

Student Retention

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Abstract

Community colleges across the nation have, in recent years, come to understand the importance of student retention. Where state funding has decreased over the last decade, the financial burdens of most public schools now falls on the tuition dollars of students. College administrators have become increasingly more concerned with student retention, to help ease the load of that financial burden. Realizing recruiting is simply not enough; community colleges now emphasize retaining students (and their tuition) as well. Through inventive retention methods community colleges are encouraging and facilitating their students obtain diplomas.

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The importance of student retention is something long known by private institutions, as this has been a key factor in financial stability. With retention of students comes repetitive tuition money. Public community colleges are now starting to face the challenges of student retention as a result of a decrease in state funding. Where recruitment once was the main focus, retention has now come into focus as well. Administrators are feeling the pressure to not only get the students, but keep them and what that looks like to the structure of community colleges.

According to Wild (2002) retention is hard to define for the community college setting. Wild contends that most of the definitions in today's academic world are solely for the four year universities and are "too narrow a view to provide a definition of student retention for community colleges" (Wild, 2002). In an article written by Don Hossler titled *Managing Student Retention: Is the Glass Half Full, Half Empty, or Simply Empty*, the author offers his insights on why community college are struggling to connect with their students on the students level:

The enrollment management literature contains many studies about marketing, admissions recruitment strategies, tuition discounting efforts, and the structure of enrollment management organizations, but there are few empirical studies of the effectiveness of retention interventions and little has been written about how colleges and universities organize or coordinate their retention initiatives. (Hossler, 2006)

The challenges community colleges face with regards to retention are not cut and dry, they are case specific by institution. Wild goes on to explain that rather than put persistence of students into terms of integration, putting retention in terms of involvement. Getting down on the level of activities that students are interested in can go further than seminars and lectures. Student based activities are one way to get the students to feel included in campus life.

Another idea presented by Mangan (2015) on student retention is peer mentoring in remedial courses. Peer mentoring is offered on many campuses across the United States as a tool to keep students engaged and encouraged in the courses some view as having no real-world value, such as basic reading and writing. Both of these strategies can not only welcome students to return to campus, but often times keeps them connected and wanting to come back.

As an employee of Eastern Arizona College, I have a unique perspective on McClusky's (1963) *load* and *power* concept. Partnered with ASU on campus, EAC offers our students to get a four year degree in a community college setting. This is a great retention effort by EAC to keep our students in the Gila Valley. One of the key marketing points the partnership promotes is the *Dollar for Dollar* campaign. ASU has graciously lowered the cost of tuition for students attending classes on EAC's campus to match a full federal pell grant offered to qualifying students. Along with this incentive, all ASU classes are held in the evening to accommodate the non-traditional student who works during the day. Both of these things are ways to lessen the *load* of the student and give them the *power* to graduate.

When thinking in terms of *load* and *power*, Vander Schee (2011) suggests that early intervention might be a strategy in lessening the *load* of hurdles the student may encounter. By compiling a list of factors students are facing in college, an intervention plan can be mapped out to help the student succeed. This list can be provided by the student in a short inventory survey completed during freshman orientation. The information compiled from the survey indicates factors such as socioeconomically background, general coping skills and academic motivations. Then the results are implemented into the advisor report for each student and used to access the retention rate of that student. With this type of support from the college staff, students are given more *power* to achieve their goals.

Some of the factors in student backgrounds that need to be considered for retention, according to Derr (2006), range from a wide variety of things including; students coming from a financially disadvantaged family, students with learning disabilities and returning students who have families to support. All of these factors are key elements to determine if retention is even possible.

Finding new and inventive ways to retain students on community college campuses for the duration of their degree programs is becoming more and more manageable. As retention issues arise with most colleges in the U.S. today, so are the strategies and ideas to reach students on a personal and academic level.

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