How Colleges Organize Themselves to Increase Student Persistence:
Four-Year Institutions

College Board Study on Student Retention

From Indiana University's Project on Academic Success

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Executive Summary

The search for strategies to increase student success as measured in persistence and graduation rates has become a frequent topic of intense debate at education conferences, institutional meetings and legislative sessions. Most of the relevant research on this crucial issue has focused on the role of student characteristics and experience in persistence and graduation. The role of institutions — through policies and practices affecting persistence and graduation — is also critical, yet until now we have known little about how that role develops and is enacted in institutions' efforts to boost these measures of student success. The College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention is beginning to fill this knowledge void by collecting and analyzing an extensive set of institutional data from which actionable findings are emerging on the nature, extent and effects of institutions' efforts to increase persistence and graduation.

This report presents findings from a survey of four-year postsecondary institutions in five states, and offers insights into the efforts of these colleges and universities to improve the persistence and success of their students. The findings converge on two pressing points. First, institutions are engaged in retention efforts, but the resources they are devoting to those efforts are minimal and inadequate. Second, to know how to make their retention efforts more effective, institutions need information that is empirically grounded and contextually specified in benchmarks for comparisons across peer institutions.

Most of the surveyed institutions regularly analyze their retention rates and have retention committees, showing that they are searching for ways to increase persistence. A majority of the campuses have early warning systems and require first-year students to meet with advisers at least once per term, yet most of the institutions do not reward faculty for serving as advisers. Nearly 60 percent of the campuses have a designated retention coordinator; however, on average less than one-third FTE is formally allocated to that role. Moreover, most retention coordinators are given little to no authority to implement new program initiatives. Finally, even though the research literature has established a positive relationship between participating in orientation programs and persisting, institutions with lower persistence rates were also less likely to require students to participate in orientation programs.

Rather than one-size-fits-all propositional advice and received wisdom, institutions need benchmarks grounded in empirical research that is conducted in the contexts of similar institutions. They can then gain perspective on how their institution matches up with peer institutions in efforts to improve student persistence and graduation rates, to illuminate the effectiveness of their institution's policies, and to create both the impetus and the tools to make more informed, successful efforts to improve student persistence. In addition, state policymakers often search for benchmark data across multiple public institutions to determine which campuses are making good-faith efforts toward state policy goals.

Institutions need information that is empirically grounded and contextually specified in benchmarks for comparisons across peer institutions.

To fill this need, the College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention is developing benchmarks of the retention practices of groups of similar institutions. With its large sample of public and private four-year institutions across the country, this study is making it possible to create benchmarks of retention efforts across a range of institution types. This line of inquiry complements studies of the effects of student characteristics and experiences on persistence and graduation. Together, both threads of research will provide a more complete picture of this crucial issue for policymakers and institutional administrators striving to improve student success.

Overview

Student persistence — and how to increase it — has been one of the most intensively studied topics in higher education research, and it has been attracting greater attention over the last 30 years. As a result, a formidable body of theory and research has accumulated from such leading scholars as William Spady, Vincent Tinto, John Bean, Ernest Pascarella, Patrick Terenzini and John Braxton. By the mid-1980s many campus administrators had realized that it was in their best interest to intensify efforts to retain and graduate the qualified students that had matriculated at their institutions.

Despite the attention given to this topic by researchers and by campus policymakers, however, student graduation rates have remained fairly constant for more than three decades (AASCU, 2005). As a result of these patterns, critics of postsecondary education are now asking if colleges and universities are serious when it comes to improving persistence and graduation rates for all students.

> Institutions need a deeper understanding of the student-institution interaction from which student persistence arises.

Federal and state policymakers are increasingly using student persistence and graduation rates as measures of institutional effectiveness. The *U.S. News & World Report* annual publication, "America's Best Colleges," also uses first- to second-year persistence rates and graduation rates in its algorithm for ranking colleges and universities.

In recent years, a number of good reports on campus efforts to reduce dropout rates have been published, notably "What Works in Student Retention: All Survey Colleges" (Habley & McClanahan, 2004), by ACT in 2004; "Student Retention and Graduation: Facing the Truth, Living with the Consequences" (Tinto, 2004), by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education in 2004; and a study published by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in 2005, "Student Success in State Colleges and Universities: A Matter of Culture and Leadership."

One of the shortcomings of most of these recent reports — as well as many similar ones — is that they fail to document the extent to which institutions match their rhetorical dedication to student success and graduation with an accompanying commitment in campus resources, policies and practices designed to increase student persistence. This is a consequential weakness in many large-scale reports on campus-based efforts to improve graduation rates. Furthermore, none of these reports includes a comprehensive, systematic plan to collect up-to-date benchmarking information that could guide policy development in this critical area. Despite the attention persistence and graduation rates are being given, we know surprisingly little about campus-based efforts to improve these outcomes.

Until now, research on student persistence has neglected to investigate how postsecondary institutions organize themselves to improve student persistence and graduation, as Tinto (2006-2007) and Hossler (2006) have recently noted. For institutions to have informed ways of improving persistence, they need a deeper understanding of the student-institution interaction from which student persistence arises. With this first publication of "How Colleges Organize Themselves to Increase Student Persistence: Four-Year Institutions," the College Board; the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice at the University of Southern California; and the Project on Academic Success at Indiana University launch a biannual report to address this need.

By providing a national survey of findings on policies and practices related to institutions' efforts to increase student persistence and graduation rates, we aim to aid campus policymakers as they strive to enhance student

This kind of benchmarking information can help institutions place their own efforts within the perspective of wider practice.

success. This inaugural report describes the results of our initial survey in three sections. The first section considers the broad picture of national data on persistence and graduation across various types of four-year institutions. The second highlights descriptive results and benchmarks that shed light on the shape and intensity of institutions' efforts to improve graduation rates. This kind of benchmarking information can help institutions determine the kinds of retention programs that other four-year institutions have implemented, and thus place their own efforts within the perspective of wider practice. The final section examines what can be learned from how institutions organize themselves in their retention efforts and looks at the relationship of these efforts to the institutions' persistence and graduation rates.

The National Context

Studies of student persistence and success are inevitably comparative in nature. Public and institutional policymakers answer questions about an institution's performance mainly by comparing its persistence and graduation rates with those of regional- and national-level peer institutions. Therefore, our discussion of institutions' retention efforts begins with a national overview of student persistence and graduation rates.

It is also important, of course, to look beyond the "private versus public" dichotomy and explore the trends in different types of institutions. Recent data gathered from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System provide a richer, more variegated picture of student success by breaking these figures down by Carnegie Classification and other relevant institutional characteristics.

Table 1. Graduation and Persistence Rates at Four-Year Institutions, 1988-2007

	Percentage of Students at Four-Year Colleges Who Earned a Degree Within Five Years of Entry			Percentage of Students at Four-Year Colleges Who Returned for Second Year		
Year	*Public*	*Private*	*All*	*Public*	*Private*	*All*
1988	48.0	58.1	55.2	70.4	76.2	74.5
1990	47.9	57.8	54.9	71.4	76.2	74.8
1992	46.7	57.6	54.4	71.6	76.2	74.8
1994	45.6	57.2	53.7	71.7	75.2	74.1
1996	44.6	57.1	53.3	71.0	74.1	73.1
1998	42.9	56.2	52.1	71.2	74.7	73.6
2000	41.9	55.5	51.2	72.1	75.1	74.2
2002	41.2	55.5	51.0	71.9	74.9	74.0
2004	42.3	57.9	52.0	73.5	75.1	74.5
2006	42.8	57.8	52.3	74.0	74.7	74.5
2007	43.7	57.8	52.3	73.4	73.9	73.7
Adapted from ACT data: http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/retain_trends.pdf						

In the past 20 years graduation rates at both public and private four-year institutions have declined (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). In addition, from 1988 to 2007 the gap in five-year graduation rates between public and private institutions widened by 4 percent, from 10.1 percent in 1988 (48 percent for public versus 58.1 percent for private institutions) to 14.1 percent in 2007 (43.7 percent for public versus 57.8 percent for private institutions) (see Table 1).

However, first- to second-year retention at public institutions has increased; this puts these institutions' retention rates at about the same level as those of private four-year institutions. These shifting patterns reflect the complexity of the central concern of graduation outcomes for institutional and public policymakers.

Tables 2 and 3 reveal different patterns of persistence and graduation at institutions granting doctoral, master's and baccalaureate degrees. Table 2 underscores the well-documented point that graduation rates calculated over a longer period provide a more appropriate measure, given that many students graduate after the four-year mark. Likewise, both Tables 2 and 3 show that baccalaureate colleges (liberal arts) and doctoral/research universities (extensive) have the highest graduation and persistence rates. Table 3 highlights the large difference between the national-level persistence rates for full- and part-time students.

An examination of graduation rates by institutional total enrollment (Table 4) shows that the highest rates occurred where enrollment was between 1,000 and 3,000 — suggesting that institutional size may be an important determinant of student success, a pattern likely attributable in part to a disproportionate number of midsize institutions that are more selective or residential.

Table 2. Average 2004 Baccalaureate Graduation Rate by Carnegie Classification

		Degree Within 4 Years	Degree Within 6 Years
Carnegie Classification	*N*	*MEAN %*	*MEAN %*
Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive	151	45.46	68.58
Doctoral/Research Universities-Intensive	108	28.89	50.39
Master's Colleges and Universities I	493	28.92	48.28
Master's Colleges and Universities II	111	32.04	46.33
Baccalaureate Colleges-Liberal Arts	223	55.15	65.66
Baccalaureate Colleges-General	319	27.65	42.42
ALL INSTITUTIONS	1,405	34.86	51.90

Table 3. Average Retention Rate of Full- and Part-Time Students by Carnegie Classification, 2004-2005

		2004 Full-Time Retention Rate	2005 Full-Time Retention Rate	2004 Part-Time Retention Rate	2004 Part-Time Retention Rate
Carnegie Classification	*N*	*MEAN %*	*MEAN %*	*MEAN %*	*MEAN %*
Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive	151	86.53	86.52	56.71	53.74
Doctoral/Research Universities-Intensive	108	76.24	74.93	51.85	47.35
Master's Colleges and Universities I	493	73.72	73.56	44.70	44.77
Master's Colleges and Universities II	111	69.84	68.89	44.36	35.28
Baccalaureate Colleges-Liberal Arts	223	80.78	80.69	39.82	41.70
Baccalaureate Colleges-General	319	68.40	66.72	40.31	39.34
ALL INSTITUTIONS TOTAL	1,405	74.88	74.25	45.25	43.84

Table 4. Average 2004 Graduation Rate by Total Enrollment of Institution

		Bachelor's Degree Within 4 Years	Bachelor's Degree Within 6 Years
*Total Enrollment**	*N*	*MEAN %*	*MEAN %*
less than 1,000	223	29.63	42.44
1,000-2,999	544	41.04	54.41
3,000-9,999	398	30.77	50.31
10,000-19,999	155	31.25	54.27
20,000-higher	84	34.27	62.40
ALL INSTITUTIONS	1,404	34.86	51.90
*FTE is found by adding full-time enrollment and 1/3 of part-time enrollment.			

Benchmarking Indicators

To determine the effectiveness of institutional efforts to increase persistence, campus policymakers need benchmarks and evaluative data. This section presents illustrations of the kinds of necessary benchmarks that are emerging in this pilot study's new line of inquiry. Through our continuing research we aim to expand the scope of these benchmarks, and as the number of participating institutions grows, our research will be able to support increasingly meaningful comparison groups for institutions. By way of illustration, we present an initial set of benchmarks in six broad categories focusing on the practice and intensity of institutions' efforts to increase persistence: retention program coordination, retention research and assessment, orientation programs, early warning practices, faculty-student interaction and advising practices.

> We aim to expand the scope of these benchmarks through our research and through support of more meaningful comparison groups for institutions.

Coordinating Efforts

While a broad spectrum of departments or units may carry out a higher education institution's efforts to coordinate its retention programs, administrators are charged with tracking and improving persistence at 59.1 percent of the institutions responding to our survey, with percentages slightly higher at private institutions than at public ones However, the overall mean FTE dedicated for this administrative role at these institutions was only .29.

As Figure 1 makes evident, at the majority of these institutions none, or nearly none, of the "retention coordinator's" job was formally assigned to coordinating retention efforts. More than 80 percent of the 52 institutions that reported having a retention coordinator fall into this category — if we combine the 18 institutions that reported devoting 0 FTE to the retention coordinator role with the institutions that reported devoting 1 to 25 percent of an FTE to that role. This is a provocative finding in its own right.

Interestingly, master's-granting institutions were most likely to report having a nearly full-time retention coordinator; however, even in this instance less than 15 percent of these institutions have someone in an approximately full-time retention coordinator role. We also found that private not-for-profit institutions, and institutions classified as residential, reported having more FTE devoted to coordinating retention efforts (a mean of .33 FTE for both groups) than public (.22 FTE) or commuter (.26 FTE) institutions.

Looking at the percentage of institutions reporting that their retention coordinators had the authority to initiate new programs (Figure 2) gives a fuller picture of the extent to which these institutions are positioned to organize campus retention efforts. Only a very small number

Figure 1. Percentage of an FTE Devoted to the "Retention Coordinator" Role by Institution Type
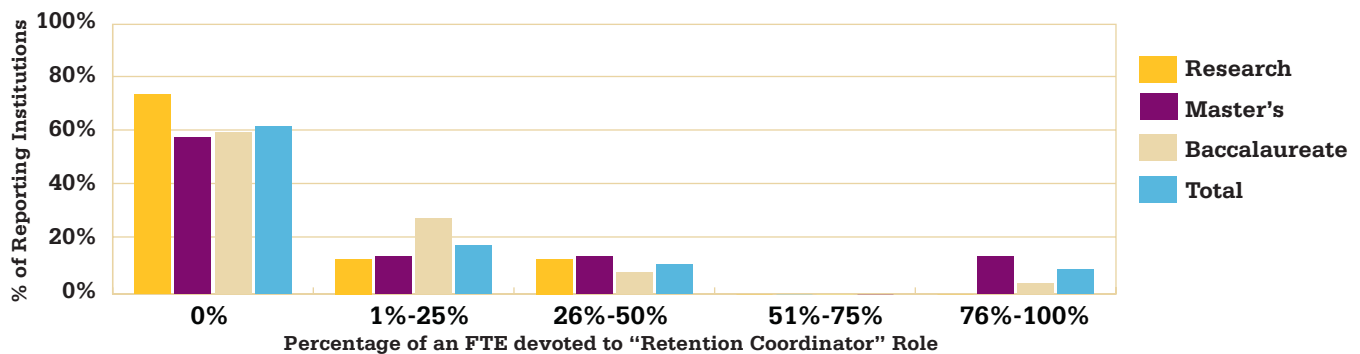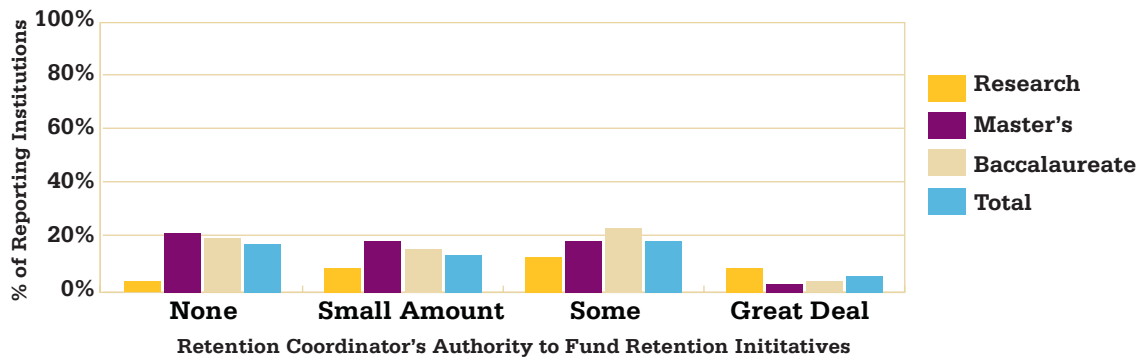
Figure 2. Retention Coordinator's Authority to Fund Retention Initiatives by Institution Type

of institutions reported that their retention coordinator had the authority to initiate new programs, and most indicated that they had little to no authority to launch new programs.

In this study we discovered that more often than not, few resources are being allocated to efforts to increase student persistence. Only 42.9 percent of the institutions with a retention coordinator gave this person the authority to implement new initiatives, and only 25.4 percent reported that the coordinator had the authority to fund new retention initiatives. Together, these findings mean that less than one-third of all responding institutions have a designated campus administrator who can fund initiatives or make policy decisions to enhance student success and increase persistence.

Figure 3 shows results from institutions' self-rating of the coordination of their retention efforts. Not surprisingly, given the findings reviewed so far, only a small proportion of institutions reported high levels of coordination for retention efforts on their campuses. Research universities were most likely to report high levels of coordination, but

even among these institutions, the percentage was still low: approximately 35 percent.

Retention committees are often a vehicle for monitoring and coordinating retention efforts. In contrast to our troubling findings regarding retention coordinators at surveyed institutions, 73.9 percent of responding institutions had a retention committee. This is a positive sign, suggesting that an array of faculty and administrators are coming together at institutions to grapple with how to improve their persistence and graduation rates.

Research and Assessment on Student Retention

Another indicator of an institution's commitment to improving student success is its consistency in tracking persistence and graduation rates, as well as its efforts in assessing programmatic interventions. Almost all of the institutions (98.8 percent) in this survey analyzed retention data annually; of these, 95 percent looked at the data by class year, 88.8 percent by race and ethnicity, and 70.9 percent by student major. These responses, however, did not tell us how

Figure 3. Level of Coordination of Retention Programs Across Campus by Institution Type
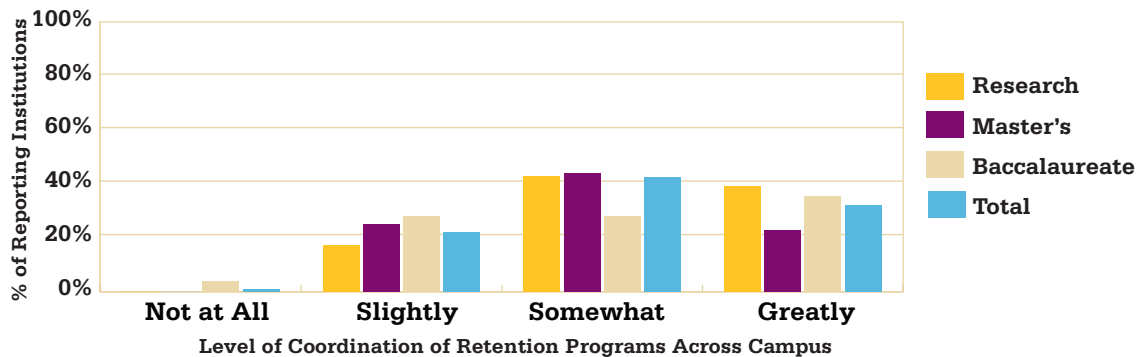
extensively participating campuses evaluated their retention programs. Previous research on this topic suggests that most institutions do not conduct studies of sufficient methodological and statistical rigor to analyze, track, or explain problems or initiatives in retention efforts (Braxton, McKinney, & Reynolds, 2006; Hossler, 2006). This will be an area for further inquiry as our study of institutional practices continues.

Orientation

Retention research across the years has emphasized the importance of orientation programs as one means to maintain or increase student persistence by helping students integrate into the institution (Braxton et al., 2006; Hossler, 2006; Patton, Morelon, Whitehead, & Hossler, 2006). Our survey found that many of the participating institutions were making

> Many of the institutions we surveyed are making serious efforts to provide high-quality orientation programs.

serious efforts to provide high-quality orientation programs. Orientation programs at these campuses were reported to last an average of 4.74 days for entering first-year students, and about 44 percent of the institutions had an orientation program extending through the first semester of classes.

Most institutions (80.50 percent) reported that more than three-quarters of their first-year students participated in the entire length of an orientation program, while 90.8 percent reported that at least half of their first-year students

participated fully in such a program. Although these proportions are large, a strong case can be made that they should be closer to 100 percent — perhaps with all students participating by institutional requirement if not voluntarily.

Early Warning

Writings on student retention suggest that early warning programs designed to identify students at risk of dropping out can also be effective tools

> Early warning programs can be effective tools to improve persistence and graduation rates.

to improve persistence and graduation rates (Beck & Davidson, 2001; Reisberg, 1999). More than 50 percent of the surveyed institutions reported having some kind of early warning program in place for first-year students. Midterm grade reports, often the centerpiece of an early warning system, were being used to identify students with two or more Ds, Fs or Ws, as these students are frequently viewed as being more likely to drop out. In addition, courses in which large percentages of students receive Ds, Fs and/or Ws are frequently identified as needing supplemental instruction or other forms of course-targeted academic support to help students succeed.

In our pilot study, we were surprised to discover that 58.1 percent of the surveyed institutions reported that they collected midterm grade information for first-year students. Results showed that only baccalaureate-granting institutions were found to collect midterm grades in a high proportion (see Figure 4). Almost 70 percent of baccalaureate-granting institutions reported having a midterm grade policy in place, while

Figure 4. Percentage of Institutions That Collected Midterm Grade Information for First-Year Students in 2004-2005 by Institution Type
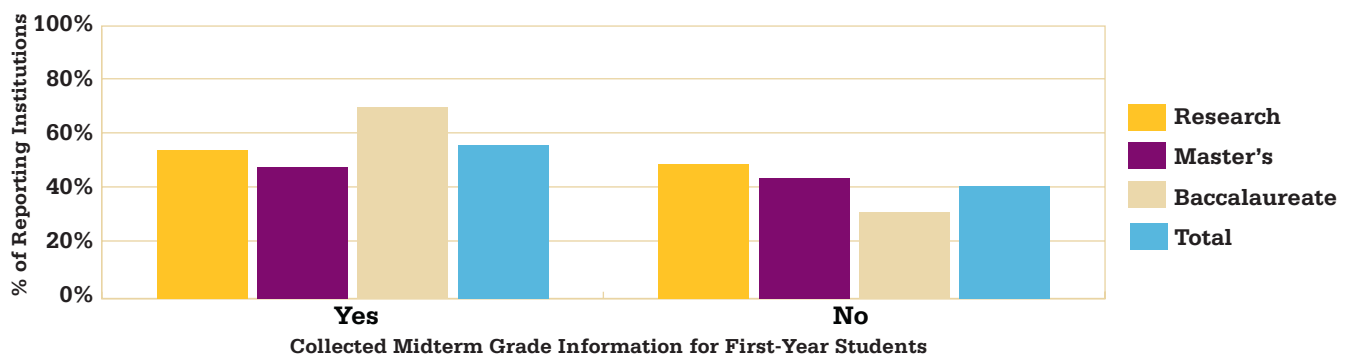
approximately 50 percent of master's-granting institutions and research universities reported collecting midterm grades. A surprisingly small proportion of participating institutions (47.1 percent) reported the practice of flagging courses with high percentages of Ds, Fs or withdrawals.

Faculty-Student Interaction

Interactions with faculty during students' first year of college can have a positive impact on persistence. Many scholars who have written on the topic of student success and graduation have advocated for small classes for first-year students, and for full-time faculty teaching introductory first-year courses (Kokkelenberg, Dillon, & Christy, 2008; Weaver & Qi, 2005). Among the responding institutions, 61 percent reported an average class size between one and 30 in courses with mostly first-year students. This is a positive result and likely indicates that more faculty-student interaction is occurring at these institutions, although we note that this pattern may be attributable in part to the large number of small institutions participating in the study. An equally relevant but more troubling finding is that about 70 percent of institutions reported that incentives for full-time faculty to teach first-year classes were small or nonexistent.

Advising

Tinto (1999) argues that an academic adviser who is fully integrated into the first-year experience can be an excellent source of professional knowledge about student success. In our research, 82.6 percent of the institutions reported requiring first-year students to meet with an academic adviser every semester, and 57 percent estimated that their full-time faculty members advised more than three-quarters of their first-year students. These results alone suggest a strong commitment to advising as a retention strategy at these institutions. However, 70 percent of the institutions reported small or nonexistent incentives for full-time faculty to serve as academic advisers — an unsurprising yet troubling finding consistent with other research on this topic (Gordon & Habley, 2000; McArthur, 2005). Increasing student-faculty interaction by using faculty members as academic advisers has been shown to affect student persistence (see Figure 5). Not surprisingly, in this pilot study baccalaureate-degree-granting institutions reported the highest percentages of first-year students with faculty advisers. Master's-degree-granting institutions and research universities reported relatively low levels of faculty utilization for first-year student advising.

Review of Benchmarking Indicators

The survey results highlighted in this report reveal differences across types of institutions. Baccalaureate-granting institutions indicated relatively high levels of midterm grade collection as well as the greatest utilization of faculty for advising. These findings suggest that this group of institutions may be doing more to address student persistence concerns than other types of institutions. However, the findings also show low levels of effort to coordinate campus retention efforts. It may be that small institutional size and/or relatively modest financial

> Comparative data such as these can help guide the expectations of institutions and focus campus efforts to increase student persistence.

Figure 5. Proportion of First-Year Students Advised by Full-Time Faculty in 2004-2005 by Institution Type
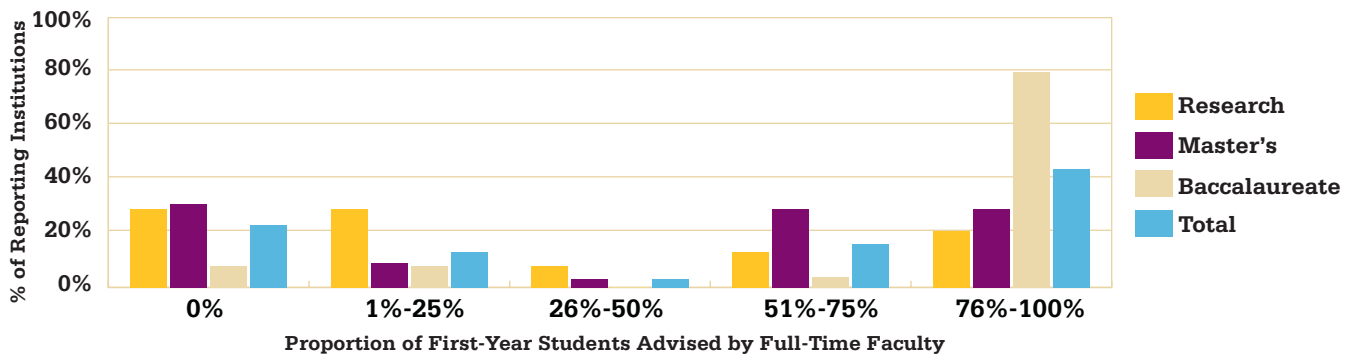
resources prevent baccalaureate institutions from being able to invest in organizational efforts to coordinate retention practices. Overall, there is little evidence that institutions of any type are consistently making a strong effort to manage and organize student retention efforts. Comparative data such as those shown here can be used to guide efforts and expectations at institutions so that efforts to increase student persistence become more focused, grounded and ultimately effective.

Summing Up

Enhancing student success is too important in today's policy environment to simply assume that all retention programs will achieve their goals. In a new set of studies of the efficacy of student success programs (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, in press), the authors observed that very little program evaluation takes place on most campuses. This report, from the College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention, extends those observations to capture further detail about how four-year colleges and universities take action with regard to student retention — specifically, how they design, support, and coordinate these efforts. Collectively, these results present an actionable set of findings for campus and public policymakers.

In brief, the findings outlined in this report reveal important insights into the extent of efforts by colleges and universities to enhance student success and increase persistence. The findings converge on two pressing take-away points.

First, a view of the state of institutional practice reveals a pervasive but inadequate investment of resources in this most crucial institutional task.

Second, there is a pressing need for additional information — information that is both empirically grounded and contextually specific. For institutions to engage seriously with their role in enhancing student success, benchmarks are required. Campus policymakers need to know how their tasks and their efforts compare with those of their peers.

The Current State of Institutional Practice Surrounding Student Retention

Most of the institutions in our study are engaged with retention efforts, but the resources they devote to enhancing student success and increasing persistence are few and, more importantly, inadequate to the task. The majority of the campuses appear to be creating either modest or minimal organizational structures to manage campus retention efforts. Most of them regularly analyze their students' persistence rates and convene retention committees. A majority

> The institutions in our study with lower persistence rates were less likely to require students to participate in orientation programs.

of campuses have early warning systems in place and require first-year students to meet with advisers at least once per term. In addition, nearly 60 percent of them have a designated retention coordinator. However, the amount of staff time allocated to the retention coordinator tasks is surprisingly small — less than one-third of an FTE — and most of these retention coordinators also lack policy-making or budgetary authority to implement new programmatic initiatives. In addition, the results reveal that most institutions do not reward faculty for serving as advisers and that the feedback loop from early warning systems to the faculty often remains weak. Finally, even though the research literature has clearly established a positive relationship between participating in orientation programs and persistence, the institutions in our study with lower persistence rates were less likely to require students to participate in orientation programs.

The Potential of Benchmarking

Higher education institutions need benchmarks that would enable them to move from relying on propositional advice and received wisdom applied at the most general, one-size-fits-all level to specific, research-grounded observations suited to their specific contexts. In all areas of college and university administration, senior campus officials seek comparative benchmarks to evaluate their funding and programmatic efforts alongside those of similar institutions. In addition, state policymakers often search for benchmarking data across multiple public institutions to determine which campuses are making good-faith efforts to achieve state policy goals. Until we know more about institutional efforts to increase persistence and their effectiveness, benchmarking studies like this one provide the best guidance as to how

institutions can move forward in their efforts to enhance student success. To fill this need, these survey reports will benchmark retention practices of groups of similar institutions. To date it has not been possible to provide such benchmarks, but with a large sample that represents the range of public and private institutions across the country, this survey will provide useful benchmarking information for campus policymakers.

A parallel study of efforts at community colleges would also fill an important need. Although such institutions are not the focus of this report, our exploratory multivariate results (Hossler, Ziskin, Kim, & Gross, 2007) raise some intriguing possibilities that merit further inquiry. From that study, it appears that institutional wealth, admission selectivity, commuter campus status, and other visible student and institutional characteristics exert a powerful influence on the experiences of many students. This raises a provocative question: Is there a limit on the extent to which institutions, through policy and practice, can influence student persistence? Because of the limited sample size in that study thus far, we cannot yet answer this question; however, our findings are beginning to address a line of inquiry of interest to institutional and public policymakers.

Is there a limit on the extent to which institutions can influence student persistence through policy and practice?

In summary, our pilot study suggests that current institutional efforts to enhance student success are not up to the task of linking broadened access, academic success in college and persistence to graduation. Institutions and policymakers alike talk a great deal about the importance of graduation rates, but the reality is that the efforts at most institutions are not currently in proportion to the number, scope and depth of the challenges.

The need for more research is plain. We need additional evidence documenting how campuses are organizing themselves to enhance student success. We need useful benchmarking indicators that can provide institutional policymakers with perspective on how they match up with peer institutions in their efforts to improve student persistence and graduation rates. In addition, reports applying empirically grounded insights aligned to specific contexts and situations are needed to illuminate the effectiveness of institutional policies and to create both the impetus and the tools for institutions to become more serious, informed and successful in their efforts to improve student persistence. This line of inquiry will complement studies that focus on how student characteristics affect student persistence and graduation, and together both lines of inquiry will render a much more complete picture of the issue for policymakers and institutional administrators seeking to improve student success.

This inquiry will render a much more complete picture of how institutions organize to enhance student success.

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On Our Methods

The data for this report were taken from the College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention institutional survey (CBI) and from public data available through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The CBI survey was administered to 275 four-year public and private institutions in five states (California, Georgia, Indiana, New York and Texas) in the summer of 2006. In total, 90 institutions responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 32.7 percent. Questions focused on institutional policies and practices related to increasing student persistence. Additional data on each institution's student body and other important institutional characteristics were obtained from IPEDS, and subsequently were merged with survey responses from the institutions to create a complete data set for this exploratory research.

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