The Indiana Project on Academic Success and the College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention evaluated the effectiveness of a variety of approaches to student retention. The authors share empirically grounded insights gleaned from this research.

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GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE IN STUDENT RETENTION

Research-Based Lessons on Effective Policies and Practices

GIVEN TIGHTENING FISCAL CONSTRAINTS, growing pressure from public policymakers to improve student persistence and graduation rates, and the ever-present imperative to cultivate institutional quality and prestige, the conversation about student persistence is shifting from the abstract and theoretical to the concrete and actionable. Of greatest concern is the human toll that attrition takes on those who leave college without achieving their goals. Students who do not persist, especially if they leave for reasons an institution can control, are cheated of important opportunities to learn in college and to reap the benefits of that learning after graduation.

Despite increasing college enrollments and the pressure to improve student achievement, completion rates have remained fairly constant over the past thirty years, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Recognizing the importance and complexity of issues associated with student persistence now comes with the territory for concerned educators, but getting serious about these issues—serious enough to significantly improve learning, success, persistence, and graduation rates for all students—requires more than a serious mind-set. Getting serious about student persistence requires that educators connect what they know about institutional retention practices with an empirically grounded sense of what works.

Our work with the Indiana Project on Academic Success (IPAS) has led us to conclude that improving student persistence is, to use two sports metaphors, often more three yards and a cloud of dust than a Hail Mary pass and a touchdown. That is, far from solving all retention problems with a single sweeping effort, institutions improve student persistence through organized programs supported by adequate funding, administrative oversight, and favorable campus policies.

Getting serious about student persistence requires that educators connect what they know about institutional retention practices with an empirically grounded sense of what works.

In this article, we share what we have learned in two distinct but complementary research projects that focus on institutional efforts to enhance student persistence and graduation—one funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education and the second by the College Board. Together, these projects have helped us develop a fuller picture of how institutions organize themselves to enhance student persistence (which we also refer to as retention throughout this article) and the extent and effectiveness of those efforts. While the Lumina–funded project has been completed, the College Board project is a continuing effort to better understand the policy levers that institutions use to influence student persistence and graduation rates. By sharing our growing understanding

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of institutional practices and of which practices work, this article can contribute to the ongoing discussion among scholars and practitioners around the country about how to increase persistence and graduation and, by extension, improve student learning.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CAMPUS-BASED INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE RETENTION

TWO KEY REPORTS of research on how institutions organize themselves for student learning and success were published in 2005. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), using a method similar to the institutional self-study approach recommended by many accrediting groups, examined twelve public universities with high persistence and graduation rates. Study group members interviewed campus administrators and faculty and looked at campus documents to develop a better understanding of the institutional culture, policies, and unique institutional characteristics associated with the high persistence rates at these institutions. Research by George Kuh, Jillian Kinzie, John Schuh, Elizabeth Whitt, and associates, although it did not focus on student persistence, used a series of campus case studies that asked campus administrators, faculty, and students to identify practices and policies that influence student learning and success in order to investigate how institutions with highly engaged students promote that achievement.

Looking across these two studies, we see several consistent findings. Both studies noted that leadership from the top helps create a campus culture in which student success and persistence are a high priority. They also reported that student affairs and student services units at these campuses were integrated with academic affairs instead of working alone. Both studies found evidence of successful links that had been forged between academic affairs and student affairs, fostering a campus culture that values teaching and learning and works holistically on improving student learning, success, and persistence. Both reports found that the institutions that were studied made efforts to create a sense of belonging among students. Some institutions

rewarded faculty for focusing on enhancing student persistence. The AASCU study also documented the importance of academic advising for students.

While these studies identify the broad strategies that institutions use to enhance student persistence, learning, and success, they do not provide evidence of the structures and policies that specific campuses have put in place for that purpose. This more detailed understanding of what institutions are doing to enhance persistence is at the center of the efforts described in this article.

Our two research projects—the Indiana Project on Academic Success (IPAS) and the College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention (CBS)—were designed to investigate two overarching questions not yet fully addressed in previous research: Which strategies work in increasing student retention, and how do institutions organize themselves to enhance persistence and graduation? Through IPAS and CBS, we have gained empirically grounded insights into how policies and practices are associated with student retention as well as an on-the-ground perspective on what institutions are doing to improve student learning, success, and graduation. In a sense, IPAS and CBS are complementary pillars that support our developing knowledge in the under-examined area of success strategies in student retention. In the following discussion, we share what we have learned from these two projects, arriving at a synthesis of findings and implications for all educators.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT CAMPUS EFFORTS TO ENHANCE STUDENT PERSISTENCE

THE INDIANA PROJECT ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS, initiated four years ago by Edward St. John, established and facilitated collaborations between researchers at the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University and professionals at fifteen two-year and four-year public and private colleges in Indiana. IPAS had two primary foci. First, we worked extensively with participating campuses to identify and design programmatic interventions to enhance student persistence and success. Our second focus was on helping to evaluate existing as well as new campus-based interventions to improve retention and student learning and success. Over four years, we developed a rich understanding of how institutions structure their policies and practices and we compiled a record of sound assessment results that told us which programs were most effective and how.

In addition to this project, we have also been working with the College Board to develop a survey of campus policies and practices that are intended to enhance student persistence. In the first round of this ongoing effort, we conducted a pilot study of practices at four-year institutions in five states. Survey questions asked about first-to-second-year retention rates as well as programs and policies related to student persistence. Despite this being a pilot study, the number of responding campuses was sufficiently high for us to make observations and reach conclusions, which we share in the following sections.

IPAS: Looking at What Works in Student Retention. Our research suggested that implementing successful targeted interventions to enhance student learning, success, and persistence—organizing programmatic interventions and staying on top of them—takes the time, willingness, and commitment of student affairs educators, academic administrators, faculty, and policymakers at all levels. It takes campus administrators who are willing to make orientation programs mandatory for incoming students, to provide seed funding, or to show support by attending planning meetings for targeted interventions. Administrators must also be willing to put in the time—whether in advisory committees or in training staff—to deliver these planned programs. The amount of money required to support programs aimed at improving student success is often surprisingly small, but administrators do have to arrange sufficient time for staff to manage these programs in order for them to be successful. It is possible for a few well-funded, well-organized student support programs to be more effective than a wide range of poorly supported programs.

Our first example of a well-organized, strongly supported program that is intended to enhance student learning and success comes from the collaboration between IPAS and a private, church-affiliated university that we will call Midwestern Religious University (MRU). As part of a broader institutional strategic plan forged in a period of institutional change, MRU looked for a structural way—through programs and practice—to connect its mission and values with the academic and career success of its students. One factor in this plan was a concern about the retention of students with no declared major.

In 1999, MRU had established a center to help students find their life calling, a concept encompassing personal development, scholarly pursuits, career planning, and personal or religious belief. Although the center's purpose is much broader than the retention of undeclared students, a key component of its mission is to serve this population. The center's staff members serve as academic advisors for students with no declared major. In addition, students are encouraged to enroll in

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a course intended to help them reflect on and better understand their values and beliefs, their sense of purpose, their personal development, and their aspirations for school and later careers. The center's staff members guide students through a holistic academic, career, and life planning process—a process that includes academic advising as well as such interventions as life coaching, connecting students to internships, leadership training, service-learning opportunities, and even career placement advising. As part of this process, students take a variety of personality inventories and do in-class exercises to help them learn more about themselves and others. Course assignments include writing letters that connect their faith with a variety of disciplines. Moreover, they have the support of an advisor who acts as a life coach and life calling counselor outside of the classroom.

Although both students and administrators had expressed positive impressions of the program, MRU wanted to assess the program more systematically, to find out whether it was having the intended effect, before making it mandatory for all undeclared students. In collaboration with IPAS, MRU undertook a mixed-methods study to ascertain the effects of the program on the retention and graduation of its undeclared students. Our results indicated that students who took the life calling course were three to six times more likely to persist to the following year and six times more likely to earn a degree within four years. In semi-structured interviews, students told us that they felt that the program helped them lead more intentional lives and come to terms with expectations from family, friends, and themselves about major declaration and their future career. They also said the cumulative support they received from life coaches, academic advisors, and teachers provided a broader base of support than one person would provide.

The life calling program benefited from having strong advocates at the highest levels of the MRU administration who had the discretion and the budgets to devote monetary resources to the development of the program. At other IPAS partner institutions, however, we found successful programs that were funded by pooling and redirecting limited resources. One such institution was a small community college undergoing enrollment growth and demographic changes in its student body. After much discussion, the campus work group of faculty, administrators, and student affairs educators—with facilitation from IPAS staff members—identified the three challenges their work group would address: academic literacy, student retention, and financial need. These challenges were based on the observations of the workgroup and a baseline quantitative report by IPAS staff on student learning and success. Because of financial, personnel, and other constraints, the work group began to consider addressing the three challenges through a single intervention: a mandatory orientation program for all new and transfer students. Although an orientation program already existed at the college, the work group described it as poorly organized and sparsely attended.

To develop the new orientation program, members of the IPAS staff and the college work group conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with faculty, staff, and students as well as a short survey of students. Information gathered from the focus groups, interviews, and survey, along with the experiential knowledge of the student affairs educators, was used to design the mandatory orientation program, to be implemented in the fall. Because no additional funding for this new effort was provided, staff time in several offices was reallocated to make this new orientation program a priority. Funding from the previous orientation program was also made available. The five-hour pilot orientation program included a session led by faculty on classroom expectations and another session led by student affairs educators to help students register for classes, get their student identification cards, navigate financial aid, and access the college's computer network. In addition, returning students were on hand at the orientation to help answer questions about specific programs or other aspects of academic life at the college. Every constituency at the institution was asked to participate in the program.

An integral component of implementing the pilot orientation included planning for program assessment

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to determine whether it was successful and worth continuing. Using a mixed-methods approach, IPAS analyzed enrollment and program data to ascertain the effects of the program on students' likelihood of re-enrolling in the spring semester. In addition, we again spoke with students, staff, and faculty to get their impressions of the program. Faculty and staff who participated in focus groups noted that students who had participated in the orientation were using all campus services more effectively, were more prepared, and were more proficient in accessing online student services and course resources. Also, the new students reported that they felt welcomed into the college community through the personal connections they made with faculty and staff during orientation. Our analysis of the institutional data showed that the pilot orientation program equalized the likelihood of persisting between returning and new students. This was an encouraging finding because our previous research had revealed that returning students at this community college were more likely to persist than first-time students. Given these results and the positive perceptions of the program among faculty and staff, the institution planned to continue the program.

CBS: Understanding Institutional Efforts. Data from the College Board project surveys demonstrate that institutional efforts to enhance student persistence and graduation can be characterized via the following broad axioms:

- *When managers identify a problem, someone should be assigned to fix it.* Applying this axiom to the context of our study, then, it is fair to ask, "Are the people whose job it is to improve student persistence actually empowered to organize efforts to address the issues affecting student persistence and graduation rates?"

- *Institutions need benchmarking—comparative information on what peer institutions are doing in retention programming.* Often when a president wants to know how his or her institution is performing in any area, the first question is

"Compared with what?" The answer is always "Compared with our peers."

- *Institutions need careful and ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of their efforts to improve the student outcomes of persistence and graduation.* Drawing on this bottom-line axiom and using the limited results from our pilot study, we asked questions about what kinds of institutions are making the greatest effort to enhance student persistence and whether these efforts seem to be working. This last question is more complex than it first appears, and we explore it in more detail later in this section.

Putting Someone in Charge of Retention Efforts. Drawing on the first axiom outlined in the preceding list, we asked, "How do campuses allocate responsibility for managing or coordinating campus retention efforts?" So many factors influence student persistence that it is impossible for one person to directly manage all institutional policies, practices, and student experiences related to it. Nevertheless, it is imperative that someone be responsible for monitoring and coordinating campus-based retention efforts. We all know the old adage: if everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. Thus, we asked campus administrators in the College Board pilot study whether they had an individual responsible for tracking and coordinating campus retention efforts. Well over half (60 percent) of respondents reported that they did. Our first reaction was "This looks pretty good," but we found otherwise as we looked further. While 60 percent of responding campuses had someone assigned to coordinate their retention efforts, we discovered that the average amount of time allocated to coordinating these efforts was less than one-third of a full-time position.

Moreover, the influence that these individuals have is relatively limited. We found that only 40 percent of the retention coordinators have the authority to implement new programs and only a quarter of those individuals could also fund the new initiatives. Thus, while well over half of all campuses have a designated reten-

tion coordinator, the amount of time, authority, and financial resources that campuses dedicate to enhancing student persistence is limited. If we view these responses as an indicator of the intensity of effort that these institutions are devoting to campus-based retention efforts, the results suggest only modest efforts at best.

We then looked at the relationship between how institutions organize themselves and their retention rates. We found that among institutions with lower-than-predicted graduation rates, 69 percent had a retention coordinator, 84 percent had a campuswide retention committee, and 24 percent had mandatory class attendance policies for first-year students. The institutions in our pilot study with higher-than-predicted graduation rates evinced less effort to enhance student persistence. Among this set of institutions, only 55 percent had a retention coordinator, 64 percent had a retention committee, and only 7 percent had mandatory attendance policies. The differences were not large, but the group with higher-than-predicted graduation rates engaged in most of these activities at significantly lower rates.

Our results revealed that the amount of effort to improve persistence—as reflected in the amount of dedicated administrative time, in the authority of the responsible person to influence policy, and in the funding for programs—was low across the full range of respondents in this pilot study. Those with lower graduation rates may be doing more, but there is little evidence that most campuses are making extensive efforts to reduce student withdrawal. The College Board research has the potential to provide important insights into the intensity of institutional commitments to enhance persistence and graduation rates and the efficacy of these efforts.

Benchmarking. In addition to examining intensity of effort, one of the goals of our survey is to provide benchmarking information on policies and practices related to student persistence. This kind of information can be invaluable for student affairs and academic administrators who are seeking to build a case for greater focus on retention efforts. When developing budget requests for new programmatic initiatives, student affairs or enrollment management professionals often provide information about the activities of peer institutions to bolster their request.

Some of the findings we have already discussed provide important benchmarking information. For example, knowing what kind of administrative oversight peer institutions are devoting to retention could be valuable information. Later in this section, we provide information derived from survey items that explore how academic advising and orientation programs are structured and how campuses organize their early warning systems. These are examples of the kind of useful information that is not currently available to campus administrators but that could be invaluable in helping to shape campus policies and practices.

For example, two key indicators of an institution's commitment to improving student retention are its consistency in tracking persistence and graduation rates and its efforts in assessing programmatic interventions. In regard to consistency in tracking persistence, almost all of the institutions that participated in our survey reported that they analyze retention and graduation data annually. Most look at the data by class year, race and ethnicity, and student major. This widespread examination of data is an encouraging sign; however, tracking of retention and graduation rates does not necessarily mean that institutions are using these data to assess the effectiveness of their retention efforts. The pilot study did not gather data on institutional efforts to assess the effectiveness of retention practices; however, we plan to add questions that will enable us to explore this topic in future iterations of this survey.

Up to now, campus policymakers have lacked comparative information. Comparative information can serve as a broad guide for campus educators and policymakers, helping them to situate their efforts. However, as most educators know, each institution is unique and what works in one context may not work in another. Although our campuses have much in common, they also have many unique features. For this reason, targeted and tailored assessment of campus retention initiatives is necessary in order to know what works.

Assessing Programs and Campus Efforts in Order to Discover What Works. The increased emphasis on accountability in the national discourse on postsecondary education led us, naturally, to ask, "To what extent do colleges and universities assess the effectiveness of

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programs intended to increase student persistence?" We looked at many campus policies and practices in areas such as academic advising, graduation, orientation, and early warning systems.

In academic advising, we found that more than three-quarters of the institutions reported that they required first-year students to meet with an academic advisor every semester and that more than half of the institutions estimated that full-time faculty advised more than three-quarters of their first-year students. Both of these findings suggest strong commitment to advising as an element of enhancing persistence. However, almost three-quarters of the institutions reported that incentives for full-time faculty to serve as academic advisors were nonexistent or small—an unsurprising yet troubling finding. A recurring critique of faculty advising policies and practices cites a lack of incentives for faculty to provide high-quality advising. Many of the institutions responding to our survey appear to have policies that reflect a commitment to advising, but advising may be uneven in quality and ultimately ineffective for many students if faculty members are expected to deliver advising without incentives. Indeed, faculty advising models may simply continue to be implemented to avoid the costs associated with having professional advisors.

Other programmatic interventions for increasing student retention are orientation and an early warning system for students who are not performing well in their classes. In regard to orientation programs, 43 percent of institutions responding to the College Board survey reported that they had a semester-long orientation or a University 101 course for first-year students. Most institutions (80.5 percent) reported that three-quarters or more of their students participated in the entirety of the institution's orientation program. As for early warning systems, 58.1 percent reported that they collect midterm grade information for first-year students.

During this phase of our efforts, we also started to look at the relationships between responses to individual survey items and student persistence rates. We found that campuses with lower retention rates had lower participation rates in orientation programs and were less likely to have mandatory orientation policies.

Our work with IPAS campuses has suggested that less selective commuter institutions are less likely to require participation in new student orientation, which confirms the findings from the College Board study.

In addition to looking at the impact of individual programs, we also attempted to assess the extent to which overall campus efforts to enhance persistence affected the campus retention rates of institutions in our pilot study. After all, the goal of campus retention programs is to increase year-to-year persistence and graduation rates. But the factors that affect student persistence are more complicated than just the extent of campus efforts to improve graduation rates. For example, should we expect that institutions that are more affluent—and that thus have the means to do so—are making the greatest efforts to reduce student attrition? Or should we anticipate that institutions that are less selective and less affluent—and thus probably have lower retention and graduation rates—are making greater efforts to enhance student persistence? And finally, shouldn't we also explore whether there is evidence that increased efforts result in reduced rates of student attrition?

Given these complexities, we also sought to better understand the relationship between graduation rates and the efforts of institutions to enhance persistence, putting institutional efforts in perspective by examining the graduation rates predicted by basic institutional characteristics (features that are unlikely to be easily changed such as funding, residential or commuter status, selectivity, and size). In this work, we have used an approach similar to ones employed by Lana Muraskin and John Lee and by Jennifer Engle and Coleen O'Brien at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education as well as by Kevin Carey at Education Sector. We classified institutions into groups with similar levels of selectivity and institutional wealth and then examined the relationship between their retention efforts and their six-year graduation rates. Though the differences were not large, they suggest that the institutions that are making more focused efforts to enhance student persistence have lower-than-predicted graduation rates.

These findings are intriguing because many federal and state policymakers' critiques of campuses with high rates of student attrition and low rates of gradu-

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ation presuppose that such colleges and universities could ameliorate these problems and graduate students at the same rate as more selective residential institutions if they would only try harder. However, when we consider the fact that institutions that have high rates of student withdrawal and low graduation rates are less selective and less well funded than other institutions and often enroll many commuting students who are likely to work as much as thirty to forty hours per week, the assumption that they just need to try harder simply misses the complicated truth of how much harder these institutions might need to try in order to achieve comparable rates of persistence and graduation. In the early stages of the College Board project, it appears that these institutions confront many structural issues that may constrain their ability to enhance persistence and graduation. This is not to say that these institutions cannot reduce attrition and increase graduation but that dramatic improvements may well depend on changes that are either impractical for many institutions (large infusions of campus funding, significant increases in state and federal financial aid) or out of step with their founding mission (becoming more selective or more residential).

Discovering that institutions with lower rates of persistence are making greater efforts to enhance persistence is good news in that this is what public policymakers and boards of trustees might hope. However, this finding also begs the question of whether those institutions are doing enough and how to determine the success of institutional efforts to reduce student attrition and enhance graduation rates. This question brings us back to the original warrant for the College Board project. First, we have discovered that most institutions are not investing a great deal of effort in trying to coordinate and manage their retention efforts. Second, we restate the need for more benchmarking information. Only with a much larger comparison group of institutions with low, moderate, and high rates of student persistence and graduation will we be able to fully explore how campus efforts interact with structural characteristics such as selectivity, institutional wealth, and other measures, including percentage of residential students. This kind of analysis and benchmarking is critical if we are to develop a rich understanding of what works.

IPAS and CBS: Institutions Need to Undertake More Assessment of Their Own Programs. The patterns that emerge from the study funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education as well as the analyses of the College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention raise concerns about the state of efforts to improve student learning, success, and retention at universities and colleges. Our findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Loir Patton and his colleagues, Carla Morelon, Dawn Whitehead, and Don Hossler and by John Braxton, Jeff McKinney, and Pauline Reynolds. Patton and her colleagues reviewed previously published research on efforts to assess the impact of individual campus retention programs and discovered that there were relatively few published studies of high quality. In addition, there was, at best, limited evidence that retention initiatives such as orientation and transition-to-college programs had a positive impact on student persistence. Similarly, Braxton, McKinney, and Reynolds examined campus-based evaluation studies that were not published but that had been submitted for review to determine the extent to which they provided evidence of the efficacy of campus retention efforts. They noted that surprisingly few studies had been submitted and, furthermore, found that most were of insufficient rigor to determine whether the programs were effective. They concluded that most institutions either (1) do not evaluate their retention interventions at all or (2) conduct studies that are simply descriptive pictures of the intervention, failing to approach evaluation systematically.

The dearth of systematic assessments of institutional practices and policies that support student learning and success is not surprising in light of what we have learned in the College Board pilot study and in our experiences with IPAS partner institutions. Despite what may be the best of intentions, most institutions have more to do before they can justifiably claim that they are making intentional, focused, and well-resourced efforts to improve student persistence. Too many institutions put retention initiatives in place without sufficient staffing and funding, and—not surprisingly—these initiatives seldom work. Senior campus administrators may be giving more

lip service to the importance of student persistence than actual institutional commitment to help retain and graduate their students. In a recent critique of campus-based efforts to enhance student persistence and graduation, Kevin Carey, research manager and policy analyst with Education Sector, an independent education policy institute, is critical of such efforts by most colleges and universities. Describing the practice of campuses whose retention, learning, and success initiatives move beyond rhetoric, he states, "Successful colleges pay attention to graduation rates. They monitor year-to-year change, study the impact of different interventions on student outcomes, break down the numbers among different student populations, and continuously ask themselves how they could improve" (p. 8).

The cumulative evidence from our Lumina-funded studies of efforts to enhance student learning and success strongly supports Carey's conclusions. Although IPAS partnered with fifteen institutions, the level of engagement with IPAS was uneven across the institutions. Campuses with cultures of inquiry and assessment vis-à-vis their retention efforts were the most engaged. Often, these campuses lacked the staff time and/or expertise to design a program or to conduct an evaluation. In some cases, IPAS offered a single shot of help, bolstering a short-term evaluation effort that was ultimately unsustainable because systemic support for such an effort was lacking. In other cases, IPAS served as a catalyst, igniting an initiative that was fueled by the existing culture of assessment on campus. In the IPAS experience, we saw that the practices of the successful campuses that Carey describes grow from an ethos grounded in a critical and systemic approach to appraising the practices of an institution. The results from analyses of the College Board survey of institutional retention practices suggest that few campuses devote substantial resources to adopting such an approach and asking themselves how to improve student persistence. Moreover, our results suggest that even fewer campuses devote resources to changing practice or policy. These results paint a relatively bleak picture of efforts to enhance retention and graduation rates on most campuses.

Collectively, the studies we describe should give pause to many senior campus administrators. They demonstrate a low level of commitment to enhancing student retention and graduation on most campuses. On the other hand, our results suggest that retention efforts can be successful when institutions devote sufficient management and ongoing oversight, when adequate resources go to training staff, and when senior campus administrators demonstrate

ongoing interest and support for efforts to enhance persistence.

WHAT MORE CAN INSTITUTIONS DO TO IMPROVE STUDENT PERSISTENCE?

AS PRESSURES INTENSIFY to increase persistence and graduation rates, we anticipate that more and more senior administrators will seek ways to improve performance on these important measures. To achieve these goals, they would be well advised to take the following steps:

Ensure that someone on campus is charged with coordinating or directing all campus efforts to improve persistence and graduation. Two perspectives seem to exist in regard to whether a campus ought to appoint a retention coordinator. One argues that retention should be every campus educator's job and that promoting and supporting every student's graduation should be woven into the professional ethos and culture. While our perspective does not oppose that argument, it differs significantly. While helping students learn and succeed in college ought to be natural for every educator, campuses benefit from having a specific person who is charged with looking across multiple initiatives to determine what is working, what can be improved, and how efforts ought to be coordinated.

One of our strongest impressions based on both the IPAS and College Board projects is that many senior campus policymakers and others responsible for student retention look across the panoply of good practices recommended in the student retention literature and say to themselves, "We do that," without considering whether they do it well. In addition, during our IPAS project, we saw several campuses announce with fanfare that they were starting new retention initiatives, but sufficient support often failed to materialize. We posit that on many campuses, fewer—but well-supported—retention initiatives might be more effective than many poorly supported ones *and* that a retention coordinator can help move a campus toward more effective efforts.

Ensure that individuals charged with oversight as well as implementation of retention initiatives have sufficient resources. In these times of shrinking budgets, some administrators' minds may immediately go to money at the mention of resources; however, we define *resources* broadly. While funding may be necessary, it is not always sufficient when it comes to developing retention efforts grounded in cultures of evidence. Resources such as time, authority, or personal and professional encouragement can often go a long way toward cultivating systematic approaches to developing and evaluating retention efforts. In a debriefing session with the community college work group that implemented the orientation program, for example, when the group was asked about

the benefits of the collaboration with IPAS, each team member said that time and space for reflection was the most beneficial aspect of the project.

Develop a set of clear goals to strive for in campus efforts to enhance graduation rates. A distinctive feature of Midwestern Religious University's initiative to improve retention of its undeclared students was its connection to clear goals related to student success set within a broad strategic vision. Having these goals had at least two effects. Initially, the goals provided a road map for the student affairs educators in charge of the life calling center to follow in designing and implementing a dynamic and multifaceted program. In other words, they had a clear sense of how their efforts were supposed to relate to other efforts across the institution to improve student retention.

The second effect of having established goals was that it became necessary to evaluate the program to determine whether it had met its objectives. After the pilot years, the student affairs educators who directed the program were asked to report back on the efficacy of their efforts vis-à-vis the established campus goals. Moreover, they were asked to provide information about how the program might be changed and further developed. All of this necessitated a systematic approach to evaluation that fed back into the program.

Insist on annual reports for senior policymakers and the board of trustees that provide evidence of the efficacy of campus policies and practices intended to enhance student persistence. Such reports can achieve several salutary benefits. By requiring an annual report, campus policymakers create conditions that require a campus administrator to be charged with the task of developing a plan. It is almost axiomatic that this individual will pay attention to the performance of programs and, in all likelihood, to coordinating efforts. Plans usually require an evaluation of the effort's effects, which is likely to lead to a campus environment in which assessment of retention programs is expected. In addition, by insisting on an annual report on retention for the trustees, senior campus policymakers are likely to focus their attention at least once a year on enhancing student persistence.

CONCLUSION

IN OUR WORK with the IPAS and College Board projects, we have found that most four-year colleges and universities make relatively little effort to implement programmatic initiatives to enhance persistence or to assess the impact of their initiatives after implementation. Nonetheless, definite steps can be taken that will result in campuses' giving more attention to enhancing student persistence. The growing pressure from federal and state policymakers to improve student persistence and the projected increase in the number of first-generation, low-income students enrolling in our institutions are among the many good reasons for campus administrators to get serious about student persistence.

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