Focusing on Student Success

How 10 community colleges are taking steps to advance their retention and completion rates
Focusing on Student Success

How 10 community colleges are taking steps to advance their retention and completion rates

Western Texas College (Snyder, Texas)

Western Texas College established goals to increase the overall retention rate from 55 to 75 percent and develop specific strategies to improve retention among students in remediation and developmental courses. The college's faculty and staff teamed up with Noel-Levitz to create processes, programs, and courses to improve completion, retention, and graduation rates among students enrolled in remediation and developmental courses, and also strengthen student services on the campus. Still in the piloting phase, the college has implemented a bridge program, which is matriculating students to college course study more rapidly than ever before. Over the past two years, Western Texas College has increased its retention rate from 55 to 78 percent leading to enrollment growth in each of the last five semesters. The college's staff and faculty are now measuring completion and retention rates by cohort so they know immediately when changes create results.

"Sometimes you look at things so intently from the inside that you start to miss the problems that are staring right at you. Having Noel-Levitz come in gave us a fresh perspective. It was invaluable to work with someone who has completed this process before, whereas we didn't even really know where to start."

David Hanes
Associate Development Officer

Montgomery County Community College (Blue Bell, Pennsylvania)

Since 2003, Montgomery County Community College has administered the Student Satisfaction Inventory™ to gather data on student satisfaction. Evidence from survey results provides a baseline for year-by-year comparisons, allowing the college to track progress, look at trends, and guide strategic planning for campus improvements. The data spurred the college to create an early-alert system that lets students and faculty know if classroom performance becomes unsatisfactory, giving students time to reverse failing grades and improve persistence. Satisfaction data also identified a challenge with student counseling and advising, which the college successfully addressed by combining these two areas under the Student Success Center.

"Utilizing the Noel-Levitz SSI and IPS has permitted the college to address important items, which can lead to greater student satisfaction and success. We have been able to make positive changes to college issues ranging from student services to campus safety."

Leon Hill
Director of Institutional Research

Delgado Community College (New Orleans, LA)

Enrollment at Delgado Community College has been increasing as the campus works to regain its pre-Katrina numbers. Retaining more students would help Delgado achieve this goal, and the college realized that providing better service to students would help make a positive impact on student satisfaction and retention. Because the campus has limited staff and resources, it used the Connections NOW™ quality service program to train frontline workers in Financial Aid, the Registrar’s Office, Student Advising and Testing, and Admissions and Enrollment, so that they would provide friendly, efficient service. The training had an immediate impact on frontline workers. Empowered by the training, they are now holding themselves to higher expectations and going the extra mile to assist students. Excitement about the program spread and training has since been expanded to other service departments.

"The Connections NOW training is so flexible—it fit right into workers’ daily responsibilities and has added so much value to what they do."

Stephen Andrus
Assistant to Provost
Hinds Community College (Raymond, Mississippi)

Despite being a two-year, open-enrollment school, Hinds Community College draws a mostly traditional-aged population of students (ages 18 to 20 years). The campus turned to the Student Satisfaction Inventory to better understand the needs and priorities of its student body. One of the results revealed that the traditional-aged students craved a campus-climate similar to a four-year institution, which Hinds satisfied in part by hiring a student activities coordinator and adding more extracurricular activities. Data also helped the campus serve its non-traditional population better by extending the hours of campus services such as financial aid and the bookstore. Additionally, a committee now monitors customer service to insure student satisfaction and needs are met. Since using the Student Satisfaction Inventory, Hinds has experienced an increase in enrollment, hitting a record high of 12,000 students last year.

“The College Student Inventory has fit into our strategic plan by connecting students to the college during Pre-Freshman Institutes and New Student Seminars, establishing relationships with counselors, formulating topics to be covered in Second Semester Seminars, and obtaining grant funding to address students’ learning styles.”

Steve Dauz
Director, College Discovery Program

LaGuardia Community College (Long Island City, New York)

Serving a population of students that is at high risk for attrition, the College Discovery Program at LaGuardia Community College implemented assessments from the Noel-Levitz Retention Management System™ to gather data and aid strategic retention planning. LaGuardia’s College Discovery Program has effectively implemented the assessments, along with counseling and academic support, to promote ownership of their education and goals. Early intervention and student support has yielded retention rates of 85 percent from first to second term and 68 percent from first to third term, indicating progress relative to the college’s retention and persistence goals.

“Compared to other survey companies we’ve worked with, the ease of use of the Student Satisfaction Inventory and the quality of service Noel-Levitz provides are unmatched.”

Robert Dunnam
Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

Trenholm State Technical College (Montgomery, Alabama)

The college enlisted the help of Noel-Levitz consultants and products to assist with developing and providing retention strategies for the entire campus that addressed academic advising, student satisfaction, professional development and customer service, and orientation. The college’s retention rate increased from 37.9 percent to 43 percent in the first year, to 45.7 percent in the second year, and is estimated to reach 48 percent this year. In addition, the college has trained 98 percent of faculty and staff in the importance and application of retention strategies.

“We are a two-year technical college with 34 programs that lead to associate degrees and certificates. We had to work hard to change the culture of the college to understand the importance of retention and its effects on our students and the institution. Our consultants were able to bring their expertise as leading retention specialists to our college and work with us to help the entire campus—faculty, students, and staff—understand the importance of retention to the institution. Before Noel-Levitz, we were mainly focused on bringing students in. Now, because of our retention success, we have other institutions in our system and state calling us to see how we did it. We have earned a great deal of respect from our colleagues because of our retention efforts.”

Samuel Munnerlyn
Dean of Students
Madison Area Technical College
(Madison, Wisconsin)

To promote student success and combat retention concerns from increased and new competition, Madison Area Technical College (MATC) began collecting data on student satisfaction levels with the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™. The results helped the college with strategic planning and instigate initiatives to better serve students, such as the Text Book Rental Program—an immensely popular program which helps reduce educational costs, a key concern for MATC students. Since aligning campus goals with satisfaction-priorities data, MATC has seen an increase in both retention and graduation rates.

“The Student Satisfaction Inventory has helped insure that what is important to students is important to the college.”
Tom Heaney
Institutional Research and Effectiveness Supervisor

South Arkansas Community College
(El Dorado, Arkansas)

With the increasing number of students enrolling in two-year schools, South Arkansas Community College wanted to help incoming students adjust to the demands of college. To jumpstart this process, they used data gathered from the Student Satisfaction Inventory and College Student Inventory to address student needs and help get them started on the right track towards graduation.

“The CSI survey gives our staff the ability to identify and address students’ needs early in their academic careers. It also creates the best opportunities to connect incoming students with services essential to their success. The Retention Management System is an essential component of our Enrollment Plan.”
Larry Andrews
Retention Coordinator

Minnesota State Community and Technical College
(Fergus Falls, Minnesota)

Set in a rural area and facing declining student populations, Minnesota State Community and Technical College wants to distinguish its campus from the competition by providing exceptional service to students. The campus turned to Noel-Levitz for service training, participating in the Connections NOW quality service training program. Leaders from each campus completed a Train the Trainer workshop together to ensure implementation of a shared approach to Connections NOW across each of the college’s five sites. Employees are currently completing three of the Connections NOW training modules every two weeks, allowing employees to fit training comfortably into their normal work schedules. After completion of each block, employees gather for small group discussions of the material, fostering productive dialogue that furthers development and involvement in the campus’ quality service mission.

“Everyone is loving Connections NOW. It is easy to use and has created a very positive buzz of dialogue across our campuses.”
Dacia Johnson
Human Resources Director

Anne Arundel Community College
(Arnold, Maryland)

The Student Achievement and Success Program (SASP) at Anne Arundel Community College is designed to facilitate early intervention. As part of the intake services, students complete the College Student Inventory (CSI) at the same time as their placement tests. Meeting directly with advisors in the Counseling Advising and Retention Service office and in the SASP office, they receive assistance in setting academic and developmental milestones, while integrating into the campus community. During the first six years of using the Retention Management System, fall-to-fall retention increased 11.3 percentage points.

“The CSI is a significant part of the SASP’s mission to provide individualized support to student populations traditionally experiencing the greatest challenges in meeting their academic goals. The program includes a contract that helps to proactively connect students with relevant resources that support and encourage participants to achieve academic milestones, to graduate, and then continue their educations at a four-year institution.”
Terry Clay
Assistant Dean, Student Development and Success

Noel-Levitz can help your campus reach your retention and completion goals. Call or e-mail us today to find out more.

Student photos courtesy of Delgado Community College.

© 2010 Noel-Levitz, Inc. • Community College Case Studies