A SURVEY OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES SURROUNDING STUDENT PERSISTENCE

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Grappling With Questions

- What policies and practices do institutions enact to try to enhance student persistence?
- How do the ways in which students interact with institutions and experience institutional practices influence their success and graduation?
Overview

- We are interested in understanding how campuses can intervene to positively influence persistence.

- Because the way that campuses deliver programmatic initiatives is so variable, we are also interested in how campuses organize themselves to address issues of student persistence. We think this might be an important factor.
Many have pointed to the importance of this question

(Braxton, 1999; Hossler, 2005; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Tinto & Pusser, 2006)

Policy levers

- Work identifying pivotal practices
  
  (Braxton, Hirschy, McClendon, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Stage & Hossler, 2000)

- Directions identified through theory and research
  
  (Braxton & McClendon, 2001-2002; Peterson, 1993)

- Empirical record remains uneven
  
  (Patton, Morelon, Whitehead, & Hossler, 2006)
A Metaphor for Our Efforts

I have 1.3 million dollars to spend on retention programs and I only want to spend these dollars on programs that work.
Selection criteria

Web-based administration
- 275 institutions surveyed
- Response rate of 32.8%

Findings focus on:
- Retention Coordinator & Institutional Retention Committee
- Actionable Institutional Policies/Practices
  - Orientation
  - Academic Advising
  - First-Year Experience Seminar
Analyses

Principal focus:
Descriptive data on institutional practices related to persistence

Goals
- Examine patterns in current institutional practice surrounding retention
- Identify factors associated with retention

Factor Analyses

OLS regression: Fall to Fall Retention Rates
- Authority of Retention Coordinator
- Advising Required Each Term
- Midterm Grade Reporting
- Resources for Student Affairs (Index)
- Residentialness
- Total Revenue
- Instructional Expenditures
Institutional Characteristics

- Mean scores on select variables
  - Fall-to-fall retention rate for first time 1st year students 78.12% (min 51% - max 99%)
  - 72.3% of first-year students living in campus residence halls

- Median revenue figures
  - Instructional expenses $6,076
  - Tuition and fee revenues $8207/per FTE
  - Total revenue $70,643,587

- Mean SAT scores:
  - 995 (25th percentile)
  - 1195 (75th percentile)
Caveats That Limit Our Findings and Shaped Future Plans

- Inferential analyses comprise an exploratory thread ...and a work in progress ...in a predominantly descriptive-level study
- Some potential non-response bias
  - Responding institutions
  - Item-missing data
- Focus on four-year colleges and universities
59.1% report having an administrator charged with tracking and improving retention & persistence
- Mean FTE reported for this position was .29

72.6% of these report that the retention coordinator has some or a great deal of authority to implement new initiatives

43.1% of these report that retention coordinator has some or a great deal of authority to fund new initiatives

73.9% have a retention committee

72.1% report coordinating retention program somewhat or to a great extent
Orientation

- 80.5% report that more than three quarters of first-year students participated in entire orientation program.
  - 90.8% report that more than 50% participated in entire orientation program.
- Orientation program entails 4.74 days (mean) for entering first-year students.
- 44% report having an orientation program that extends through the first semester of classes.
Retention Analysis Activity

98.8% of institutions analyze retention data annually

- Annual analyses, broken out by class year, 95%
- Annual analyses, broken out by race/ethnicity, 88.8%
- Annual analyses, broken out by major, 70.9%
Policies for Faculty Interaction & Early Warning

Early Warning

- 58.1% report they collect midterm grade information for first-year students

  However...

- 52.9% report they do not flag specific courses with high percentages of Ds, Fs, or Withdrawals

Faculty Interaction Practices

- 61.0% report average class size for courses primarily taken by 1st year students is between 1-30 students

  However...

- 69.2% report that incentives for full-time faculty to teach first-year classes were non-existent or small
Academic Advising

Advising Practices

- 82.6% require first-year students to meet with an academic advisor every term

- 70.0% report that incentives for full-time faculty to serve as academic advisors were non-existent or small

Advising Roles

- 57.1% estimate that more than three-quarters of their first-year students were advised by full-time faculty

- 28.4% estimate that more than three-quarters of first-year students were advised by professional advisors
Factor Measurement

- Authority Allocated to retention coordinators (alpha=0.834)
  - Authority to implement new initiatives
  - Authority to fund new programs
  - Percent of an FTE for the “retention coordinator” role

- Coordination of retention efforts (alpha=0.481)
  - Respondent's rating of how coordinated the retention efforts on a campus are
  - Presence of a campus wide retention committee
  - Number of FTE professionals devoted to research on retention
## Regression on Retention Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority of Retention Coordinator (Factor)</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Required Each Term</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Grade Reporting</td>
<td>-0.099</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources for Student Affairs (Index)</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residentialness</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Expenditures</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001  
n=77
Discussion of Key Findings

- Only 59% of respondents have retention coordinators and less than half of these are able to fund new initiatives.
- Few institutions report incentives for faculty to take advising seriously.

- Potential to provide a snapshot of:
  - Practices institutions are using to improve persistence and graduation rates.
  - Policies
  - The intensity of those efforts

- Explorations of what matters for retention:
  - Resources devoted to instruction
  - Residentialness
Where Are We Going?

- First goal is to provide descriptive information about what institutions are doing.

- As we gather data from more institutions we will also continue to examine how institutional intensity of effort, policies, and practices influence student success.

- Working with the College Board to create national benchmarking surveys for two- and four-year schools.

- Recent Pell Institute study reveals the complexity in relationships between persistence rates and institutional efforts.
Indiana University
Project on Academic Success

http://pas.indiana.edu

Presentation available via download:
http://pas.indiana.edu/cb/resources.cfm
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Supplemental Slides
College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention rate</td>
<td>Fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time first-year students in 2004-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority of retention coordinator</td>
<td>• Factor comprised of three questions: (a) Authority to implement new initiatives; (b) Authority to fund new programs; (c) Percent of an FTE for the “retention coordinator” role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising required</td>
<td>1 = required first-year students to meet with an academic advisor every term, 0 = otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm grade reporting</td>
<td>1 = collected midterm grade information for first-year students in 2004-2005, 0 = otherwise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residentialness</td>
<td>Percentage of first-year undergraduate students who lived in campus residence halls in 2004-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>Core revenue in total dollars DFR2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional expenditures</td>
<td>Instruction expenses per FTE DFR2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Student affairs                 | Index combining respondents’ ratings of (a) staffing and (b) funding for student affairs at home institution }
References


