

Strategies for Improving Student Retention

September 2014



In the following report, Hanover Research presents strategies for improving student retention in higher education in the United States and Canada. The report includes both institution-wide strategies and initiatives that target specific student populations, such as first-year students, Aboriginal/First Nation students, and Francophone students.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This report presents a scan of retention practices among higher education institutions in the United States and Canada, including strategies that benefit all students and targeted initiatives for first-year, Aboriginal/First Nations, and Francophone students. The report comprises two sections:

- **Section I** focuses on institution-wide retention strategies, addressing current shortfalls in retention strategies, factors influencing retention, and specific retention strategies in place at three North American universities.
- **Section II** presents a brief overview of trends and strategies for retaining first-year students, Aboriginal/First Nations students, and Francophone students, with illustrative examples from successful institutions.

An appendix at the end of this report provides supplementary information on student retention strategies.

KEY FINDINGS

- **A 2009 survey by The College Board found that many institutions state concern over their retention rates, but few allocate the necessary resources to affect long-term change at the institution.** Retention initiatives are often carried out across many departments and units in an institution, and many institutions lack a full-time coordinator for these programs. Even institutions with retention coordinators seldom give these coordinators authority to launch new programs or fund new initiatives. Furthermore, few institutions provide incentives for faculty to take on additional roles teaching and advising first-year students, and “soft activities,” such as campus events and organizations that drive student engagement, are often downsized during budgetary cutbacks.
- **Seven constructs can influence student retention. These are: academic advising, social connectedness, student involvement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services.** Vincent Tinto, an established retention scholar, suggests that institution-wide improvement of classroom practices is essential for driving up retention among all students. Academic support, student engagement, and faculty interaction in the classroom can help keep students on track to graduate.
- **Effective student support services can have a measurable, significant, positive impact on student retention and graduation rates across the institution.**
 - A study at Brock University found that participation in Learning Skills Services, a service available to all students, had a small but significant effect

on academic outcomes, including higher grades and higher retention rates among students using these services.

- At Florida State University, a combination of six initiatives targeting student retention and graduation rates resulted in a 7-percent improvement in retention among first-time students between 1999 and 2010.
- Trent University improved its first-year retention rate by 3.5 percent between 2007 and 2011, following implementation of four retention improvement strategies across the institution. The strategic plan emphasized student-centred education, redesigned scholarship and bursary programs, improving student support programs, and enhanced student organizations and activities.
- **Orientation programs, optional introductory learning and study skills courses (either for-credit or non-credit), and mentoring or coaching programs are some of many approaches for improving first-year retention.** For example, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay saw marked improvement in student persistence following the implementation of first-year seminars for freshman students, with a nearly 10-percent higher retention rate from the first year to the second year among seminar participants compared to non-participants.
- **Anecdotal evidence suggests that a physical Aboriginal student services program on campus, partnerships with Elders and Aboriginal community leaders, and peer counseling and mentoring all have a positive impact on Aboriginal student retention.** However, a general lack of standardized records about Aboriginal services utilization or formal program review processes makes it difficult to quantify the impact of these services on retention among this student population.
- **Little existing research addresses retention strategies for Francophone students in Canada.** The University of Ottawa, which recruits more than 55 percent of Ontario's university-bound Francophone students, provides a wide range of services to Francophone students including bilingual staff and access to most of the same student support resources as English-speaking students. The University also launched a Francophone mentoring program in 2011 that pairs new students with second- and third-year Francophone students to guide them through the transition to university life.

SECTION I: INSTITUTION-WIDE STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT RETENTION

Student retention has become an issue of increasing concern for higher education institutions in the United States and Canada. According to a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey of the cumulative withdrawal rate for first-time students at a four-year institutions in the United States, only 64 percent of students who entered in 2004 had obtained any kind of degree or certificate by spring of 2009.¹ Nearly 24 percent of students who had enrolled in 2004 had no degree or certificate and were not enrolled at any institution in the spring of 2009, while 12 percent were still enrolled and pursuing a degree or certificate.

Among eleven Ontario universities reporting data in 2009,² the average seven-year graduation rate for students enrolled in full-time, year-one studies in 2002 was 80 percent.³ This means that one in five students who enrolled full-time in 2002 had not yet completed their degree seven years later. More recent comparative data are unavailable.

With a shrinking pool of potential students in Canada and the United States, student retention is paramount for accomplishing institutional goals for growth and success. The Canadian higher education market is becoming more competitive, and it is “far more cost effective to retain a current student than to recruit a new one.”⁴ Low student retention rates negatively affect both the student and the institution. Colleges and universities devote a large amount of resources toward students who leave with an incomplete education, and students who do not finish their program leave with student debt but no degree that will help them find a job to repay this debt.⁵ With this in mind, many institutions seek to develop a plan for improving student retention rates by focusing on particular at-risk student populations and/or implementing an institution-wide approach.

With the Canadian higher education market becoming more competitive, it is “far more cost effective to retain a current student than to recruit a new one.”

¹ “Six-Year Attainment, Persistence, Transfer, Retention, and Withdrawal Rates of Students Who Began Postsecondary Education in 2003-2004.” U.S. Department of Education, July 2011. Table 5.0-A, p. 188. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011152.pdf>

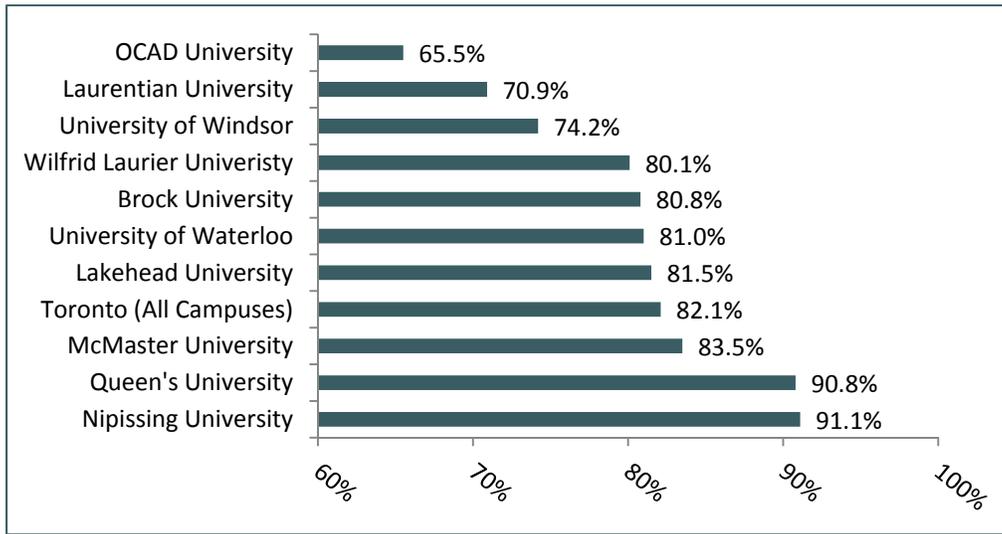
² Universities reporting data to the Common University Data Ontario (CUDO) in 2009 included Brock University, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Nipissing University, OCAD University, Queen's University, Toronto (All Campuses), University of Waterloo, University of Windsor, and Wilfrid Laurier University.

³ “Key Performance Indicators, Degree Completion Rate for Undergraduate Cohort, New Year 1 Students (2009).” Common University Data Ontario. <http://cudo.cou.on.ca/page.php?id=7&table=22#univ=1,2,3,8,9,12,14,15,16,17,23,24,25,27,28,30,31,32,33,34,42&y=2009&r=1463>

⁴ “Five Ways to Meet the Coming Enrollment Management Challenges for Canadian Higher Education.” Noel-Levitz, January 15, 2014. <http://blog.noellelevitz.com/2014/01/15/ways-meet-coming-enrollment-management-challenges-canadian-higher-education/>

⁵ Vedder et al. “25 Ways to Reduce the Cost of College.” Center for College Affordability and Productivity. http://www.centerforcollegeaffordability.org/uploads/25_Ways_Ch15.pdf

Figure 1.1: Seven-Year Graduation Rates at Ontario Universities, 2009



Source: CUDO⁶

SHORTFALLS IN CURRENT RETENTION STRATEGIES

While attention to student retention and persistence has increased over the past 30 years, graduation rates in the United States have remained relatively constant over this period.⁷ Many institutions recognize their retention issues, but administrators may feel a sense of “paralysis” when considering implementing new retention efforts.⁸ **However, poor planning or implementation of retention policies can have far-reaching financial effects on the institution.** For example, Jane Wellman, Executive Director of the Delta Cost Project,⁹ points out that there are many costs to an institution when an institution loses a student, including:¹⁰

- Losses in tuition revenue;
- Losses in auxiliary revenues;
- Losses in revenue from future alumni philanthropy (a student who [does not] graduate is a lost opportunity to cultivate a future donor);
- The additional cost of recruiting and enrolling the students who will fill the voided places of those who [do not] persist;

⁶ “Key Performance Indicators, Degree Completion Rate for Undergraduate Cohort, New Year 1 Students (2009),” Op. cit.

⁷ “Student Success in State Colleges and Universities: A Matter of Culture and Leadership.” American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2005. http://www.calpoly.edu/~acadsen/documents/AASCU-GRO_Report_093005.pdf

⁸ Fusch, D. “Where Current Retention Efforts Fall Short.” Academic Impressions, April 7, 2011. <http://www.academicimpressions.com/news/where-current-retention-efforts-fall-short>

⁹ The Delta Cost Project is an undertaking of the American Institutes for Research centered on analyzing higher education revenues, spending, and outcomes. See: “Delta Cost Project.” American Institutes for Research. <http://www.deltacostproject.org/>

¹⁰ Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Fusch, Op. cit.

- The cost of turning away other applicants in favor of admitting an applicant who then [does not] persist; and
- Losses in state subsidies that had been directed at students who then [do not] persist.

To further examine the reasons why there has been little improvement in retention despite a widespread awareness of the issue, in 2009 The College Board conducted a survey of 90 postsecondary institutions in five states about current student retention strategies.¹¹ The survey found that while institutions state concern over their retention rates, few allocate the necessary resources to affect long-term change at the institution.¹²

Most institutions monitor their retention data and have retention committees that develop institutional initiatives for increasing persistence among students.¹³ However, **few institutions have a full-time coordinator for retention programs**, which are often carried out in many departments and units across the institution. The average full-time equivalent staff dedicated to retention programs at surveyed institutions was only .29.¹⁴ Even at institutions with a retention coordinator, few reported that this position had the authority to launch new programs or fund new initiatives.¹⁵

The College Board survey also revealed that many institutions do not provide adequate incentives for faculty to teach or advise first-year students. Several scholars on retention in higher education have stressed the importance of small classes for first-year students and having first-year courses taught by full-time faculty.¹⁶ Moreover, many institutions require that first-year students meet with an academic advisor at least once a semester to guide student academic success. However, only about 30 percent of institutions offer any incentives to faculty for teaching first-year classes or for serving as a faculty advisor. The College Board argues that “interactions with faculty during student’s first year of college can have a positive impact on persistence.”¹⁷ Incentivizing faculty interactions with first-year students can help encourage full-time faculty to take on additional responsibilities, such as advising and other leadership roles, that have a positive relationship on student retention.

Finally, administrators may focus too narrowly on improving retention for a particular student population and neglect the broader institution-wide need for improved student retention when managing retention issues. In these cases, initiatives may target one unit of the university, such as admissions or student services, rather than integrating student retention into the larger strategic plan for the institution. Instead, for institutions aiming to

¹¹ “How Colleges Organize Themselves to Increase Student Persistence: Four Year Institutions.” College Board Advocacy and Indiana University’s Project on Academic Success, 2009. p. 15.
<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/college-retention.pdf>

¹² Ibid., p. 1.

¹³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁷ Ibid.

affect a large-scale change, “recruitment strategy, organizational structures, student programming, academic policies, and incentives need to be aligned to support that experience and ensure the institution delivers on its promise.”¹⁸ Any retention plan should be mission-driven and consider the institution’s unique circumstances.

FACTORS INFLUENCING RETENTION

Institutions often assess “student success” through a variety of metrics that address academic achievement, student engagement, and retention. Although success can be defined in many different ways, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) suggests that student success in postsecondary education is characterized by “solid and effective teaching, strong levels of student engagement, deep learning, and value-added skills development,” resulting in a postsecondary credential that provides added employment, health, and civic benefits to the student throughout their lifetime.¹⁹

To assess student success through improved retention, HEQCO recommends that institutions first consider a number of factors, including academic selectivity, program mix, administrative policies, institution size, and characteristics of the student population.²⁰

Academic selectivity has a clear relationship with retention rates according to data from Ontario institutions.²¹ More selective institutions typically have higher completion rates

Student success is characterized by “solid and effective teaching, strong levels of student engagement, deep learning, and value-added skills development.”

than those that engage a broader student body of traditionally underrepresented groups. Different **program types**, such as certificate programs versus applied degree programs, may have different student retention rates according to longitudinal studies. **Institutional policies** like course withdrawal deadlines and tuition refund policies and **institution size** can also influence student engagement and retention rates. These are all factors to consider when measuring student success metrics and benchmarking one institution against others.

A study of student satisfaction and persistence by researchers at the University of Southern Mississippi considered seven constructs that can factor into student retention: academic advising; social connectedness; involvement and engagement; faculty and staff approachability, business procedures; learning experiences; and student support services.²² **Academic advising** is considered “perhaps the most crucial aspect” of a student’s

¹⁸ Fusch, Op. cit.

¹⁹ Wiggers, R. and C. Arnold. “Defining, Measuring and Achieving ‘Student Success’ in Ontario Colleges and Universities.” The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011. p. 2.
<http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/AtIssueStudent%20Success%20ENG.pdf>

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Roberts, J. and R. Styron. “Student Satisfaction and Persistence: Factors Vital to Student Retention.” *Research in Higher Education Journal*, March 2010. pp. 3-6.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/762208723/fulltextPDF?accountid=132487>

interaction and engagement with university staff and can play a major role in retention.²³ According to a 2009 survey by The College Board, about 83 percent of the U.S. institutions surveyed require first-year students to meet with advisers at least once each semester.²⁴ Vincent Tinto, who has published extensively on student retention in the United States, suggests that social support for students through advising or mentoring can enhance retention and completion.²⁵ This is especially true for at-risk student populations like first-generation and low-income students who may lack other resources for dealing with the challenges of completing a post-secondary degree program.

Social connectedness and **student involvement** are also important elements influencing student retention. Tinto has argued that social integration and commitment to the institution are major considerations for student persistence.²⁶ Several studies have found that students are more reluctant to leave an institution after joining a campus organization.²⁷ Social connections allow students to “bond with other students to achieve a common goal,” such as completing their degree program.²⁸ Therefore, despite temptations to cut “soft activities” during budgetary cutbacks,²⁹ it is important that students have a variety of opportunities to engage with peers through campus activities and organizations.

Students who engage with faculty and staff at the university are more likely to persist to graduation as well.³⁰ **Faculty and staff approachability**, through providing adequate contact information, offices hours, and other opportunities for interaction, can greatly impact whether a student feels comfortable contacting a professor or advisor. Some scholars argue that smaller class sizes and introductory courses taught by full-time faculty encourage more faculty-student interaction, which can positively affect to student success and retention.³¹

Furthermore, burdensome **business procedures** or institutional bureaucracy can cause students to develop a negative relationship with their university. If students have unhelpful or unpleasant experiences with units like the business office, residence life, financial aid, or departments that define major requirements, they may become disillusioned toward the institution and less likely to finish their program.³²

²³ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁴ “How Colleges Organize Themselves to Increase Student Persistence: Four Year Institutions.” Op. cit., p. 9.

²⁵ Tinto, V. “Promoting Student Completion One Class at a Time.” Pell Institute for the Student of Opportunity in Higher Education. <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Promoting-Student-Completion-One-Class-at-a-Time--Tinto.pdf>

²⁶ Albert, S. “Student Retention – A Moving Target.” Council of Ontario Universities, July 2010. p. 2. http://cou.on.ca/publications/academic-colleague-papers/pdfs/ac-discussion-paper-student-retention---july-2010_

²⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁸ Roberts and Styron, Op. cit., p. 3.

²⁹ Albert, Op. cit., p. 4.

³⁰ Roberts and Styron, Op. cit., p. 4.

³¹ “How Colleges Organize Themselves to Increase Student Persistence: Four Year Institutions.” Op. cit., p. 9.

³² Roberts and Styron, Op. cit., pp. 4-5.

Learning experiences are “the collective effort of faculty, staff and students.”³³ Tinto suggests that the classroom is the primary place for students to engage with their peers and with faculty.³⁴ This is particularly applicable for non-residential students and students working part-time or full-time while earning their degree, who may not engage in other campus activities, events, or organizations.³⁵ As such, Tinto argues that the classroom should be the starting point for retention initiatives:

What would it mean for institutions to take student completion seriously? First and foremost it would mean that institutions would stop tinkering at the margins of institutional educational life and make enhancing student classroom success the linchpin about which they organize their activities. Rather than beginning the conversation about improving student completion with the question “What programs should we employ?” institutions would first ask “What is the nature of the educational experience we want our students to have in attending our institution?”

Finally, **student support services**, such as academic support centres for speaking, writing, and mathematics, can help ensure students succeed in higher education.³⁶ Studies by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education and other education researchers suggest that “academic resources such as these produced statistically significant positive impacts on student persistence.”³⁷ While academic support centres allow a university to accept students with a broader range of ability levels, such services can have a high cost as these students still have increased probability of taking longer to graduate or not completing their program.³⁸

INSTITUTION-WIDE RETENTION STRATEGIES

SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

In order to promote student success and persistence through graduation, Vincent Tinto suggests a focus on improving the classroom because “if [students] do not succeed in the classroom, one class at a time, they do not succeed in college.”³⁹ **Tinto proposes improving classroom practices in four ways: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement.**

First, clearly defined **expectations** in the classroom can help students to develop realistic expectations and begin to plan their time according to competing demands in college.⁴⁰ All faculty members should provide clear information about course requirements, assignments, examinations, and projects. Furthermore, faculty should retain high expectations of

³³ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴ Tinto, Op. cit., p. 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Roberts and Styron, Op. cit., pp. 5-6.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁸ Albert, Op. cit., p. 4.

³⁹ Tinto, Op. cit., p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

students. Among students with the same ability level, students with higher expectations tend to perform at a level above students with low expectations.⁴¹

Academic **support** is vital to students as they strive to meet high expectations.⁴² For under-represented and underserved populations, academic support can make or break the first-year experience. Tinto argues that support is most effective when it directly aligns with daily learning in classes that the student is currently enrolled in rather than generic support tools. Social support can be equally important for students when difficulties arise in the university experience. Student mentors and faculty advisors can serve to provide a social and academic support network to struggling students.⁴³

Frequent **assessment and feedback** can keep students informed of their progress and allow all parties to adjust their actions accordingly.⁴⁴ Assessment and feedback opportunities not only create an environment that promotes self-reflection on progress but also encourage students to “think about what they are learning as they are learning.”⁴⁵ Many institutions use midterm grades as an “early warning” to identify students at-risk of dropping out for supplemental instruction or other targeted academic services.⁴⁶

Finally, student engagement or “**involvement**” within the classroom can greatly influence student success and persistence. To build a sense of community and involvement, institutions can adopt a cohort model or learning communities that foster progression through the university with a common set of peers.⁴⁷ Within the classroom, faculty might incorporate cooperative learning, problem-based learning, or project-based learning, which encourage student interactions and team-building. Furthermore, these learning methods lend themselves to “applied” learning that helps students develop critical skills.

IMPROVING FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

In April 2012, the National Commission on Higher Education Attainment (NCHEA) released a paper addressing ways that faculty engagement can enhance student retention and persistence at the institutional level and how institutions are currently approaching this challenge.⁴⁸ The NCHEA asserts that most initiatives aimed at improving faculty engagement to enhance student attainment focus on professors in isolation from one another as well as instructional quality to the exclusion of other ways that faculty influence students (advising,

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴² Ibid., p. 5.

⁴³ Albert, Op. cit., p. 6.

⁴⁴ Tinto, Op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁶ “How Colleges Organize Themselves to Increase Student Persistence: Four Year Institutions.” Op. cit., p. 12.

⁴⁷ Tinto, Op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁸ Rhoades, G. “Faculty Engagement to Enhance Student Attainment.” National Commission on Higher Education Attainment and the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona.
<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Faculty-Engagement-to-Enhance-Student-Attainment--Rhoades.pdf>

research collaborations, etc.).⁴⁹ However, these approaches still provide a step toward improving faculty-student interactions and the classroom experience.

It is increasingly common for institutions to emphasize faculty-student engagement as a major component of faculty positions in job announcements.⁵⁰ More institutions are requesting evidence for teaching experience (such as teacher evaluations) and stressing instructional and advising skills within job postings. For existing faculty, professional development opportunities at an institutional teaching centre can improve instructional effectiveness through improved use of technology or training in developing instructional techniques.⁵¹ However, professional development centres for faculty may not be available to contingent (non-tenure track) faculty.

Many research universities also weigh teaching evaluations and instructional performance as a significant factor when promoting faculty members.⁵² Furthermore, regional and professional accreditation has moved toward an increased emphasis on learning outcomes. However, these factors often do not consider faculty engagement with students outside the classroom, which is also critical to student success.

The NCHCA has developed the following list of key strategies for increasing faculty engagement to enhance student attainment levels:⁵³

- **Strategic approach to the aging academic workforce.** Full-time faculty aging into retirement presents the opportunity to rebalance the demographic profile of the professoriate to become more reflective of an increasingly diverse student body. Furthermore, faculty fellows programs that engage faculty nearing retirement should connect senior faculty to academic initiatives targeting student attainment.
- **Broader engagement of contingent faculty and re-integrating the faculty role.** Contingent and part-time faculty often hold a narrow role in the institution that “decouples” various aspects of teaching, and they are less likely to advise students, meet students outside of class, or be provided information about student engagement. These faculty members should be more involved in cultivating student success through improved working conditions and re-structured workloads.
- **Strategic collaboration between faculty and support professionals.** Institutions should develop or expand programs that connect academic units with student support units. Programs could focus on outreach, college readiness, transitioning to college, and student persistence to graduation, among other issues. This broader engagement can positively affect each unit’s respective impact.
- **Joint faculty/management organizational initiatives.** Academic units and individual programs should collaborate with the larger central planning units to target “major

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁵² Ibid., p. 16.

⁵³ Summarized from: Ibid., pp. 18-31.

educational blockage/failure points for students.”⁵⁴ These units tend to be disconnected in decision-making, which obscures some of the most pressing issues for addressing retention.

- **Prioritizing education, quality, and completion in resource allocation and evaluation.** While many institutions were in an “arms race” to enrol students during turn of the century with leisure and non-educational facilities, many universities have now turned to retaining and educating students. Personnel, programs, and facilities should prioritize the mission and educational activities of an institution and allocate resources to promote quality and student attainment.
- **Leadership that calls on, not just calls out, the faculty.** Leaders should call on faculty to address the changes needed, rather than calling out faculty on past issues. Faculty should be viewed as “a part of the solution” and, as such, should make positive contributions toward developing proposals that enhance student attainment.

RETENTION STRATEGIES IN ACTION

BROCK UNIVERSITY

Brock University (BU) is a public research institution with an enrolment of about 18,000 students, located in St. Catharines, Ontario. In 2008, BU received a grant from the HEQCO to evaluate its Student Development Centre’s Learning Skills Services for two programs: the Online Writing Skills Workshop, and the learning skills workshops and one-on-one/drop-in services offered by the unit.⁵⁵ Learning Skills Services provides general and specific learning skills training through student-peer and instructor-guided, non-credit workshops and services.⁵⁶

LEARNING SKILLS SERVICES

During the time of the study, Learning Skills Services offered small group workshops in over 70 topics, grouped into the following general categories:⁵⁷

- The Online Writing Skills Workshop (later known as “Essay-Zone”)
- Study skills workshops (time management, notetaking, critical thinking and reading)
- Documentation workshops (avoiding plagiarism and APA, MLA, Chicago, CBE or ACS style)
- Exam prep workshops (exam preparation, exam anxiety and last-minute exam prep)

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁵ “An Evaluation of the Impact of Learning Skill Services on Student Academic Success at Brock University.” Learning Skills Services at Brock University and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011. p. 5.
<http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Brock%20LSW%20ENG.PDF>

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁷ Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 6-7.

- Writing workshops (essay writing, persuasive writing, thesis statements, grammar and editing)
- Science workshops (succeeding in the sciences, problem solving in chemistry and grammar for science students)
- Math workshops (succeeding in mathematics, algebra basics and exponents and fractions).

Learning Skills Services also offers one-on-one “drop-in” services to students on writing and problem solving.⁵⁸ The sessions can last from 10 minutes to an hour and are held during specific windows of time throughout the week. Alternatively, students can also schedule a consultation with a Learning Skills professional for more in-depth assistance or connect with a professor-recommended student tutor through the tutor registry.

Essay-Zone, originally called the Online Writing Skills Workshop, is another service for students to “practice essay-writing skills through an interactive self-testing process involving subject-specific options, writing style choices and constructive feedback.”⁵⁹ The program, instituted in 2008, is required by some BU professors as a part of their course curricula. BU has also added additional online tutorial modules, including Essay-Zone: Aboriginal Focus, Numeracy-Zone, and Science-Zone.⁶⁰

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

BU collected information about student participation and outcomes through a mixed-methods approach, including survey data, focus groups, and administrative records.⁶¹ Although these services are available to all students at any point during their enrolment, the services are likely most beneficial to first- and second-year students.⁶² Evaluating the impact of these services on upper-level students presents difficulties for correlating grades with the use of learning skills workshops over a period of one to two years. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the measurable impacts seen in first- and second-year students at BU.

The study found that participation in Learning Skills Services had a small but significant effect on academic outcomes, including higher grades and higher retention rates among students utilizing these services. Students using learning skills training had first-year grades 3 percent higher than classmates who did not and second-year grades that were 2.7 percent higher.⁶³ These students had an easier academic transition into higher education, with a smaller drop in grades from high school to university than students who did not use the services. However, researchers point out that on average, students taking advantage of these services also had higher high school grades than their peers. The study also found that

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Academic Zone.” Brock University. <http://www.brocku.ca/learning-skills/academic-zone>

⁶¹ “An Evaluation of the Impact of Learning Skill Services on Student Academic Success at Brock University.” Op. cit., pp. 7-8.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 59.

students using Learning Skills Services improved their grades by 1.7 percent compared to other students, but no additional increase in grades persisted through the second-year.⁶⁴ Students who participated in learning skills workshops and drop-in counseling also had higher retention rates than those who did not.⁶⁵ As presented in Figure 1.2, the average second-year retention rate for first-year learning skills participants in the 2006, 2007, or 2008 cohorts was nearly 5 percent higher than that of non-participants. The study sample size included a total of 9,052 students across three cohort years.⁶⁶

Figure 1.2: Second-Year Retention Rates by Participation Status, 2006-2008 Cohorts

LEARNING SKILLS STATUS IN FIRST YEAR	RETENTION RATE	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL
Participant	92.4%	[90.6%, 93.9%]
Non-Participant	87.6%	[86.8%, 88.3%]

Source: BU⁶⁷

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Florida State University (FSU) is a large public university in Tallahassee, Florida, with about 32,500 undergraduate students. The university has had a centre devoted to academic retention initiatives since 1968, when FSU created the Horizons Unlimited program.⁶⁸ In 2000, Horizons Unlimited was combined with a summer enrichment program to become the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE), a department shared between the Division of Academic Affairs and the Division of Student Affairs.

RETENTION INITIATIVES

FSU has outlined six specific strategies that have been implemented at FSU to improve retention and graduation rates at the university:⁶⁹

- **Expanded academic advising services.** The university placed “centrally selected and trained advisors” within academic departments and specialized advising centres to provide informed and targeted guidance for students. These “expert” advisors are fully informed of university policies and resources and have been trained in effective student guidance.
- **A structured program to work with undecided (and also re-deciding) students.** FSU’s Center for Exploratory Students targets students who lack clear focus in their studies and are therefore more susceptible to dropping out. Students attend mandatory one-on-one meetings and programming and must also develop firm action timelines.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “About C.A.R.E.” Florida State University. <http://care.fsu.edu/About-C.A.R.E>

⁶⁹ Bulleted points summarized from: “Practical Steps to Improving Retention and Graduation Rates.” The Florida State University Student Success Team, U.S Department of Education. pp. 9-13. <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/college-completion/practical-steps-to-improving-retention-and-graduation-rates.doc>

- **Success Coaching.** FSU provides biweekly coaching for students at high risk of non-retention with trained academic coaches. While it is likely not cost-efficient to coach every student at an institution, at FSU the additional tuition revenue from retaining at-risk students has paid for the cost of coaching and more.
- **Expanding tutoring services.** FSU offers drop-in and by-appointment tutoring for all students. Drop-in tutoring in 15-minute sessions is located in the university library until 1 a.m., while by-appointment tutoring offers longer sessions located in the Learning Studio on campus.
- **Special programming for first-generation and Pell grant recipient students.** At FSU, about 350 students are identified for the Summer Bridge Program. Students receive a brief orientation before the start of summer classes and are required to attend daily study and tutorial hours, academic survival skills programs, and cultural events. The program has a dedicated set of advisors, including seniors who are former program participants. Some services, such as follow-up tutoring, advising, and other support services continue through graduation.
- **Expanded opportunities for high-achieving students.** FSU's retention data suggests that about one-third of students who do not graduate are actually high achieving academically. Personal or family circumstances may contribute to this attrition. To keep such students engaged, FSU expanded research opportunities and honor student activities, established a fellowship office to raise awareness of scholarships, and added two lower division honor societies named for outstanding African-American and Hispanic leaders.

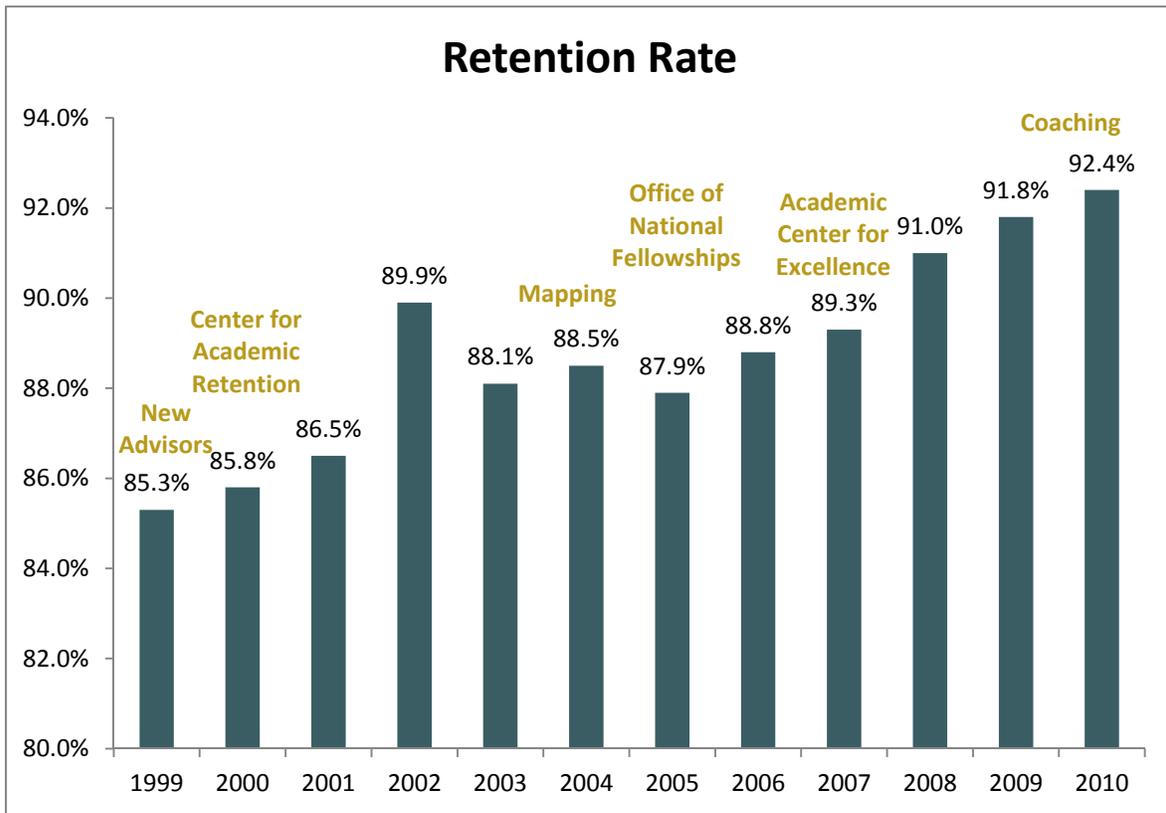
Additional suggestions from the FSU CARE Center are included in Figure A.1 in the Appendix to this report.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Over a 12-year period from 1999 to 2010, FSU improved its retention rate among first-time students from 85.3 percent to 92.4 percent.⁷⁰ The progression of retention rates is presented in Figure 1.3 on the following page, along with the timing of retention initiatives that were implemented during this period. Furthermore, the institution has consistently improved its graduation rates from 2008 to 2012. The six-year graduation rate at FSU rose six percentage points during this period, as presented in Figure 1.4 on the following page.

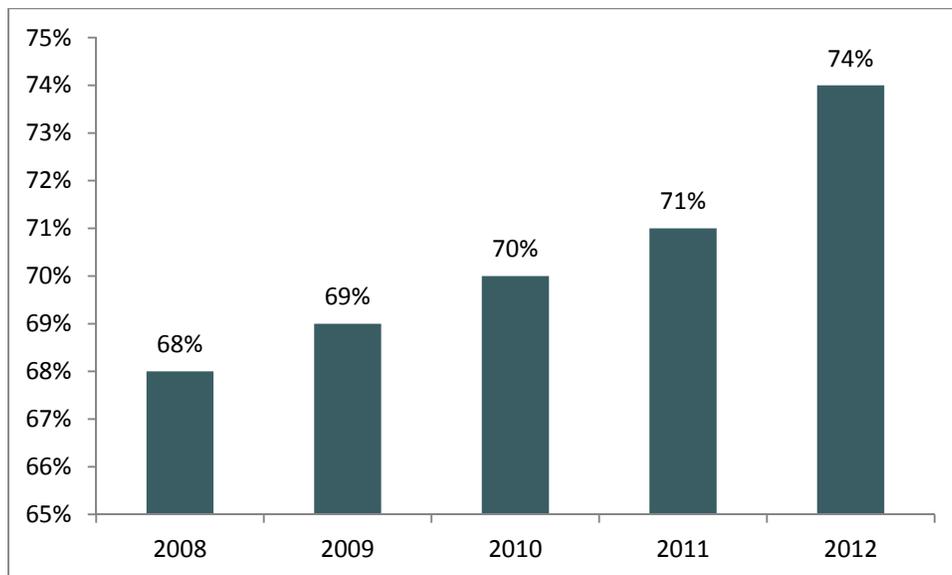
⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

Figure 1.3: First-year Retention Rate at FSU, 1999-2010



Source: FSU⁷¹

Figure 1.4: Six-Year Graduation Rate at FSU, 2008-2012



Source: NCES⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid.

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Trent University is a mid-sized public university with its main campus in Peterborough, Ontario, and a satellite campus in Oshawa that opened in 2010.⁷³ The Peterborough campus enrolls about 8,100 full-time undergraduate students, 1,500 part-time undergraduates, and 500 graduate students. According to data from Common University Data Ontario (CUDO), Trent University steadily improved its first-year student retention rate from 2007 to 2011 by about 3.5 percent.⁷⁴ This improvement coincided with the development of a seven-year strategic plan for the university, which laid out strategies to improve its academic reputation, recruitment, retention rates, and community ties.⁷⁵

RETENTION INITIATIVES

Trent University considers its recruitment and retention goals to be interrelated, and this is reflected in the strategic plan for recruitment and retention initiatives that tackles both problems “in concert.”⁷⁶ The university planned to change the mix of full- and part-time students at the university as well as increase the quality of students. It anticipated that raising the admissions standards would result in a lower intake of first-year students; therefore, Trent University realized it must improve student retention to maintain optimal enrolment levels.

Trent University defined four main strategies for improving retention rates at the institution:⁷⁷

- **Provide high-quality, student-centered education.** To improve the quality of students at the university, it planned to focus some attention on students completing Honours Degrees by improving educational quality.
- **Review and possibly redesign scholarship/bursary programs.** This step involved examining the requirements for student entrance and ongoing support.
- **Improve support to students and enhance student life programs.** The university planned improvements in health, career centre, housing, special needs, and athletic and recreational services for students. A detailed agenda of student service improvements is included in Figure A.2 in the Appendix to this report.
- **Enhanced opportunities for engaging in student organizations and activities.** The university emphasized that all students, full- and part-time, undergraduate and

⁷² “IPEDS Data Center.” National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

⁷³ “Trent Facts.” Trent University. <http://www.trentu.ca/about/facts.php>

⁷⁴ “Retention Rates.” Common University Data Ontario. <http://cudo.cou.on.ca/page.php?id=7&table=23#univ=1,2,3,8,9,12,14,15,16,17,23,24,25,27,28,30,31,32,33,34,42&y=2011>

⁷⁵ “A Strategy for Trent University 2007-2014.” Trent University. <http://www.trentu.ca/oirsp/documents/AstrategyforTrentUniversity20072014.pdf>

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Bulleted points summarized from: *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

graduate, should have opportunities to participate in student government and associations and other student-initiated activities.

- **Report on student retention through the Consortium on Student Retention Exchange (CSRDE).** The CSRDE is run through the University of Oklahoma and is dedicated to improving student success and retention.

A more recent planning document prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and University by Trent University details additional retention strategies currently underway at the institution.⁷⁸ The administration is working with College Heads to continue planning student support and student life programs that will strengthen co-curricular support and ties to the community. The university sponsors a range of educational campaigns, programs, and workshops aimed at developing academic and life skills in students through wellness, housing, academic skills, career, and advising initiatives.

Trent University also has a designated Student Success Coordinator who maintains communication with students in the Student Success Program for retention.⁷⁹ The coordinator is responsible for monthly emails communicating important deadlines, campus programs, and events, as well as individual progress-monitoring emails sent to students two to four times a year.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Trent University had the most improved first-year retention rate from 2007 to 2011 among 19 universities reporting to CUDO, raising its retention rate from 80.6 percent in 2007 to 84.1 percent in 2011.⁸⁰ Figure 1.5 below presents the first- to second-year retention and first- to third-year retention among student cohorts from 2008 to 2011. The university showed improvement in both first- to second-year and first- to third-year retention during this period. Due to the broad range of institutional initiatives aimed at improving retention, it is difficult to identify if any particular strategy was more effective than others or if the combination of strategies proved most effective.

Figure 1.5: Retention Rates for Trent University Student Cohorts

ENTERING COHORT	2008 COHORT	2009 COHORT	2010 COHORT	2011 COHORT
1 st to 2 nd Year	82.5%	83.1%	83.9%	84.1%
1 st to 3 rd Year	73.1%	73.5%	75.2%	N/A

Source: OMTCU⁸¹

⁷⁸ "2012-2013 Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) Report Back." Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. p. 39. <http://www.trentu.ca/oirsp/documents/1213MYAAREportBack.pdf>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "Retention Rates." Op. cit.

⁸¹ "2012-2013 Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) Report Back." Op cit., p. 38.

SECTION II: IMPROVING RETENTION IN SPECIFIC STUDENT POPULATIONS

A 2008 survey of enrolment trends in the United States and Canada found that there are many underserved student populations in Canada, including Aboriginal/First Nations/Inuit, recent immigrant, Asian, northern Canadian, rural, first-generation, low-income, Francophone, black students, and students with disabilities.⁸² First-year students in general are also recognized as at high-risk for attrition. This section will focus on retention strategies for three specific student populations: first-year students, Aboriginal or First Nation students, and Francophone students.

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

First-year students receive much of the attention in retention literature, as transitions into the first year of post-secondary education are often the most difficult period for university students.⁸³ Many students enter the university academically underprepared for college-level classes but are still “malleable to institutional intervention.”⁸⁴ First-year transition programs generally include orientation programs, optional introductory learning and study skills courses (either for-credit or non-credit), and mentoring or coaching programs.⁸⁵

Many students enter the university academically underprepared for college-level classes, but are still “malleable to institutional intervention.”

Figure 2.1 on the following page presents the first-year retention rates at 19 Ontario universities from 2007 to 2011.⁸⁶ Eight institutions (42 percent) reported raising their retention rates during this period, with increases between 0.8 percent and 3.5 percent.⁸⁷ Eleven institutions (58 percent) experienced declining first-year retention rates between 0.3 and 4 percent.

⁸² Smith, C., and S. Gottheil. “Increasing Accessibility: Lessons Learned in Retaining Special Population Students in Canada.” *College & University*, 86(4), 2011. <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/sem/system/files/CUJ8604AR-Smith.pdf>

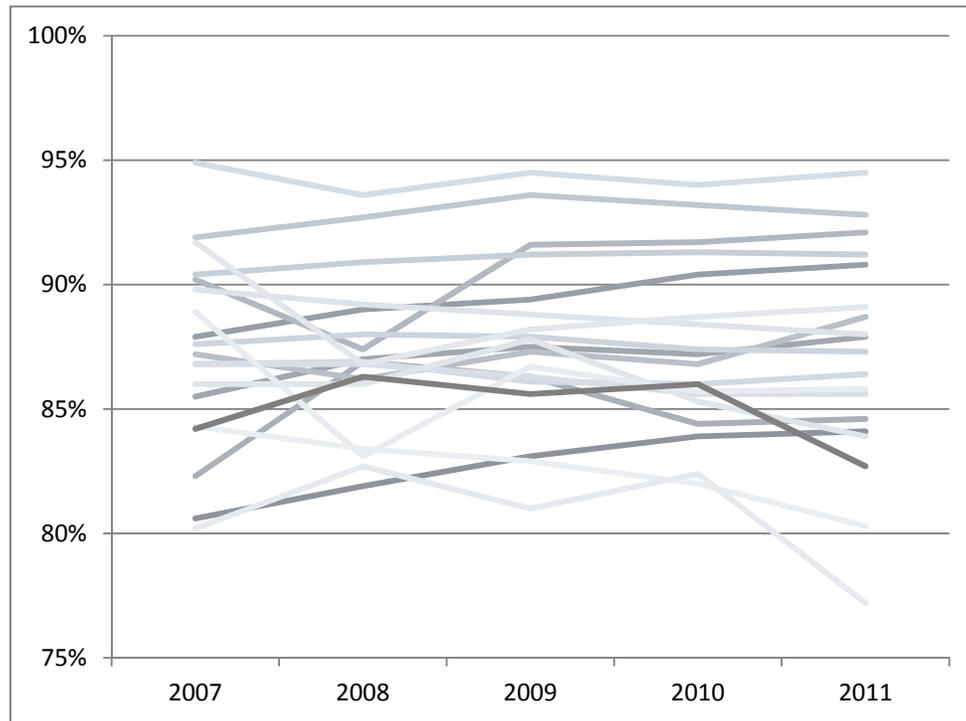
⁸³ Tinto, Op. cit.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Wiggers and Arnold, Op. cit., p. 5.

⁸⁶ “Retention Rates.” Op. cit.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Figure 2.1: First-Year Retention Rates at Ontario Universities, 2007-2011

Source: CUDO⁸⁸

There are many approaches to improving first-year retention. For example, first-year seminars are regarded as a high-impact practice by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, meaning that they have been “widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds.”⁸⁹ The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UW-Green Bay) saw marked improvement in student persistence following the implementation of first-year seminars for freshman students.⁹⁰

The seminars at UW-Green Bay consist of small, three-credit, graded courses restricted to 25 or fewer first-year students per seminar. The seminars are available on a variety of interdisciplinary subject matter, but all courses include:⁹¹

- Significant interaction with faculty, peer mentors, and other students;
- Required participation in co-curricular activities on campus;

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Kuh, G. “High-Impact Education Practices.” Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008. <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>

⁹⁰ “Selected Examples of Proven, Promising, and Emerging Programs and Strategies: Strengthening Retention, Closing Equity Gaps and Degree Attainment.” Board of Regents for the University of Wisconsin System, 2013. p. 23. <http://www.uwsa.edu/assets/sites/edi/docs/pdfs/BORpresentationFeb2013.pdf>

⁹¹ Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 23.

- Information on, and the opportunity to practice, the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in college (e.g., effective note-taking, time management skills, choosing a major);
- The use of engaging, active-learning pedagogy; and,
- An introduction to the interdisciplinary, problem-focused mission of the university.

First-year seminars at UW-Green Bay incorporated critical thinking, data analysis, oral communication, and writing assignments to facilitate adjustment to college-level skill expectations. The small class size and format also encourage student engagement with faculty, classmates, and campus resources.

Among all students in the 2010 cohort, seminar participants had nearly a 10-percent higher retention rate from the first year to the second year than non-participants. Furthermore, these students had higher first-semester grades and higher levels of academic and co-curricular engagement as measured by the National Student of Student Engagement.⁹² First-year seminars also proved to be effective in improving retention among disadvantaged students, with nearly 9 percent higher retention to the second year for disadvantaged seminar participants compared to disadvantaged non-participants.

ABORIGINAL/FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS

Although Aboriginal Canadians make up only 3.8 percent of the total population,⁹³ they represent a rapidly growing subset of the general population in Canada.⁹⁴ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada estimates that the Aboriginal population in Canada grew by 20 percent between 2001 and 2006.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the Aboriginal population is much younger than the Canadian population as a whole, with nearly half of the Aboriginal population aged 25 or younger.⁹⁶ Still, only about 8 percent of Aboriginal Canadians hold a university credential, compared with 23 percent of the non-Aboriginal population.⁹⁷

The attrition rates are 33 to 56 percent higher among Aboriginal students than the general student population. Aboriginal student services stakeholders cite family obligations, financial difficulties, academic preparedness, personal issues, and differing goals as the main reasons for attrition among Aboriginal students.⁹⁸ Developing targeted retention

⁹² Ibid., p. 24.

⁹³ Smith, C., and Gottheil, Op. cit., p. 47.

⁹⁴ "Aboriginal Post-Secondary Retention and Transition." The Canadian Chamber of Commerce. <http://www.chamber.ca/download.aspx?t=0&pid=25c2b24c-9bae-e211-8bd8-000c291b8abf>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Smith and Gottheil, Op. cit., p. 47.

⁹⁷ Cited from Statistics Canada 2008, in Smith and Gottheil, Op. cit., p. 48.

⁹⁸ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. "Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario." Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. pp. 33-34. <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Promising%20Practices.pdf>

strategies for Aboriginal students that address these issues is an important step toward increasing access and persistence in this underserved student population.

HEQCO identifies 14 colleges and universities in Ontario that currently offer Aboriginal student services centres.⁹⁹ Stakeholders agreed that “the primary goals of the centres are to increase Aboriginal student enrolment through recruitment initiatives and to support Aboriginal student retention and graduation rates.”¹⁰⁰ These centres function to ease the transition to higher education, providing “culturally sensitive support” by Aboriginal counselors, tutoring and academic advising, and information on scholarships and bursaries to overcome financial barriers.¹⁰¹ Some service centres also facilitate cultural events and involve partnerships with community organizations or other postsecondary institutions.¹⁰²

According to a survey of Ontario universities on the utilization of student services among Aboriginal students, participation rates vary widely depending on the size of the institution and the number of Aboriginal students present on campus.¹⁰³ Figure 2.2 presents the number of Aboriginal students accessing student service centres according to self-reported data from these institutions.

Figure 2.2: Number of Students Accessing Aboriginal Student Services Centres

POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS
Lakehead University	600
Loyalist College	400
Fanshawe College	300
University of Toronto	250
Trent University	150
Algoma University	135
Northern College	95
Ryerson University	75
Seneca College	50
University of Windsor	30
York University	20
Wilfrid Laurier University	18
University of Guelph	15

Source: HEQCO¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., Op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Few universities have standardized records of Aboriginal services utilization that would allow for tracking student outcomes, nor do many programs have a formal review or self-evaluation.¹⁰⁵ This makes it difficult to assess the impact of these services on retention among this student population. However, **anecdotal evidence suggests that a physical Aboriginal student services program on campus, partnerships with Elders and Aboriginal community leaders, other postsecondary institutions, and local employers, and peer counseling and mentoring all have a positive impact on Aboriginal student retention.**¹⁰⁶

FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS

There is limited research available on retention strategies for Francophone students in Canada. While much research has been carried out in the United States and Canada regarding ethnic and racial retention issues, retention among linguistic minorities such as French-speakers has been largely overlooked.¹⁰⁷ However, a recent symposium at the 2012 Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference focused on the issues surrounding Francophone retention and student experience.¹⁰⁸ The symposium largely focused on the Francophone student population at the University of Ottawa, which recruits more than 55 percent of Ontario's university-bound, French first-language secondary school graduates.¹⁰⁹

Figure 2.3 on the following page presents the first-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates for Francophone students at four Ontario universities, including the University of Ottawa. Between 1997 and 2003, three out of four institutions were able to raise their Francophone retention, although it is unclear what strategies may have been used to achieve this.¹¹⁰

At the University of Ottawa, Francophone students and professors have access to all academic services in French, as most support staff members are bilingual.¹¹¹ Student services offered in French and English include "individual and group counselling, guidance and skills assessment service, career planning service, labour force liaison program, support to students with special needs, assistance in writing university assignments, spiritual resources for students in general and First Nations' students in particular, welcome program

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

¹⁰⁷ Turner, K. "Paper 2: Somebody Like Me: Student Perspectives on Facilitating the Transition to and Success in Higher Education." Symposium at Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference, 2012. <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2012/abstracts/0185.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ "Symposium C2: We all have our parts to play: The roles of students, peer-mentors and administration in creating pathways to higher education and student success for minority-language students." Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference, 2012. <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2012/list.search.results.asp?search=parts&search.x=0&search.y=0>

¹⁰⁹ Lamoureux, S. "Paper 1: Linguistic Heterogeneity and Non-Traditional Pathways to Postsecondary Education in Ontario." Symposium at Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference, 2012. <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2012/abstracts/0183.pdf>

¹¹⁰ "French at the University of Ottawa, Vol. II." University of Ottawa, 2007. http://web5.uottawa.ca/vision2010/consultation/documents/Volumell_State_of_Affairs_final_24_august2007.pdf

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 30.

and University 101, student mentoring network, residence study groups, and community service learning program.”¹¹²

Figure 2.3: Retention and Graduation Rates of Francophone Students from Secondary Schools Registering Fulltime in the First Year of a Degree Program

UNIVERSITY	COHORT	% CONTINUING TO 2 ND YEAR	% GRADUATED AFTER SIX YEARS
University of Ottawa	1997	87%	70%
University of Toronto	1997	93%	74%
McMaster University	1997	89%	80%
University of Western Ontario	1997	78%	75%
University of Ottawa	2003	91%	Not available
University of Toronto	2003	92%	Not available
McMaster University	2003	93%	Not available
University of Western Ontario	2003	94%	Not available

Source: University of Ottawa¹¹³

More recent data on Francophone retention is unavailable. However, the University of Ottawa has developed new programs in recent years to continue addressing Francophone retention. In 2010, the university received a \$4 million in provincial funds to increase Francophone course offerings, expand services in French, and provide more scholarships and bursaries for Francophone students.¹¹⁴ In 2011, it implemented a peer-to-peer mentoring program intended to support Francophone students in the transition to university life and academics.¹¹⁵ The program hired second- and third-year Francophone students as mentors for incoming students from four highly minoritized regions: Northern Ontario, Central Ontario, Southwestern Ontario and New Brunswick.¹¹⁶ The program was aimed at improving persistence in these students by providing them with “insider” guidance on student services and social activities in addition to helping to create a social support network.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹⁴ Gottheil, S., and C. Smith. “Increasing Accessibility: Lessons Learned in Retaining Special Population Students in Canada.” AACRAO 2010, New Orleans. p. 39. http://handouts.aacrao.org/am10/finished/F0100p_C_Smith.pdf

¹¹⁵ Turner, Op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Cotnam, M. “Paper 3: ‘Lean on Me:’ The Experience of Being a Regional Peer-Mentor.” Symposium at Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference, 2012. <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2012/abstracts/0187.pdf>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

APPENDIX

This appendix provides additional information about Florida State University’s (FSU) and Trent University strategies for retaining students.

Figure A.1: FSU’s Ten Elements for Sustained Retention Programs

10 IMPORTANT ELEMENTS FOR RETENTION
<p>1. Develop a “map” of course schedules by term for every major with the critical courses highlighted. If a student does not successfully complete a critical course in the term recommended, place a registration hold. Require the student to meet with an advisor to find out what happened and take appropriate action to ensure the student understands how to proceed. For example, if an accounting major has not completed calculus by the end of the first year, it is unlikely that the student can complete the degree in a reasonable amount of time. Part of the conversation with the advisor may well involve looking for an alternate major that might better suit the student’s strengths and provide a viable alternative for reaching the student’s career goals.</p>
<p>2. Establish an automated contact system (email, Twitter, Facebook or other social media) to reach every student and let each one know that the institution is monitoring his or her progress. Send a congratulatory note to students who do well or improve and a note asking if everything is OK to any student who drops as little as 0.25 in their grade point average. Additional intervention is necessary for any student who falls below a 2.0, but that is a higher cost action that will be addressed later.</p>
<p>3. Move academic advisors to the students and develop a structure that fosters professionalism and accountability among advisors. A log of student contacts by time of day and day of week will reveal that few students seek out advisors between 8:00 AM and 11:00 AM. Drop-in advising should be made easy by having advisors with afternoon and evening hours available in the library, student union and other sites where students congregate.</p>
<p>4. Establish Freshman Interest Groups (known by several different names) allowing small groups of students with similar interests to take several classes together along with a small weekly seminar in the topic. With appropriate supervision, high-achieving senior students can lead the seminar and provide inspiring role models for the new students.</p>
<p>5. Pay attention to where students live. Research shows that students who live on campus for the first year earn higher grades and are retained at higher levels than those who live off campus. Living-Learning Communities offer an even better opportunity to a smaller segment of the on-campus population. Students in these special programs live in the same residence hall and participate in courses and programs that have a common theme. Teaching at least one of the courses in a classroom in the residence hall will further enrich these programs. The result is an even higher level of academic success and retention.</p>
<p>6. Look at course grades. The courses with high percentages of Ds and Fs, particularly those with high enrolment, should be studied. There are national programs to assist with this effort. Encouraging faculty to take attendance is a good idea for all courses but is particularly important in courses with high percentages of Ds and Fs. This is getting easier with so many electronic options available to assist faculty teaching courses with high enrolments.</p>
<p>7. Survey students who choose to leave the university prior to graduation and take note of their academic performance. Retention can be an issue for high-achieving as well as low-performing students and different strategies will be necessary to engage and better meet the needs of all student groups.</p>

<p>8. Do not neglect the full range of academic support services available to help engage and retain students. A great deal can be learned and accomplished by working with student groups, especially student government, since this group often has more resources than the average academic department.</p>
<p>9. Be willing to intervene early. Data shows that without intervention more than half of the students who fall below a 2.0 early in their college experience will drop out. Yet, a relatively low cost mandatory course focusing on study habits, time management, note taking, etc. will significantly reduce attrition.</p>
<p>10. Be willing to deploy new approaches. Coaching has become part of our American culture. Health providers often offer coaching to patients to encourage adherence to a health improvement program. Some professional groups offer coaching to new senior administrators in the field. And there are plenty of ads in the media for life coaches, so it is not surprising that coaching has entered higher education.</p>

Source: FSU¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Table text taken verbatim from: "Practical Steps to Improving Retention and Graduation Rates." Op. cit., pp. 5-9.

In addition to providing ongoing services to students, Trent University identifies specific areas for different units to focus on, as detailed in Figure A.2.

A.2: Trent University Strategic Plan, Student Service Improvement for Retention

HEALTH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing increased health information (e.g., a health fair, nutritional advice, peer sex education program). • Revising the Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response Policy. • Reviewing of the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy with respect to student health services. • Adding a fast track clinic to assist with the overflow of student visits (for a total of 14 clinics per week).
CAREER CENTRE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the number of graduating students served. • Increasing the number of first and second year students served. • Enhancing the employer recruitment program for Trent graduates. • Maintaining the number of Trent students employed within six months after graduation at 96% and improving the level at 24 months after graduation from 97% to 98%. (This is a provincial government indicator for funding purposes).
COLLEGE RESIDENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing Gzowski College in its new facility. • Reviewing residence policies and programs to ensure their appropriateness in view of younger aged students. • Increasing residence rooms so as to be able to offer all first year students with a 75% entering average a room in a College and maintain rooms for senior students. • Planning new types of college housing to serve a broader range of students.
SPECIAL NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining the 30 hours per student per academic year standard. • Maintaining the in-house learning disability assessment service. • Continuing the centralized service for proctoring tests and exams. • Implementing a new policy in response to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
ATHLETICS AND RECREATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In planning the future of Trent Athletics, it is imperative the Department of Athletics, through the Office of Student Affairs and other university offices, explore and develop partnerships internally in the university and externally in the community in search of "win - win" situations. • Developing an extensive set of short- and long-term goals for improving facilities, infrastructure, programming, and varsity athletics.

Source: Trent University¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Taken verbatim (with some modifications to improve readability) from: "A Strategy for Trent University 2007-2014." Op. cit., pp. 11, 32-33

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