



**2023 Effective Practices for
Student Success, Retention,
and Completion Report**
Four-year private institutions



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Introduction

Driving Student Success Through Student-Driven Measures

Which student retention practices do private colleges and universities use the most? Which are the most effective? Where are the best opportunities to improve student retention and completion?

RNL polled campus retention leaders to answer these questions. This report collects data from 86 institutions on a wide variety of retention practices.

More opportunities to inform retention strategies with data

Campus retention goals are only as effective as the strategies that support them. Those strategies also need data to inform them and guide decision making. Our poll shows that private colleges and universities are missing an opportunity to collect data that can strengthen retention policies.

81% of respondents set measurable goals for college completion rates

73% ask incoming students to identify their needs

57% assess student satisfaction and leverage predictive modeling to impact student retention

More opportunities to have an up-to-date retention plan

Achieving your desired retention goals starts with a comprehensive student success plan. While most institutions have a retention plan and retention committees, those plans may not be as updated and the committees as empowered as they should be.

53% of institutions **have a written retention plan.**

74% of institutions **have a retention/student success committee.**

19% of those committees are **empowered to make decisions** that impact student success.

67% of private institutions **have a position charged with leading retention efforts.**

More opportunities to explore strengthening student success

Our poll results can provide helpful context for conversations about student success at your institution, such as:

- What does student success look like at your institution?
- What gaps exist in your current efforts?
- Do you have a committee in place to execute the plan, and are its members empowered to make decisions and effect change?

Consider using this report to perform an informal audit of your current practices, noting practices that you have in place, and highlighting those that you can consider in your retention efforts.



Talk with our student success experts

Ask for a complimentary consultation with us. Our student success experts work with hundreds of institutions each year on retention strategies and planning, student assessment, early-alert programs, and retention data collection and analysis.

Request at RNL.com/RetentionSuccess

Most Widely Used Strategies and Tactics for Student Success, Retention, and Completion

STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%
Student success coaching (internal)	95%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	95%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	87%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	87%

Most Widely Used Programs and Strategies Targeted to Specific Populations to Increase Student Success, Retention, and Completion

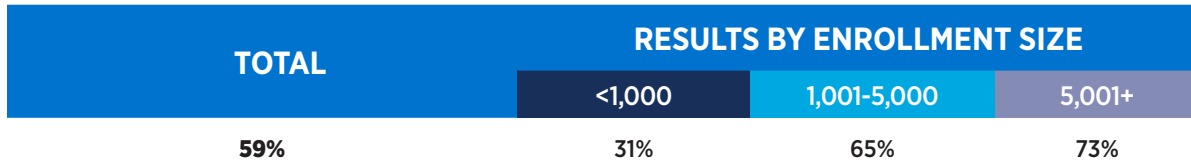
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	89%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	66%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	66%
Programs designed specifically for international students	62%
Programs for first-generation students	51%

Management Practices for Optimizing Student Success, Retention, and Completion

STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	90%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	90%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	89%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term to term or year to year	88%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	86%

Technology

Using retention management software to track retention



TOP FUNCTIONALITIES OF THE PLATFORM



Predictive modeling



Appointment scheduling



Assessment of student needs

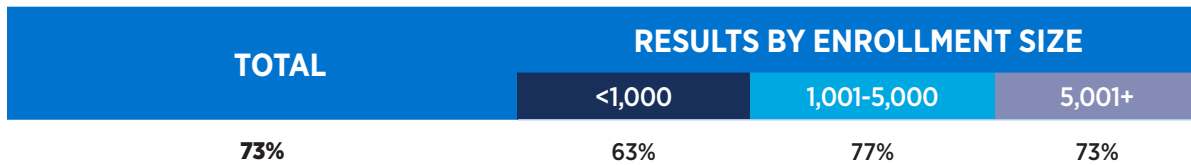


Advising

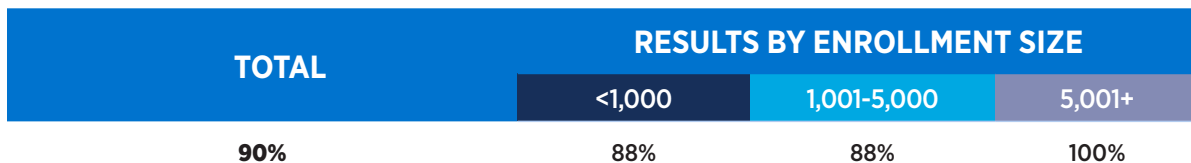


Communications with students

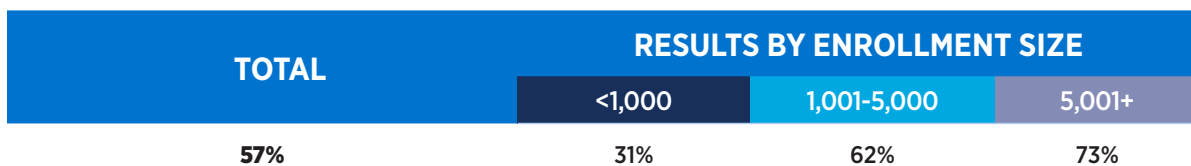
Using incoming student assessment to identify students' needs



Using assessment to make changes to address attrition



Using predictive modeling to assess the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion



New Strategies

STRATEGY	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Virtual career services programs	53%	11%	10%	50%
Virtual faculty advising	41%	33%	57%	63%
Virtual student life programs and activities	35%	33%	33%	13%
Asynchronous tutoring	29%	67%	30%	38%
HyFlex Courses	22%	11%	23%	25%
Virtual group advising	16%	11%	7%	0%

What Guides Retention Planning Efforts?

Institution has a written plan that guides efforts aimed at student success, retention, and completion

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
53%	53%	59%	36%

Retention plan is updated annually

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
74%	60%	75%	100%

When was the plan last updated if not done annually?

UPDATED	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Within the last year	33%	0%	50%	n/a
1-2 years ago	17%	25%	13%	n/a
3 years or more	50%	75%	30%	n/a

Which statement best describes the institution's written plan?

PLAN DESCRIPTION	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
The plan includes retention goals for at least the first four terms and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	15%	30%	9%	25%
The plan has retention goals for the first through the fourth year as well as graduation/completion rate goals and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	39%	40%	38%	50%
The plan has retention goals for the first through the fourth year, graduation/completion goals, and specific student success strategies aligned with the entire undergraduate experience.	37%	20%	44%	25%
Other	9%	10%	9%	0%

Student Success, Retention, and Completion Committee

Institutions with a committee

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
74%	68%	80%	55%

Which area is the committee chair from?

AREA/DEPARTMENT	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Academic leadership position	25%	15%	28%	17%
Academic affairs staff	17%	15%	16%	33%
Student affairs staff	13%	31%	9%	0%
Student affairs leadership position	9%	8%	9%	17%
Faculty member	8%	23%	5%	0%
This committee has more than one chair from different areas	17%	0%	21%	17%

Role of committee

Respondents who had a committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the role of their committee for student success, retention, and completion.

ROLE	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
The committee is empowered to make decisions that affect multiple areas of campus.	19%	31%	12%	33%
The committee gathers and shares information that affects multiple areas of campus.	22%	31%	16%	33%
The committee is charged to make recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	59%	38%	72%	33%

Chief Retention Officer

Institutions that have a chief retention officer

These respondents indicated their institutions have an individual position charged with leading and coordinating activities for getting results in student success, retention, and completion.

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
67%	63%	65%	82%

Which office does the chief retention officer report to?

OFFICE	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
President	19%	8%	26%	0%
Academic affairs	41%	33%	43%	56%
Student affairs	12%	25%	11%	0%
Enrollment management	14%	25%	11%	11%
Other	14%	8%	9%	33%

What guides your retention planning efforts?

PLAN TYPE	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Institutional strategic plan	29%	16%	31%	36%
Strategic enrollment plan	7%	16%	4%	9%
Both of the above	53%	58%	54%	45%
Neither	10%	11%	11%	9%

Influence of Performance-Based Funding?

Respondents were asked to indicate if their institutions' attention to student success, retention, and/or completion has been influenced by performance-based funding.

ANSWER	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Yes, performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to these areas.	15%	16%	10%	45%
No, performance-based funding has not influenced us to pay more attention to these areas.	85%	84%	90%	55%

How can you optimize your student success strategies?

Ask for a complimentary retention consultation with an RNL student success expert. We can discuss how you can:

- Optimize your retention planning.
- Predict which students are more likely to be at risk.
- Intervene earlier and connect students to the most appropriate campus resources.
- Realize significant gains in tuition revenue from the students you save.

Request now at RNL.com/RetentionStrategy

Appendices

Programs and strategies targeted to specific populations to increase student success, retention, and completion

Effectiveness by program type (sorted by usage)

PROGRAM	USED	EFFECTIVE		
		ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	89%	77%	100%	92%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	66%	64%	98%	81%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	66%	67%	98%	94%
Programs designed specifically for international students	62%	65%	88%	94%
Programs for first-generation students	51%	85%	94%	85%
Programs for students with disabilities	50%	77%	100%	93%
Programs for student-athletes	48%	50%	100%	73%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	45%	100%	83%	100%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	40%	67%	100%	94%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American	38%	75%	97%	88%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	37%	91%	61%	70%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	30%	92%	89%	100%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	28%	80%	81%	89%
Programs designed specifically for Latinx	26%	86%	95%	83%
Programs designed specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community	26%	50%	95%	100%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	23%	100%	100%	100%
Programs for part-time students	17%	75%	80%	75%

Usage by enrollment size

PROGRAM	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	89%	89%	100%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	47%	47%	63%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	26%	26%	50%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	42%	42%	63%
Programs designed specifically for Latinx	26%	26%	29%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American	32%	32%	25%
Programs designed specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community	16%	16%	25%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	37%	37%	63%
Programs designed specifically for international students	47%	47%	100%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	16%	16%	25%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	47%	47%	63%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	68%	68%	75%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	53%	53%	25%
Programs for part-time students	26%	26%	38%
Programs for first-generation students	32%	32%	50%
Programs for student-athletes	53%	53%	63%
Programs for students with disabilities	47%	47%	63%

General strategies and tactics for student success, retention, and completion

Effectiveness by program type (sorted by usage)

STRATEGIES	USED	EFFECTIVE		
		ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	77%	100%	92%
Student success coaching (internal)	95%	64%	98%	81%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	95%	67%	98%	94%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	87%	65%	88%	94%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	87%	85%	94%	85%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	85%	77%	100%	93%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	84%	50%	100%	73%
Providing opportunities for engagement for residence hall students	84%	100%	83%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	82%	67%	100%	94%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	81%	75%	97%	88%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	80%	81%	81%	81%
Global experiences/studies abroad	80%	91%	61%	70%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	78%	92%	89%	100%
Student life program supporting student success	78%	80%	81%	89%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	77%	86%	95%	83%
Peer mentoring	76%	50%	95%	100%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	76%	100%	100%	100%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	73%	75%	80%	75%
Use of social media to engage students post enrollment	72%	72%	72%	72%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	71%	72%	72%	72%
Explicit diversity, equity and inclusion strategies	71%	72%	72%	72%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	69%	72%	72%	72%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	64%	72%	72%	72%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	61%	72%	72%	72%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	56%	72%	72%	72%

General strategies and tactics cont'd

Required developmental education courses	51%	72%	72%	72%
Supplemental Instruction	51%	72%	72%	72%
Learning communities	49%	72%	72%	72%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	41%	72%	72%	72%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	40%	77%	89%	100%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	37%	91%	96%	100%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	36%	100%	95%	93%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	27%	85%	69%	75%
Summer bridge program	26%	67%	100%	75%
Digital badging	17%	63%	43%	33%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	8%	100%	67%	33%
Digital diaries	2%	0%	0%	0%

Usage by enrollment size (practices sorted alphabetically)

PRACTICE	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	100%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	74%	81%	100%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	100%	72%	100%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	37%	37%	78%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	68%	79%	89%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	39%	38%	55%
Digital badging	5%	13%	56%
Digital diaries	0%	2%	9%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	53%	74%	82%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	94%	87%	67%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	53%	58%	82%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	32%	40%	36%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	95%	98%	88%
Global experiences/studies abroad	58%	85%	91%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	95%	81%	100%

Usage by enrollment size cont'd

PRACTICE	<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	53%	53%	82%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	84%	75%	82%
Learning communities	53%	49%	45%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	95%	79%	91%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	26%	21%	45%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	53%	79%	64%
Peer mentoring	74%	79%	82%
Please list any other effective practice not mentioned above.	29%	23%	13%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	63%	77%	89%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	53%	77%	89%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	89%	77%	89%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	47%	34%	33%
Providing opportunities for engagement for residence hall students	78%	92%	67%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	89%	81%	89%
Required developmental education courses	53%	50%	64%
Student life program supporting student success	79%	81%	73%
Student success coaching (internal)	95%	94%	100%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	16%	4%	18%
Summer bridge program	16%	25%	55%
Supplemental Instruction	58%	53%	36%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	63%	79%	56%
Use of social media to engage students post-enrollment	84%	63%	89%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	63%	64%	78%

Management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion

(sorted by effectiveness)

PRACTICE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	81%	90%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	73%	87%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	69%	86%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	86%	85%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	80%	85%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	67%	85%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	64%	85%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	90%	84%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	80%	83%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	79%	83%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	73%	83%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	59%	83%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	72%	82%
Title III or Title V funding	62%	82%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	77%	81%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	66%	81%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	78%	79%
Development of faculty skills in advising	70%	79%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	64%	79%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	73%	78%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	89%	77%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	76%	76%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	90%	75%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term to term or year-to-year	88%	75%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	65%	75%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	71%	73%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	74%	72%

Management practices for optimizing cont'd

PRACTICE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Tracking rates of academic probation	78%	71%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	73%	71%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	52%	70%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	80%	68%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	57%	57%

Usage and effectiveness by enrollment size (sorted alphabetically by practice)

PRACTICE	<1,000		1,001-5,000		5,001+	
	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Assessing what is important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	75%	92%	75%	74%	91%	90%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	71%	67%	81%	70%	91%	60%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	71%	67%	75%	74%	82%	89%
Development of faculty skills in advising	71%	83%	67%	74%	73%	88%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	88%	87%	73%	82%	100%	82%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	65%	91%	62%	75%	82%	89%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	76%	77%	71%	70%	82%	67%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	71%	92%	70%	81%	91%	100%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	69%	73%	77%	80%	91%	80%
Institution wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	71%	75%	81%	88%	91%	80%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	94%	75%	85%	78%	100%	82%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	47%	75%	48%	60%	73%	88%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	56%	89%	65%	65%	73%	100%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	69%	82%	69%	72%	91%	90%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	71%	83%	83%	89%	82%	100%

Usage and effectiveness by enrollment size cont'd

PRACTICE	<1,000		1,001-5,000		5,001+	
	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	53%	89%	62%	79%	82%	100%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term to term or year to year	76%	69%	92%	76%	82%	78%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	31%	60%	62%	53%	73%	63%
Title III or Title V funding	44%	86%	67%	77%	64%	100%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	71%	58%	72%	71%	73%	100%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	88%	87%	81%	81%	100%	91%
Tracking rates of academic probation	88%	67%	72%	66%	91%	90%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	82%	86%	94%	80%	82%	100%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	63%	80%	58%	73%	91%	100%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	71%	83%	77%	80%	100%	91%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	63%	90%	77%	80%	73%	100%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	56%	78%	69%	83%	82%	100%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	71%	75%	70%	84%	82%	78%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	31%	100%	65%	79%	73%	88%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	71%	100%	62%	78%	82%	89%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	81%	54%	69%	72%	82%	100%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	88%	79%	88%	70%	100%	91%

About this study

Source of data and methodology

Data in this report reflect responses from **86** four-year private institutions that collectively enroll approximately **261,189** undergraduate students (according to data reported to IPEDS). Respondents participated in the RNL national electronic poll of “Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion” between **January 17 and March 4, 2023**. The poll was emailed to student affairs, academic affairs, and retention officers at accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States.

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness **options that were given to respondents: “very effective,” “somewhat effective,” and “minimally effective,”** rather than including the fourth response, “practice not used.”

Institution distribution by size (total undergraduate enrollment taken from IPEDS)

<1,000	1,001-5,000	5,001+
23%	34%	13%



About RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. More than 1,500 colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations rely on RNL for advanced analytics, personalized engagement, and industry-leading insights to achieve their missions. The firm is distinguished by its powerful portfolio of solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right college or university, graduate on time, secure their first job, and give back to support the next generation. RNL conferences, research reports, papers, and articles help clients stay on top of current trends.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

RNL offers a full suite of solutions to increase student outcomes, including:

- Early-alert assessment instruments
 - Student satisfaction and priorities assessments
 - Student retention planning
 - Yield and engagement to prevent stop-outs
 - Predictive analytics for student retention
-



Visit RuffaloNL.com/StudentSuccess

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Call **800.876.1117**

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