

# Best Practices in Student Retention

There is an abundance of research on best practices in student retention. Understanding these practices appropriate for college settings is important to designing retention strategies that will meet the needs of our students. The following strategies are relevant to non-residential colleges:

## 1. Commit to and invest in student retention.

- ❖ Develop a **retention plan** that sets goals, establishes strategies to attain the goals, and includes action plans to ensure achievement.
- ❖ Ensure all members of the college community understand that they have a role and responsibility in student retention. **Everyone (faculty, staff and administrators) has a responsibility in improving retention rates; they must work together to promote success.**
- ❖ Only hire employees who embrace the institution's vision and values.

## 2. Gather and analyze data on student retention. Use the data to plan for improvements.

- ❖ **Conduct effective student satisfaction surveys on a systematic basis.** [A poorly designed survey will not provide usefully information].
- ❖ Conduct **exit interviews** to ascertain student reasons for leaving and possibly to resolve issues that are barriers to returning.

## 3. Develop a student-centered environment.

- ❖ Establish a warm and welcoming environment.
- ❖ Provide excellent customer service.
- ❖ Review all policies, procedures, syllabi, and processes to ensure that they are student-centered, learning-oriented, and student-friendly. Eliminate unnecessary paperwork and policies.
- ❖ **Design a system to provide for seamless orientation, assessment, advising, registration, and payment.**
- ❖ **Front-load with ministry skills courses that impact current ministry.**
- ❖ **Front-load the highest rated courses that impact student satisfaction.**
- ❖ Offer flexible forms of participation and review availability of classes to ensure that students' needs are being met. Develop mechanisms to increase offerings of classes with high enrollment.
- ❖ Ensure that facilities and grounds are clean, comfortable and safe. Commit to improving facilities that are important to students, such as student dining areas and the **walking paths from parking to classrooms.**
- ❖ Offer financial aid and student employment opportunities.
- ❖ Establish articulation agreements and transfer options to other institutions.

## 4. Develop methods to ensure students are academically prepared for coursework.

- ❖ Mandate **course placement testing** for undergraduate programs.
- ❖ Mandate **GRE** for graduate programs and postgraduate programs.
- ❖ **Require students showing deficiencies to complete remedial coursework.**

**5. Implement early alert methods.**

- ❖ Identify students who are “at risk” and develop proactive intervention methods.
- ❖ Identify students who may be dropout-prone by observing “behavioral cues” (e.g., missing classes, failing to apply for financial aid, not pre-registering, or requesting a transcript).
- ❖ Contact students experiencing difficulty or planning not to return.
- ❖ Communicate with students who are in good standing who fail to enroll before late enrollment fees kick in.

**6. Help students develop study skills and understand effective learning strategies.**

- ❖ Offer academic support services such as remedial courses in writing, tutors, orientation to Blackboard, etc. Encourage students to use these resources.
- ❖ Provide tutorial services for at risk students for a fee.
- ❖ Provide **Learning Coaches** for at risk students in classes that are extremely difficult for a nominal fee.

**7. Provide transition assistance programs, including pre-enrollment orientation and first-year seminar courses.**

- ❖ Design **online Blackboard orientation** sessions to meet the needs of diverse student populations.
- ❖ Offer workshops to help students develop skills such as **time management, study skills, career exploration.**
- ❖ Each fall offer a **chapel** to create a sense of community among students.

**8. Develop an academic advising plan based on effective advisement strategies.**

- ❖ Provide training for academic advisors.
- ❖ Design an evaluation program that assesses the effectiveness of the institution’s advising program.
- ❖ **Utilize a computerized degree audit.**
- ❖ Use a model of frontloading and progressive responsibility. Front-loading involves a proactive and interventionist approach with new students. With progressive responsibility, faculty and institutional support/intervention can lessen in intensity as students increasingly understand school procedures and penalties.

**9. Provide career-counseling services.**

- ❖ Research shows that students who are committed to their educational goal are more likely to persist.
- ❖ Helping students identify their learning styles, personality, and spiritual gifts can increase retention.
- ❖ Helping students identify career goals and interests early can increase retention.
- ❖ Encourage students to utilize a computer career exploration software such as DISCOVER.
- ❖ Provide career counseling early in student’s college experience.
- ❖ Offer career planning courses or workshops.
- ❖ Incorporate **self-assessment** of personality, study skills, leadership skills, etc. into classes.

**10. Encourage on-campus communities to create bonds between students. Ensure frequent and high quality contact between students and faculty.**

- ❖ Encourage participation in student activities. Ensure that there are opportunities for all students to participate.
- ❖ Establish student common areas for socialization and relaxation.
- ❖ Develop innovative strategies to increase student involvement. Change the attitude in serving students from, “We have the services, but students don’t take advantage of them,” to “How can we provide proactive ways of ensuring that students are supported by the programs we offer?”
- ❖ Create online learning communities that link courses together.
- ❖ Establish opportunities students to be mentored by peers and faculty.
- ❖ Have faculty to be available via different modes of communication (e-mail, phone, office hours).
- ❖ Have students provide feedback on their perceptions of faculty attitudes towards them.

**11. Commit to ongoing training for faculty and emphasize the critical role they play in student retention.**

- ❖ Help faculty develop methods to engage students in the classroom.
- ❖ Provide incentives, recognition, and rewards for faculty/staff involved in retention-related initiatives.
- ❖ Train the faculty in the teaching/learning process. Few faculty members have this teaching background.

**12. Establish opportunities for active and collaborative learning.**

- ❖ Have students participate in class discussions.
- ❖ Incorporate hands-on learning activities.
- ❖ Offer early exposure to career-related skills courses.
- ❖ Encourage group activities to break down barriers between students.

**13. Demonstrate commitment to education of all students.**

- ❖ Develop systems for proactive monitoring, formative assessment, early identification and feedback.

Sources:

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<http://www.dtcc.edu/owens/trc/Best%20Practices%20in%20Student%20Retention%20CWRTF.doc>