METHODS AND MODELS FOR
PROMOTING STUDENT PERSISTENCE:
THE EMERGING NATIONAL PICTURE

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Grappling With Questions

The limits of current theories and research on student persistence provide the backdrop.

- How and to what extent do institutions organize themselves to promote student persistence?
- What policies and practices do institutions enact to try to enhance student persistence?
Focal Points of Our Inquiry: Actionable Implications

- Understanding the role of campus policies and practices
- Identifying actionable practices and policies
- Providing useful benchmarks of normative and effective policies and practices
Utility of Benchmarking

- The empirical base for understanding how practices and policies affect student persistence is still developing.
- In the meantime, comparative data are an important resource for institutions.
  - Recommendations from institutional policy-makers
Survey of Institutional Retention Practices

2009:
Survey of 4-year institutions nation wide

□ Web-based administration
  ▪ 1484 institutions surveyed
  ▪ Response rate of 30% (ca. 442 responding institutions)

□ Findings focus on:
  ▪ Coordination of Retention Efforts
  ▪ Actionable Institutional Policies/Practices
    ■ Orientation
    ■ Academic Advising
    ■ Early Warning
    ■ Faculty-Student Interaction
    ■ Research and Assessment
Institutional Characteristics

- **Mean scores on select variables**
  - Fall-to-fall retention rate for first time 1st year students 75.73% (national mean = 72.65%)
  - 40% of the institutions have a requirement for full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking students to live on campus

- **Median revenue figures**
  - Instructional expenses per FTE $5,802
  - Tuition and fee revenues $4,846/per FTE
  - Total revenue $49,588,399

- **Mean SAT (Critical Reading & Math) scores:**
  - 978 (25th percentile)
  - 1196 (75th percentile)
Coordination of Retention Efforts: Structures in Place

- 74% reported having a retention coordinator
  - Based on two definitions
    - “an administrator charged with coordinating efforts”
    - “an administrator acting as a central resource”
    - Most reported that the position entails both functions
  - Mean FTE reported for the position was .35
  - 66% reported retention coordinator has at least some authority to implement new initiatives
  - 32% reported retention coordinator has at least some authority to fund new initiatives

- 63% have a retention committee
- 27% report coordinating retention program to a great extent
Percentage FTE Devoted to Retention Coordination at Institutions with Retention Coordinators

Revenue per FTE

- Less than $15,000
- $15,000-$25,000
- More than $25,000
Percentage FTE Devoted to Retention Coordination at Institutions with Retention Coordinators (continued)

- Residential: 30%
- Commuter: 40%

Residentialness: Residential vs. Commuter
Percentage of an FTE Devoted to the “Retention Coordinator” Role
76% report that more than three quarters of first-year students participated in entire orientation program.

- 90% report that more than half participated in entire orientation program.

- 40% report that their general orientation programs for entering first-year students last 2 days or less.

- 37% report offering an orientation program that extends through the first semester of classes.
Percentage of Schools that Collected Midterm Grade Information for First-Year Students in 2007-2008

No Yes

Research Masters Baccalaureate Total
Policies for Early Warning

- 70% report they collect mid-term grade information for first-year students
- 68% report they ask faculty to complete Early Alert forms for first-year students
- 53% report they regularly flag specific courses with high percentages of Ds, Fs, or Withdrawals
- 46% report they offer voluntary weekly sessions to deepen student learning in courses with traditionally high D, F, & W rates.
Policies for Faculty Interaction

- 69% report that more than half of 100-level classes were taught by full-time faculty

- 66% report average class size for courses primarily taken by 1st year students is between 1-30 students

However...

- 78% report that incentives for full-time faculty to teach first-year classes were non-existent or small
Academic Advising

Advising Practices

- 83% require first-year students to meet with an academic advisor at least once per term
- 93% report that full-time faculty act as academic advisors to undergraduates

Advising Roles

- 58% estimate that more than three-quarters of their first-year students were advised by full-time faculty
- 34% estimate that more than three-quarters of first-year students were advised by professional advisors
Proportion of 1st Year Students Advised by Full-Time Faculty in the 2007-2008
Implications

- Institutions are, in fact, organizing for retention. However,...

- Resources (e.g. FTE, funding and programming authority) devoted to the enterprise may not be equal to the task.
  - Differences in structures across institutional type:
    - Research institutions rely on professional advisors more than faculty for advising first-year students
    - Research institutions show a lower FTE for retention coordinator positions, and emphasize committee efforts vs stronger coordination
Concluding Remarks

- Results may reflect the early stages of coordination and/or of institutional recognition that organization is needed.
- Federal and State agencies are increasingly focused on outcomes, so the organizing trend is likely to continue.
- Economic factors causing families to consider "value" may also contribute to the continuance of the trend.
- The need for longitudinal research
  - To determine if these patterns hold over time
  - To tie the retention factors noted in the study to actual retention results
Discussion, Questions

- What do these patterns suggest about the genuine commitment of colleges and universities to encourage student persistence and graduation?
Contact Us

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Presentation available via download:
http://pas.indiana.edu/cb/resources.cfm

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Reports

- Survey 2006
  - Pilot Report available at www.collegeboard.com/retention

- Survey 2009
  - Report coming in Winter 2010