

Student Success 101

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Today's Session

- 1. What is student success?
- 2. Research-informed practices
- 3. Framework for impacting student success
- 4. Resources

National retention percentages



For students who started in the fall of 2022, the national retention rate was 68.2%.

- Public Four-year institutions: 80.9%
- Private Four-year institutions: 79.2%
- Community colleges: 55.0%



But consider the flip-side: 19% to 45% of students were not retained.

Between January 2022 and July 2023, approximately 2.1 million students left college without a credential

What is the impact of the demographic cliff?

Spoiler alert: Retention is even more important now!



How do you define student success?

Defining student success: Broad themes







Support Systems



Holistic Development







Student-Defined Goals

Key themes in success definitions

	4-Year, Private	4-Year, Public	2-Year
Degree Completion & Retention	Focus on graduation within 150% of the expected time	Emphasize timely progression through degree programs	Consider multiple completion pathways, including transfer rates
Support Systems	Favor personalized mentoring	Focus on scalable support structures	Prioritize flexible, accessible resources
Holistic Development	Stress spiritual and emotional growth alongside academics	Target overall student well-being	Emphasize personal and professional development
Career Outcomes	Prioritize post-graduation employment Prioritize post-graduation employment		Emphasize workforce readiness
Student-Defined Goals	Growing recognition that success varies by individual	Emphasis on personal goal achievement	Flexible definitions accommodating diverse student objectives

Representative definitions: More than just completion

- Four-year Private: "Student retention, graduation, and subsequent placement with a transformative experience."
- Four-year Public: "Students who successfully persist through their progression points in a timely manner."
- Community College: "Curriculum completion rates evaluated along three separate avenues: graduation rates, credit accumulation, and persistence."

Defining retention

Federal definitions

- Retention: the percentage of students who return to the same institution for their second year.
- Persistence: the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year.
- Institutions that receive federal financial aid are required to report student success data to the U.S. Department of Education via annual surveys (IPEDS).
 - Part of a larger set of information that is also shared with students and families through the College Navigator website.





Who's in charge of retention

Only about 2/3 of institutions have a retention lead

Respondents indicated an individual position within their institution charged with leading and coordinating activities for getting results in student success, retention, and completion.



70%

Four-year private

79%

Four-year public

71%

Two-year

Institutions with a retention/student success committee



71%

Four-vear private

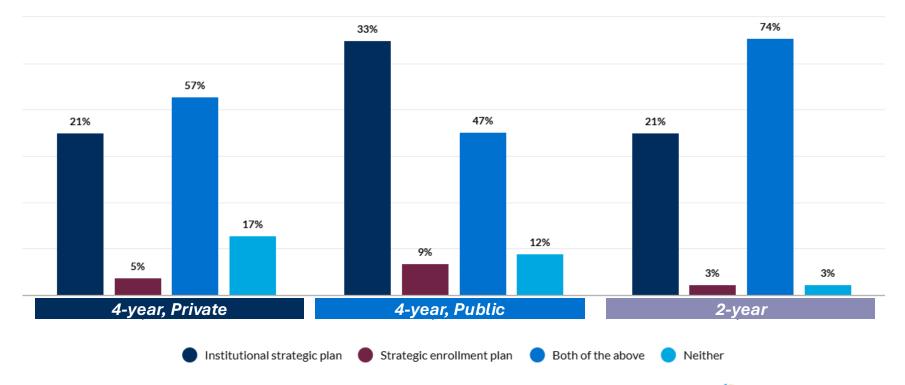
53%

Four-vear public

66%

Two-year

What guides retention planning efforts?



Institutional Strategic Plan vs. Strategic Enrollment Plan

Compare and contrast the two

Institutional Strategic Plan entails:

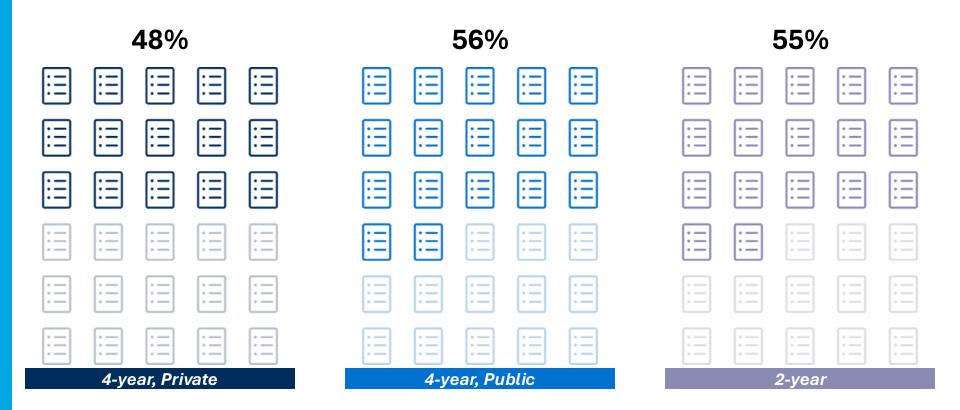
- Foundational information
 - Mission, vision, and values
- Goals, strategic issues, and objectives
- Strategies, tactics, and actions
- Metrics and KPIs to measure success

Strategic Enrollment Plan entails:

- Preparation and data analysis
 - Setting enrollment goals
- Strategy development
 - Using ROI and action plans
- Plan formation and goal setting
- Implementation and evaluation

Do you have a written student success plan?

Written student success plans



Recommended elements of a written student success plan

Successful written plans include

- Current state of retention
 - Situation analysis, including focus groups
 - Historical data analysis and trends
 - Discovery: Advising model, new student onboarding/transitions, student engagement programs, teaching and learning...

- Student success measures
- Retention, persistence, and graduation rate goals
- Strategies
- Action plans with timeline and accountability

Your institution's mission, vision, and strategic plan provide the necessary clarity and focus for your student success efforts.

Recommended strategies and tactics



General strategies and tactics

Top strategies at four-year privates

	Practice Used	Effective* Traditional/On-Campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	98%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	93%	95%
Student success coaching (internal)	90%	100%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	87%	95%
Providing each student an academic plan/roadmap of courses	87%	98%

^{*} Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)

General strategies and tactics

Top strategies at four-year publics

	Practice Used	Effective* Traditional/On-Campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	93%	91%
Student success coaching (internal)	91%	100%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	89%	97%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	88%	90%

^{*}Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)

General strategies and tactics

Top strategies at community colleges

	Practice Used	Effective* Traditional/On-Campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	100%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	97%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	94%	96%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	91%	88%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	88%	92%

^{*}Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)

Also consider programs and strategies targeted to specific populations

- First-year students
- Online students
- Honors programs for academic advanced students
- International students
- Student-athletes
- Students with disabilities
- Veterans
- First-generation students

Academic and co-curricular experiences are mutually reinforcing, contribute to students' holistic development, and prepare them for life after college.



Management practices for optimizing student success

Top practices at four-year privates

	Practice Used	Effective*
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	89%	90%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	89%	74%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	89%	74%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	87%	86%
Setting measurable goals to improve retention rates from term-to-term or year-to-year	87%	91%

^{*}Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)

Management practices for optimizing student success

Top practices at four-year publics

	Practice Used	Effective*
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	94%	86%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	85%	81%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	85%	89%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	85%	88%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	82%	77%

^{*} Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)

Management practices for optimizing student success

Top practices at community colleges

	Practice Used	Effective*
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	88%	83%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	88%	74%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	85%	81%
Title III or Title V Funding	85%	91%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	85%	72%

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Effective practices for student success, retention and completion

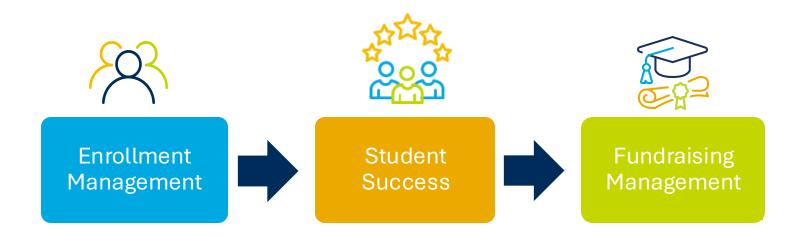
Practice	Institution type	Using method	Very or somewhat effective
	4-Year Private	89%	90%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled student to help ensure their satisfaction	4-Year Public	79%	91%
and success	2-Year Public	81%	72%
Using an incoming student	4-Year Private	68%	78%
assessment to identify students' needs and their motivation to complete their degree	4-Year Public	67%	81%
-	2-Year Public	46%	67%

Which practices are you using or hoping to implement this year?

Framework for impacting student success

Student success is the connector

Help students stay successfully enrolled after recruiting them so they graduate and have the potential to be engaged alumni



Intentionally using data for student success

Follow these ABC's

It is important to be aware that just gathering the data will not magically help you retain students. It is just the first step in the process.

- Assess student needs with individual and institutional level data collection.
- **2. Build** a high-impact completion plan to engage students from pre-enrollment to graduation. Gather student feedback before developing action plans.
- 3. Connect students to campus resources that best match their needs and increase their likelihood to persist and complete. Communicate about what you are doing and why as improvements are made.

Six building blocks for student success

Be intrusive and intentional

Integrate with other programs

Gather and integrate student feedback

Provide quality classroom engagement

Ensure studentcenteredness Empower students to develop relationships

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Student Success Checklist

For a copy of the full pdf: StudentSuccessTech@RuffaloNL.com



STUDENT SUCCESS CHECKLIST	
Focus	Key Questions
Robust student data to inform planning and strategies*	Do you have access to data reports for retention, academic performance and major discernment, and student motivation and satisfaction? *
Early alert system	How do you identify students at risk of attrition in the first two weeks of the semester? Do you have an attrition curve for your first-year cohort?
Student-faculty connections	How do you connect students to faculty in their area of interest in the first semester (while they are likely not taking major-specific courses)?
Parent/family communications	What messages do your communications to first-year families include?
Community integration	How do your students acclimate to the surrounding community? What opportunities exist for service learning and appreciation for the cultural and social life of the community?
Student support services	Do your students know which support services to access to address specific issues? Are they easy to find on your website? Does your physical campus have clear signage for walk-ins?
Peer connections	In what ways do you intentionally connect new students to peer mentors, provide group interactions in and out of the classroom, and connect online students to virtual communities?
Formal retention committee	Do you have a retention committee with a designated chair(s), charge, and scope of responsibility from senior leadership?
Written student success plan	Do you have a current, written student success plan that includes goals and strategies for at least the first two years of college?
First-Year Experience	Do you have a comprehensive first-year experience program that addresses the transition to college? Is it tailored to your unique populations?

Download the 2025 National First-Year Students and Their Motivation to Complete College Report

RNL.com/FirstYear



2025 National First-Year Students and Their Motivation to Complete College Report

Data and insights on the challenges and opportunities for completing a college degree, based on an analysis of nearly 62,000 first-year college students



Download the 2024 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

RNL.com/Satisfaction



ocusing on class-level subpopulation results with data from nearly 400,000 students at 693 institutions



Download the 2025 Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion

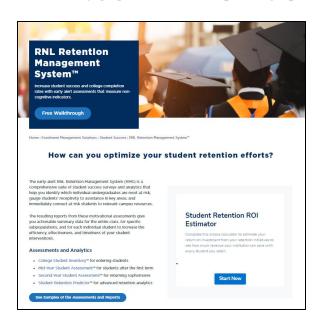
RNL.com/Papers





Learn more on the RNL website

RNL.com/RMSPlus



RNL.com/ SPSOverview



Another Resource: Many RNL blogs on the topics of satisfaction and motivation

Let's develop a plan together! Partner with us for student success consulting



RNL NC ALTERING & LANDSCAPE

7/23 at 8:15 a.m. — Student Success: Gather and Use Data to Impact the Student Experience Across Your Campus

7/23 at 9:45 a.m. — Using Data for Improvement: What to Track and How to Create a Data Culture

7/24 at 11:15 a.m. — RNL Student Success Assessment Tools: Using Data to Inform Your Retention Efforts

7/24 at 1:45 p.m. — Advising Across the Student Journey: A Panel Discussion

We'd love to hear from you!



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