

HUMPHREYS COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

SUPPLEMENT

Stockton, California

December 2004

College Student Retention: National Trends and Implementation Strategies

Interview with Dr. Vivian Snyder,
Associate Dean of the School of Education
and Director of the Educational Resource Center, University of the Pacific

On July 22, 2004, in the College's Forum, Professor Vivian Snyder, Associate Dean of UOP's Gladys L. Bernerd School of Education, presented an informative lecture on college student retention.

She clarified many of the reasons, according to current research, why students leave college. As the Director of UOP's Educational Resource Center, she was also able to provide hands-on implementation strategies that have worked for her and her staff in improving student retention. Dr. Snyder focused on research that she surmised would assist Humphreys College in its retention efforts.

The audience of almost twenty faculty, staff, and administrators listened as she described theoretical research that could aid us in improving the success of our students. The following interview summarizes the major points of Dr. Snyder's presentation.

Why do students leave college? What do
researchers say?

Most students leave college because they have failed to connect. Research by Astin, Tinto, Noel, and others has concluded that students need to connect, to feel like they belong, and to become involved in the institution. Astin (1993) says that students learn and develop by becoming involved. Students who are involved learn, develop, and persist. Tinto (1994) says that retention is primarily the result of integration into the social and intellectual life of the institution. Dropping out results from isolation (“incongruence”)—the experience of being “at odds” with the institution in terms of one’s needs, interests, preferences, and culture. His “Interactionist Model” argues that “colleges and universities are like other human communities; that student departure, like departure from human communities generally, necessarily reflects both the attributes and actions of the individual and those of the other members of the community in which that person resides. Decisions to withdraw are more a function of what occurs after entry than of what precedes it. They are reflections of the dynamic nature of the social and intellectual life of the communities which are housed in the institution, in particular of the daily interaction which occurs among its members. Student departure may then serve as a barometer of the social and intellectual

health of institutional life as much as of the experiences of students in the institution.”

What works at other schools for increasing student retention?

A staying environment, one that encourages retention, has certain academic and social/psychological characteristics. These include such academic characteristics as progress toward an educational career goal, academic success, clarity of program options, and availability of advising and support services. It also includes social/psychological characteristics, provided by faculty, peers, and environment, of a feeling of belonging, social integration, personal involvement, positive identity, and high self-esteem.

“If we want to create a staying environment, this responsiveness to student needs must extend to everyone on campus—the telephone operator, the receptionist, the clerk at the cashier’s window. . . In short, we need people working in front line positions on our campuses who have a mission, a burning desire, to help students become all that they can become. Further, we need people who have a tremendous drive to establish rapport with students, people who are able to woo students, who make them

feel that they are the most important people on campus—not the inter-ruption of their work, but the purpose of it” (Noel, et al., 1999).

Tinto (1997) provides the following seven action principles for successful implementation of retention programs:

- (1) Institutions should provide resources for program development and incentives for program participation that reach out to faculty and staff alike.
- (2) Institutions should commit themselves to a long-term process of program development.
- (3) Institutions should place ownership for institutional change in the hands of those across the campus who have to implement the change.
- 4) Institutional actions should be coordinated in a collaborative fashion to insure a systematic, campus-wide approach to student retention.
- (5) Institutions should act to insure that faculty and staff possess the skills needed to assist and educate their students.
- (6) Institutions should frontload their efforts on behalf of student retention.
- (7) Institutions and programs should continually assess their actions with an eye toward improvement.

“Retention should not be the ultimate goal of institutional action. Though it may be a desirable outcome of institutional efforts, retention alone should not be the long-term object of those efforts. Instead, institutions and students would be better served if a concern for the education of students, their social and intellectual growth, were the guiding principle of institutional action. When that goal is achieved, enhanced student retention will naturally follow” (Tinto, 1997).

Types of academic support that have worked successfully at other schools include tutorial support, learning communities, supplemental instruction, getting the student connected, referral system and student performance monitoring, coordination of academic support services, collaboration with other campus units, assessment and placement into academic support courses, accommodating diversity through varied instructional methods, mastery learning, linking remedial / developmental course content to college-level requirements, teaching critical thinking and learning strategies (either in a stand-alone course or workshop or the integration of critical thinking skill development activities throughout an entire curriculum), and the use of active learning techniques (such as collaborative

learning, cooperative learning, and small group learning).

What types of local research on student attrition should a school conduct? What information should it seek?

Local research should guide local retention efforts. A school cannot do everything every semester. A school should know:

- (1) Who is leaving;
- (2) When they are leaving;
- (3) How many are leaving;
- (4) Why they are leaving (although the most difficult discovery pertains to why students are leaving) (Terezini, 1998).

Such local research will help guide local retention efforts and will help identify students early so that they can get the appropriate academic assistance.

What can individual instructors do to promote retention?

Faculty members should not underestimate their impact on student retention. One study at a large Western university found that faculty attitude and behavior have a significant impact on predicting student thoughts about leaving the university: faculty members being supportive of student needs, returning telephone calls and e-mails in a timely fashion, and being approachable (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002).

Ten things that individual instructors can do include:

- (1) Learn the name of each student and use the student's name in class.
- (2) Call or e-mail students if they are absent.
- (3) Provide positive reinforcement whenever possible; give students a respectful answer to any question they might ask.
- (4) Listen intently to students' comments and opinions. By using a "lateral thinking technique" (adding to ideas rather than dismissing them), students feel that their ideas, comments, and opinions are worthwhile.

(5) Return tests, quizzes, and papers as soon as possible. Write comments when appropriate.

(6) Vary your instructional techniques (lecture, discussion, debate, small groups, films, etc.).

(7) Get to class before the students arrive; be the last one to leave.

(8) Create opportunities for student leaders to emerge in class. Use their leadership skills to improve student performance.

(9) Take the initiative to contact and meet with students who are doing poor work. Be especially cognizant of the “passive” student, one who comes to class, sits quietly, does not participate, but does poorly on tests, quizzes, etc.

(10) Take students on a mini-tour of the learning resources center, reading/study skills area, counseling center, etc. If a particular student needs reading/study skills help, don't send him/her; TAKE him/her.

These and other suggestions can be found on the following website:

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/studretn.htm>

(or by doing a search, using the key words “Encouraging Student Retention”).

Do you have any other comments or remarks?

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with the faculty at Humphreys College in July. It was readily apparent to me that the Humphreys College faculty members love teaching and are extremely student-centered. Many individual faculty members already provide individual assistance to students outside of class. Others demonstrated a genuine interest in finding out what they can do to help students. The faculty is to be commended for their student-centered activities.

Anyone interested in obtaining additional information on supplemental instruction and other types of academic support may visit the following web sites:

<http://www.umkc.edu/cad/SI/> (Information on supplemental instruction (S.I.), definition of S.I., and how to start an S.I. program on your campus. The Center for Academic

Development at the University of Missouri,
Kansas City)

<http://www.ntatutor.com/> (National Tutoring
Association, for tutor training suggestions, also
how to get your tutoring program nationally-
certified)

<http://www.cscsr.org/email.htm> (The Center
for the Study of College Student Retention)

~S. Perkner

Sources Cited

Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college*.
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lundquist, C., Spalding, R.J., & Landrum,
R.E. (2002). College students'
thoughts about leaving the university:
The impact of faculty attitudes and
behaviors. *Journal of College Student
Retention, 4*(2), 123-133.

Noel, L., Levitz, R. & Saluri, D. (1999).

*Increasing student retention: Effective
programs and practices for reducing
the dropout rate.*

Terezini, P. (1998, July). *Recent research on
retention: What does it tell us?
Where does it point?* Presented at the
12th National Conference on Student
Retention, New Orleans, LA.

Tinto, V. (1994). *Leaving college:
Rethinking the causes and cures of
student attrition*. 2nd Ed. Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as
communities: Exploring the educational
character of student persistence.
Journal of Higher Education, 68(6),
599-623.

Humphreys College Newsletter - Supplement, September 2004

Editor: Stanislav Perkner (sperkner@humphreys.edu)

Contributing Editor: Cynthia Becerra (cbecerra@humphreys.edu)

