WHAT WORKS IN STUDENT RETENTION

Dr. Wes Habley
Principal Associate
Educational Services
ACT, Inc.
Survey Details

- **Overall responses**
  - Mailing: 3360 institutions
  - Usable returns: 1104 (32.9%)

- **Four-year public college responses:**
  - Mailing: 598 institutions
  - 258 usable returns (43.1%)
Survey Details

Survey sections

I. Background
II. Retention and degree completion rates
III. Factors affecting attrition
IV. Retention practices
V. Highest impact programs
What Works.....

- The data reported in this survey are based on the **perspectives of the individuals** who responded to the survey. In some cases responses were informed by data collected at the respondent’s institution.
- This session is the tip of the iceberg. Complete data reports should be available for all four institutional types after March 1, 2010 at: http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/retain.html
Factors affecting attrition

- 42 factors listed
- To what degree does each factor affect attrition at your school
  - 5 = Major effect on attrition
  - 4
  - 3 = Moderate effect on attrition
  - 2
  - 1 = Little or no effect on attrition
Highest Rated Contributions to Attrition

- level of student preparation for college-level work (3.9)
- adequacy of personal financial resources (3.9)
- student study skills (3.8)
- amount of financial aid available to students (3.7)
Highest Rated Contributions to Attrition

- **level of student motivation to succeed** *(3.6)*
- **level of student commitment to earning a degree** *(3.6)*
- **level of job demands on students** *(3.5)*
- **student low socio-economic status** *(3.5)*
Lowest contribution to attrition

- **level of intellectual stimulation in the classroom** (2.7)
- **quality of interaction between staff and students** (2.7)
- **relevancy of curricula** (2.6)
- **distance from students' permanent homes** (2.6)
- **extracurricular programs** (2.5)
- **residence hall facilities** (2.5)
RetentionPolicy

- 94 identified retention practices
- 2 wild cards

Two sub-sections:
- Is this intervention offered? (yes or no)
- If it is offered, rate the contribution to retention
  - Five-point Rating Scale
    - 5 = Major Contribution to Retention
    - 4
    - 3 = Moderate Contribution to Retention
    - 2
    - 1 = Little or no contribution to Retention
Retention Interventions

- **Intervention clusters**
  - First-year transition programs (8 items)
  - Academic advising (15)
  - Assessment (9)
  - Career Planning and Placement (6)
  - Learning Assistance/Academic Support (19)
  - Mentoring (4)
  - Faculty Development (7)
  - Financial Aid (3)
  - Co-curricular Services/Programs for specific sub-populations (10)
  - Other activities/programs (10)
Highest Rated Interventions

- academic advising center (4.0)
- increased number of academic advisors (4.0)
- advising interventions with selected student populations (4.0)
- comprehensive learning assistance center/lab (3.9)
Highest Rated Interventions (cont.)

- supplemental instruction (3.9)
- first-generation students (3.9)
- required on-campus housing for freshmen (3.9)
- reading center/lab (3.9)
- tutoring (3.8)
Highest Rated Interventions (cont.)

- summer bridge program (3.8)
- extended freshman orientation (credit) (3.8)
- honors student program (3.8)
- integration of advising with first-year transition programs (3.8)
Lowest Rated Interventions

- library orientation, workshop, and/or course (2.9)
- degree guarantee program (2.9)
- learning styles assessment (2.9)
- vocational aptitude assessment (2.9)
- recognition/rewards for non-faculty academic advisors (2.9)
- values assessment (2.8)
- recognition/rewards for faculty academic advisors (2.8)
- personality assessment (2.6)
Top three interventions

- freshman seminar/university 101 (credit) (24%)
- supplemental instruction (16%)
- tutoring (15%)
- advising interventions with selected student populations (14%)
- living/learning communities (residential) (14%)
- mandated placement of students in courses based on test scores (13%)
Top three interventions

- **academic advising center** (12%)
- **summer orientation** (11%)
- **early warning system** (10%)

- 43 interventions between 1% and 9% of the institutions
- 42 interventions not mentioned at all
Highest Rated Clusters

Learning Assistance/Academic Support
Academic Advising
First-year Transition Programs
Comparing Interventions

- Top quartile first to second year retention rate (high performers) v. bottom quartile first to second year retention rate (low performers)
  - High = 66 institutions
  - Low = 67 institutions

- Included only items with a mean $\geq 3.6$ for all four-year public colleges

- High performer incidence rate $\geq 10\%$ above low performer incidence rate
Intervention Differences

- increased number of academic advisors (43% - 30%)
- advising interventions with selected student populations (96% - 82%)
- supplemental instruction (75% - 64%)
- summer bridge program (75% - 49%)
- honor students (91% - 73%)
Intervention Differences

- integration of advising with first-year transition programs (72% - 48%)
- training for non-faculty academic advisors (84% - 67%)
- faculty mentoring (74% - 45%)
- living/learning communities (residential) (84% - 42%)
- international students (87% - 60%)
- staff mentoring (57% - 31%)