



The College Student Inventory Guide for Advisors and Success Coaches

The Retention Management System Plus

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Introduction

Welcome Advisors and Success Coaches!

This guide is designed to facilitate your use of the College Student Inventory (CSI), one of the core components of the Retention Management System Plus. Use of this manual, in conjunction with the training sessions and other resources available in the Client Communities website, provides you with the resources you need to help students pursue a constructive learning experience and make a smooth transition into college life.

As an advisor/success coach, you are a major catalyst in facilitating student engagement in the academic and social life of your college community, while significantly influencing your students' educational and personal growth. Your dedication to this process will be appreciated by your students and readily evident in their satisfaction, success, and persistence.

The topics covered in this guide respond to questions you may have as you examine the College Student Inventory (CSI), including:

- What is the Retention Management System *Plus* (RMS *Plus*)?
- What is the College Student Inventory (CSI)?
- What is my role as a CSI advisor/success coach?
- Are there specific intervention strategies for the CSI?

What is the Retention Management System Plus (RMS Plus)?

The Retention Management System *Plus* (RMS *Plus*) refers to a combination of analytics, assessment tools and a data dashboard that are designed specifically to support increased student completion rates through earlier, more focused student interventions. The RMS *Plus* provides a wealth of data to make interventions more meaningful, more focused, and more successful. Campuses may choose to use one or a combination of the System offerings.

The RMS *Plus* provides critical information to promote student success, at the time you need it. You'll understand the strengths and challenges of each student, as well as their levels of receptivity. With this information you will be able to target your outreach efforts and resources more strategically. More specifically, this proactive approach to comprehensive student retention planning is designed to enable institutions to:

- Assess students' needs and strengths
- Identify students who may be at risk of leaving college prior to graduation
- Recognize students' motivational patterns, such as receptivity to assistance
- Use information to implement successful referrals and intervention programs
- Help advisors, success coaches and other educators to have effective and rewarding interactions with students through a more holistic understanding of students' non-cognitive, motivational attributes.

The six primary components of the Retention Management System *Plus* are intended to inform a broad range of student programs, services, and interventions.

1. College Student Inventory™—Prioritize your interventions more efficiently by assessing the strengths and challenges of each student.

2. Mid-Year Student Assessment™—Compare the strengths and challenges of your students at the mid-point of their first year and adjust your interventions accordingly with this followup survey.
3. The Second-Year Student Assessment™—Extend and strengthen your interventions beyond the first year using this survey for second-year students.
4. Student Retention Predictor™—Gauge the precise likelihood of each student persisting and the factors that may be putting them at risk.
5. Retention Data Center™—Manage and analyze all of your student success data more strategically through this comprehensive online portal.
6. Consulting—Develop data informed strategies to guide your retention efforts.

What is the College Student Inventory (CSI)

The College Student Inventory (CSI) is the foundation of the RMS *Plus*. The inventory is designed especially for incoming first-year students and is available in three versions: Form B (comprised of 100 items subsumed in 17 different scales) and Form C (comprised of 74 items subsumed in 13 different scales). These scales are organized under three following main categories:

- Academic Motivation
- General Coping Skills
- Receptivity to Support Services

The CSI also contains a number of single items reporting such background characteristics as high school GPA, hours the student plans to work, and family educational background. With information from this inventory, an advisor and/or success coach is in a position to initiate a meaningful conversation with a student, perhaps through an appeal to his or her capacity for tolerance, reading interests, social engagement, background, or yet another area.

Students complete the CSI online or via paper/pencil before the term begins or early in the term. With the online CSI, the reports are available to the campus coordinator immediately. With the paper CSI, an e-mail with a secure Web link to your reports is sent to the campus coordinator within approximately two to four business days from the time the answer sheets are received by the Ruffalo Noel Levitz processing center.

1. The CSI Coordinator Report

The CSI Coordinator Report is a one-page synopsis of each student's strengths, needs, and background.

Summary Observations provides a preliminary overview of a student's levels of risk and receptivity through the predictive analytics imbedded in the College Student Inventory results. Four observation scales are included:

- Overall Risk Index (four-year institutions); Overall Risk Index (two-year institutions)
- Predicated Academic Difficulty (four-year institutions); Acknowledged Academic Needs Index (two-year institutions)

- Educational Stress (four-year institutions); Apprehension Index (two-year institutions)
- Receptivity to Institutional Help (four-year institutions); Receptivity Index (two-year institutions)

This sensitive information helps you prioritize interventions. It is never shared with students, but may be shared with advisors and success coaches at the coordinator's discretion.

Motivational Assessment allows advisors to identify areas of strength and challenge for individual students at a glance. The motivational scales are reported in two ways, as a percentile rank and with a bar graph.

Student Background Information provides a context for discussing motivational patterns within the scales, such as activities in which the student participated during high school.

Specific Recommendations for each student provide action steps based on need and receptivity scores. The strength of each recommendation is indicated by its priority score. These statements are useful when encouraging students to commit to goals and as a means of facilitating referrals to support offices.

2. The CSI Advisor/Counselor Report

This report parallels the Coordinator Report with one exception. Namely, the Advisor/Counselor Report does not include the Summary Observations. Rather, its focus is on the motivational assessment, recommendations, and background information.

3. The CSI Student Report

The CSI Student Report contains the same information as the CSI Advisor/Counselor Report, as well as written interpretations that explain a student's score on each scale. The interpretations are written in very clear, non-technical language and are designed to provide students encouragement and guidance. Through the Retention Data Center, you can now insert campus-specific text to appear in the student report's narrative, to highlight your campus resources for referrals, such as your student success center.

4. The CSI Summary and Planning Report

The CSI Summary and Planning Report is a resource tool to be used for institutional planning. The analysis includes all of the means of the students who completed the CSI, presented in three statistical summaries, including the total sample, males only, and females only. All means are computed from percentile scores. Since these scores are viewed in relation to national norms, the means provide a useful indication of how your students' overall motivational pattern compares with that of a national sample of comparable institutions, broadly defined.

The analysis then provides separate list of students having high priority scores in the following areas:

- High Overall Risk Index/overall risk

- High receptivity to institutional assistance
- Academic assistance needs and interests
- Personal counseling needs and interests
- Career counseling needs and interests
- Social engagement needs
- Low sense of financial security
- Invalid reports

Priority scores, as noted in the section entitled, “Recommendations,” are determined by a formula weighing a student’s need for a particular service with their expressed interest in that service. The priority scores can be extremely useful in identifying students who will most likely benefit from a given service.

5. The Integrated Summary Observations with Receptivity Report

This useful report serves as a very efficient tool for connecting students with campus services, such as academic support, drawing upon their receptivity to assistance as a springboard for intervention.

The report provides an integrated view of your students’ scores across the *summary observations* scales (indicating need) and the individual *receptivity scales* (indicating desire for services). Additionally, desire to transfer is noted for students at four-year institutions only.

Students with percentile scores of 80 and above on one or more of the summary observations scales **and** scores of 65 and above on one or more of the receptivity scales are highlighted in color in the table.

Additional analyses are possible with two standard options for this report:

- You can apply different filters to your data by defining the value (scale) and the range of scores from the filters
- You can download the Excel table with your students’ scores

In combination, the six facets that comprise the College Student Inventory are used to quickly identify which students are most in need of help, and to describe the general scope of their strengths, challenges, and receptivity to assistance. The inventory and report samples can be viewed at www.ruffalonl.com/CSIsamples.

The Role of Advisor/Success Coach in using the CSI?

What is your role as an advisor/success coach?

As an advisor or success coach, your dedication to student success and early intervention is integral to the effective implementation of the College Student Inventory. While the CSI reports help to inform meaningful advisor and student conversations, without the personal contact you provide through the Student-Advisor conference – either face-to-face or via phone – the essential value of the inventory is likely compromised.

Because the CSI taps a wide range of personal information about each student, you may feel more comfortable if your role is defined. CSI training will provide the guidance you need to explain the student's report, answer questions, and facilitate referrals to other colleagues and services.

Below are some expectations that provide you with a jump-start on delivering quality advising/coaching using the CSI:

- Read all CSI materials thoroughly.
- Review the College Student Inventory so that you are familiar with the inventory the students completed.
- Watch the short video clip of an advisor and student conference about the CSI Student Report
- Participate in training sessions your coordinator may schedule.
- Plan to contact your advisees on an individual basis *at least once* during the first three to six weeks of the term.
- Become thoroughly familiar with each student's report.
- Become familiar with any procedures recommended by your institution to protect privileged information like the CSI Reports.
- Become sufficiently knowledgeable to refer students to appropriate resources to meet their needs.
- Function as a liaison between the individual student and the institution.
- Establish a positive relationship with each advisee that is mutually respectful, open, friendly, and trusting.
- Help students to focus on their strengths while recognizing limitations.

What are your specific responsibilities as an advisor/success coach?

While the specific responsibilities of an advisor/success coach vary depending on the institution, there are several tasks that are specific to the College Student Inventory. The following list provides

a brief overview of these tasks, explained more fully under the section entitled, "The CSI Intervention Strategy."

- Obtain your advisees' CSI reports from your RMS *Plus* coordinator or via the online link and access codes that he or she may forward to you for direct use.
- Study the student profiles thoroughly in order to identify the pattern of students' strengths and needs that the scores seem to suggest.

- Set up an appointment (in person or by phone) to meet with each student during the first three to six weeks of the term to discuss his/her CSI student report.
- Discuss how the students feel about their experiences so far.
- Discuss with the student the motivational pattern demonstrated on the CSI Student Report.
- Arrange to follow up with each advisee.
- Arrange or provide guidance on how to attain any information that the student requests, if you are not able to provide it.
- Refer students to the appropriate resources as necessary, to further the process of integration.
- Follow up with personal encouragement and inquiries to students about progress with their goals.
- After each contact with your advisee, document your interactions with students via your campus' system (or using the Advising Notes within the Retention Data Center).

CSI Advising Practices

Is the CSI appropriate for use with strengths-based advising?

The CSI can be used effectively with any type of advising/coaching program. The presentation of the motivation scales on the Student Report and Advisor/Counselor Report allows the advisor/coach to focus solely on the student's strengths if they desire to do so.

The separate versions of the CSI "Conversation Starters" Questions provide the structure for both a strengths-based focus and a developmental focus.

How should patterns and themes be treated when interpreting CSI Reports?

Before discussing any patterns or themes found in the CSI profiles, it is important to emphasize the preliminary nature of the data contained in the CSI. Any inventory results should be considered preliminary, since they are a sample of a person's behavior at that particular point in time. As such, no definitive conclusions about a person's attitudes or behavior should be based solely on information obtained by any one inventory, regardless of its technical merits. All data should be interpreted in light of other information available, such as information commonly found in a student's file and information obtained during an interview with the student. *It is best to view the CSI Reports as hypotheses to be tested during the Student-Advisor Conferences. Thus, recommendations are preliminary suggestions to be confirmed by the student.*

How important is it to avoid labeling when interpreting the CSI reports?

Once you become experienced in interpreting profiles, extreme care is warranted to avoid unintentionally labeling or categorizing students based on their CSI Reports. If you have access to the Summary Observations, keep in mind that these scores are only to help in prioritizing interventions. Unfortunately, labels have a way of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies and students who are labeled may be treated in such a way as to fulfill that label. *It is important to view each student, regardless of his/her score on any segment of the CSI, as an individual in need of encouragement to fulfill his/her potential.*

Is it appropriate to use the CSI to predict student behaviors?

Every student is an individual with a unique configuration of motivational processes. To be most effective with each student, we need to understand that individuality.

The purpose of studying general patterns is to improve our understanding of the influence that key variables have on student behavior, so that we can become more sensitive to each student's needs. For instance, the Overall Risk Index score on the CSI Coordinator Report is not meant to be used as a universal explanation for all instances of attrition. Rather, it is one piece of information you can use in seeking the most effective intervention to fit the needs of a particular student.

Most advisors would also suggest that broad levels of performance and qualitative descriptions stated in simple terms are preferable to specific numerical scores when discussing the student reports with students. Although the suggested group sessions would help students to understand percentile ranks, an advisor's discussion will be more productive if technical jargon and scores are kept to a minimum.

Again, the CSI should be used as a springboard for meaningful discussion that fosters student engagement.

How does the CSI promote student engagement?

Student engagement occurs when students connect with the college community in ways that advance their opportunities to become fully integrated into that community. Below are some specific ways the CSI promotes student engagement:

- Each of the CSI scales can be connected to at least one student service or support area. For example, the verbal confidence scale or the math and science confidence scale present a great opportunity for the advisor to connect the student to appropriate academic areas, support services, or student activities. The receptivity scales represent even more direct links with programs and services.
- The Advisor/Counselor Report features up to seven specific recommendations for each student. Again, these recommendations represent specific opportunities for students to connect with the programs and services they need to become more fully engaged in the community.
- The Summary and Planning Report and the filtering/export functions in the Retention Data Center provide outreach lists that allow individual program and service areas to connect with students who have indicated a need or a desire for their services.
- The Integrated Summary Observations with Receptivity Report is designed to facilitate the connection of students with the service areas that they've indicated as most beneficial upon entry to college.
- The "Conversation Starters" Questions are designed to promote student engagement with the programs, services, activities, and people who can help them become integrated into the college community.

Additional Resources

These resources are intended to supplement the information provided in this guide. Many of the strategies were developed by resourceful coordinators and advisors at all types of institutions. Please feel free to adapt any of these strategies to fit your advising style and the approach adopted by your institution for using the CSI to intervene with students.

www.ruffalonl.com/RMSResults

www.ruffalonl.com/RMSSharingResults