

ROOTS OF ATTRITION:

Adapted from Joe Cuseo

1. ACADEMIC UNDERPREPAREDNESS

Attrition stemming from students being ill-prepared to accommodate the *academic demands* of higher education and meet the minimal *academic standards* of the institution (i.e., attrition due to academic failure or dismissal).

Retention Remedies:

- • **Academic Alliances:** University and schools collaborate to identify and promote key/core preparatory knowledge and skills.
- • **Diagnostic assessment** at University entry, strategic course placement, & identification of course prerequisite skills/knowledge.
- • **Early alert/warning systems**
- • **“Intrusive” academic support**

2. ACADEMIC BOREDOM

Attrition triggered by lack of *interest* in, or *enthusiasm* for, the type of academic learning experience that characterizes university course work (i.e. the content of courses and/or the delivery methods).

Retention Remedies:

- • **Selecting** academically able students, matching students to courses
- • Promoting staff use of **engaging pedagogies** that increase students' *active involvement* in learning, via: proactive staff development.
- • *staff recognition, rewards, & incentives*

3. TRANSITION- TO-HIGHER EDUCATION ADJUSTMENT DIFFICULTIES

Attrition resulting from new students feeling overwhelmed by, and being unable to *cope* with, the *stresses* that accompany the transition into Higher education (i.e. “culture shock”).

Retention Remedies:

- • New-student **induction** programmes.
- • **“Extended-orientation”** programmes
- • Proactive & intrusive **support in a social context**

4. UNCERTAINTY ABOUT EDUCATIONAL OR OCCUPATIONAL GOALS

Attrition related to *prolonged indecisiveness* about, and *protracted delay in making a commitment* to a career path.

Retention Remedies:

- • “Developmental” **academic advice (PDPs)**
- • **Career counselling**
- • Intrusive promotion of students' **long-range planning (PDPs).**

5. IRRELEVANCY

Attrition deriving from a student perception that the university experience is not relevant to “*real life*” outside the classroom, or pertinent to *personal and professional plans*.

Retention Remedies:

- “Developmental” **academic advice (PDPs)**
- **Experiential learning** opportunities integrated into the formal curriculum
- **Curriculum revision**- producing an experience, which meets the career (or intellectual) aspirations of most students.

6. ISOLATION

Attrition caused by an *absence of social contact* with other members of the university community and resulting feelings of *separation or marginalization*.

Retention Remedies:

- “*Social integration*” practices that promote:
 - • *student-staff* interaction inside and outside the classroom
 - • *student-student* interaction inside and outside the classroom
 - • *co-curricular (=extra curricular)* involvement.

7. INCONGRUENCE (a.k.a., DISSONANCE or INCOMPATIBILITY)

Attrition attributable to poor “institutional fit” that may stem from either or both of the following causes:

- *mismatch* between the student’s expectations, interests or values and those of the prevailing university community.
- *friction or frustration* with institutional rules, regulations, policies, or procedures.

Retention Remedies:

- Reviewing, revising, or streamlining of organizational practices and protocols
- Adopting student recruitment and admissions practices that promote better student-university “fit”

8. LOW COMMITMENT

Attrition resulting from student unwillingness or inability to expend the *time* and *energy* needed to persist to graduation, which may stem from either of the following causes:

- *weak initial intent* to persist at university;
- *competing student commitments or obligations* to communities “external” to the university which “pull away” time and energy that would otherwise be committed to higher education.

Retention Remedies:

- Promoting early student *identification* with the institution and *incorporation* into the academic community
- *Community outreach and inclusion*