

From Noel Levitz

Fundamental Retention Theory

Students who successfully integrate into the college community tend to persist (Bean, 1980).

Persistence is a function of the match between an individual's motivation and academic ability and his/her academic and social characteristics (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, Hengstler, 1992).

A student's tendency to drop out of college is inversely related to the degree of direct involvement in the academic and social life of the institution (Astin, 1984).

The strongest indicator of retention is the degree of connection to peers and faculty that a student makes (Astin, 1984).

Retention and Attrition Theory

Beans Theory of Attrition

Expectations + Actual Experience = If positive, the student stays, if negative, the student leaves.

Tinto's Integration Theory

Interaction between the student and his/her environment and the match between individual motivation, academic ability, and his/her academic and social characteristics causes a student to stay or depart.

Astin's Theory of College Persistence

Student involvement is the key.

Noel and Levitz Four Stage Model Theory

Enrollment management, action-orientation, organizational development, and staffing.

Themes of attrition (Noel and Levitz, 1999)

Academic underpreparedness
Transition or adjustment problems
Unrealistic expectations
Boredom or uncertainty
Incompatibility

Retention Principles

1.	The ultimate goal of a retention effort is improved educational experiences for students, rather than retention per se.
2.	Improving the quality of student life and learning is a continuing and important priority for all institutions of higher education.
3.	Engaging in a quality of student life and learning (retention) improvement process should provide an approach to organizing a systematic effort, while at the same time enhancing overall institutional quality, effectiveness, and student success.
4.	Increases in retention rates are a function of the current state of efforts to improve the quality of educational programs and services. Most institutions engaging in a systematic and comprehensive retention effort should be able to expect over time a "lift" in cohort graduation rate between ten percent and twenty percent and improvements in annual retention rates of two percent to five percent.
5.	Improving retention is a complex task: retention and attrition are multi-variant phenomena, and are not subject to "quick-fix" strategies.
6.	Retention tools, systems, staff development activities, computer software, and professional consultation can make a significant contribution to an organized retention effort.
7.	Retention strategies already in place can serve as an excellent foundation for developing an ongoing, more systematic approach to improving the quality of student life and learning (retention).
8.	Retention is a key component of a comprehensive enrollment management program.
9.	Some attrition is inevitable and acceptable.
10.	Dropouts are expensive, and improvements in retention rates can add to the annual operating budget.
11.	Attrition is a problem for which there is a solution, and retention is one aspect of an enrollment management program over which an institution can exert considerable influence and control.
12.	Single casual factors of student attrition are difficult to ascertain.
13.	Some attrition is predictable and preventable by focusing special efforts on selected target groups of students.
14.	Effective retention strategies focus on improving campus programs, services, attitudes, and behaviors, and result in quality educational experiences for all students.
15.	Educational programs and services cannot compensate for the absence of competent, caring, and conscientious faculty and staff.
16.	Key to improving the quality of student life and learning (retention) are student-centered policies, procedures, and programs.
17.	Persistence depends upon the extent to which an individual has been integrated into the academic and non-academic components of the campus environment.

Retention Planning Strategies

- ? *Recruiting.* Providing students with adequate and accurate information will assist in the selection of an institution that best matches their needs, which in turn will increase their chances of persisting.
- ? *Admissions Selectivity.* Academic ability is a strong predictor of student retention and there is clearly a relationship between the degree of admissions selectivity and institutional retention rates.
- ? *Financial Aid.* The type and mix of financial aid provided to a student can have either a positive or negative influence on a student's decision to remain in college depending upon their circumstances and background.
- ? *Orientation.* Orientation programs are important to the successful integration of students into the academic and social components of the campus environment. They also can be helpful in developing consonance between student expectations and the actualities of the educational environment.
- ? *Academic Advising.* The importance of academic advising as a retention strategy is well documented in the literature. Advising provides the most significant mechanism by which students can clarify their educational/career goals and relate these goals to academic offerings.
- ? *Sectioning/Placement.* Homogeneous grouping of students based on their level of academic ability is a common educational and retention strategy. Mandatory assessment and placement of students helps ensure that they can compete successfully academically.
- ? *Teaching/Learning.* Academic programs and experiences must be consistent with and relevant to students' educational/career goals. There is no substitute for good instruction in promoting academic integration. Some studies have shown a strong relationship between student learning and increased persistence.
- ? *Academic Support.* Retention literature documents that academically underprepared students are more dropout-prone. Institutions should ensure that students enter with, or have the opportunity to acquire, the skills needed for academic success. Learning support programs improve a student's chance of persistence.
- ? *Academic Enrichment.* Academic boredom is a common reason talented students drop out of higher education. Providing enriched or accelerated programs can have a positive impact on the persistence of some of these students.
- ? *Residential Living.* The quality of on-campus residential living is an important element in social integration.
- ? *Counseling.* Personal counseling can be important in assisting students to overcome problems that interfere with the degree of academic and non-academic integration.
- ? *Extracurricular Activities.* The literature indicated that significant and meaningful participation in extracurricular activities can contribute to student retention.

- ? *Underrepresented Students.* Some racial/ethnic groups experience a higher dropout rate than do others. Special programs and efforts can be successful in reducing the attrition rates for these groups.
- ? *Undecided Students.* Retention research identified this group as being highly dropout-prone. Lack of a clearly defined educational or career goal is often an important reason for a student deciding not to pursue a college degree. Model programs for undecided students have proven to reduce attrition rates.
- ? *Early Alert.* Prediction of dropout-prone students when combined with early warning strategies can increase retention.
- ? *Exit Interviews.* Even though their observed impact on persistence is lower than most other intervention strategies, exit interviews can gather significant information on why students leave and how the institution might change to improve the retention for other students. In addition, a few individuals may remain in the institution as a result of assistance gathered through an exit interview.
- ? *Policies/Procedures.* Colleges and university whose policies and procedures have been redesigned to be student-centered often show improvements in their retention rates.
- ? *Faculty/Staff Development.* The frequency and quality of faculty/staff and student interactions has been shown to contribute positively to student retention, and in-service faculty/staff development efforts can result in a more competent, caring, and concerned group of individuals.