Strategies to
Encourage Student Completion

A Resource for the College Success Learning Community
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A significant number of Philadelphians do not have a degree from a postsecondary institution. Only 27.4% of the city’s population have received a 4-yr degree and even less have obtained an associate’s degree (5.7%). Compare this to the national averages of 30.6% and 8.2% and it becomes clear Philadelphia is behind.

Yet, the disparity is more pronounced in high risk populations. The National Center for Academic Statistics found only 14% of low socioeconomic status high school graduates receive a bachelor’s or higher degree within eight years compared to 29% of middle-income students. With over half of jobs now requiring a postsecondary degree or credential, college completion has never been more important (Center on Education and the Workforce 2013).

However, research has shown there are strategies that can be built into the higher education experience to combat inequitable college retention. The following collection of essays looks at nine subsections of the college apparatus and offers recommendations for how equity in college retention and success can be achieved in each.

Why College Degrees Matter to Career Success

“The data are clear: a college degree is key to economic opportunity, conferring substantially higher earnings on those with credentials than those without.”

Source: https://cow.georgetown.edu/cow-reports/the-college-payoff
Teaching and Learning

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline key pedagogical strategies that can increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of educators who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

How we Teach has an Impact

Often the task of retaining high risk students in colleges is delegated to student affairs teams, yet research shows making changes in the classroom can significantly increase the likelihood a high risk student completes a degree. Forward thinking institutions and faculty have begun implementing pedagogical strategies for increasing equity in college completion including:

- Restructuring remedial course offerings
- Offering transparent reasoning for course assignments
- Reframing language used by faculty in regards to student intelligence

We propose a professional learning community of Directors of Teaching and Learning who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first-generation students on our campuses.
A Tale of Three Grants: Redesigning First-Year Experiences to Bolster Student Success

“In the new “co-requisite” model, students take developmental courses alongside their college-level course. The Strengthening Institutions Project grant also allowed ChSCC to provide tutoring support. In this new co-requisite and tutoring model, 48 percent of students were successful in the college-level course.”


A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students’ Success

“The results of our project suggest that faculty can contribute to increasing all students’ success, especially that of underserved students, in their first year of college. Specifically, students who received more transparency reported gains in three areas as important predictors of students’ success: academic confidence, sense of belonging, and mastery of the skills that employers value most when hiring.

Full Article Available at: https://www.aacu.org/peerreview/2016/winter-spring/Winkelmes

Faculty Development for Student Success at Bronx Community College

“Faculty at Bronx Community College (BCC), have created a year-long course in which new faculty develop academic career plans and study new pedagogy and assessment techniques for working with BCC’s particular student population.

“We don’t lecture at them, but rather put into practice the pedagogy we know works with our students—peer-to-peer work, flipped classrooms, all these high impact practices for the classroom.

Full Article Available at: https://www.aacu.org/campus-model/faculty-development-student-success-bronx-community-college

Recommended Readings
Admissions

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline key admissions strategies that can increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create a learning community of admissions professionals who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- *Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.*

How we enroll Students has an Impact

Admissions strategies can offer significant impact to student outcomes. By instituting strategies aimed at helping high risk students enroll and persist, admissions professionals can increase completion rates. Future facing institutions have begun combating inequitable retention by implementing comprehensive admissions policies, including:

- **Dropping standardized test requirements that often prevent minority students from acceptance and aid**

- **Providing clear and comprehensive financial aid counseling prior to enrollment**

- **Offer socioeconomic class-based incentives for enrollment**

We propose a learning community of Admissions Professionals who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first generation students on our campuses.
**Making the Case for Test Optional**

Data from 28 test-optional colleges and universities and 955,774 applicants over multi-year periods found: Increases in the total number of applications with gains in the numbers of black and Latino students applying and being admitted. Underrepresented minority and female students were more likely than others to decide not to submit their test scores. “Non-submitters” were slightly less likely to be admitted, but their yield was higher, also first-year grades were slightly lower for non-submitters, but they ended up graduating at equivalent rates than did those who submitted test scores. This, the report says, is “the ultimate proof of success.”


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**Aid Letters without Information Students Need**

Colleges routinely use award letters that fail to provide students and families with the information they need. The report notes that many low-income students don’t receive enough aid to enroll, so understanding loan options is a crucial issue and only about 40 percent of colleges calculated what students would need to pay. This makes it exceedingly difficult for students and families to make a financially informed college decision, especially first generation or low income families who are unfamiliar with the financial aid jargon.

Full Article Available at: https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/06/11/report-outlines-flaws-aid-award-letters

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**Race-Based Admissions: The Right Goal but the Wrong Policy**

Several states have banned racial preferences in admissions to public universities. Yet many universities were able to produce comparable or greater levels of African American and Latino representation without resorting to racial preferences. These universities have instituted class-based admissions preferences, increased financial-aid budgets, and formed new partnerships with disadvantaged high schools. A number of universities have placed an increased emphasis on high-school class rank over test scores and beefed up transfers from community colleges to four-year institutions.

Full Article Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/06/race-based-admissions/394784/

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**Recommended Readings**
We propose a professional learning community of Academic Advisors who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first generation students on our campuses.

**Academic Advising**

**Goals for the Working Group**

- Outline key advising strategies that can increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of advisors who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

**How we prepare Class Offerings has an Impact**

Advising strategies can offer significant impact to student outcomes. Although there is debate over intrusive versus traditional advising structures, Department of Education research has shown that credit accumulation in the first year is a key factor in successful degree completion and correct course planning can positively impact completion rates. Future facing institutions have begun combating inequitable retention by implementing comprehensive advising strategies, including:

- Mandatory, intrusive advising for at risk students

- Individual advisor – student relationships

- Early and intentional collaboration with career planning offices
The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School through College

We have identified which factors consistently contributed to bachelor's degree completion and were most subject to change by external parties. **First-year credit generation:** making sure students end their first year with 20 or more credits. Removing excessive no-penalty withdrawals and no-credit repeats. Use of summer terms to increase credit accumulation. **No delay of entry.** The later they show up, the more their postsecondary fate is in jeopardy. **The high school curriculum:** if students cannot read close to grade level all will be beyond them.

Full Report Available at: https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/toolboxrevisit/index.html

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Report of the Study Group on Academic Advisement:

Various strategies are underway at CUNY campuses to facilitate the development of individual educational plans, including mandatory advisement of students with fewer than 12 credits. In addition to facilitating educational plans, other key components of high quality advising programs include pre-enrollment activities, orientation offerings with faculty, mandatory and intrusive advisement in the first year, early alert systems, differentiated services for transfer, ongoing training for advisors, and effective use of technology.


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Inside Accelerated Study in Associate Programs: A Resource Guide on Program Structure, Components, Management

ASAP provides: A dedicated adviser who guides students from acceptance through graduation; a career and employment specialist who provides individual employment expertise and connections to industry-related events, mandated tutoring for students identified as struggling or with developmental needs, and facilitated access to other campus services. **Advisors work with a caseload of up to 150 students, yet the close relationship between ASAP advisors and their students is the heart and soul of ASAP.**

Career Planning

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline key career planning strategies that can increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of planners who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

How we Prepare Students for Careers has an Impact

Career planning professionals observe far too many students waiting until the last few years of their college life to begin working with the career offices, yet research shows beginning career conversations in the first year can increase the likelihood a high risk student completes a degree. Future facing institutions have begun combating inequitable retention by implementing strategies for early starting career planning, including:

- Introducing career clarity instruction during freshman orientation
- Infusing career counseling services with academic advising structures
- Proactively reaching out to students with high risk indicators

We propose a professional learning community of Career Planners who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income, first-generation students on our campuses.
**Program Engages Students in Developing Career Clarity Beginning at Freshman Orientation**

KEY Careers program events introduce students to career development concepts in a fun environment and establishes relationships between students and career center staff. The four-year graduation rate for students who participated in the KEY Careers program as freshmen in 2011 was 15.4 percent higher than non-participants.


**Infusing Career Counseling with Academic Advising**

Rowan is undertaking a plan to infuse career counseling with academic advising. They use a proactive approach to career advising that engages students where they are instead of waiting for them to walk into the office. “Our retention rate jumped up and our graduation rate is the highest on record in the last 25 years”.


**First-Generation Students: Understanding, Meeting Needs**

McDonough points out that first-generation students often need more in-depth career counseling, greater access to networking connections, and monetary support for internships and other career-related experiences. “We also ensure that first-generation students know about our services through targeted emails, walk-in hours at the Office of Intercultural Education, and programs that provide monetary assistance to students in need,” McDonough says. “We track metrics on number of student visits and interactions by first-generation students so we can then target students who haven’t used our services.”

Full Article Available at: [http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/special-populations/first-generation-students-understanding-meeting-needs/](http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/special-populations/first-generation-students-understanding-meeting-needs/)
Financial Aid

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline key financial packaging strategies that can increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of financial aid directors who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

Financial Aid Structures have an Impact

It comes as no surprise that finances can be a barrier preventing at risk students from completing a college degree. Yet, how can colleges and universities assist students financially when there are limited funds? Some innovative institutions have begun answering this question by implementing strategic financial aid programs aimed at combating inequitable retention trends. Programs include:

- Targeting miniature grants at key student groups

- Increasing work study to promote social integration while providing financial assistance

- Tie continual financial assistance to academic progress

We propose a professional learning community of Financial Aid Directors who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first-generation students on our campuses.
Three Ways that Financial Aid can Improve Student Retention

The Educational Policy Institute studied the cost of a single year of student attrition and found that the average school loses nearly $10 million a year. Schools can combat this attrition in the following three ways. **Target financial aid to students with the largest unmet needs;** student retention is most positively impacted when financial aid is targeted to students at the bottom half of the income distribution scale. **Tie financial aid to academic progress and student supports;** retention is higher when financial aid is contingent on academic progress, such as GPA and class credits. **Simplify the financial aid application process.**


How Does Last-Dollar Financial Aid Affect First-Year Student Outcomes?

“Bridging the Gap, a program that reduces or eliminates tuition and campus fee costs for income-eligible students, substantially boosted the likelihood of enrollment at Rutgers University–Camden for lower-income New Jersey residents admitted to the school. **Students reported diminished financial stress, reduced reliance on student loan debt, and the ability to reduce work hours during the school year as key benefits of the program.** The bureaucratic nature of the financial aid system, including challenges with program implementation, was frustrating and discouraging for participants. These challenges may have muted the effect on persistence and credit completion for eligible lower-income students.”


Student Aid and Its Role in Encouraging Persistence

Several scholars studying financial aid have suggested that one of the positive effects of college work-study might be that it **helps students socially integrate into higher education communities and further help(s) increase student persistence.** Overall, the evidence suggests that **college work-study exerts a positive influence on student persistence,** but the relative strength of the effects of work-study remains unclear. Nevertheless, because of its **potential positive impact on student integration,** this form of student financial aid deserves more consideration.

Full Article Available at: [http://pas.indiana.edu/pdf/Student%20Aid%20and%20Its%20Role.pdf](http://pas.indiana.edu/pdf/Student%20Aid%20and%20Its%20Role.pdf)
Food Pantry Services

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline how to connect students to basic services to increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of food and housing providers who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

Food and Shelter can have an Impact

Many low-income students experience food and housing insecurity during college. With their time and energy dedicated to covering the cost of tuition, basic necessities can be placed on the back burner. However some future facing institutions have begun implementing strategies to meet the basic needs to these students to ensure they can enroll. Programs include:

- Single stops where students can register for public benefits

- Intentional collaboration with career planning offices to provide better job placements for students while in school

- Collaborations with community organizations to offer services to students

We propose a professional learning community of Service Providers who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first-generation students on our campuses.
**Still Hungry and Homeless in College**

36% of university students were food insecure in the 30 days preceding this survey. 36% of university students were housing insecure in the last year. 9% of university students were homeless in the last year. The data show that basic needs insecurities disproportionately affect marginalized students and are associated with long work hours and higher risk of unemployment. However, the level of academic effort – in and outside the classroom—is the same regardless of whether or not students are dealing with food and housing insecurity. It is therefore critically important to match their commitments with supports to ensure degree completion.


**Single Stop Impact and Implementation Report**

Community College of Philadelphia partnered with Single Stop USA, a nonprofit organization, to establish a center to connect students to state and federal financial resources and local community services. The aim is to help students overcome economic barriers, continue with their education and move towards economic mobility. In a 2016 report done by Metis Associates, students who utilized Single Stop were shown to have higher GPAs, higher credit pass rates, and were more likely to persist semester-to-semester.


**No Excuses: A Systemic Approach to Student Poverty**

The Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC) provides students with coaching, counseling, social service intervention, access to a food pantry and a clothing closet (both stocked entirely by donation), and student peer advocacy. Staffed with only two full-time social workers and one part-time assistant, the ARC relies on an extensive network of community partnerships and relationships to maximize resources for the 10 percent of AC’s student body that the center serves. Since the initiative’s launch, fall-to-fall retention rates have increased 13 percent, we have also seen a 7 percent increase in three-year graduation rates, a 2 percent increase in transfer rates, and a 6 percent increase in three-year completion rates.

Full Article Available at: https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2017/fall/lowery-hart
We propose a learning community of Diversity and Inclusion professionals who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first generation students on our campuses.
**Equity and Inclusion: Pipeline, Recruitment, and Retention**

The University of California Davis is implementing a strategic pipeline to promote diversity and inclusion on their campus. Key components are: Engage all faculty equitably in mentoring diverse students, incentivize interventions that encompass access, progress and retention challenges specific to underrepresented students in each discipline and streamline and improve the communication of diversity and inclusion policies and services.

Full Article Available at: https://diversity.ucdavis.edu/pipeline-recruitment-and-retention

**Student Success and Retention through Offices of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs**

This brief examines how institutions affect multicultural student retention and success. Key observations from our research:

1. Academic and retention-based programming should foster full campus student identities and avoid creating student reliance on multicultural affairs office programming and resources.
2. Mentorship programs remain the most effective retention and academic success initiative for multicultural affairs offices.
3. Assessment data from surveys and institutional collections reshapes office programming and support services.


**Civic-Minded Practices for LGBTQ Student Success**

Over recent decades, many faculty and student affairs practitioners have come to understand the benefits of being inclusive and culturally responsive in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. Yet many educators and practitioners still struggle to connect these practices with LGBTQ student identities. For LGBTQ students in particular, success hinges at least in part on the meaningful engagement of faculty, staff, and administrators with issues relevant to these students’ lives. Also important are campus-wide opportunities for civil discourse and civic engagement around issues affecting LGBTQ students.

Full Article Available at: https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2014/fall/dolinsky-mccambly
Peer Mentoring

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline key peer mentoring strategies that can increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of student affairs staff who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

Peer Mentors can have an Impact

Research has shown that engaging students in peer mentoring relationships can help to increase overall retention (Glaser et al., 2006). Students on both sides of the relationship are more likely to sustain and successfully complete their education. Forward thinking institutions have begun implementing peer mentoring strategies aimed at increasing equity in college completion, including:

- Assigning struggling students to peer coaches

- Utilizing students to explain complex financial aid systems

- Pairing incoming students with upperclassmen to provide instant social supports

We propose a learning community of Student Affairs Professionals who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first-generation students on our campuses.
How This University Answers 2,000 First-Gen Student Questions Per Day

Eastern Kentucky University hires and trains 35 students as GURUs each year. GURUs work out of three on-campus locations and collectively offer tutoring in over 30 subject areas. Most recently, staff found that GURUs answer 2,000 student questions per day—including approximately 100 via social media—and complete 3,000 homework help sessions per semester. They have also seen increases in overall retention rates. Students who met with a GURU retained at a rate of 89%, compared with a 68% retention rate for students who did not meet with a GURU.

Full Article Available at: https://www.eab.com/daily-briefing/resources/practices2018/0514

The TMCC Financial Literacy and Money Education by Students

FLAMES is a student-led financial mentoring program designed to help educate students in financial literacy. FLAMES peer mentors are trained to help students with budgeting, FAFSA applications, student loans, basic money management, and banking skills along with a variety of other topics. FLAMES services are available to all TMCC students as well as TMCC employees free of charge.

Full Article Available at: http://www.tmcc.edu/flames/

Peer Coaching of At-Risk Students in a Remedial Mathematics Course

Remedial mathematics has evidenced strikingly low retention and passing rates. This study endeavored to address affective variables by: incorporating the teaching of study skills into an elementary algebra course; and identifying at-risk students and assigning these students “coaches,” who functioned both as tutors and counselors, providing regular personalized assistance. The results showed that the attrition rate was significantly lower in the treatment groups, and the overall passing rate for coached students was significantly higher.

Full Article Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10668926.2014.922133
Institutional Research

Goals for the Working Group

- Outline key strategies for using institutional research to increase retention and degree completion for at-risk students.

- Create professional learning community of researchers who convene regularly to compare notes, share best practices and critically review outcomes data.

- Move the needle on post-secondary degree completion for low-income/first generation students.

- Help you implement your own road map for moving this work forward on your campus.

What we Track has an Impact

Big data might be the tool institutions need to combat the falling retention and completion rates seen across the country. Future facing institutions have begun utilizing data to avoid inequitable retention and implement strategies, including:

- Tracking risk factors in all students

- Identifying areas of growth needed in students to encourage completion

- Allocating limited funds strategically to prevent close to graduation drop outs

We propose a professional learning community of Institutional Researchers who will explore these and other strategies as we collectively work to improve degree completion for low-income/first-generation students on our campuses.
Georgia State U. Made Its Graduation Rate Jump. How?

An army of advisers there tracks more than 800 risk factors daily, and innovations include in-class tutors, restructured gateway courses, and freshman learning communities. The public research university raised its six-year graduation rate from 32 percent in 2003 to more than 54 percent in 2017. That’s all the more remarkable considering that many of its students come from groups with higher dropout rates nationally. Georgia State’s population is 60 percent nonwhite and one-third first generation; 58 percent of students are on Pell Grants. And they all now graduate at the same rate as everyone else.

Full Article Available at: https://www.chronicle.com/article/Georgia-State-U-Made-Its/243514?cid=wsinglestory_6_1a

A Tale of Three Grants: Redesigning First-Year Experiences to Bolster Student Success

Administrators interviewed community stakeholders—local businesses, students, faculty, and academic advisory boards—to explore reasons why students weren’t completing. “We kept getting data that was really linked to soft skills or work ethic, basic grit,” said Amanda Hyberger, professor of music and director of the QEP. “So we fashioned a list of attributes we felt we wanted to target: teamwork, integrity, professionalism, and productivity and integrated the attributes into general education courses and developed a new student eportfolio system.

Full Article Available at: https://www.aacu.org/campus-model/tale-three-grants-redesigning-first-year-experiences-bolster-student-success

How a Little Data Can Solve One of Higher Education’s Biggest Problems

Georgia State has joined a small but growing number of universities using Big Data to guide decisions, much like Amazon and Netflix use algorithms to recommend books and movies to customers. By mining the data, the university is able to spend its limited funds on students who have the potential to do the most with the extra dollars. Georgia State calls them "structured interventions": Find a problem, comb the numbers to figure out a solution, test the idea on a small group of students, and either tweak it or expand it if it works.

Full Article Available at: https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-a-Little-Data-Can-Solve/139347