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ABSTRACT

The introductory material to this student retention manual focuses on the legal responsibility of Florida community colleges with regard to retention, and provides a collection for program planning, factors that affect retention, accountability, and the essentials of a retention program. The remainder of the manual is presented as a checklist of potential ideas to be explored in establishing a student retention program. A section of questions identifying essential student information precedes checklists of typical student needs and criteria for the evaluation of retention research. The next section of the manual considers retention and college programs in terms of: administrative understanding of and commitment to the retention program; course scheduling; the faculty; student services (e.g., financial aid, job placement, counseling, advising, career planning, admissions, and registration); community relations; library resources; the business office; the support staff; and the security office. Institutional policies are discussed next, and questions are presented to help colleges evaluate their admissions, placement, transfer, grading, withdrawal, and appeals policies. The influence of student goals on persistence and typical dropout behavior are described to help identify potential dropouts before they withdraw. The final section lists considerations for in-service training programs. (AYC)

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A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO STUDENT RETENTION:  
A COLLEGE-WIDE RESPONSIBILITY

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EDUCATION & WELFARE  
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## INTRODUCTION

### The Legal Responsibility

Regulations of the State Board of Education require that each community college district board of trustees provide placement services and maintain follow-up studies:

6A-8.581(4) Each board shall establish and maintain organized placement services and follow-up studies to assist all students graduating from or leaving the community college. The experiences from placement services and the results of follow-up studies shall be used in adjusting curricula. These services shall be provided according to guidelines prescribed by the Commissioner. Guidelines for vocational education shall be consistent with §230.7651, Florida Statutes, and §6A-8.55 of these regulations.

In 1974, the Florida Department of Education adopted Guidelines for Placement Services, Follow-Up Studies, and Dropout Studies in Community Colleges. The Guidelines defined the subject of dropout studies as:

"Included in the population subject to dropout studies are those students who have declared their educational objectives and who have been identified by the institution as leaving prior to the attainment of those objectives, and those students who enroll for twelve or more hours in any term and who leave prior to the receipt of a degree or certificate.

All students who qualify for dropout studies or such a number of those students as to constitute a representative sample of the dropout population are to be included in dropout studies."

The Guidelines went on to define procedures for dropout studies as:

"Each college shall designate an officer to be responsible for the organization and supervision of activities involved in the study of

students who qualify for dropout studies. Dropout studies are to be conducted for each of the degree, certificate, diploma, and other instructional programs offered by the college.

Provision should be made in the procedures for dropout studies for the participation of personnel who are responsible for the design and implementation of the instructional programs from which students withdraw. Each college shall design the instruments and procedures to be utilized in dropout studies.

Provision for the collection of data for dropout studies shall include but not be limited to exit interviews with students who withdraw prior to the attainment of their educational objectives. Provision shall be made for the identification of potential dropouts and for the development of procedures designed to reduce the likelihood of withdrawal of students prior to the attainment of their objectives. Provision shall be made for the interpretation of data to determine the nature of any modifications that need to be made in instructional and/or support programs of the college."

Finally, the Guidelines spoke to the reporting dropout studies to the District Board of Trustees:

"Each district board of trustees shall be provided in even numbered years beginning in 1976 with appropriate reports relative to the withdrawal of students prior to the attainment of their objectives, including information relative to the use being made of findings toward the improvement of instructional and instructional support programs."

### Accountability

In the past, some institutional personnel were not concerned about what happened to the student who left their college before completing a program. It was felt that the student who left before completing could not measure-up to the requirements of the institution's program; therefore, program leavers were not a concern of the institution.

Clearly, the regulations and guidelines require a college to conduct dropout studies and to set into place procedures that will reduce the dropout phenomena.

### Getting Started

In order to develop an effective retention program, an institution must take a realistic look at itself and students. By gathering and utilizing student demographic data, the college can look at data that will indicate the breadth of the problem that they are facing and a retention program may be developed. A college needs to know who are the students who graduate and who are the students that leave before graduating. Students should be surveyed concerning their attitudes about college policies, procedures, programs, services, and staff. This data should be pooled with data that is generated by follow-up studies and dropout studies. The results of all these studies can be examined and the results yielded may point the way to establishing an effective retention program.

### Recognizing the Problem

For any institution to develop retention procedures, it must first recognize the factors that affect retention and then make a college-wide commitment to correcting those problems. Commitment to correcting retention problems means assigning an individual responsibility for a retention program, and requiring a periodic progress update and retention follow-up program. Too often retention may result in concern but not of action.

For years, students have been telling colleges why they leave: academic difficulty, financial difficulty, lack of motivation, not being academically challenged, and personal and health problems. Unfortunately, few colleges have made substantive changes within the college that correct the problems that have been identified by the students.

One of the first steps in any retention program is gathering specific data from students concerning problems that the students may be having with the institution

that affects retention. Such data may point to trends and directions for improvement in specific programs or the overall operation of the college. In most institutions, the staff is aware of those things that elicit complaints from students. However, staff may not be aware as to what degree these complaints affect retention.

It is hoped that if an institution were to look at itself and listen to what students are saying about why they are leaving, then positive steps could begin in dealing with attrition problems.

### The Essentials of a Retention Program

A review of the retention literature has pointed out the following areas as essential components of a successful program:

- A. The establishment of a college-wide commitment to retention by the college president and establishment of a formal retention program.
- B. The careful examination of student attitudes and student perceptions of the college.
- C. The development of a college-wide concern for retention with the underlying premise that all staff members will be helpful and friendly to students.
- D. The development of a comprehensive staff in-service training program that deals with problems such as helping students make proper referrals and aiding students to develop problem solving skills.
- E. The review of college policies and procedures, and redesigning them where necessary when they contribute to the reasons why students drop out of the institution.
- F. The development of programs to assist students in specific problem areas, such as defining career goals, and dealing with academic skill deficiencies.
- G. The establishment of a program that recognizes the importance of faculty impact on students as it relates to retention.
- H. The encouragement of faculty and administrative involvement in the retention program.

- I. The assessment of the advising program and the effectiveness of the program.
- J. The recognition of alternative learning modes, the encouragement of time-shortened degrees, and the recognition of credit for nontraditional programs.
- K. The evaluation of the student activities program and evaluation of the program in terms of the involvement of the entire student body.

This review is just a start in the formulation of a retention program. Each institution's characteristics will dictate the development of unique retention techniques. It is hoped this Manual suggests a few ideas that can be implemented at your own institution.

#### How to Use This Manual

The Retention Manual is designed in an outline format. The Manual is a checklist of potential areas to be explored. By no means is it an exhaustive listing of ideas. Not all items apply to each institution and it is expected that new items will be added by the institutions using the Manual. The format of the Manual allows the reading of any one section that may apply as an area of interest or concern. Other sections may be referred to at a later date.



### Know your Students

A sound knowledge of how a student perceives the college is an essential ingredient in an effective retention program. Such knowledge can be of great aid in discovering where institutional improvements can be made.

- A. What are the major demographic characteristics of students?
- B. Have these characteristics changed over time? What are the current trends?
- C. What is the attrition rate of your students?
- D. What is the attrition rate for the following categories: full-time, part-time, by race, by sex, younger students, older students, full-time employed, part-time employed, unemployed?
- E. What are your students' goals?
- F. What do students like about the college? Dislike?
- G. How do students feel about the services and quality of education they receive at your college?
- H. What kind of students enroll in your college?
- I. Which students graduate from your college?
- J. What students withdraw from your college?

### Assessing Student Needs

The following are typical needs expressed by students. Is your college providing these services?

- A. Tutorial Services in:
  1. Reading
  2. Math
  3. Writing
  4. Language
- B. Study Skills
- C. Career Exploration
- D. Nontraditional learning methods, such as:
  1. Self-paced
  2. Behavioral objectives

3. Mastery learning
  4. Cognitive mapping
  5. Cooperative education
- E. Methods to implement nontraditional programs include:
1. The creating of a learning lab.
  2. The development of in-service programs that train full-time faculty in nontraditional methods of instruction.
  3. The utilization of paraprofessionals and/or trained students as teacher aids in nontraditional programs.
- F. Assessing the needs of special students.
1. Has the institution evaluated the needs of special students -- handicapped, foreign, and developmental in the areas of:
    - a. Academics
    - b. Student activities
    - c. Specialized counseling
    - d. Physical facilities
    - e. Specialized materials such as braille, magnified readers, taped materials, etc.
    - f. Transportation
- G. Assessing student involvement in the total spectrum of college activities.
1. Are students used as recruiters?
  2. Are student organizations used to improve communication between students and college personnel?
  3. Are there sufficient activities for students; e.g., clubs, athletics, concerts, etc.?
  4. Are students given the opportunity to evaluate the college services, programs, and staff; e.g., counselors, instructors?
  5. Are students' opinions and reactions sought regarding college policies and procedures?

### Evaluating Retention Research

Research is a waste of time and money if no one reads the results of the research or acts upon the information, and if the research fails to either ask the proper questions or elicit appropriate responses. Every community college in Florida

conducts placement and follow-up evaluation. How is the information from that research being used at your college?

- A. Do instructors and student services personnel have the opportunity to discuss the placement and follow-up studies?
- B. Is there a formal process within the college to evaluate and make recommendations concerning the follow-up studies?
- C. When program changes are made resulting from the placement and follow-up studies, is the staff informed?
- D. Are negative evaluations explored in depth?
- E. Are there trends or indicators concerning college sub-populations?
- F. Is the data helpful to the institution?
- G. Is the data taken seriously? If not, why not?
- H. Who receives and utilizes the data?
- I. Is there a regular routing of the data?
- J. Does your completer questionnaire tell you what you wanted to know?
- K. Does your employer survey adequately evaluate the completer's performance on the job?
- L. Does your questionnaire indicate areas for further research?

### Retention and College Programs

In order to effectively deal with the problem of retention, a college must view the retention problem as a college-wide problem, a problem that must be dealt with by all units of the college if the problem is going to receive the attention it deserves.

- A. Administrative understanding of the retention problem.
  - 1. Does the administration have a clear understanding of the retention problem and their responsibilities in dealing with the problem?
  - 2. Are there written policies and programs to deal with student retention?
  - 3. Is there a staff member or a committee assigned to assess and deal with student retention?
  - 4. Is there an information (student data) system to inform the college staff about retention data?
  - 5. Is there a retention in-service training program for all staff and faculty?

6. Does the administration know the community and its needs?
7. Is the retention program a part of the organizational structure of the college; e.g., a part of the standing college committees?

**B. Administrative commitment to retention.**

1. Is student retention a high priority with the administration?
2. Have the chief administrative offices made a commitment to deal with student retention; e.g., staff, money, and time?
3. Is there a systematic evaluation of the retention program?
4. Are the goals set by the administrators realistic for the college?

**C. Course scheduling and retention.**

1. Are the high demand courses being offered at times convenient to both day and night students?
2. Has the college considered offering courses on the weekends, immediately following shift changes at local manufacturing sites, during the noon hour in downtown office locations, etc.?
3. Are the courses keeping up with changing job demands?
4. Are the instructors qualified to teach the courses they teach?
5. Are courses scheduled so as to allow a full-time day student to schedule his or her classes in a convenient way?
6. If an error occurs in a student's schedule, can adjustments be made conveniently?
7. Are there procedures for phasing-out programs and courses no longer needed by students?
8. Is the course schedule available to the advisors and students early enough in the term for effective planning?
9. Has the community been surveyed to determine what courses meet community needs?

**D. The faculty and retention.**

1. Does the faculty have realistic office hours for students? Are instructors available during these hours?
2. If the student has an appointment with a faculty member, is the appointment kept by the student? (By the faculty member?)
3. Do faculty members know and understand the community college policies and the reasoning behind those policies?
4. Do faculty contact students who withdraw from their class?

- 5. Are faculty able to meet the needs of special students?
- 6. Do faculty set appropriate and realistic course requirements, and are tests based on these course requirements?

E. Student services and retention.

1. Financial Aid.

- a. Do the students know what kind of financial aid is available?
- b. Are financial aid forms easily completed by students?
- c. Do the students understand the conditions of the awards they receive?
- d. Do the students receive their monies in a timely fashion?
- e. Are there diverse opportunities for work on campus?
- f. Is there academic assistance available for financial aid students having academic difficulties?
- g. Is the student aided in developing a personal budget? In completing the financial aid forms?
- h. In the case of the students who work on campus, are their job responsibilities and work schedules clearly defined?
- i. Do the personnel who are charged with financial aid have easy access to appropriate student records?
- j. Are the financial aid procedures fully understood by the financial aid staff?
- k. Is the college staff aware of the financial aid program?
- l. Has the financial aid program been evaluated?
- m. If there are academic standards of progress, are they easily understood by the students?
- n. Is the financial aid staff able to assist special students; e.g., handicapped, vocational education students, disadvantaged, etc.?
- o. Is the financial aid staff courteous to students?
- p. Is there assistance for students who have difficulties with their campus jobs (work attitudes, interpersonal relationships, etc.)?

2. Job placement.

- a. Does the college have job placement service?
- b. To what degree are students aware of the job placement services?
- c. Is the college staff aware of the job placement services?
- d. Are there diverse jobs available for students? Are jobs available at various times of day?

- e. Are there preemployment training skill sessions available to students; e.g., How to Complete a Resume; How to Interview, etc.?
  - f. Are there part-time and full-time jobs available?
  - g. Are there job placement services for graduates?
  - h. Do the occupational programs utilize the job placement services?
  - i. How is the job placement program evaluated?
  - j. Is the job placement staff able to assist special students; e.g., handicapped, remedial, etc.?
3. Counseling.
- a. How does the counseling program relate to the educational program?
  - b. Does the college staff understand the counseling program?
  - c. Do faculty refer students to the counseling staff? Is the referral system effective?
  - d. Are special guidance services available to students with special needs?
  - e. Are the specific skills of the counselors known by the faculty and students?
  - f. Does the counseling program meet the diverse needs of the various subpopulation; e.g., adult, part-time, handicapped, etc.?
  - g. Does the counseling program use students as peer counselors, tutors, etc.?
4. Advising.
- a. Is the institution committed to an effective advising program?
  - b. Is there an institutional policy on advising?
  - c. Is the advising program understood by both students and faculty?
  - d. Is there an adequate ratio between students and advisors?
  - e. Is there an in-service training program for the advisors?
  - f. Do the advisors have an adequate information system to conduct advising; e.g., transcripts, student data, etc.?
  - g. Is there a student referral and follow-up system?
  - h. Are there different advising programs for different types of students; e.g., part-time, adult, veteran, etc.?
  - i. Does the advising session include evaluation of: goals, academic progress, career plans, personal/interpersonal needs, physical needs, scheduling of courses, referral systems, student evaluation, etc.?

- j. Are the advisors available when students are on campus? Nights? Weekends?
  - k. Are office hours known by students?
  - l. Do students know their responsibilities in terms of advising; e.g., defining goals, attending advising classes, etc.?
  - m. Do the counseling program and advising program compliment each other?
  - n. Does the advisor know the institution's policies and procedures?
  - o. Is the advisor trained in referral skills?
  - p. Are there different types of advising delivery systems available to students; e.g., computer, self-advised, peer advising, registration, etc.?
  - q. Does the advisor who specializes in an area; e.g., political science, psychology, etc., assist students appropriately and make a proper referral when necessary?
  - r. Does the institution know the characteristics of an effective advisor; e.g., interest, concern for the student, willingness to improve, humanistic advising skills, knowledgeability, and availability?
  - s. Do the students know what is required for graduation?
  - t. If transferring, does the student know which courses to take for a major?
  - u. Is assistance provided to help students choose an appropriate college?
  - v. Is the advising program evaluated and improved where necessary?
5. Career planning/life-long planning.
- a. Are sufficient test and evaluation instruments available; e.g., ability, interest, etc.?
  - b. Are group and individual sessions available?
  - c. Is there a course for college credit available?
  - d. Are job placement, counseling, advising, and career planning interrelated?
  - e. Are the students who are undecided majors identified and assistance offered to them?
  - f. Are various technique and AV media resources available for career exploration; e.g, tapes, film strips, tests, etc.?

- g. Are student needs being met through groups (undecided majors, minorities, women, etc.)?
  - h. Does the career library cover all career choices for all students (minorities, women, etc.)?
6. Admissions/orientation.
- a. Is the admissions process convenient for students?
  - b. Is the student notified of acceptance to the college in a reasonable length of time?
  - c. Does the new student know what the requirements are for admission and his responsibility for completing the admission process; e.g., providing transcripts, taking assessment tests, etc.?
  - d. Is the application easy to complete?
  - e. Does the application give all the necessary student data for advising, orientation, etc.?
  - f. Does the new student have an opportunity to see an advisor/counselor so that he may have questions answered about the college before entering the college?
  - g. Is there a college orientation for new students?
  - h. How often is the orientation process evaluated?
  - i. Is the orientation program comprehensive; e.g., does it include placement testing, course offerings, and orientation to physical facilities?
  - j. Are various personnel used in the orientation program; e.g., counselors, faculty, peers, etc.?
7. Registration.
- a. Does the student know what to expect at registration; e.g., pay money, schedule classes, etc.?
  - b. Is there professional assistance available to the student at registration? Does the student know that professional assistance is available?
  - c. Are staff from all areas available at registration; e.g., academic career, student services, etc.?
  - d. Is there a reasonable length of time for students to complete registration?
  - e. If difficulty occurs with the registration system, are there alternative registration plans for the students; e.g., computer registration versus manual registration?



- f. Do the students know the requirements to graduate, including general education requirements, and how to schedule classes?
  - g. When a student completes registration, does the student know what to do next?
  - h. If the student has a problem after completing registration, does the student know where to go to have the problem corrected?
  - i. Are there various registration systems; e.g., mail, telephone, etc.? Are there multiple registration locations?
  - j. Is the appointment system fair?
  - k. Does the appointment system allow for changes?
  - l. When registration is completed, does the student know his schedule, his course, the section numbers, the times, courses met, the classroom location, and the total credits signed for fees due, fees paid?
8. Records processing.
- a. Are the transcripts from other institutions processed in a timely manner?
  - b. When the student gets a transcript evaluation, does the student know how the credits apply to graduation/general education?
  - c. Are the advisors aware when a transcript has been evaluated?
  - d. When an institution's transcript is requested, does the student keep a receipt and know when the copy is sent?
  - e. Is there a tracer system for transcripts to verify they were processed?
  - f. Does the student review a grade history in a timely manner?
  - g. If there is an error on a transcript or record, is it corrected in an efficient and timely manner with appropriate verification to the student?
  - h. How accurate are your records?
9. Student activities/athletics.
- a. Are the activities meeting students' needs and interests?
  - b. Are there events for both individual and group activities?
  - c. Are there activities and or organizations that permit student representation, interest students, and/or promote student involvement?
  - d. Are faculty and administrators involved in the student activities program?

- e. Is it known which students participate in the programs offered by student activities?
- f. Does the administration support the student activities program?
- g. Are student activities provided for the entire student body or a select few?
- h. Do the students know what the student activities program offers?
- i. Do students participate in the design and development of the student activities program?

**F. Community articulation and student retention.**

- 1. Has the college analyzed enrollment patterns?
- 2. Does the institution know which are potentially new students in the community?
- 3. Does the institution have a defined, active articulation with various community agencies: high schools, businesses, churches, social organizations, etc.?
- 4. Is the institution committed to a community articulation program?
- 5. If the community college represents more than one county or city, are there equal efforts to reach students in all those service areas of the community college district?
- 6. Are there provisions for course offerings in all the areas served by the college?
- 7. Who in the college is involved in the community articulation program? Is it a college-wide effort?

**G. Library/learning resources and retention.**

- 1. Is the library staff helpful in assisting students?
- 2. Does the library support the instructional program?
- 3. Does the library provide assistance in research and other student projects?
- 4. Is there an orientation and/or tour to the library for staff and students?
- 5. Is there assistance available at the college library in obtaining materials not found in public libraries?
- 6. Are students able to utilize AV resources?
- 7. Does the library provide space for study in quiet and semi-quiet areas?
- 8. Are the library hours convenient for all students?

**H. The business office and retention.**

1. Is the business office friendly and helpful to students?
2. Are refunds, disbursement of checks, and other financial services to students handled in a timely and helpful manner?
3. When a student has a problem affecting the business office, is the student notified of the problem and provided an opportunity to correct it?
4. Is the business office open during hours that are convenient to students; e.g., lunch hours, evenings, etc.?
5. Are the facilities able to accommodate the handicapped without special assistance?

**I. The support staff and retention.**

1. Is there an institutional policy and commitment to the proposition that all college personnel should be helpful and courteous?
2. Is there any in-service training to promote this philosophy?
3. Is the support staff trained in referral skills?
4. Does the support staff know and appreciate its role in student retention?
5. Do support staff students feel they are an important part of the campus?

**J. The security office and retention.**

1. Are security policies and procedures fair to the student?
2. Is the staff helpful and respected by the students?
3. In stress situations with students, are the security staff trained to be helpful and courteous when dealing with students?

## Institutional Policies

Policies of a college are developed to deal with operational problems of a college. No matter what area the policy covers, it is paramount to access the policies as they affect students.

For a college to operate efficiently, the development and implementation of policies and procedures are essential; however, the policies and procedures need not be developed or implemented at the student's expense. Both college and student should benefit as appropriate.

- A. Other than the college catalog, is there a mechanism for informing students of policies and procedures?
- B. Is college policy easily understood by the students?
- C. Have students been involved in or assigned to committees developing policies and procedures?
- D. Is there someone on the college staff available to assist and interpret the policies and procedures to students.
- E. What are the appeals procedures for students who disagree with policies systematically updated?
- F. Have the policies and procedures been systematically updated?
- G. Have the existing policies and procedures been evaluated in terms of their relevances and necessity?
- H. Are the policies and procedures available to students?
- I. Have the students ever evaluated the policies and procedures which affect them?
- J. Does the college know to what extent which policies and procedures affect retention of students?
- K. Are college policies available for students to read? Although all policies and procedures potentially affect student retention, the following are the major areas which have an impact directly on students. Each should be reviewed with reference to the aforementioned criteria.
  1. Admissions
    - a. Is the college represented accurately to the prospective student so that the student can make a sound decision as to whether or not to enter college?

## 2. Placement Testing

- a. Does the placement test accurately predict success for students in courses?
- b. Does the college provide adequate support (academic remedial or skill development) for the students?
- c. Do the college and staff support the placement programs and the results?
- d. Are the instructors willing and trained to deal with the students they receive based on the placement test?
- e. Are the placement tests given under good testing conditions?
- f. Does the curriculum reflect the competencies evaluated by the placement test?
- g. Are the placement tests used in the advising and course selection process?

## 3. Transfer Credit

- a. Are maximum efforts being made to accept transfer credits that benefit students?
- b. Are the transfer credits evaluated in a timely manner?
- c. Does the student know how transfer credits apply to the graduation requirements of the college?

## 4. Nontraditional Credits

- a. Are other types of credits evaluated; e.g., CLEP, military, work experience, etc.?
- b. Is credit given for the nontraditional courses?
- c. Are the equivalency credits given fairly based on evaluation?

## 5. Advising/Course Placement

- a. Does the institution have a policy on advising?
- b. Do advising, course placement, course selection, and course offering relate to each other?
- c. Is the college committed to a strong advising program?

## 6. Academic Progress

- a. If a policy exists, is it followed, understood, and capable of being implemented?
- b. Do the students know and understand how it will affect them; e.g., meet specific GPA, removal of financial aid, etc.?
- c. Are there interventions of courses, programs, or projects to assist students if they do not meet the academic progress standards?

7. Grading
  - a. Is the grading system based upon some uniform standards?
8. Withdrawal
  - a. Is the withdrawal period long enough?
  - b. Is there an exit interview?
  - c. Is there a withdrawal questionnaire?
  - d. Does the institution know which students withdraw and why?
  - e. Is the institution aware of any patterns, policies, or courses which cause students to withdraw?
  - f. If these factors are known, is anything done to correct them?
9. Graduation
  - a. Are the graduation requirements well defined and known by students?
  - b. Is the student informed of graduation requirements before the last term of attendance?
10. Appeals
  - a. Does the institution have an appeal process?
  - b. Does the student know what may be appealed; e.g., grades, refunds, etc.?
  - c. Are the appeals handled in a timely manner?
  - d. Is the student able to make a personal appearance during the appeal process?
  - e. Is the student notified in writing of the results?
  - f. Does the student have the right of due process?

### Student Goals and Retention

A state-wide committee has been established by the Division of Community Colleges, State of Florida, to explore the development and implementation of a student goals concept. A Student Goals Inventory was developed and administered through six colleges throughout the State. Identifying and helping students to meet their goals can improve the services and programs to students as well as improve retention. The major findings of the Student Goals Committee are as follows:

1. Students have multiple goals for attending college.
2. Students have non-degree seeking goals which may lead to meaningful occupational placement.
3. The identification of student goals relates to all areas within the institution -- faculty, student affairs, curriculum, administration, and research.
4. Student goals should be integrated into the institution's goals.
5. Students have identified many non-degree seeking goals as well as degree seeking goals.

Additional work on student goals is being conducted by the Committee. For additional information, contact the Division of Community Colleges, Department of Education, Tallahassee, Florida.

### A Checklist of Dropout Behavior

Some students will exhibit behavior that is associated with dropping out. If a college has a system that identifies students exhibiting dropout behavior, the college will have the opportunity to contact the student and take action that may prevent the student from leaving the institution.

1. The inability to decide on a major.
2. The act of constantly changing majors.
3. The expression of interest in transferring to another college because of dissatisfaction with your college.
4. Failure to meet standards of progress.
5. Failure to keep registration appointments.

6. Failure to collect financial aid awards.
7. Failure to pay tuition, fees, and fines.
8. Irregular class attendance.
9. Failure to keep advisement/counseling appointments.
10. A record of multiple transfers.



### Staff Training and Student Retention

In-service training can provide the staff of the college with the basic skills necessary to support an effective retention program. Listed below are some elements that should be considered when planning an in-service program that focuses on retention.

- A. In order to deal with attrition, the staff must be briefed on the dimensions of the problem. Such a briefing should include:
  1. All demographic data about students that is thought to relate to retention.
  2. A description of the behavioral characteristics of a dropout.
  3. How retention affects the college's finances.
  4. The degree to which the college is committed to dealing with the attrition problem.
- B. The following elements should be included in an in-service student retention program for staff:
  1. Basic Communications
    - a. Listening to students.
    - b. Speaking to students.
    - c. Communicating with students in writing.
  2. Problem Solving Skills
    - a. Defining the student's problem.
    - b. Ascertaining the proper contact person.
    - c. Determination of whether the problem is really solved.
  3. Referral Skills
    - a. Knowledge of the organization of the college.
    - b. Knowledge of the college responsibilities.
    - c. Knowledge of the limitations of staff.
- C. Desirable staff attitudes that should result from an effective in-service program that deals with retention.
  1. The feeling that all staff members' contributions to retention problem solving are valuable.
  2. The feeling that all staff members' ideas will be treated with consideration.
  3. The feeling that all members of the college community, professional staff, support staff, instructional staff, and administration must work together in dealing with the problem of retention.

**D. In-service follow-up.**

Without a sound follow-up component to an in-service program dealing with retention, the skills and attitudes that are acquired by those trained may simply vanish. A follow-up program should include:

1. Communicating to the staff the dimension of the retention problem before and after the training sessions.
2. Recognition of and encouragement by supervisory staff when they recognize positive actions that bear upon good retention practices.
3. Periodic written or verbal support for the retention program by top-level administrators.

### In Summary

The single greatest problem with any project is getting started. A sound approach to starting a student retention program is outlined below:

1. Accept the fact that attrition is a problem.
2. Gain top level administrative recognition of the problem.
3. Obtain top level administrative support for attacking the problem.
4. Gather the facts concerning who drops out, when the drop outs occur, and why the drop outs occur.
5. Develop a mechanism, a committee, or an individual through which a retention program may be initiated.
6. Conduct a self study of the institution. Identify all aspects of the institution that may reveal factors that contribute to the dropout problem.
7. Study student characteristics so as to identify high risk students.
8. Develop a dropout prevention program. After-the-fact programs have little chance of success.

At one time or another, most of the college personnel were college students. Most of us experienced firsthand student frustrations of one kind or another. When we were students, we were all quite sure that we could improve the institution in which we were enrolled. The years went by and, now as college staff, we often have lost the perspective we once had as students. When the telescope is reversed, the world looks quite different. In order to regain the student's perspective, we must view the institution as a student might. A few questions we might start with when analyzing the institution from the student's viewpoint, are:

1. Can college personnel relate to the students as human beings and not as stereotypes?
2. When referrals are made, are they accurate and helpful or are they just another merry-go-round of frustrations?
3. Is the college staff polite, helpful, and interested in the students, or is the college just one more big impersonal institution where no one really cares about human values?
4. Have the problems of administrating the college become the primary goal of the college and the problems of the students a secondary goal?

### A Final Word

Attrition is real. Attrition should not be approached solely as a loss of F.T.E. and subsequently dollars, but rather it should be recognized that attrition means the loss of human beings who have chosen education as a method of shaping their future. If the institution recognizes that students are first and foremost human beings with very real human needs, then the rewards will be forthcoming to both the students and the institution. Students will stay in school because their educational and human needs are being met, and by retaining the students, the institution will receive the financial support it needs to continue to provide for the needs of students.

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