10 combines two variables: 1. on-campus practices where the percentage of high-performing four-year public college campuses reporting the use of the practice exceeds the percentage of low-performing campuses reporting the use of the practice by 10% or more and 2. the institutional type contribution mean is reported at 3.5 or higher.

Table 10

**DIFFERENTIAL PRACTICES IN HIGH-PERFORMING VS. LOW-PERFORMING CAMPUSES
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Institutional Mean	Percent of High- Performing Campuses Reporting Use of This Practice	Percent of Low- Performing Campuses Reporting Use of This Practice
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	4.0	94%	68%
Increased Advising Staff (8)	4.0	46	36
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	3.9	72	62
Integration of Advising with First Year Transition Programs (9)	3.8	62	52
Centers that Combine Advising and Counseling and Career/Life Planning (11)	3.8	36	23
Summer Bridge Program (33)	3.8	68	48
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	3.8	26	16
Course Placement Testing (recommended) (16)	3.5	47	27
Performance Contracts for Students in Academic Difficulty (45)	3.5	61	42
Residence Hall Programs (64)	3.5	100	81
Extended Freshman Orientation (credit) (3)	3.5	56	40

Summary Table D

**RETENTION PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Survey Question: Of the programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that may make a contribution to retention on your campus, indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus. (Response scale: 5=major contribution to 1=no contribution.)

	All Survey Colleges		4-Year Public Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
First-Year Programs						
1. Pre-enrollment orientation	82	3.5	92	3.6	94	92
2. Extended freshman orientation (non-credit)	27	3.6	34	3.5	56	40
3. Extended freshman orientation (credit)	26	3.6	31	3.7	24	25
4. Freshman seminar/university 101 (non-credit)	8	3.5	11	3.8	26	16
5. Freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	51	3.8	68	3.8	74	72
Academic Advising Program						
6. Advising interventions with selected student populations	75	3.8	81	4.0	97	68
7. Advisor training	70	3.4	73	3.4	82	58
8. Increased advising staff	30	3.8	41	4.0	46	36
9. Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	41	3.8	55	3.8	63	52
10. Academic advising centers	47	3.8	68	3.9	72	68
11. Centers that combine advisement and counseling with career planning and placement	33	3.7	27	3.8	36	23
12. Advisor manual/handbook	56	2.9	58	3.0	64	54
13. Application of technology to advising	58	3.2	68	3.3	82	64
Assessment Programs						
14. Classroom assessment	77	3.1	78	3.1	89	85
15. Course placement testing (mandated)	76	3.6	77	3.5	76	84
16. Course placement testing (recommended)	30	3.3	33	3.2	47	27
17. Outcomes assessment	66	3.0	68	2.9	65	69
18. Diagnostic academic skills test(s)	46	3.2	46	3.2	58	46
19. Learning styles inventory(ies)	37	2.9	39	2.9	41	36
20. Motivation assessment(s)	12	3.0	17	3.0	15	11
21. Values inventory(ies)	24	2.9	30	2.9	33	27
22. Interest inventory(ies)	50	2.9	56	2.9	52	54
23. Vocational aptitude test(s)	34	2.9	38	2.8	58	15
24. Personality test(s)	32	2.8	36	2.7	36	27

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**ON-CAMPUS PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges		4-Year Public Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
Career Planning and Placement Programs						
25. Career development workshops or courses	76	3.1	87	3.1	97	81
26. Internships	82	3.6	91	3.8	100	88
27. Cooperative education	43	3.5	58	3.7	62	65
28. Individual career counseling services	83	3.3	92	3.3	100	88
29. Computer-assisted career guidance	67	3.0	77	3.0	85	54
30. Job shadowing	32	3.1	38	3.1	44	31
Learning Assistance/Academic						
31. Learning communities	34	3.7	59	3.8	69	69
32. Supplemental instruction	51	3.7	57	3.9	68	72
33. Summer bridge program	27	3.6	45	3.8	66	46
34. Remedial/developmental coursework (required)	69	3.7	73	3.6	47	96
35. Remedial/developmental coursework (recommended)	35	3.5	36	3.4	33	46
36. Comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	57	3.9	55	3.9	72	62
37. Mathematics center/lab	54	3.6	66	3.6	76	69
38. Writing center/lab	68	3.6	81	3.6	89	88
39. Reading center/lab	31	3.8	30	3.9	24	69
40. Foreign language center/lab	30	3.1	46	3.0	62	46
41. Tutoring program	87	3.8	87	3.8	94	96
42. Study skills course, program, or center	70	3.6	68	3.6	82	81
43. Early warning system	61	3.5	59	3.4	57	65
44. Mid-term progress reports	64	3.3	61	3.3	72	58
45. Performance contracts for students in academic difficulty	38	3.4	43	3.5	61	42
46. Degree guarantee program	10	2.7	13	2.7	30	0
47. Organized student study groups	13	3.5	33	3.6	44	46
48. Service learning programs	41	3.2	51	3.4	69	48
Mentoring Programs						
49. Peer mentoring	42	3.5	57	3.5	74	65
50. Faculty mentoring	43	3.6	40	3.5	53	31
51. Staff mentoring	22	3.5	29	3.4	33	31
52. Community member mentoring	8	3.3	8	3.3	3	16
Faculty Development Programs						
53. Teaching techniques	62	3.4	67	3.3	86	64
54. Assessing student performance	30	3.4	27	3.3	79	73
55. Instructional use of technology	83	3.2	86	3.2	97	80
56. Writing across the curriculum	50	3.2	52	3.2	68	60
57. Interdisciplinary courses	48	3.1	75	3.0	86	76
58. Enhanced/modified faculty reward system	31	3.0	24	3.0	38	29

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**ON-CAMPUS PRACTICES
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges		4-Year Public Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
Parent Programs						
59. Parent newsletter	20	2.8	32	2.9	54	27
60. Parent orientation	52	3.1	75	3.1	86	58
61. Advisory group	22	2.9	24	3.0	43	23
Campus Programs						
62. Freshman interest groups (FIGS)	11	3.6	27	3.7	42	35
63. Diversity information/training	50	3.0	68	3.1	91	65
64. Residence hall programs	59	3.4	86	3.5	100	81
65. Fraternities/sororities	31	3.1	72	3.0	89	62
66. Recreation/intramurals	78	3.1	92	3.2	100	92
67. Academic clubs	84	3.2	93	3.3	100	96
68. Cultural activities program	78	3.1	91	3.1	97	92
69. Leadership development	72	3.4	82	3.4	97	77
Programs for Sub-populations						
70. Adult students	38	3.3	45	3.2	30	46
71. Commuter students	28	3.2	36	3.0	45	38
72. Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender students	29	3.0	52	3.1	79	35
73. Women	39	3.2	58	3.2	81	68
74. Racial/ethnic minorities	56	3.4	78	3.4	91	84
75. Honor students	64	3.7	81	3.9	85	88
Additional Activities						
76. Time management course/program	46	3.2	55	3.2	62	58
77. Health and wellness course/program	58	2.9	72	3.0	82	77
78. Personal coping skills course/program	33	3.1	39	3.2	48	35
79. Social skills course/program	17	3.1	20	3.1	27	31
80. Required on-campus housing for freshmen	35	3.6	40	3.6	27	21
81. Library orientation, workshop, and/or course	73	2.9	76	2.9	82	81
82. Motivation and goal setting workshop/program	29	3.2	28	3.3	34	31

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION E: Programs with Greatest Impact on Retention

In this section, respondents were asked to review all 82 retention programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions and to identify the 3 practices having the greatest impact on student retention. Reported below are the percentage of campus respondents who identified a particular practice among those three choices.

Table 11

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IDENTIFYING RETENTION PRACTICES AMONG THE TOP THREE CHOICES FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	20.2%
Learning Communities (31)	18.4
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	12.3
Academic Advising Center (10)	9.6
Tutoring Program (41)	9.2
Course Placement Testing (mandated) (15)	7.0
Remedial/Developmental Coursework (required) (34)	7.0
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	6.6
Supplemental Instruction (32)	6.6
Program for Honors Students (75)	6.6

RECOMMENDATIONS: Four-Year Public Colleges

The recommendations for enhancing student retention practices discussed in this section include several that are obvious and affirm the “common wisdom” on retention practices, but nevertheless warrant careful consideration by campus practitioners. Several other recommendations, however, may not be as obvious to the casual reviewer of the data and also deserve careful attention by campus practitioners. While each of these recommendations reflects the opinions of the author, many are supported by survey data.

1. Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.

Considering the fact that student retention and degree completion have been touted as critical elements in institutional effectiveness and accountability, it is disheartening to note that only half of all four-year public colleges (49.1%) in the survey have designated an individual to coordinate retention activities. Of further concern are the findings on the levels and titles of the individuals identified as coordinating retention activities. Only 18.9% of all four-year public colleges assign coordination at the Dean level or higher, and a mere 10.2% of all colleges include the term “retention” in the title of that individual. When focusing only on those colleges that have appointed an individual to coordinate retention efforts, those percentages rise to 37.8% and 20.7%, respectively. The position level and title of the individual responsible for coordinating campus retention practices send a message to the entire campus community about how high a priority campus leaders place on retention issues.

Equally important is the appointment of a campus-wide retention planning team. Each college is unique in its history and precedents, and its culture is owned by all and controlled by all. While it may be true that everyone on the campus is responsible for retention, relying on each individual to independently determine the scope, direction, and intensity of that contribution is unsystematic and potentially counterproductive. No single individual or small group of individuals can bring about lasting enhancements in retention programs. Given that everyone on campus is responsible for retention, it follows that a broad-based campus planning team should engage in the study of student needs and the development of recommendations to enhance retention—as well as in the implementation and assessment of those recommendations.

2. Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.

Though most campuses have access to data on student characteristics, many campuses could be characterized as data rich and information poor. Although attrition decisions involve the complex interplay of many variables, two fundamental questions must be addressed for a college to design effective strategies to improve student persistence:

- *Who are our students?*
- *What differentiates students who stay from students who leave?*

To answer the first question, the retention planning team should review student data in the following areas.

- *Demographics:* including, but not limited to, sex, race/ethnicity, age, size of high school, parental level of education, socioeconomic status, etc.
- *Academic performance:* including, but not limited to, admission test scores, high school rank and grade point average, placement test scores, etc.
- *Academic plans:* including, but not limited to, choice of major, level of highest degree aspiration, etc.
- *Non-academic variables:* including, but not limited to, academic goals, achievement motivation, self-concept, social involvement, interest patterns, etc.
- *Self-reported needs:* including, but not limited to, expressed need for instructional support (writing, math, reading, study skills, etc.) and expressed need for non-instructional support (choice of major, disability support, personal counseling, co-curricular involvement, etc.)
- *Student opinions and attitudes:* including a broad-based assessment of student opinions and attitudes on instructional and non-instructional programs, services, and policies

Even though data in many of these categories are already collected through the admission, orientation, and course placement processes on the campus, it may be necessary for the planning team to recommend the use of additional sources to complete the data set. It is also recommended that, whenever possible, the data be disaggregated by student characteristics (e.g. undecided, at-risk, race/ethnicity) and by existing program interventions (e.g. supplemental instruction, first-year seminar, learning community).

Answering the second question is merely an extension of answering the first. Many of the data elements required for the answer reside in the campus database (e.g., demographics, admission test scores, high school academic performance). As a result, these variables can be studied almost immediately by separating last year's first-year students into two groups, those who persisted to a second year and those who did not—and studying the differences between them. Data on student involvement, opinions, and attitudes however, must be collected while

students are enrolled in the first year and, thus, cannot be completely analyzed until the following fall.

3. Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.

Although it is inappropriate and counter-productive to lay the blame for student attrition at the feet of either the students or the institution, respondents to this survey are far more likely to cite student characteristics as causal factors in student attrition than they are to cite institutional factors. Of the 24 institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition, respondents identified five as making a moderate or higher contribution: amount of financial aid available, student-institution fit, student involvement in campus life, academic advising, and social environment. Yet, of the 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified 16 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, inadequate preparation for college, too many job demands, and poor study skills. Although the nexus between student characteristics and institutional characteristics (retention interventions) on each campus will most certainly vary from the results of this survey, the planning team must recognize that improvements to student retention will accrue only if enhanced or new interventions are undertaken. Improved retention evolves from quality programs and services to students.

4. Carefully review high-impact strategies identified through the survey.

This survey provides three significant insights into retention practices that make a difference. First, the survey does clearly identify retention practices that work. Second, it is important to note that virtually *none* of the most common retention practices cited by survey respondents are among those cited as having the greatest impact on retention. This phenomenon suggests that few gains in student retention result from conducting business as usual. Finally, survey results strongly suggest that campus efforts should focus on high-impact, value-added retention interventions. Of the 82 retention interventions included in our survey, strategies cited by respondents as making the greatest contribution to retention fall into three main categories.

- *First-year programs*: including freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, non-credit freshman seminar/university 101, learning communities, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- *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
- *Learning support*: including supplemental instruction, a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, summer bridge program and tutoring program

These three categories also characterized the practices that differentiate high-performing (retention and degree completion) from low-performing four-year public colleges. Finally, when asked to identify the three strategies (of 82) that made the greatest contribution to retention, only three practices were cited by more than 10% of the respondents: (1) freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, (2) learning communities, and (3) advising interventions with selected student populations.

Since programs in each of these three categories exist to some degree at every college, the planning team should first focus on assessing the degree to which these interventions address identified student needs. In some situations this assessment will lead to recommendations for

minor changes in the definition and delivery of these interventions. In other cases, however, significant program changes or realignments may be indicated. One of the primary reasons for having a retention planning team is to provide broad-based campus support for some of the more significant program changes or realignment that may be needed.

5. Do not make first to second-year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.

While it is true that the majority of student departures occur between the beginning of the first year and the beginning of the second year, significant attrition does occur after students enter the second year. It is also true that many campuses have deployed a front-loading strategy that commits significant resources to first to second year retention interventions only to experience no concomitant increase in degree completion rates. In fact, only 19% of the four-year public college campuses participating in this survey were identified as high-performing institutions in both first to second year retention *and* in degree completion rates. Certainly students must survive to the second year to complete a degree, but first to second year survival is simply the first benchmark in a continuous process that leads to degree completion. The second benchmark is progression rate. Progression is defined as the percentage of first-time, full-time students who are retained for a second year *and* have achieved academic standing as second year (sophomore) students. Students who are retained, but fail to progress in academic standing are far more likely to drop out during the second and subsequent years. Progression rates for the third and subsequent years should also be studied. And the final benchmark is degree completion rate. If a campus is to improve on these three benchmarks, it is necessary that retention interventions be sustained throughout a student's enrollment and that those interventions be systematically applied to all facets of the student experience.

6. Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals.

Success or failure in retention, progression, and degree completion often rests on the establishment of realistic short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals that are set too high often result in frustrated faculty and staff, and goals that are set too low may be achieved but result in nothing more than blips on the data radar screen. Short-term goals for retention, progression, and degree completion should focus on incremental but meaningful improvement.

Setting long-term goals can be a slippery slope for a number of reasons. First, although the conventional wisdom suggests that about one-third of all first-year students fail to return for a second year, establishing an institutional goal to beat that figure is as inappropriate for an open-admissions community college as it is for a highly selective private college. Second, though it is tempting to establish long-term goals based on national averages, there is a problem with citing national averages when determining goals for retention, progression, and degree completion. On some campuses, being "above average" provides a convenient rationale for maintaining the status quo; on "below average" campuses, getting to "average" may prove unrealistic.

Comparisons with peer institutions may provide more realistic benchmarks. Yet, these comparisons may not reflect the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics that exist on a specific campus. The goal should not be to be "average," for even if all campuses miraculously improved retention, progression, and degree completion rates, "below average" campuses would still exist. The goal to stay above average is really not a goal at all; long-term goals should be improvement goals.

Where possible, institutional goals should include target goals for selected programs and for selected student groups. For example, within an overall institutional goal to improve first to second year retention, the planning team might establish sub-goals for at-risk students, undecided students, or students who participate in supplemental instruction. Or, as the result of the implementation of a particular program strategy, the planning team might establish a target goal for students who participate in that program strategy.

A corollary to setting realistic goals is to allow ample time for interventions to have an impact on student retention. It is unreasonable to assume that a new or enhanced retention strategy will be flawlessly implemented in its first incarnation. It is equally unreasonable to assume that a retention intervention will meet or exceed its retention goal in the first year of implementation. Program adjustments will most assuredly need to be undertaken. Because of these factors, patience is counseled. Goals for first to second year retention and progression are not likely to be achieved for at least two years or, in some cases, longer. The impact on degree completion may not be fully realized for five to seven years.

7. Orchestrate the change process.

The planning team may encounter resistance to some and perhaps all of its recommendations. Accomplishing change on a college campus is not easy. It involves changing attitudes and opinions of multiple constituencies because it is unlikely that all constituencies will immediately and uncritically embrace the recommendations of the planning team. For some individuals, change poses a threat to status, to notions of competency, to routines, and to both formal and informal influence among colleagues. While there is no surefire formula for gaining constituent buy-in, several strategies such as the following may be helpful.

- Carefully consider the composition of the planning team. In addition to broad-based involvement discussed in the first recommendation, care should be taken to include individuals from all levels of the campus hierarchy. These individuals bring important insights and perspectives that are often excluded from the discussion. Although it might be tempting to populate the planning team with proponents for change, it is imperative that the planning team include skeptics and critics. These individuals may slow the process somewhat, but their support for team recommendations is essential to gaining campus-wide acceptance.
- Provide frequent reports to and structured opportunities for input from the entire campus community. Regardless of its size and scope, a planning team that operates in a closed environment over a period of time is likely to encounter significant resistance when its recommendations, no matter how thoughtful, are finally unveiled to the campus community.
- Be ready to provide *proof of concept* in support of planning team recommendations. Proof of concept provides evidence that the recommendations are likely to succeed. It may be established through the literature and research or result from site visits to peer institutions that have successfully implemented a particular intervention. If significant resources or a major shift in normative behavior are involved, persuasive proof of concept may be gained only through a pilot program.

8. Implement, measure, improve!

Designing and implementing retention strategies is not a process with a clear beginning and a clear end. It is a complex and continuous process that involves analysis, implementation, and assessment. And assessment, in turn, leads to new strategies, implementation, and further assessment. While it is not possible to achieve perfection (if such a condition exists) in student retention, progression, and completion, it is always possible to improve.

What Works in Student Retention?

Two-Year Public Colleges

Wesley R. Habley
Randy McClanahan

Acknowledgments

It has been quite some time since ACT has engaged in a comprehensive study of college student retention practices. This study would not have been possible however, had it not been for the earlier efforts of ACT staff members Lee Noel and Susan Cowart who conducted “What Works in Student Retention” studies and published results in 1980 and 1987, respectively. And, this study could not have been completed without the continuing support of Jon Erickson, ACT Vice President of Educational Services.

No study of this magnitude could be complete without efforts of a multitalented team. The staff of ACT’s Survey Research Area, directed by Michael Valiga, was the backbone of this team. This team was supportive, creative, thorough, and responsive. Specific thanks go to the following people:

- Peggy Loveless provided statistical analysis and responded promptly to requests for just one more data run.
- Vi Bitterman managed a multilevel, complex mailing and return strategy.
- Elizabeth McBride handled data entry and far more. Elizabeth had the magical ability to massage, manipulate, and mine the database to produce a never-ending stream of charts and tables.
- Randy McClanahan (co-author) served all phases of this study. She was instrumental in the design of the survey. She supervised the data collection. She wrote the review of the literature and assembled the bibliography. She critiqued the manuscript mercilessly, and necessarily. In an undertaking as major as this survey, one could simply not ask for a better colleague.

Deb Anderson is responsible for the production of the final manuscript. Whether interpreting my scribbled notes, gently suggesting changes that should have been obvious, adjusting the size and or tables, and producing unknown number of drafts, Deb has been unflappable and unerring. Deb has always been, and continues to be, my right arm.

Finally, I acknowledge the readers of this report, particularly those who recognize that there is much at stake if college students are to be successful. If this report, in some small way, provides the stimulus and creates a resolve to for you to enhance campus retention practices, then it will have served its purpose.

Wesley R. Habley, ACT

INTRODUCTION: Two-Year Public Colleges

This report reflects ACT's three-decade commitment to assist colleges and universities to better understand the impact of campus practices on college student retention and degree completion. During that time ACT has conducted many research projects that demonstrate that commitment. Below are selected examples of this effort.

Six National Surveys on Academic Advising Practices

ACT believes that academic advising plays a pivotal role in student retention. That belief is clearly borne out by the findings of the survey discussed in this report. Beginning in 1979 ACT, in collaboration with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), has conducted six national studies of campus practices in academic advising. The latest of these, *The Status of Academic Advising: Findings from the ACT Sixth National Survey*, is published in the NACADA monograph series. That monograph may be ordered through the NACADA website: www.nacada.ksu.edu

***What Works in Student Retention* (1980)**

The first *What Works in Student Retention* study (Beal and Noel, 1980) was a joint project of ACT and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). Staff of NCHEMS and ACT developed and piloted the survey. In the complete study, surveys were sent to 2,459 two-year and four-year colleges with a response rate of 40.2%. As a part of this study, the authors collected information about 17 student characteristics and 10 institutional characteristics that contributed to attrition and retention. In addition, respondents were asked to select from a list of 20 action programs that had been implemented to improve retention. In the conclusions reached in the final report (now out of print), the authors cited the following three action program areas as critical to retention.

- *Academic stimulation and assistance*: challenge in and support for academic performance
- *Personal future building*: the identification and clarification of student goals and directions
- *Involvement experiences*: student participation/interaction with a wide variety of programs and services on the campus

***ACT Dropout and Graduation Rate Tables* (1983-2003)**

In 1982, began collecting institutional data on first to second year retention and on degree completion rates through the Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). The IDQ is an annual survey of 2,500-2,800 colleges and universities. Each year since 1983 ACT has published the *ACT National Dropout and Degree Completion Tables*. The most recent reports can be found on ACT's website: www.act.org/path/postsec/index.html.

***What Works in Student Retention* (1987)**

In what was essentially a content replication of the earlier survey, ACT collaborated with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to produce the monograph *What Works in Student Retention in State Colleges and Universities* (Coward, 1987). (Unfortunately, this monograph too is out of print.) The 370 members of AASCU were included in the survey population, and responses from 190 (51.7%) were included in the analyses. When asked about strategies employed to improve retention since 1980, the following groupings of practices were cited by more than 50% of the colleges: improvement/redevelopment of the academic advising program (72.1%), special orientation program (71.0%), establishment of early warning systems (65.6%), and curricular innovations in credit programs (61.7%).

The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention (2004)

This policy report (Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth, 2004) provides information from ACT's major technical study on the influence of non-academic factors alone and, combined with academic factors, on student performance and retention at four-year colleges and universities. It highlights examples of successful retention practices and concludes with four recommendations:

1. Determine student characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and implement a formal comprehensive retention program that best meets institutional needs.
2. Take an integrated approach in retention efforts that incorporates both academic and non-academic factors into the design and development of programs to create a socially inclusive and supportive academic environment that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.
3. Implement an early alert, assessment, and monitoring system based on HSGPA, ACT Assessment scores, course placement tests, first semester college GPA, socioeconomic information, attendance records, and non-academic information derived from formal college surveys and college student inventories to identify and build comprehensive profiles of students at risk of dropping out.
4. Determine the economic impact of college retention programs and student time to degree completion rates through a cost-benefit analysis of student dropout, persistence, assessment procedures, and intervention strategies to enable informed decision-making with respect to types of interventions required—academic and non-academic—including remediation and financial support.

This 30-page policy report is available at: www.act.org/research/policy/index.html

About This Study

When ACT study design staff began meeting in the summer of 2003, the intention was to replicate the surveys conducted in 1980 and 1987. That intention was soon abandoned. First, it was clear that the retention literature had grown exponentially since the first survey was constructed and that much more now was known about student characteristics and institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition. Also, far more institutional interventions contributed to student retention and degree completion. In view of this changed landscape, the design team conducted thorough analyses of the retention literature and, as a result, expanded the original list of institutional characteristics from 10 to 24 and the list of student characteristics from 17 to 20. But it was in the area of institutional interventions that the most significant expansion in number of items took place. Whereas the 1980 survey identified only 20 action programs as contributing to retention, after first brainstorming and then refining a list that included more than 100 interventions, the design team settled on 82 strategies that became the basis for Section D of the survey.

The design team also concluded that it was important to assess not only the prevalence of particular practices at colleges and universities but also the impact of those programs. Hence, Section D was constructed to include both of these measures. Three survey drafts were reviewed for content and structure and revised accordingly by staff of the Survey Research Department and the Office for the Enhancement of Educational Practices.

The first mailing associated with the survey was a pre-survey letter to chief academic officers at 2,995 colleges. The mailing included all accredited, degree-granting, two-year and four-year, public and private colleges. The purpose of the letter was to announce the survey and to allow the chief academic officers to identify an individual (other than themselves) to whom the survey should be mailed. Response cards identifying such a person were received from 807 institutions.

The survey was then mailed to the 807 individuals identified through the postcards and to the chief academic officers at the remaining 2,188 colleges. Within a six-week period two additional survey mailings took place.

Table 1 provides an overview of the responses to the survey.

Table 1

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Colleges	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Returned	Return Rate
All	2,995	1,061	35.4%
Two-year public	991	386	39.0%
Two-year private*	197	46	23.4%
Four-year public	536	228	42.5%
Four-year private	1,271	401	31.5%

*Note: Several responding institutions in this group could not be categorized as both two-year and private colleges. This factor, combined with a low response rate, precluded meaningful analysis of data. As a result, no additional analyses were conducted.

This document includes the following sections:

- Introduction
- Executive Summary
- Survey Section A: Campus Coordination and Retention/Completion Goals
- Survey Section B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services
- Survey Section C: Student Characteristics
- Survey Section D: Retention Practices
- Recommendations
- Appendices
 1. Review of the Retention Literature
 2. Bibliography
 3. The Survey

This report focuses only on the data provided by two-year public colleges. Reports for the other institutional types can be found on the ACT website: www.act.org/path/postsec/droptables/index.html

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Two-Year Public Colleges

In spite of the attention paid to college student retention:

- Only 40.7% of campuses have identified an individual responsible for coordinating retention strategies.
- Only 27.2% of campuses have established an improvement goal for retention of students from the first to second year.
- Only 19.9% of campuses have established a goal for improved degree completion.

Respondents at two-year public colleges are far more likely to attribute attrition to student characteristics than they are to attribute attrition to institutional characteristics.

- Of 24 institutional characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified only two factors that made a moderate or higher contribution to attrition: amount of financial aid available to students and student employment opportunities.
- Of 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition respondents identified 15 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were inadequate preparation for college, lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, poor study skills, too many job demands, and too many family demands.

Retention practices responsible for the greatest contribution to retention in two-year public colleges fall into three main categories:

- *Academic advising*: including advising interventions with selected student populations, integration of advising with first-year programs, and increased advising staff
- *Learning support*: including a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab; required remedial/developmental coursework; tutoring program; and math, writing, and reading centers/labs
- *Assessment*: including mandated course placement testing

Several retention practices at high-performing (retention and degree completion) two-year public colleges differentiate them from low-performing two-year public colleges. (See page 16 of complete report for definitions of high-performing and low-performing colleges.) Those are:

- mathematics center/lab,
- writing center/lab,
- reading center/lab,
- advising interventions with selected student populations,
- learning communities,
- foreign language center/lab, and
- programs for racial/ethnic minorities.

When asked to identify three campus retention practices that had the greatest impact on student retention, respondents from two-year public colleges identified:

- mandated course placement testing (20.7%),
- tutoring program (19.3%),
- required remedial/developmental coursework (19.2%),
- comprehensive learning assistance center/lab (19.2%), and

The remaining practices were cited by less than 10% of the colleges.

Recommendations:

- Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.
- Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.
- Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.
- Carefully review the high impact strategies identified in the survey.
- Do not make first to second year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.
- Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals.
- Orchestrate the change process.
- Implement, measure, improve!

SECTION A: Two-Year Public Colleges

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide information on the coordination of retention services and the goals (if any) the campus had set for both retention and degree completion. The questions from Section A include the following.

1. Is there an individual designated to coordinate retention activities on your campus? Yes ☐ (Go to item 2.) No ☐ (Skip to item 3.)	4. Based on your current first to second year retention rate, what percentage increase have you established as your retention goal? _____ %	7. Assuming a 6-year timeframe for 4-year institutions and a 3-year timeframe for 2-year institutions, what percentage increase have you established as your student degree completion goal? _____ %
2. What is this individual's title? _____	5. In how many years do you intend to reach this retention goal? _____ # of year(s)	8. In how many years do you intend to reach this student degree completion goal? _____ # of year(s)
3. Have you established a goal for the retention of students from the first to second year? Yes ☐ (Go to item 4.) No ☐ (Skip to item 6.)	6. Have you established a goal for student degree completion at your institution? Yes ☐ (Go to item 7.) No ☐ (Skip to Section B.)	

A summary of responses to items 1, 2, 3, and 6 for two-year public colleges is provided below. Unfortunately, an analysis of the ranges of responses to items 4 and 5 (retention goal) and 7 and 8 (degree completion goal) yielded confounding results. Some survey participants responded to the request for **percentage increase** (items 4 and 5) by reporting an overall retention or degree completion goal. Some of the survey participants answered “Yes” to items 3 and/or 6, but did not answer items 4 and/or 7. And finally, some survey participants responded to items 4 and/or 7, but did not respond to items 5 and/or 8. As a result of these inconsistencies, it was inappropriate to include these data in the final report.

Coordination of Retention Activities

Of the 386 two-year public college responses, 157 (40.7%) indicated that there was an individual designated to coordinate campus retention activities. 117 different titles were identified, the most common of which were Dean of Student Services (9), Retention Coordinator (7), and Retention Specialist (7). A review of the various titles of individuals responsible for coordination of retention efforts resulted in the following.

- At 46 colleges (29.3%), the terms Director, Coordinator, or Executive Director were included in the title.
- At 15 colleges (9.6%), the term Vice President was included in the title.
- At 15 colleges (9.6%), the term Associate Dean was included in the title.
- At 12 colleges (7.6%), the term Dean was included in the title.
- At 6 colleges (3.8%), the term Assistant Dean was included in the title.
- At 45 colleges (28.7%), the term retention was included in the title.

- At 17 colleges (4.5%), the term enrollment was included in the title.
- At 45 colleges (28.7%), the terms, student affairs, student services, student development, or student success were included in the title.

Retention and Degree Completion Goals

Of the 386 two-year public colleges responding to the survey:

- 105 colleges (27.2%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the first to second year retention rate, and
- 77 colleges (19.9%) reported that they had established a goal for improvement in the three-year degree completion rate.

SECTION B: Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services in Two-Year Public Colleges

In Section B of the Survey, respondents were asked to the following question.

*To what degree is each of the following **institutional** issues, characteristics, or services a factor **contributing to attrition** on your campus?*

Respondents were asked to rate each of 24 characteristics according to the following five-response scale:

Means for each of the 24 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major factor), 4 (between major and moderate factor), 3 (moderate factor), 2 (between moderate factor and not a factor), and 1 (not a factor).

See Summary Table B (page 11) for mean scores for all 24 institutional issues, characteristics, and services.

Table 2

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Amount of Financial Aid Available to Students (6)	3.24
Student Employment Opportunities (1)	3.11
Number and Variety of Courses Offered (24)	2.88
Student Engagement in the Classroom (active learning) (23)	2.85
Academic Advising (5)	2.82
Student Involvement in Campus Life (12)	2.81

Table 3

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS MAKING THE LEAST CONTRIBUTION TO ATTRITION
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services (Item Number)	Mean for Factor
Other On-Campus Housing (18)	1.33
Residence Halls (17)	1.58
Rules and Regulations Governing Student Behavior (16)	1.95
Extracurricular Programs (2)	2.01
Admission Practices/Requirements (8)	2.21
Quality of Teaching (4)	2.36
Personal Counseling Services (10)	2.36

Summary Table B

INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SERVICES

Survey Question: To what degree is each of the following institutional issues, characteristics, or services a factor contributing to attrition on your campus?

	Mean*	Mean Rating
	All Colleges	2-Yr Public
1. Student employment opportunities	2.67	3.11
2. Extracurricular programs	2.10	2.01
3. Curriculum issues	2.86	2.74
4. Quality of teaching	2.25	2.32
5. Academic advising	2.79	2.82
6. Amount of financial aid available to students	3.46	3.24
7. Financial aid services	2.73	2.73
8. Admissions practices/requirements	2.30	2.21
9. Student-institution “fit”	3.13	2.66
10. Personal counseling services	2.21	2.36
11. Career exploration services	2.31	2.49
12. Student involvement in campus life	2.96	2.81
13. Attitude of faculty toward students	2.46	2.56
14. Attitude of staff toward students	2.42	2.56
15. Academic support services (learning centers, similar resources)	2.55	2.63
16. Rules and regulations governing student behavior	2.23	1.95
17. Residence halls	2.30	1.58
18. Other on-campus housing	1.60	1.33
19. Personal contact between students and faculty	2.51	2.70
20. Cultural environment	2.69	2.52
21. Social environment	2.92	2.67
22. Intellectual stimulation or challenge	2.54	2.52
23. Student engagement in classroom (active learning)	2.72	2.85
24. The number and variety of courses offered	2.84	2.88

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION C: Student Characteristics in Two-Year Public Colleges

In Section C of the Survey, respondents were asked the following question.

To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

Respondents were asked to rate each of 20 characteristics according to the following five-response scale:

Means for each of the 20 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution), 4 (between major and moderate contribution), 3 (moderate contribution), 2 (between moderate contribution and no contribution), and 1 (no contribution).

See Summary Table C (page 13) for mean scores for all 20 Institutional Issues, Characteristics, and Services.

Table 4

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Inadequate Preparation for College Work (1)	4.28
Lack of Motivation to Succeed (10)	4.14
Inadequate Financial Resources (8)	4.14
Poor Study Skills (19)	3.98
Too Many Job Demands (15)	3.83
Too Many Family Demands (16)	3.68

Table 5

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS MAKING THE
LEAST CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ATTRITION
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Student Characteristics (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Distance from Permanent Home (18)	1.91
Physical Health Problems (11)	2.26
Mental or Emotional Health Problems (12)	2.44
Poor Social Integration (16)	2.83
Commuting/Living Off-Campus (4)	2.86

Summary Table C

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Survey Question: To what degree do each of the student characteristics below contribute to attrition on your campus?

	Mean*	Mean Rating
	All Colleges	2-Yr Public
1. Inadequate preparation for college-level work	3.85	4.28
2. Lack of educational aspirations and goals	3.31	3.64
3. First-generation to attend college	3.16	3.58
4. Commuting/living off campus	2.71	2.86
5. Socio-economic disadvantage	3.21	3.59
6. Indecision about major	3.00	3.22
7. Indecision about career goal	3.02	3.27
8. Inadequate financial resources	4.17	4.14
9. Weak commitment to earning a degree	3.18	3.55
10. Lack of motivation to succeed	4.17	4.14
11. Physical health problems	2.30	2.26
12. Mental or emotional health problems	2.48	2.44
13. Lack of support from significant others (e.g., spouse, parents, peers)	2.78	3.16
14. Too many family demands	2.96	3.68
15. Too many job demands	3.27	3.83
16. Poor social integration (peer group interaction, extracurricular activities)	2.85	2.83
17. Poor academic integration	3.12	3.23
18. Distance from permanent home	2.17	1.91
19. Poor study skills	3.67	3.98
20. Inadequate personal coping skills	3.18	3.34

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION D: Retention Practices In Two-Year Public Colleges

In Section D, respondents were given the following instructions.

*Listed below is a series of programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that **may make a contribution to retention on your campus**. First indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus.*

The format of Section D items follows.

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Offered at Your Institution?	Major Contribution to Retention				
	No Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)	Moderate Contribution to Retention No Contribution to Retention				
		5	4	3	2	1

Section D included 82 on-campus practices. See Summary Table D (pages 18-20) for a breakdown of all 82 practices at two-year public colleges.

Table 6

MOST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses Reporting the Practice
Course Placement Testing (mandated) (15)	87%
Tutoring Program (41)	85
Individual Career Counseling Services (28)	81
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	79
Remedial/Developmental Coursework (required) (34)	79
Instructional Use of Technology (55)	79
Academic Clubs (67)	78
Classroom Assessment (14)	75
Computer-Assisted Career Guidance (29)	72
Career Development Workshops or Courses (25)	72
Study Skills Course, Program, or Center (42)	70
Advisor Training (7)	69
Internships (26)	68
Cultural Activities Program (68)	68
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	66

Table 7

**LEAST COMMON RETENTION PRACTICES
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses reporting the practice
Freshman Interests Groups (FIGS) (62)	2%
Fraternities/Sororities (65)	2
Parent Newsletter (59)	2
Required On-Campus Housing for Freshmen (80)	5
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit) (4)	5
Community Member Mentoring (52)	5
Motivation Assessments (20)	9

Means for each of the 82 items were calculated by awarding values of 5 (major contribution to retention), 4 (between major and moderate contribution to retention), 3 (moderate contribution to retention), 2 (between moderate and no contribution to retention), and 1 (no contribution to retention).

Table 8 reports on-campus retention practices receiving the highest mean ratings, and Table 9 reports on-campus retention practices with the lowest mean ratings.

Table 8

**PRACTICES WITH HIGHEST MEAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RETENTION
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	4.0
Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS) (62)	4.0
Integration of Advising with First-Year Transition Programs (9)	3.9
Course Placement Testing (mandated) (15)	3.9
Remedial/Developmental Coursework (required) (34)	3.9
Tutoring Program (41)	3.9
Advising Interventions with Selected Populations (6)	3.8
Increased Advising Staff (8)	3.8
Mathematics Center/Lab (37)	3.8
Writing Center/Lab (38)	3.8
Reading Center/Lab (39)	3.8
Seven Practices Tied (See Table 3.)	3.7

Table 9

**PRACTICES WITH LOWEST MEAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RETENTION
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Mean Contribution
Values Inventory (21)	2.8
Personality Tests (24)	2.8
Degree Guarantee Program (46)	2.8
Recreation/Intramurals (66)	2.8
Fraternities/Sororities (65)	2.9
Programs for Women (73)	2.9
Ten Practices Tied (See Table 3.)	3.0

Definition of High-Performing and Low-Performing Two-Year Public Colleges

Data used to determine high-performing and low-performing campuses were drawn from ACT's 2003 Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). ACT annually requests information from all two-year and four-year public and private institutions through its IDQ. Two-year public colleges are asked to provide first to second year attrition rates and three-year degree completion rates. In 2003, 2,530 colleges and universities returned the IDQ and provided data on attrition and degree completion rates. Of these colleges, 729 were two-year public colleges.

The data for two-year public colleges were then broken into four groups: 1. those performing above the median in both retention and degree completion rates (hereinafter called High-Performing Campuses), 2. those performing below the median in both retention and degree completion rates (hereinafter called Low-Performing Campuses), 3. those performing above the median in retention and below the median for degree completion rates, and 4. those performing below the median in retention and above the median in degree completion. Groups 3 and 4 are not included in the analysis below.

Of the 386 two-year public colleges responding to the survey, 55 were identified as high-performing, and 66 were identified as low-performing.

Table 10 combines two variables: 1. on-campus practices where the percentage of high-performing two-year public college campuses reporting the use of the practice exceeds the percentage of low-performing campuses reporting the use of the practice by 10% or more, and 2. the institutional type contribution mean is reported at 3.5 or higher.

Table 10

**DIFFERENTIAL PRACTICES IN HIGH-PERFORMING VS. LOW-PERFORMING CAMPUSES
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Institutional Mean	Percent of High-Performing Campuses Reporting Use of this Practice	Percent of Low-Performing Campuses Reporting Use of this Practice
Mathematics Center/Lab (37)	3.8	78%	52%
Writing Center/Lab (38)	3.8	77	64
Reading Center/Lab (39)	3.8	58	36
Advising Interventions with Special Populations of Students (6)	3.8	75	65
Learning Communities (31)	3.6	33	22
Foreign Language Center/Lab (40)	3.6	37	15
Programs for Racial/Ethnic Minorities (74)	3.5	48	34

Summary Table D

**RETENTION PRACTICES
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

Survey Question: Of the programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that may make a contribution to retention on your campus., indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus. (Response scale: 5=major contribution to 1=no contribution.)

	All Survey Colleges		2-Year Public Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
First-Year Programs						
1. Pre-enrollment orientation	82	3.5	79	3.3	80	84
2. Extended freshman orientation (non-credit)	27	3.6	12	3.3	12	10
3. Extended freshman orientation (credit)	26	3.6	27	3.5	27	37
4. Freshman seminar/university 101 (non-credit)	8	3.5	5	3.1	7	3
5. Freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	51	3.8	38	3.7	42	35
Academic Advising Program						
6. Advising interventions with selected student populations	75	3.8	22	3.8	75	65
7. Advisor training	70	3.4	69	3.4	72	70
8. Increased advising staff	30	3.8	28	3.8	30	29
9. Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	41	3.8	26	3.9	37	25
10. Academic advising centers	47	3.8	52	3.7	55	53
11. Centers that combine advisement and counseling with career planning and placement	33	3.7	48	3.7	52	50
12. Advisor manual/handbook	56	2.9	54	3.0	63	59
13. Application of technology to advising	58	3.2	61	3.0	70	60
Assessment Programs						
14. Classroom assessment	77	3.1	75	3.0	82	73
15. Course placement testing (mandated)	76	3.6	87	3.9	92	87
16. Course placement testing (recommended)	30	3.3	27	3.7	28	29
17. Outcomes assessment	66	3.0	62	3.1	67	65
18. Diagnostic academic skills test(s)	46	3.2	49	3.5	50	53
19. Learning styles inventory(ies)	37	2.9	39	3.0	43	40
20. Motivation assessment(s)	12	3.0	9	3.1	7	15
21. Values inventory(ies)	24	2.9	20	2.8	22	25
22. Interest inventory(ies)	50	2.9	54	3.0	58	60
23. Vocational aptitude test(s)	34	2.9	39	3.0	42	40
24. Personality test(s)	32	2.8	32	2.8	37	34

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**RETENTION PRACTICES
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges		2-Year Public Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
Career Planning and Placement Programs						
25. Career development workshops or courses	76	3.1	72	3.1	77	63
26. Internships	82	3.6	68	3.5	78	75
27. Cooperative education	43	3.5	53	3.3	50	49
28. Individual career counseling services	83	3.3	81	3.4	90	79
29. Computer-assisted career guidance	67	3.0	72	3.1	83	76
30. Job shadowing	32	3.1	26	3.2	20	32
Learning Assistance/Academic Support/Intervention Programs						
31. Learning communities	34	3.7	29	3.6	33	22
32. Supplemental instruction	51	3.7	50	3.7	52	54
33. Summer bridge program	27	3.6	24	3.5	22	25
34. Remedial/developmental coursework (required)	69	3.7	79	3.9	88	84
35. Remedial/developmental coursework (recommended)	35	3.5	39	3.7	45	53
36. Comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	57	3.9	66	4.0	78	73
37. Mathematics center/lab	54	3.6	58	3.8	78	52
38. Writing center/lab	68	3.6	60	3.8	77	64
39. Reading center/lab	31	3.8	38	3.8	58	36
40. Foreign language center/lab	30	3.1	17	3.6	37	15
41. Tutoring program	87	3.8	85	3.9	87	97
42. Study skills course, program, or center	70	3.6	70	3.6	72	79
43. Early warning system	61	3.5	52	3.6	50	60
44. Mid-term progress reports	64	3.3	46	3.3	42	54
45. Performance contracts for students in academic difficulty	38	3.4	27	3.4	25	34
46. Degree guarantee program	10	2.7	12	2.8	22	12
47. Organized student study groups	13	3.5	20	3.5	18	26
48. Service learning programs	41	3.2	28	3.2	40	28
Mentoring Programs						
49. Peer mentoring	42	3.5	25	3.5	28	26
50. Faculty mentoring	43	3.6	26	3.5	33	32
51. Staff mentoring	22	3.5	13	3.5	18	18
52. Community member mentoring	8	3.3	5	3.5	7	4
Faculty Development Programs						
53. Teaching techniques	62	3.4	58	3.5	63	65
54. Assessing student performance	30	3.4	28	3.5	33	41
55. Instructional use of technology	83	3.2	79	3.5	88	91
56. Writing across the curriculum	50	3.2	44	3.3	57	42
57. Interdisciplinary courses	48	3.1	39	3.1	50	38
58. Enhanced/modified faculty reward system	31	3.0	17	3.1	20	19

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

Summary Table D, cont.

**RETENTION PRACTICES
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES**

	All Survey Colleges		2-Year Public Colleges			
	% Report	Mean*	% Report	Mean Contribution	% High-Performing	% Low-Performing
Parent Programs						
59. Parent newsletter	20	2.8	2	3.4	2	6
60. Parent orientation	52	3.1	23	3.0	17	40
61. Advisory group	22	2.9	16	3.4	10	19
Campus Programs						
62. Freshman interest groups (FIGS)	11	3.6	2	4.0	3	6
63. Diversity information/training	50	3.0	40	3.0	42	38
64. Residence hall programs	59	3.4	18	3.2	15	35
65. Fraternities/sororities	31	3.1	2	2.9	3	1
66. Recreation/intramurals	78	3.1	59	2.8	72	74
67. Academic clubs	84	3.2	78	3.2	88	90
68. Cultural activities program	78	3.1	68	3.0	78	66
69. Leadership development	72	3.4	59	3.2	60	66
Programs for Sub-populations						
70. Adult students	38	3.3	31	3.5	35	31
71. Commuter students	28	3.2	14	3.7	17	15
72. Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender students	29	3.0	13	2.9	18	4
73. Women	39	3.2	24	3.5	23	18
74. Racial/ethnic minorities	56	3.4	39	3.5	48	34
75. Honor students	64	3.7	58	3.6	67	71
Additional Activities						
76. Time management course/program	46	3.2	39	3.1	42	41
77. Health and wellness course/program	58	2.9	47	3.0	50	49
78. Personal coping skills course/program	33	3.1	30	3.1	37	31
79. Social skills course/program	17	3.1	15	3.2	17	12
80. Required on-campus housing for freshmen	35	3.6	5	3.3	0	10
81. Library orientation, workshop, and/or course	73	2.9	62	3.1	62	62
82. Motivation and goal setting workshop/program	29	3.2	28	3.2	40	40

*Note: Mean excludes two-year private colleges.

SECTION E: Programs with Greatest Impact on Retention

In this section, respondents were asked to review all 82 retention programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions, and to identify the 3 practices having the greatest impact on student retention. Reported below are the percentage of campus respondents who identified a particular practice among those three choices.

Table 11

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IDENTIFYING RETENTION PRACTICES AMONG THE TOP THREE CHOICES TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGES

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions (Item Number)	Percentage of Campuses
Course Placement Testing (mandated) (15)	20.7%
Tutoring Program (41)	19.2
Remedial/Development Coursework (required) (34)	19.2
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab (36)	19.3
Pre-enrollment Orientation (1)	9.3
Academic Advising Centers (10)	9.1
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations (6)	9.1
Centers that Combine Advisement and Counseling with Career Planning and Placement (11)	8.3
Early Warning System (43)	7.3
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (credit) (5)	7.0

RECOMMENDATIONS: Two-Year Public Colleges

The recommendations for enhancing student retention practices discussed in this section include several that are obvious and affirm the “common wisdom” on retention practices, but nevertheless warrant careful consideration by campus practitioners. Several other recommendations, however, may not be as obvious to the casual reviewer of the data and also deserve careful attention by campus practitioners. While each of these recommendations reflects the opinions of the author, many are supported by survey data.

1. Designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team.

Considering the fact that student retention and degree completion have been touted as critical elements in institutional effectiveness and accountability, it is disheartening to note that only 41% of the two-year public colleges responding to this survey have designated an individual to coordinate retention activities. Of further concern are the findings on the levels and titles of the individuals identified as coordinating retention activities. A mere 6.9% of two-year public colleges assign coordination at the dean level or higher, and only 11.7% include the term “retention” in the title of that individual. When focusing only on those colleges that have appointed an individual to coordinate retention efforts, those percentages rise to 17.2% and 28.7%, respectively. The position level and title of the individual responsible for coordinating campus retention practices send a message to the entire campus community about how high a priority campus leaders place on retention issues.

Equally important is the appointment of a campus-wide retention planning team. Each college is unique in its history and precedents, and its culture is owned by all and controlled by all. While it may be true that everyone on the campus is responsible for retention, relying on each individual to independently determine the scope, direction, and intensity of that contribution is unsystematic and potentially counterproductive. No single individual or small group of individuals can bring about lasting enhancements in retention programs. Given that everyone on campus is responsible for retention, it follows that a broad-based campus planning team should engage in the study of student needs and the development of recommendations to enhance retention—as well as in the implementation and assessment of those recommendations.

2. Conduct a systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students.

Though most campuses have access to data on student characteristics, many campuses could be characterized as data rich and information poor. Although attrition decisions involve the complex interplay of many variables, two fundamental questions must be addressed for a college to design effective strategies to improve student persistence:

- ***Who are our students?***
- ***What differentiates students who stay from students who leave?***

To answer the first question, the retention planning team should review student data in the following areas.

- *Demographics*: including, but not limited to, sex, race/ethnicity, age, size of high school, parental level of education, socioeconomic status, etc.
- *Academic performance*: including, but not limited to, admission test scores, high school rank and grade point average, placement test scores, etc.
- *Academic plans*: including, but not limited to, choice of major, level of highest degree aspiration, etc.
- *Non-academic variables*: including, but not limited, to academic goals, achievement motivation, self-concept, social involvement, interest patterns, etc.
- *Self-reported needs*: including, but not limited to, expressed need for instructional support (writing, math, reading, study skills, etc.) and expressed need for non-instructional support (choice of major, disability support, personal counseling, co-curricular involvement, etc.)
- *Student opinions and attitudes*: including a broad-based assessment of student opinions and attitudes on instructional and non-instructional programs, services, and policies

Even though data in many of these categories are already collected through the admission, orientation, and course placement processes on the campus, it may be necessary for the planning team to recommend the use of additional sources to complete the data set. It is also recommended that whenever possible the data be disaggregated by student characteristics (e.g. undecided, at-risk, race/ethnicity) and by existing program interventions (e.g. supplemental instruction, first-year seminar, learning community).

Answering the second question is merely an extension of answering the first. Many of the data elements required for the answer reside in the campus database (e.g., demographics, admission test scores, high school academic performance). As a result, these variables can be studied almost immediately by separating last year's first-year students into two groups, those who persisted to a second year and those who did not—and studying the differences between

them. Data on student involvement, opinions, and attitudes however, must be collected while students are enrolled in the first year and, thus, cannot be completely analyzed until the following fall.

3. Focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics.

Although it is inappropriate and counter-productive to lay the blame for student attrition at the feet of either the students or the institution, respondents to this survey are far more likely to cite student characteristics as causal factors in student attrition than they are to cite institutional factors. Of the 24 institutional characteristics that contribute to attrition, respondents identified only two as making a moderate or higher contribution: amount of financial aid available and student employment opportunities. Yet, of the 20 student characteristics contributing to attrition, respondents identified 15 factors that made a moderate or higher contribution. Student characteristics cited as having the greatest impact were lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, inadequate preparation for college, too many family demands, too many job demands, and poor study skills. Although the nexus between student characteristics and institutional characteristics (retention interventions) on each campus will most certainly vary from the results of this survey, the planning team must recognize that improvements to student retention will accrue only if enhanced or new interventions are undertaken. Improved retention evolves from quality programs and services to students.

4. Carefully review high-impact strategies identified through this survey.

This survey provides three significant insights into retention practices that make a difference. First, the survey does clearly identify retention practices that work. Second, it is important to note that virtually *none* of the most common retention practices cited by survey respondents are among those cited as having the greatest impact on retention. This phenomenon suggests that few gains in student retention result from conducting business as usual. Finally, survey results strongly suggest that campus efforts should focus on high-impact, value-added retention interventions. Of the 82 retention interventions included in our survey, strategies cited by respondents as making the greatest contribution to retention fall into three main categories:

- *Learning assistance:* including a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab; required remedial/developmental coursework; tutoring program; and math, writing, and reading centers/labs.
- *Academic advising:* including advising interventions with selected student populations, integration of advising with first-year programs, and increased advising staff.
- *Assessment:* with a significant emphasis on mandated course placement testing.

In addition, the retention practices that differentiate high-performing (retention and degree-completion) two-year public colleges from low-performing colleges also fall into these same three categories with a very heavy emphasis on learning assistance. Finally, when respondents at two-year public colleges were asked to identify the three (of 82) practices that had the greatest impact on student retention, only four practices were cited by more than ten percent of the respondents: mandated course placement testing, tutoring, required remedial/development coursework and, comprehensive learning assistance center/lab.

Since programs in each of these three categories exist to some degree at every college, the planning team should first focus on assessing the degree to which these interventions address identified student needs. In some situations this assessment will lead to recommendations for minor changes in the definition and delivery of these interventions. In other cases, however,

significant program changes or realignments may be indicated. One of the primary reasons for having a broad-based retention planning team is to provide support for some of the more significant program changes or realignment that may be needed.

5. Do not make first to second year retention strategies the sole focus of planning team efforts.

While it is true that the majority of student departures occur between the beginning of the first year and the beginning of the second year, significant attrition does occur after students enter the second year. It is also true that many campuses have deployed a front-loading strategy that commits significant resources to first to second year retention interventions only to experience no concomitant increase in degree completion rates. In fact, only 14.2% of the two-year public campuses participating in this survey were identified as high-performing institutions in both first to second year retention *and* in degree completion rates. Certainly students must survive to the second year to complete a degree, but first to second year survival is simply the first benchmark in a continuous process that leads to degree completion. The second benchmark is progression rate. Progression is defined as the percentage of first-time, full-time students who are retained for a second year *and* have achieved academic standing as second year (sophomore) students. Progression rates for the third and subsequent years should also be studied. Students who are retained but fail to progress in academic standing are far more likely to drop out during the second and subsequent years. And the final benchmark is degree completion rate. If a campus is to improve on these three benchmarks, it is necessary that retention interventions be sustained throughout a student's enrollment and be systematically applied to all facets of the student experience.

6. Establish realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals.

Success or failure in retention, progression, and degree completion often rests on the establishment of realistic short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals that are set too high often result in frustrated faculty and staff, and goals that are set too low may be achieved but result in nothing more than blips on the data radar screen. Short-term goals for retention, progression, and degree completion should focus on incremental but meaningful improvement.

Setting long-term goals can be a slippery slope for a number of reasons. First, although the conventional wisdom suggests that about one-third of all first-year students fail to return for a second year, establishing an institutional goal to beat that figure is as inappropriate for an open-admissions community college as it is for a highly selective private college. Second, though it is tempting to establish long-term goals based on national averages, there is a problem with citing national averages when determining goals for retention, progression, and degree completion. On some campuses, being "above average" provides a convenient rationale for maintaining the status quo; on "below average" campuses, getting to "average" may prove unrealistic.

Comparisons with peer institutions may provide more realistic benchmarks. Yet, these comparisons may not reflect the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics that exist on a specific campus. The goal should not be to be "average," for even if all campuses miraculously improved retention, progression, and degree completion rates, "below average" campuses would still exist. The goal to stay above average is really not a goal at all; long-term goals should be improvement goals.

Where possible, institutional goals should include target goals for selected programs and for selected student groups. For example, within an overall institutional goal to improve first to second year retention, the planning team might establish subgoals for at-risk students, undecided students, or students who participate in supplemental instruction. Or, as the result of the implementation of a particular program strategy, the planning team might establish a target goal for students who participate in that program strategy.

A corollary to setting realistic goals is to allow ample time for interventions to have an impact on student retention. It is unreasonable to assume that a new or enhanced retention strategy will be flawlessly implemented in its first incarnation. It is equally unreasonable to assume that a retention intervention will meet or exceed its retention goal in the first year of implementation. Program adjustments will most assuredly need to be undertaken. Because of these factors, patience is counseled. Goals for first to second year retention and progression are not likely to be achieved for at least two years or, in some cases, longer. The impact on degree completion may not be fully realized for five to seven years.

7. Orchestrate the change process.

The planning team may encounter resistance to some and perhaps all of its recommendations. Accomplishing change on a college campus is not easy. It involves changing the attitudes and opinions of multiple constituencies because it is unlikely that all constituencies will immediately and uncritically embrace the recommendations of the planning team. For some individuals, change poses a threat to status, to notions of competency, to routines, and to both formal and informal influence among colleagues. While there is no surefire formula for gaining constituent buy-in, several strategies such as the following may be helpful.

- Carefully consider the composition of the planning team. In addition to broad-based involvement discussed in the first recommendation, care should be taken to include individuals from all levels of the campus hierarchy. These individuals bring important insights and perspectives that are often excluded from the discussion. Although it might be tempting to populate the planning team with proponents for change, it is imperative that the planning team include skeptics and critics. These individuals may slow the process somewhat, but their support for team recommendations is essential to gaining campus-wide acceptance.
- Provide frequent reports to and structured opportunities for input from the entire campus community. Regardless of its size and scope, a planning team that operates in a closed environment over a period of time is likely to encounter significant resistance when its recommendations, no matter how thoughtful, are finally unveiled to the campus community.
- Be ready to provide *proof of concept* in support of planning team recommendations. Proof of concept provides evidence that the recommendations are likely to succeed. It may be established through the literature and research or result from site visits to peer institutions that have successfully implemented a particular intervention. If significant resources or a major shift in normative behavior are involved, persuasive proof of concept may be gained only through a pilot program.

8. Implement, measure, improve!

Designing and implementing retention strategies is not a process with a clear beginning and a clear end. It is a complex and continuous process that involves analysis, implementation, and assessment. And assessment, in turn, leads to new strategies, implementation, and further assessment. While it is not possible to achieve perfection (if such a condition exists) in student retention, progression, and completion, it is always possible to improve.

Appendix 1

Review of Retention Literature

Randy McClanahan

Calls for accountability tied to funding have renewed interest in student retention strategies and research to help guide the development of those strategies at colleges and universities across the nation. “As budgets tighten, competition for students increases, resources shrink and regents, legislatures, taxpayers, and prospective students and their families take up the cry for institutional accountability, institutions that put students first will succeed, even excel, just as their students will” (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999, p. 31).

Student Attrition and Retention Rates. Despite the fact that emphasis on retention strategies has increased over the past decades, attrition rates continue to be relatively high. Data collected by ACT over the past 20 years have indicated little change in five-year graduation rates for combined Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Ph.D. granting institutions (ranging from a high of 54.6% to a low of 50.9%) with a 2003 rate of 51.6%. For two-year institutions the three-year graduation rates have ranged from a high of 44.0% to a low and current rate of 34.3% (ACT, 2003).

Even among the students most likely to succeed—those who begin their college careers as full-time freshmen in four-year colleges and universities—only six out of every ten of them, on average, get a B.A. within six years. This translates into over half a million collegians every year, ...who fall short of acquiring the credentials, skills, and knowledge they seek (Carey, 2004, p.1).

Research has focused on first to second year retention as that is the time when the greatest number of students withdraw from postsecondary pursuits. Over half of all students who leave college do so before their second year (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 1999). The report contains data, based on responses from 269 colleges, that indicates an attrition rate of 20% for the first year, 11% for the second year, and 9% for the third and later years. Findings from ACT’s annual survey of 2,500 two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions indicate a freshman to sophomore mean institutional dropout rate of 47.2% at public 2-year colleges and rates of 31.8% for public Bachelor’s level institutions, 25.7% for public Master’s level institutions, and 22.7% for public Ph.D. level institutions. (ACT, 2003).

In recent years an emphasis has been placed on the cost to colleges of not meeting goals to provide the best social, academic, and other experiences for students. The costs to institutions of student attrition are several, including “...loss of future tuition and fees, loss of faculty lines, and increased recruitment costs” (Habley, 2004).

Benefits of Student Retention. The benefits that accrue to both society and the individual as a result of successively higher levels of education are well documented. In terms of lifetime earnings, “...high school graduates earn an average of \$1.2 million; Associate’s degree holders earn about \$1.6 million; and Bachelor’s degree holders earn about \$2.1 million (Day and Newburger, 2002, as cited in Porter, 2002, p. 2).

In a study to identify the individual and public benefits of higher education, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (1988) found that the following economic and social attributes accrued to the public and to individuals who achieved higher levels of education.

1. *Public economic* benefits: increased tax revenues, greater productivity, increased consumption, increased workforce flexibility, and decreased reliance on government financial support
2. *Individual economic* benefits: higher salaries and benefits, employment, higher savings levels, improved working conditions, and personal/professional mobility
3. *Public social* benefits: reduced crime rates, increased charitable giving/community service, increased quality of civic life, social cohesion/appreciation of diversity, and improved ability to adapt to and use technology
4. *Individual social* benefits: improved health/life expectancy; improved quality of life for offspring; better consumer decision making; increased personal status; more hobbies, leisure activities (p. 20)

A study by the Kentucky Long Term Policy Research Center (Watts, 2001) identified a number of social benefits, both individual and public, that accrue as a result of those who attain successively higher levels of education. These included, "...decreased reliance on public assistance, increased tax revenues, lower demands on the criminal justice system, greater civic participation, better health status through improved lifestyle choices, improved parenting skills, increased entrepreneurial activity, and increased access to and use of computers and the Internet" (p. 9).

Models and Theories

Student attrition, then, has led to studies of the reasons for, and the development of, models that can explain attrition and lead to institutional interventions that foster retention.

Spady. Spady (1970) was the first to propose a widely recognized model for college student dropout. Drawing from Durkheim's (1950) suicide model, Spady proposed a sociological model of the dropout process. Against a backdrop of family background, he proposed five variables—academic potential, normative congruence, grade performance, intellectual development, and friendship support—that contribute directly to social integration. These five variables were then linked indirectly to the dependent variable, dropout decision, through two intervening variables (satisfaction and institutional commitment). Subsequently, Spady (1971) designed and executed an empirical study, the findings of which resulted in his addition of structural relations to the model and "...a revision of the relationships among the components in the model" (Summers, 2003, p. 67). The results of the empirical study indicated, "Over a four-year period...formal academic performance is clearly the dominant factor in accounting for attrition among both sexes" (Spady, 1971, p. 38).

Tinto. The next widely recognized work in attrition modeling was Tinto's (1975) student integration model. He linked this multivariate model to Durkheim's (1950) suicide model. Primary to Tinto's original model were the students' academic integration and social integration, both formal and informal. The degree to which students are successful in their pursuits determines the degree to which they are committed to their career and educational goals as well as to the institution. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986) referred to "...person-environment fit [as] the model's conceptual core" (p. 156).

Tinto's (1987) revised theory and, ultimately, model incorporated Van Genneep's (1960) rites of passage, "...separation, transition, and incorporation" (p. 11), the stages that mark an individual's path in the process of moving from "...youthful participation to full adult membership in society" (p. 92). (See Tinto, 1988, for a more detailed examination of the application of Van Genneep's theory to student retention.) "Tinto extends these stages to the process through which college students establish membership in the communities of a college or university in general, and to the case of early student departure from college in particular" (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000, p. 252). According to Braxton & Mundy (2001-2002), the primary principles of Tinto's model included the following description of institutions with effective retention programs.

1. ...committed to the students they serve
2. ...first and foremost committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students
3. ...committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members (p. 94)

Further work by Tinto (1993) led to the development of a longitudinal, explanatory model of departure. This expanded work added "...adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or commitments (p. 112)" to his original model. In sum, he proposed that "...the stronger the individual's level of social and academic integration, the greater his or her subsequent commitment to the institution and to the goal of college graduation" (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986, pp. 155-156).

In this later work, Tinto (1993) recognized that different groups of students (i.e., at-risk, adult, honors, and transfer) had distinctly different circumstances requiring group-specific retention policies and programs. In addition, he reasoned that different types of postsecondary institutions (i.e., nonresidential, two-year, urban, and large public) also required different types of retention policies and programs.

Bean. Bean (1980) developed the Model of Student Departure, a psychological processes model, to explain the factors contributing to student attrition. The model was an adaptation of an organizational turnover model, which was developed to explain employee turnover in work organizations. Bean's (1980) causal model posited...

...the background characteristics of students must be taken into account in order to understand their interactions within the environment of the IHE [institutions of higher education] ...The student interacts with the institution, perceiving objective measures, such as grade point average or belonging to campus organizations, as well as subjective measures, such as the practical value of the education and the quality of the institution. These variables are in turn expected to influence the degree to which the student is satisfied with the IHE. The level of satisfaction is expected to increase the level of institutional commitment. Institutional commitment is seen as leading to a degree in the likelihood that a student will drop out of school (Bean, 1980, pp. 158-160).

Findings from an empirical test of the model (Bean, 1980) indicated that, "Institutional quality and opportunity for men and, excluding satisfaction, for women were the two most important variables influencing commitment. Whereas, "...men left the university even though they were satisfied, ... women who were satisfied were more committed to the institution and were less likely to leave (p. 178)." He proposed further research to determine intervening variables not identified in the model.

In a subsequent study, Bean (1985) proposed a revised model and found, in the empirical study of the model, that...

1. a student's peers are more important agents of socialization than is informal faculty contact;
2. students may play a more active role in their socialization than previously thought; and
3. college grades seem more the product of selection than socialization (p.35).

Astin. Astin's (1984) developmental theory of student involvement was constructed as a "...link between the variables emphasized in [traditional pedagogical theories] (subject matter, resources, and individualization of approach) and the learning outcomes desired by the student and the professor " (p. 300). This theory was based on the findings of Astin's early work and was designed "...to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affect the student's persistence in college" (Astin, 1984, p.302).

Astin's (1993) later work was an empirical study of the model. Using longitudinal data collected by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles in its annual survey of freshmen, he found that the three most important forms of student involvement were academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups. A comparison of faculty, curriculum, institutional type, and peer group effects led to a primary finding of the study: "...the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398).

Astin (1993) posited that the implications for practice should be overarching, rather than singular in nature.

Institutions need not look far afield to find the key to enhanced student retention. It is achievable within the confines of existing institutional resources. It springs from the ongoing commitment of an institution, of its faculty and staff, to the education of its students.

But such commitment requires institutional change. It requires that institutions rethink traditional ways of structuring collegiate learning environments and find new ways of actively involving students, as well as faculty, in their intellectual life. It requires a deeper understanding of the importance of educational community to the goals of higher education (p. 212).

Pascarella. Pascarella (1985) developed a general causal model. In presenting the model he noted, "...causal modeling is an important methodological approach which should find increased use by those interested in the cognitive and other outcomes of college" (p. 49). He suggested that causal modeling could be used to "...understand the pattern of influences involved in the impact of postsecondary education on learning and cognitive development" (p. 49). In this model, student background/pre-college traits and structural/organizational characteristics of institutions directly impact the college environment. Quality of student effort, student background/precollege traits, and interactions with agents of socialization directly influence learning and cognitive development. All other variables in the model indirectly affect learning and cognitive development. Findings from the empirical study indicated that residential facilities and the dominant peer group were strong influences on academic achievement. Less strong, but nonetheless noticeable, was the effect of informal student/faculty interaction outside of the classroom.

Bean and Eaton. Bean and Eaton (2001-2002) detailed a psychological model of college student retention. The foundations of the model were the psychological processes at the base of academic and social integration. They presented four psychological theories to underlie their model.

1. attitude-behavior theory, which provided the overall structure of their model
2. coping behavioral theory, the ability to assess and adapt to a new environment
3. self-efficacy theory, an individual's self-perception as capable of dealing with specific tasks or situations
4. attribution theory, wherein an individual has a strong sense of internal locus of control (pp. 74-75)

They stressed the importance of institution provisions for service-learning, freshman interest groups and other learning communities, freshman orientation seminars, and mentoring programs to support student success.

Current Practices and Theories

Since the early 1970s, when retention activities and research became more prominent, postsecondary institutions have placed increasing emphasis on the search for programs, policies, and strategies that would increase retention rates. This review of literature indicated that such retention practices have evolved over the years. Early interventions designed to diminish attrition were concentrated on singular programs or services, chiefly in the domain of academic services. That approach was followed by an integration of several programs and services – combining academic services with those of student affairs. More recently, holistic approaches encompassing academic affairs, student affairs, and administration (Borland, 2001-2002) have become the norm.

Berger (2001-2002) noted, “There has been a growing recognition in recent years that our understanding of how colleges work is enhanced when different theories or models of organization behavior are integrated into a coherent whole rather than viewing each theoretical perspective as either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’” (p.4).

Freshman Seminar. Strong emphasis has been placed on the need to provide students, as they enter and proceed through their collegiate experience, with the support they need to succeed. As Levitz, Noel, & Richter (1999) explained,

Getting students started right on the path through the institution to graduation begins with anticipating and meeting their transition and adjustment needs when they enter. Freshmen need a prevention plan. Intrusive, proactive strategies must be used to reach freshmen before the students have an opportunity to experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and confusion” (p. 39).

One of the first widely recognized and emulated efforts designed primarily for freshmen was the University of South Carolina's University 101, introduced in 1972, to help quell student unrest. “The essential goal of University 101...is to maximize the student's potential to achieve academic success and to adjust responsibly to the individual and interpersonal challenges presented by collegiate life...” (University of South Carolina, *Program Overview*, p.1).

In 1989, Jewler provided a description of the evolving nature of University 101.

As a young discipline, it has borrowed a great deal from the more traditional areas of academic study. What distinguishes it from the rest, however, is its need to stay abreast of current trends in freshman behavior and to be able to respond to those trends from one year to the next, one decade to the next, one generation to the next (p. 215).

Perhaps the most interesting finding from research conducted over a 12 year period for the University 101 program at South Carolina University was that "...students with a lower predicted potential for survival are surviving at a higher rate than students who did not take the courses even though the students who did not take the University 101 course had an initially higher predicted grade point ratio as a group" (Gardner, 1986, p. 271). In addition, research has found that high risk students (e.g., those students who are undecided or pursuing an Associate degree) who participate in the University 101 program had higher retention rates than students who were not high risk (Gardner, 1986).

Called by many different names, the seminar for first time students, whether entering freshmen or transfer students, are offered by "...approximately 70% of American colleges and universities" (University of South Carolina, *Program Overview*, p.2). For the majority of those who do offer such seminars, the emphasis is placed on those interventions that will maximize academic and social integration and, thus, enhance the likelihood of persistence to the sophomore year and beyond.

"Freshman Seminar" has become the most common label for these multi-faceted programs that address the academic, social, and personal needs of students as they make the transition to collegiate life. The results of an empirical study, conducted by Davig and Spain (2003-2004) to identify those topics/activities in a freshman seminar that were most effective, found...

...support [for] the Tinto stage model of persistence since the elements of the orientation course most highly correlated to persistence were topics and activities dedicated to: 1) the development of strong social networks (with both faculty and students) and 2) integration into the institution. Results also suggest that certain topics/activities should be included in orientation courses in order to help students become more effective in dealing with their external relationships as specified in the Astin attrition model. Specifically, results indicate that if a student did not have exposure to study skills, advising information, curriculum planning, group activities, and campus tours, they were less likely to re-enroll (p. 305).

A study of the long-term effects of the freshman seminar (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003) found significantly higher retention rates for those students who participated in a freshman seminar than those for students who did not. Significant differences were observed at the end of each year across four years.

Organizational Theory. Organizational theory, which encompasses an array of organizational features and behaviors that influence student experiences and outcomes, has been used as a framework for studying the impact of the college environment on student outcomes, including student retention. Berger & Milem (2000) delineated organizational behavior, organizational culture, and organizational climate as primary to understanding the effect of the campus organization on the student.

Organizational culture represents patterns of organizational behavior that have become institutionalized as structures. ...organizational climate represents current perceptions

about organizational behavior that are less permanent and more transitory than the patterns of behavior that have already become enculturated on campus (p. 275).

Thinking about retention has evolved from the identification and implementation of isolated programs and services designed to improve retention to a view of the organization as a whole and its effect on retention. Berger (2001-2002) proposed "... that colleges and universities are organizations and subsequently that organizational perspective is an appropriate framework for gaining useful insights into how undergraduate retention can be improved" (p. 3). Organizational theory, in the context of student retention, posits dynamic, interactive processes affect student involvement and persistence.

Just as no single experience has a profound impact on student development, the introduction of individual programs or policies will not by themselves change a campus culture and students' perceptions of whether the institution is supportive and affirming. Only a web of interlocking initiatives can over time shape an institutional culture that promotes student success (Kuh, 2001-2002, pp. 30-31).

Berger's (2001-2002) review of organizational studies of undergraduate persistence led to the following recommendations for organizational practice that can lead to student success.

1. Provide students with information and clear lines of communication about campus goals, values, policies, and procedures.
2. Provide opportunities for students to participate in organizational decision-making.
3. Provide a campus environment characterized by fairness toward students.
4. Provide balance between structure and responsiveness.
5. Actively engage students in political activity on campus.
6. Provide students with advocates.
7. Build shared meaning through authentic symbols that are used with integrity.
8. Pay attention to structural and symbolic connections with the external environments.
9. Understand the nature of the organizational environment on campus.
10. Assess student perceptions of organizational behavior on campus. (pp. 15-19)

Kuh (2001-2002) proposed the following organizational practices as necessary for cultivating student success.

1. Clarify institutional values and expectations early and often to prospective and matriculating students.
2. Conduct a comprehensive examination of the student experience inside and outside the classroom
3. Consistently use good practices in teaching, learning, and retention programs.
4. Intentionally tie the curriculum to students' lives outside the classroom to bring students into ongoing contact with one another and with campus resources, especially after the first year of study.
5. Remove obstacles to student success associated with disciplinary cultures.
6. Determine the effects of proximal peer groups on persistence decisions. (pp. 32-36)

The evolution of student retention theory and practice over the past 40 years has been an ever-expanding process. From a programmatic approach, the movement has evolved to a more integrative network of initiatives guided by organizational strategies that position each student for success. From the original sociological and psychological models and theories to explain student

retention, the movement has evolved to include organizational models and theories that identify and explain the many facets of student retention and success. Future research and practice will undoubtedly add new insights. In the end, however, as Tinto (1990) noted,

...the secret of successful retention programs is no secret at all, but a reaffirmation of some of the important foundations of higher education. There is no great secret to successful retention programs, no mystery which requires unraveling. Though successful retention programming does require some skill and not an inconsiderable amount of effort, it does not require sophisticated machinery. It is within the reach of all institutions if they only give serious attention to the character of their educational mission and the obligation it entails. In short, successful retention is no more than, but certainly no less than, successful education (p. 47)

Appendix 2

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Appendix 3

WHAT WORKS IN STUDENT RETENTION Spring 2004

SECTION A

1. Is there an individual designated to coordinate retention activities on your campus?

Yes ☐ (Go to item 2.)

No ☐ (Skip to item 3.)

2. What is this individual's title?

3. Have you established a goal for the **retention of students** from the **first to second year**?

Yes ☐ (Go to item 4.)

No ☐ (Skip to item 6.)

4. Based on your current **first to second year** retention rate, what percentage increase have you established as your **retention goal**?

_____ %

5. In how many years do you intend to reach this **retention goal**?

_____ # of year(s)

6. Have you established a goal for **student degree completion** at your institution?

Yes ☐ (Go to item 7.)

No ☐ (Skip to Section B.)

7. Assuming a 6-year timeframe for 4-year institutions and a 3-year timeframe for 2-year institutions, what percentage increase have you established as your **student degree completion goal**?

_____ %

8. In how many years do you intend to reach this **student degree completion goal**?

_____ # of year(s)

SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SERVICES

To what degree is each of the following **institutional** issues, characteristics, or services a factor **contributing to attrition** on your campus?

Major Factor Contributing to Attrition						Major Factor Contributing to Attrition					
Moderate Factor Contributing to Attrition						Moderate Factor Contributing to Attrition					
Not a Factor Contributing to Attrition						Not a Factor Contributing to Attrition					
5	4	3	2	1	Issues, Characteristics, and Services	5	4	3	2	1	Issues, Characteristics, and Services
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	1. student employment opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	13. attitude of faculty toward students
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	2. extracurricular programs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	14. attitude of staff toward students
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	3. curriculum issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	15. academic support services (learning centers, similar resources)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	4. quality of teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	16. rules and regulations governing student behavior
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5. academic advising	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	17. residence halls
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	6. amount of financial aid available to students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	18. other on-campus housing
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	7. financial aid services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	19. personal contact between students and faculty
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	8. admissions practices/requirements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	20. cultural environment
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	9. student-institution "fit"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	21. social environment
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	10. personal counseling services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	22. intellectual stimulation or challenge
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	11. career exploration services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	23. student engagement in classroom (active learning)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	12. student involvement in campus life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	24. the number and variety of courses offered

SECTION C: STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

To what degree do each of the **student characteristics** below **contribute to attrition** on your campus?

Major Contribution to Attrition						Major Contribution to Attrition					
Moderate Contribution to Attrition						Moderate Contribution to Attrition					
No Contribution to Attrition						No Contribution to Attrition					
5	4	3	2	1	Student Characteristics	5	4	3	2	1	Student Characteristics
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	1. inadequate preparation for college-level work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	11. physical health problems
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	2. lack of educational aspirations and goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	12. mental or emotional health problems
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	3. first-generation to attend college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	13. lack of support from significant others (e.g., spouse, parents, peers)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	4. commuting/living off-campus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	14. too many family demands
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5. socio-economic disadvantage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	15. too many job demands
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	6. indecision about major	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	16. poor social integration (peer group interaction, extracurricular activities)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	7. indecision about career goal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	17. poor academic integration
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	8. inadequate financial resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	18. distance from permanent home
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	9. weak commitment to earning a degree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	19. poor study skills
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	10. lack of motivation to succeed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	20. inadequate personal coping skills

SECTION D: ON-CAMPUS PRACTICES

Listed below is a series of programs, services, curricular offerings, and interventions that **may make a contribution to retention on your campus**. First indicate if the feature is or is not offered on your campus. Then, if a feature is offered, indicate the degree to which you think it contributes to retention on your campus.

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Offered at Your Institution?		Major Contribution to Retention					
	No	Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)	5	4	3	2	1	
First-Year Programs								
1. pre-enrollment orientation	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. extended freshman orientation (non-credit)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. extended freshman orientation (credit)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. freshman seminar/university 101 (non-credit)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Academic Advising Programs								
6. advising interventions with selected student populations	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. advisor training	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. increased advising staff	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. integration of advising with first-year transition programs	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. academic advising centers	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. centers that combine advisement and counseling with career planning and placement	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. advisor manual/handbook	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. application of technology to advising	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assessment Programs								
14. classroom assessment	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. course placement testing (mandated)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. course placement testing (recommended)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. outcomes assessment	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. diagnostic academic skills test(s)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. learning styles inventory(ies)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	<u>Offered at Your Institution?</u>						Major Contribution to Retention				
	No	Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)					Moderate Contribution to Retention			No Contribution to Retention	
Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions							5	4	3	2	1
Assessment Programs (continued)											
20. motivation assessment(s)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. values inventory(ies)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. interest inventory(ies)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. vocational aptitude test(s)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24. personality test(s)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Career Planning and Placement Programs											
25. career development workshops or courses	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26. internships	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27. cooperative education	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28. individual career counseling services	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
29. computer-assisted career guidance	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30. job shadowing	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning Assistance/Academic Support/Intervention Programs											
31. learning communities	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
32. supplemental instruction	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
33. summer bridge program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
34. remedial/developmental coursework (required)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
35. remedial/developmental coursework (recommended)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
36. comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
37. mathematics center/lab	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
38. writing center/lab	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
39. reading center/lab	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
40. foreign language center/lab	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
41. tutoring program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
42. study skills course, program, or center	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
43. early warning system	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
44. mid-term progress reports	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
45. performance contracts for students in academic difficulty	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
46. degree guarantee program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
47. organized student study groups	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
48. service learning program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mentoring Programs											
49. peer mentoring	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
50. faculty mentoring	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
51. staff mentoring	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
52. community member mentoring	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Faculty Development Programs											
53. teaching techniques											

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Offered at Your Institution?		Major Contribution to Retention				
	No	Yes (If yes, how much of a contribution to campus retention?)	5	4	3	2	1
Campus Programs							
62. freshman interest groups (FIGS)	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
63. diversity information/training	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
64. residence hall programs	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
65. fraternities/sororities	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
66. recreation/intramurals	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
67. academic clubs	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
68. cultural activities program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
69. leadership development	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programs for Sub-populations							
70. adult students	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
71. commuter students	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
72. gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender students	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
73. women	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
74. racial/ethnic minorities	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
75. honor students	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
Additional Activities							
76. time management course/program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
77. health and wellness course/program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
78. personal coping skills course/program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
79. social skills course/program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
80. required on-campus housing for freshmen	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
81. library orientation, workshop, and/or course	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
82. motivation and goal setting workshop/program	☐	☐	→	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other Programs/Offerings – Please specify.							
83. _____				☐	☐	☐	☐
84. _____				☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION E:

From the preceding 84 items (Section D, beginning on page 2), write the **item number and text** for the 1-3 items that have the **greatest impact** on retention on your campus.

Item # _____	Text _____
Item # _____	Text _____
Item # _____	Text _____

SECTION F:

Indicate if any of the ACT programs listed below are used on your campus to enhance your retention efforts?

☐ ACT Assessment	☐ ASSET
☐ COMPASS/ESL	☐ CAAP
☐ DISCOVER	☐ Evaluation Survey/Services (ESS)

SECTION G:

Please provide the following information.

Name _____

Job Title _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

We will prepare a monograph reporting results of this survey and highlighting exemplary retention programs. Would you agree to a brief followup survey or phone call should we identify your retention program as one that we may include/reference in this publication?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Thank you!

Please return your completed survey in the enclosed envelope. (ACT, Inc., 65; 500 ACT Drive; Iowa City, IA 52243)