

Higher Ed Benchmarks

Trends in Enrollment Management

2015 Student Retention and College Completion Practices Benchmark Report

for Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions

What's working to increase undergraduate student retention and college completion? To find out, Ruffalo Noel Levitz conducted a 102-item, web-based poll of campus officials in May 2015 as part of the firm's continuing series of benchmark polls for higher education. For context, comparative findings from previous Ruffalo Noel Levitz retention studies are available on the Ruffalo Noel Levitz website, as this study is repeated every two years.

Among the highlights:

- Academic support programs, honors programs, and “giving students practical work experiences in their intended major” emerged as the most effective practices across sectors among 48 practices that were measured in this study. Also effective were first-year student programs and one-on-one advising by professional staff.
- Financial literacy programs were rated “minimally effective” by respondents across sectors, but nevertheless were widely used.
- In a ranking of 33 internal management operations for retention/completion, the most effective practices across sectors were term-by-term persistence tracking and “identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete.”
- Respondents from half or more of public institutions, and one-quarter of four-year private institutions, indicated that performance-based funding has influenced them to pay more attention to retention and college completion.
- Improvements in graduation rate trends were reported by at least 44 percent of the poll's respondents across sectors, while another 40 to 46 percent reported stable rates, and only 7 to 16 percent reported declines.
- Less than half of respondents across sectors reported having a current, written plan for student retention that they believed was of good quality, and less than half of respondents from public institutions reported having a campuswide committee for retention that they believed was of good quality.

How do your practices compare?

Readers are encouraged to compare the findings in this report to the practices on their campus. For rankings of student retention practices from 2013 and 2011, and for additional reports, visit www.noellevitz.com/BenchmarkReports.

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See the Appendix for detailed findings from all 102 items on the poll.

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Findings color key:

Four-year private institutions

Four-year public institutions

Two-year public institutions

About the rankings and the statistical process used in this study

All of the findings in this report are judged to be statistically significant. This determination was made by calculating a statistical confidence interval for each finding (e.g., means, medians, proportions, and other relevant test statistics) and then judging the confidence interval to be acceptably small relative to the size of the finding.

Note that this study's **rankings are by effectiveness and usage**. To rank the most and least effective practices, respondents were asked to rate each practice on the following scale:

___ Very effective ___ Somewhat effective ___ Minimally effective ___ Practice not used

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness options that were chosen by respondents: "very effective," "somewhat effective," and "minimally effective." This approach of excluding the fourth response, "practice not used," allows promising, less-frequently-used practices to be included in the "top 10" rankings—those practices that are rated very effective but which are not currently being used by the majority of institutions.

Note: To identify the proportion of institutions using a particular practice, a simple calculation was made of the inverse of those who selected "practice not used."

Top 10 most effective strategies and tactics for student retention and college completion, by institution type

Below are the 10 survey items, by sector, that respondents in this study most frequently rated “very effective” among 48 practices for student retention and college completion. Note that this year the top 10 list includes programs designed for particular populations of students. For rankings of all 48 practices, please see the Appendix.

Rankings by effectiveness*	Four-year private institutions	Four-year public institutions	Two-year public institutions
1	Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	Honors programs for academically advanced students	Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)
2	Required on-campus housing for first-year students	Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	Tutoring
3	Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation
4	Honors programs for academically advanced students	Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)
5	Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	Supplemental instruction	Honors programs for academically advanced students
6	Tutoring	Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)
7	Programs for first-generation students	Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	Programs for first-generation students
8	Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	Mandatory advising by professional staff, one-on-one
9	Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	Advising by professional staff, one-on-one
10	Student success coaching (internal)	Mandatory advising by professional staff, one-on-one	Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students

Highlights from these rankings: Academic support programs, honors programs, and “giving students practical work experiences in their intended major” emerged as the most effective practices across sectors. Also effective were first-year student programs and one-on-one advising by professional staff. However, only a few of the top-rated practices were rated “very effective” by the majority of respondents despite being rated more highly compared to other practices. Please see the Appendix for specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Boldface indicates practices that were *not* being used by more than one-quarter of institutions within the sector, despite the ratings of effectiveness. Institutions not using these practices may want to consider using them. Please see the Appendix for details.

*Reminder: Rating options included “very effective,” “somewhat effective,” “minimally effective,” or “practice not used.” Respondents who selected “practice not used” were excluded from the effectiveness ratings. See explanation on page 2.

Five least-effective strategies and tactics

This table shows the five items that respondents most frequently rated “minimally effective” among the 48 strategies and tactics that were measured for their effectiveness and usage.

Rankings by ineffectiveness	Four-year private institutions	Four-year public institutions	Two-year public institutions
1	Using a “reverse transfer” process to help students finish degrees at their previous institution	Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	Peer mentoring
2	Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	Programs designed specifically for adult/non-traditional students	Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave
3	Identifying re-entry dates for students who are leaving	Online social networking to engage students in online communities	Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances
4	Remaining in contact with students who are leaving	Programs designed specifically for transfer students	Learning communities
5	Programs designed specifically for second-year students*	Remaining in contact with students who are leaving	Online social networking to engage students in online communities

Highlights from these rankings: Across sectors, financial literacy programs and various types of contact with students who were withdrawing or leaving were most frequently rated “minimally effective.” Notice that both of these practices were widely used across sectors. Please see the Appendix for specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Boldface indicates practices that were being used by half or more of institutions within the sector despite being ranked minimally effective. For more details, please see the Appendix.

*Respondents from four-year private institutions were almost evenly divided on the effectiveness of this survey item, which was also rated a “least used practice,” and appears to be a promising practice, in the table on the next page. Please see the Appendix for specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Five least-used strategies and tactics, including promising practices

Note that least-used practices may be least-used for distinct reasons. For example, a practice may be least used because it is ineffective or it may be because it is a practice that has not yet caught on widely.

Rankings by least used	Four-year private institutions	Four-year public institutions	Two-year public institutions*
1	Student success coaching (outsourced)	Student success coaching (outsourced)	Required on-campus housing for first-year students
2	Programs for part-time students	Programs designed specifically for second-year students	Student success coaching (outsourced)
3	Using a “reverse transfer” process to help students finish degrees at their previous institution	Programs for part-time students	Programs for part-time students
4	Programs designed specifically for second-year students	Programs designed specifically for adult/non-traditional students	Identifying re-entry dates for students who are leaving
5	Summer bridge program	Programs designed specifically for online learners	Programs designed specifically for second-year students

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Highlights from these rankings: Outsourced coaching and programs for part-time and second-year students were the least-used practices across sectors. Please see the Appendix for specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Boldface indicates practices that half or more of respondents rated “very effective” or “somewhat effective.” Note that some practices in the above table were not rated for effectiveness. Please see the Appendix for details.

*There were not enough respondents in the data sample to rate the effectiveness of these practices with statistical confidence. Hence, no items appear in boldface for this sector.

Top five practices for retaining online learners

Below are the five survey items, by sector, that respondents in this study most frequently rated “very effective” among 12 practices for retaining online learners. For complete findings, please see the Appendix.

Rankings by effectiveness	Four-year private institutions	Four-year public institutions	Two-year public institutions
1	Mandatory training program for online faculty	Mandatory training program for online faculty	Mandatory training program for online faculty
2	Mandatory online interaction between faculty and students	Faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy	Faculty advisor assigned to each online learner
3	Mandatory academic advising	Mandatory academic advising	Mandatory academic advising
4	Faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy	Online readiness assessment for incoming students	Faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy
5	Faculty advisor assigned to each online learner	Early-alert and intervention system for online learners	Early-alert and intervention system for online learners

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Highlights from these rankings: Mandatory faculty training and mandatory academic advising emerged as the most effective practices for retaining online learners across sectors among 12 survey items that were measured. Also effective was “faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy.” Please see the Appendix for the specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Top five internal operations

Below are the five survey items, by sector, that the respondents in this study most frequently rated “very effective” among 33 internal management operations for student retention and college completion. For rankings of all 33 practices, please see the Appendix.

Rankings by effectiveness	Four-year private institutions	Four-year public institutions	Two-year public institutions
1	Institutionwide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	Institutionwide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning
2	Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	Title III or Title V funding
3	Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	Title III or Title V funding	Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty
4	Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	Tracking credit hours attempted vs. completed for each term	Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate
5	Assessing what’s important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete

Highlights from the these rankings: Term-by-term persistence tracking and “identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete” emerged as the most effective internal operations across sectors among the 33 survey items that were measured. For public institutions, Title III or Title V funding was also effective. Please see the Appendix for the specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Boldface indicates practices that were *not* being used by more than one-quarter of institutions within the sector, despite the ratings of effectiveness. Institutions not using these practices may want to consider using them. Please see the Appendix for details.

Influence of performance-based funding **NEW!**

For the first time in this biennial study, respondents were asked to indicate (yes/no) if their institution’s attention to retention and college completion had been influenced by performance-based funding.

Performance-based funding an influence?	Four-year private institutions	Four-year public institutions	Two-year public institutions
Yes, performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to retention and college completion.	25.3%	52.7%	57.1%

What the data show: The majority of public institution respondents, and a substantial minority of private institution respondents, agreed that performance-based funding had influenced them to pay more attention to student retention and college completion. Future studies will need to explore the impact of this influence on campus strategies and tactics.

Planning and leadership practices highlights

Below are quality ratings, by sector, for four planning and leadership practices for student retention and college completion. For further breakdowns, please see the Appendix.

Usage and quality ratings	Four-year private institutions		Four-year public institutions		Two-year public institutions	
	Yes	Yes, and it's of good or excellent quality*	Yes	Yes, and it's of good or excellent quality*	Yes	Yes, and it's of good or excellent quality*
Written plan to guide student retention and college completion efforts	73.1%	46.2%	65.5%	32.7%	62.5%	29.7%
Written plan to facilitate faculty/student engagement	68.4%	39.3%	60.0%	23.7%	46.9%	15.6%
Retention committee to lead and coordinate retention efforts	82.3%	58.2%	74.5%	43.6%	70.3%	31.2%
Individual position within our institution charged with primary responsibility for leading and coordinating retention activities and for getting retention results	86.1%	65.8%	81.8%	58.2%	57.8%	32.9%

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Highlights from the data: Less than half of respondents across sectors reported having a written plan for student retention that they believed was of good or excellent quality. Many respondents also questioned the quality of their written plans for faculty-student engagement. In addition, less than half of respondents from public institutions indicated they had a committee that was of good or excellent quality.

Missed opportunity? A separate cross-tab analysis found that respondents who reported a declining trend in their graduation rates (see Appendix) also questioned the quality of their written plans for retention and college completion. This finding was based on an analysis of the above findings with the graduation rate findings shown in the Appendix section titled “General Trend of Cohort Graduation Rate Over Past Three Years.” This suggests that campuses that want to increase their graduation rates should consider the role that retention planning may have on outcomes.

*These percentages indicate the percentage of respondents who rated the quality of these items as “good” or “excellent” as opposed to “fair,” “poor,” or “no” (non-existent). Please see the Appendix for the specific proportions of respondents choosing each rating category.

Appendix with complete findings by sector

The following tables include the complete findings of this study, divided and color-coded for each of the three sectors examined.

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NA notation: Please note that effectiveness ratings are unavailable (shown as “NA”) in cases where the number of respondents was too small to provide statistically significant findings.

Usage and Effectiveness of 48 Strategies and Tactics for Student Retention and College Completion—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	98.7%	55.1%	39.7%	5.1%	94.9%
Required on-campus housing for first-year students	59.5%	53.2%	36.2%	10.6%	89.4%
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	94.9%	49.3%	46.7%	4.0%	96.0%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	63.3%	48.0%	44.0%	8.0%	92.0%
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	89.9%	47.9%	43.7%	8.5%	91.5%
Tutoring	91.1%	44.4%	50.0%	5.6%	94.4%
Programs for first-generation students	35.4%	42.9%	46.4%	10.7%	89.3%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	78.5%	40.3%	45.2%	14.5%	85.5%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	72.2%	38.6%	47.4%	14.0%	86.0%
Student success coaching (internal)	68.4%	35.2%	44.4%	20.4%	79.6%
Summer bridge program	25.3%	35.0%	45.0%	20.0%	80.0%
Early-alert and intervention system	96.2%	34.2%	50.0%	15.8%	84.2%
Mandatory advising by professional staff, one-on-one	48.1%	34.2%	47.4%	18.4%	81.6%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	79.7%	33.3%	47.6%	19.0%	81.0%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	86.1%	32.4%	42.6%	25.0%	75.0%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	53.2%	31.0%	47.6%	21.4%	78.6%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	69.6%	30.9%	47.3%	21.8%	78.2%
Programs designed specifically for international students	58.2%	30.4%	41.3%	28.3%	71.7%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	91.1%	29.2%	52.8%	18.1%	81.9%
Mandatory faculty advising, one-on-one	65.8%	28.8%	46.2%	25.0%	75.0%

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics, Continued

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Programs designed specifically for adult/non-traditional students	44.3%	28.6%	48.6%	22.9%	77.1%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	67.1%	28.3%	56.6%	15.1%	84.9%
Peer mentoring	65.8%	26.9%	40.4%	32.7%	67.3%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	44.3%	25.7%	45.7%	28.6%	71.4%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	75.9%	25.0%	58.3%	16.7%	83.3%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	67.1%	24.5%	54.7%	20.8%	79.2%
Intentional telephone calls at key intervals to stay in touch with current students	58.2%	23.9%	58.7%	17.4%	82.6%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	81.0%	23.4%	34.4%	42.2%	57.8%
Learning communities	49.4%	23.1%	43.6%	33.3%	66.7%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention	72.2%	22.8%	50.9%	26.3%	73.7%
Intentional printed and electronic communications at key intervals to stay in touch with current students	74.7%	22.0%	45.8%	32.2%	67.8%
Academic recovery program for students having academic difficulty	82.3%	21.5%	61.5%	16.9%	83.1%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	77.2%	21.3%	52.5%	26.2%	73.8%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	54.4%	20.9%	48.8%	30.2%	69.8%
Mandatory academic support (e.g., required math course)	73.4%	20.7%	63.8%	15.5%	84.5%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	43.0%	20.6%	38.2%	41.2%	58.8%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	58.2%	19.6%	41.3%	39.1%	60.9%
Identifying re-entry dates for students who are leaving	50.6%	17.5%	30.0%	52.5%	47.5%
Programs designed specifically for students of color	45.6%	16.7%	58.3%	25.0%	75.0%

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics, Continued

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Online social networking to engage students in online communities	54.4%	16.3%	39.5%	44.2%	55.8%
Remaining in contact with students who are leaving	54.4%	16.3%	34.9%	48.8%	51.2%
Co-curricular programs aimed at retention	69.6%	12.7%	50.9%	36.4%	63.6%
Supplemental instruction	55.7%	11.4%	50.0%	38.6%	61.4%
Using a “reverse transfer” process to help students finish degrees at their previous institution	24.1%	10.5%	26.3%	63.2%	36.8%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	24.1%	5.3%	47.4%	47.4%	52.6%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	55.7%	4.5%	38.6%	56.8%	43.2%
Programs for part-time students	16.5%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Student success coaching (outsourced)	5.1%	NA	NA	NA	NA

Usage and Effectiveness of 12 Practices Specifically for Retaining Online Learners— Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Four-year
private
institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Mandatory training program for online faculty	44.3%	40.0%	48.6%	11.4%	88.6%
Mandatory online interaction between faculty and students	48.1%	39.5%	39.5%	21.1%	78.9%
Mandatory academic advising	46.8%	35.1%	45.9%	18.9%	81.1%
Faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy	50.6%	32.5%	45.0%	22.5%	77.5%
Faculty advisor assigned to each online learner	32.9%	30.8%	53.8%	15.4%	84.6%
Online readiness assessment for incoming students	30.4%	29.2%	41.7%	29.2%	70.8%
Orientation program or course for online learners	46.8%	27.0%	56.8%	16.2%	83.8%
Early-alert and intervention system for online learners	34.2%	25.9%	44.4%	29.6%	70.4%
Technical support to address online connection issues	54.4%	25.6%	48.8%	25.6%	74.4%
Student services geared to online learners, including registration and financial aid	43.0%	23.5%	52.9%	23.5%	76.5%
Assessment to identify program improvements for online learners	44.3%	22.9%	54.3%	22.9%	77.1%
Academic support services specifically for online learners	45.6%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	66.7%

Usage and Effectiveness of 33 Internal Operations Practices—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Rankings of Internal Operations

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Institutionwide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	83.5%	51.5%	37.9%	10.6%	89.4%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	83.5%	43.9%	42.4%	13.6%	86.4%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	72.2%	40.4%	40.4%	19.3%	80.7%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	88.6%	37.1%	47.1%	15.7%	84.3%
Assessing what’s important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	79.7%	33.3%	49.2%	17.5%	82.5%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	78.5%	32.3%	38.7%	29.0%	71.0%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	84.8%	31.3%	47.8%	20.9%	79.1%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	54.4%	30.2%	41.9%	27.9%	72.1%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	60.8%	29.2%	41.7%	29.2%	70.8%
Title III or Title V funding	48.1%	28.9%	31.6%	39.5%	60.5%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	72.2%	28.1%	40.4%	31.6%	68.4%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	78.5%	27.4%	43.5%	29.0%	71.0%
Development of faculty skills in instruction, advising, and student interaction	83.5%	27.3%	43.9%	28.8%	71.2%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	78.5%	25.8%	40.3%	33.9%	66.1%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	75.9%	25.0%	46.7%	28.3%	71.7%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	78.5%	24.2%	56.5%	19.4%	80.6%
Tracking rates of academic probation	81.0%	23.4%	45.3%	31.3%	68.8%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make campus atmosphere student-centered	65.8%	23.1%	30.8%	46.2%	53.8%

Rankings of Internal Operations, Continued

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	44.3%	22.9%	51.4%	25.7%	74.3%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	55.7%	22.7%	59.1%	18.2%	81.8%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	63.3%	22.0%	46.0%	32.0%	68.0%
Adjusting admissions standards to address attrition	51.9%	22.0%	43.9%	34.1%	65.9%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	70.9%	21.4%	41.1%	37.5%	62.5%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	54.4%	20.9%	30.2%	48.8%	51.2%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	79.7%	20.6%	49.2%	30.2%	69.8%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	65.8%	19.2%	51.9%	28.8%	71.2%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	53.2%	19.0%	42.9%	38.1%	61.9%
Tracking credit hours attempted vs. completed for each term	59.5%	17.0%	48.9%	34.0%	66.0%
Setting expectations for student engagement during hiring process for new faculty	63.3%	16.0%	48.0%	36.0%	64.0%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	64.6%	15.7%	47.1%	37.3%	62.7%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	81.0%	15.6%	50.0%	34.4%	65.6%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	49.4%	12.8%	51.3%	35.9%	64.1%
Financial incentives for faculty and staff tied to retention increases	7.6%	NA	NA	NA	NA

General Trend of Cohort Graduation Rate Over Past Three Years

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Percent in agreement
Increased 10 percentage points or more	1.3%
Increased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	18.2%
Increased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	24.7%
Remained stable (within +/- 1 percentage point)	40.3%
Decreased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	11.7%
Decreased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	2.6%
Decreased 10 percentage points or more	1.3%

Planning and Leadership Practices

Quality Ratings* for Four Leadership Practices—Ordered by Percent Rated “Excellent Quality”

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Institutions using method	Excellent quality	Good quality	Fair quality	Poor quality	Excellent or good quality
Individual position within our institution charged with primary responsibility for leading and coordinating retention activities and for getting retention results	86.1%	29.1%	36.7%	13.9%	6.3%	65.8%
Retention committee to lead and coordinate retention efforts	82.3%	27.8%	30.4%	19.0%	5.1%	58.2%
Written plan to facilitate faculty/student engagement	68.4%	8.9%	30.4%	20.3%	8.9%	39.3%
Written plan to guide student retention and college completion efforts	73.1%	7.7%	38.5%	19.2%	7.7%	46.2%

*Respondents rated the quality of these practices on the following scale: “Excellent quality,” “Good quality,” “Fair quality,” “Poor quality,” or “Practice not used.”

Practice of Annually Creating or Updating a Written Retention Plan

Respondents whose institutions had a current, written plan to guide student and college completion efforts were asked to indicate (yes/no) if they created or updated their plan annually.

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Percentage in agreement
Yes, we create or update this plan annually.	52.0%

Role of the Retention Committee

Respondents whose institutions had a retention committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the committee’s role.

Four-year private institutions

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Percentage of respondents
The retention committee is empowered to make decisions that affect multiple areas of campus.	16.7%
The retention committee is charged to make recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	25.8%
The retention committee gathers and shares information that affects multiple areas of campus.	57.6%

Chief Retention Officer Reports to Which Office?

Respondents were asked to choose the best response from the five options below for the reporting responsibility of their chief retention officer (or top officer in charge of retention initiatives).

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Percentage of respondents
President	20.8%
Academic Affairs	37.7%
Student Affairs	15.6%
Enrollment Management	18.2%
Other*	7.8%

Respondents were instructed to choose only one response from the responses above.

*“Other” responses varied, with none of the same responses being identified by two or more respondents.

Influenced by Performance-based Funding?

Respondents were asked to indicate (yes/no) if their institution’s attention to retention and college completion has been influenced by performance-based funding.

Survey items—Four-year private institutions	Percentage in agreement
Yes, performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to retention and college completion.	25.3%

Usage and Effectiveness of 48 Strategies and Tactics for Student Retention and College Completion—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Honors programs for academically advanced students	92.7%	43.1%	43.1%	13.7%	86.3%
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100.0%	41.8%	45.5%	12.7%	87.3%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	96.4%	41.5%	45.3%	13.2%	86.8%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	89.1%	40.8%	51.0%	8.2%	91.8%
Supplemental instruction	58.2%	40.6%	40.6%	18.8%	81.3%
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	96.4%	39.6%	54.7%	5.7%	94.3%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	69.1%	39.5%	36.8%	23.7%	76.3%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	76.4%	38.1%	40.5%	21.4%	78.6%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	74.5%	34.1%	43.9%	22.0%	78.0%
Mandatory advising by professional staff, one-on-one	65.5%	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%	83.3%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	49.1%	33.3%	40.7%	25.9%	74.1%
Identifying re-entry dates for students who are leaving	38.2%	33.3%	28.6%	38.1%	61.9%
Early-alert and intervention system	83.6%	32.6%	37.0%	30.4%	69.6%
Programs for first-generation students	56.4%	32.3%	45.2%	22.6%	77.4%
Student success coaching (internal)	56.4%	32.3%	45.2%	22.6%	77.4%
Summer bridge program	56.4%	32.3%	35.5%	32.3%	67.7%
Required on-campus housing for first-year students	58.2%	31.3%	50.0%	18.8%	81.3%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	56.4%	29.0%	51.6%	19.4%	80.6%
Tutoring	94.5%	28.8%	48.1%	23.1%	76.9%
Academic recovery program for students having academic difficulty	65.5%	27.8%	47.2%	25.0%	75.0%
Mandatory academic support (e.g., required math course)	80.0%	27.3%	54.5%	18.2%	81.8%

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics, Continued

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	40.0%	27.3%	31.8%	40.9%	59.1%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	34.5%	26.3%	42.1%	31.6%	68.4%
Peer mentoring	76.4%	26.2%	45.2%	28.6%	71.4%
Programs designed specifically for students of color	74.5%	24.4%	51.2%	24.4%	75.6%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	83.6%	23.9%	41.3%	34.8%	65.2%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	60.0%	21.2%	30.3%	48.5%	51.5%
Remaining in contact with students who are leaving	52.7%	20.7%	27.6%	51.7%	48.3%
Using a "reverse transfer" process to help students finish degrees at their previous institution	52.7%	20.7%	27.6%	51.7%	48.3%
Co-curricular programs aimed at retention	72.7%	20.0%	55.0%	25.0%	75.0%
Intentional printed and electronic communications at key intervals to stay in touch with current students	74.5%	19.5%	41.5%	39.0%	61.0%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	65.5%	19.4%	38.9%	41.7%	58.3%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	85.5%	19.1%	53.2%	27.7%	72.3%
Intentional telephone calls at key intervals to stay in touch with current students	67.3%	18.9%	43.2%	37.8%	62.2%
Programs designed specifically for adult/non-traditional students	29.1%	18.8%	25.0%	56.3%	43.8%
Programs designed specifically for international students	70.9%	17.9%	53.8%	28.2%	71.8%
Learning communities	74.5%	17.1%	61.0%	22.0%	78.0%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention	63.6%	14.3%	45.7%	40.0%	60.0%
Mandatory faculty advising, one-on-one	52.7%	13.8%	55.2%	31.0%	69.0%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	67.3%	13.5%	51.4%	35.1%	64.9%

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics, Continued

Four-year
public
institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Online social networking to engage students in online communities	45.5%	12.0%	32.0%	56.0%	44.0%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	65.5%	11.1%	38.9%	50.0%	50.0%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	87.3%	8.3%	58.3%	33.3%	66.7%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	61.8%	5.9%	38.2%	55.9%	44.1%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	69.1%	5.3%	36.8%	57.9%	42.1%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	20.0%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Programs for part-time students	20.0%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Student success coaching (outsourced)	1.8%	NA	NA	NA	NA

Usage and Effectiveness of 12 Practices Specifically for Retaining Online Learners—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Mandatory training program for online faculty	41.8%	30.4%	52.2%	17.4%	82.6%
Faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy	52.7%	27.6%	44.8%	27.6%	72.4%
Mandatory academic advising	27.3%	20.0%	53.3%	26.7%	73.3%
Online readiness assessment for incoming students	27.3%	20.0%	26.7%	53.3%	46.7%
Early-alert and intervention system for online learners	30.9%	17.6%	47.1%	35.3%	64.7%
Technical support to address online connection issues	56.4%	16.1%	51.6%	32.3%	67.7%
Orientation program or course for online learners	34.5%	10.5%	63.2%	26.3%	73.7%
Student services geared to online learners, including registration and financial aid	38.2%	9.5%	42.9%	47.6%	52.4%
Faculty advisor assigned to each online learner	36.4%	5.0%	65.0%	30.0%	70.0%
Mandatory online interaction between faculty and students	40.0%	4.5%	45.5%	50.0%	50.0%
Assessment to identify program improvements for online learners	40.0%	4.5%	59.1%	36.4%	63.6%
Academic support services specifically for online learners	40.0%	4.5%	54.5%	40.9%	59.1%

Usage and Effectiveness of 33 Internal Operations Practices—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Rankings of Internal Operations

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	89.1%	46.9%	38.8%	14.3%	85.7%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	90.9%	46.0%	42.0%	12.0%	88.0%
Title III or Title V funding	54.5%	43.3%	43.3%	13.3%	86.7%
Tracking credit hours attempted vs. completed for each term	69.1%	39.5%	39.5%	21.1%	78.9%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	89.1%	36.7%	42.9%	20.4%	79.6%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	76.4%	35.7%	38.1%	26.2%	73.8%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	89.1%	34.7%	40.8%	24.5%	75.5%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	80.0%	34.1%	45.5%	20.5%	79.5%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	85.5%	34.0%	42.6%	23.4%	76.6%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	61.8%	32.4%	38.2%	29.4%	70.6%
Tracking rates of academic probation	81.8%	31.1%	37.8%	31.1%	68.9%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	76.4%	28.6%	38.1%	33.3%	66.7%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	63.6%	28.6%	37.1%	34.3%	65.7%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	63.6%	28.6%	37.1%	34.3%	65.7%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	78.2%	27.9%	32.6%	39.5%	60.5%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	89.1%	26.5%	34.7%	38.8%	61.2%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students’ needs	69.1%	26.3%	36.8%	36.8%	63.2%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	70.9%	25.6%	38.5%	35.9%	64.1%
Adjusting admissions standards to address attrition	54.5%	23.3%	40.0%	36.7%	63.3%

Rankings of Internal Operations, Continued

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	70.9%	23.1%	41.0%	35.9%	64.1%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	61.8%	20.6%	41.2%	38.2%	61.8%
Institutionwide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	83.6%	17.4%	56.5%	26.1%	73.9%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	67.3%	16.2%	48.6%	35.1%	64.9%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	76.4%	14.3%	59.5%	26.2%	73.8%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	60.0%	12.1%	36.4%	51.5%	48.5%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	61.8%	11.8%	47.1%	41.2%	58.8%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	63.6%	11.4%	51.4%	37.1%	62.9%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make campus atmosphere student-centered	65.5%	11.1%	52.8%	36.1%	63.9%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	67.3%	10.8%	48.6%	40.5%	59.5%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	36.4%	10.0%	35.0%	55.0%	45.0%
Development of faculty skills in instruction, advising, and student interaction	80.0%	9.1%	43.2%	47.7%	52.3%
Setting expectations for student engagement during hiring process for new faculty	45.5%	8.0%	40.0%	52.0%	48.0%
Financial incentives for faculty and staff tied to retention increases	14.5%	NA	NA	NA	NA

General Trend of Cohort Graduation Rate Over Past Three Years

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Percent in agreement
Increased 10 percentage points or more	1.8%
Increased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	9.1%
Increased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	36.4%
Remained stable (within +/- 1 percentage point)	45.5%
Decreased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	5.5%
Decreased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	1.8%
Decreased 10 percentage points or more	0.0%

Planning and Leadership Practices

Quality Ratings* for Four Leadership Practices—Ordered by Percent Rated “Excellent Quality”

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Excellent quality	Good quality	Fair quality	Poor quality	Excellent or good quality
Individual position within our institution charged with primary responsibility for leading and coordinating retention activities and for getting retention results	81.8%	30.9%	27.3%	18.2%	5.5%	58.2%
Retention committee to lead and coordinate retention efforts	74.5%	10.9%	32.7%	21.8%	9.1%	43.6%
Written plan to guide student retention and college completion efforts	65.5%	9.1%	23.6%	25.5%	7.3%	32.7%
Written plan to facilitate faculty/student engagement	60.0%	5.5%	18.2%	21.8%	14.5%	23.7%

*Respondents rated the quality of these practices on the following scale: “Excellent quality,” “Good quality,” “Fair quality,” “Poor quality,” or “Practice not used.”

Practice of Annually Creating or Updating a Written Retention Plan

Respondents whose institutions had a current, written plan to guide student and college completion efforts were asked to indicate (yes/no) if they created or updated their plan annually.

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Percentage in agreement
Yes, we create or update this plan annually.	52.3%

Role of the Retention Committee

Respondents whose institutions had a retention committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the committee’s role.

Four-year public institutions

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Percentage of respondents
The retention committee is empowered to make decisions that affect multiple areas of campus.	16.2%
The retention committee is charged to make recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	35.1%
The retention committee gathers and shares information that affects multiple areas of campus.	48.6%

Chief Retention Officer Reports to Which Office?

Respondents were asked to choose the best response from the five options below for the reporting responsibility of their chief retention officer (or top officer in charge of retention initiatives).

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Percentage of respondents
President	7.8%
Academic Affairs	58.8%
Student Affairs	9.8%
Enrollment Management	5.9%
Other*	17.6%

Respondents were instructed to choose only one response from the responses above.

**The Office of the Provost was identified by several respondents in an open-ended “Other” field. Other responses in this field varied, with none of the same responses being identified by two or more respondents.*

Influenced by Performance-based Funding?

Respondents were asked to indicate (yes/no) if their institution’s attention to retention and college completion has been influenced by performance-based funding.

Survey items—Four-year public institutions	Percentage in agreement
Yes, performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to retention and college completion.	52.7%

Usage and Effectiveness of 48 Strategies and Tactics for Student Retention and College Completion—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics

Two-year public institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100.0%	43.8%	46.9%	9.4%	90.6%
Tutoring	96.9%	35.5%	50.0%	14.5%	85.5%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	60.9%	30.8%	38.5%	30.8%	69.2%
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	87.5%	30.4%	44.6%	25.0%	75.0%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	62.5%	30.0%	47.5%	22.5%	77.5%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	84.4%	29.6%	55.6%	14.8%	85.2%
Programs for first-generation students	42.2%	29.6%	40.7%	29.6%	70.4%
Mandatory advising by professional staff, one-on-one	57.8%	27.0%	56.8%	16.2%	83.8%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	90.6%	25.9%	55.2%	19.0%	81.0%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	67.2%	25.6%	44.2%	30.2%	69.8%
Mandatory academic support (e.g., required math course)	73.4%	25.5%	53.2%	21.3%	78.7%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	79.7%	25.5%	47.1%	27.5%	72.5%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	70.3%	24.4%	46.7%	28.9%	71.1%
Summer bridge program	40.6%	23.1%	23.1%	53.8%	46.2%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	39.1%	20.0%	36.0%	44.0%	56.0%
Using a “reverse transfer” process to help students finish degrees at their previous institution	64.1%	19.5%	36.6%	43.9%	56.1%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	32.8%	19.0%	38.1%	42.9%	57.1%
Mandatory faculty advising, one-on-one	42.2%	18.5%	40.7%	40.7%	59.3%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	51.6%	18.2%	60.6%	21.2%	78.8%
Early-alert and intervention system	87.5%	17.9%	39.3%	42.9%	57.1%

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics, Continued

Two-year public institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Faculty advising, one-on-one	89.1%	17.5%	40.4%	42.1%	57.9%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	68.8%	13.6%	40.9%	45.5%	54.5%
Programs designed specifically for adult/non-traditional students	34.4%	13.6%	27.3%	59.1%	40.9%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention	50.0%	12.5%	59.4%	28.1%	71.9%
Intentional telephone calls at key intervals to stay in touch with current students	53.1%	11.8%	44.1%	44.1%	55.9%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	53.1%	11.8%	35.3%	52.9%	47.1%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	67.2%	11.6%	46.5%	41.9%	58.1%
Programs designed specifically for students of color	40.6%	11.5%	34.6%	53.8%	46.2%
Learning communities	40.6%	11.5%	26.9%	61.5%	38.5%
Online social networking to engage students in online communities	40.6%	11.5%	26.9%	61.5%	38.5%
Peer mentoring	42.2%	11.1%	18.5%	70.4%	29.6%
Intentional printed and electronic communications at key intervals to stay in touch with current students	71.9%	10.9%	39.1%	50.0%	50.0%
Student success coaching (internal)	57.8%	10.8%	51.4%	37.8%	62.2%
Programs designed specifically for international students	50.0%	9.4%	50.0%	40.6%	59.4%
Supplemental instruction	51.6%	9.1%	51.5%	39.4%	60.6%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	68.8%	9.1%	43.2%	47.7%	52.3%
Academic recovery program for students having academic difficulty	53.1%	8.8%	64.7%	26.5%	73.5%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	75.0%	8.3%	41.7%	50.0%	50.0%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	62.5%	7.5%	30.0%	62.5%	37.5%

Rankings of Strategies and Tactics, Continued

Two-year
public
institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	25.0%	6.3%	50.0%	43.8%	56.3%
Remaining in contact with students who are leaving	34.4%	4.5%	54.5%	40.9%	59.1%
Co-curricular programs aimed at retention	54.7%	2.9%	57.1%	40.0%	60.0%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	56.3%	2.8%	30.6%	66.7%	33.3%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	18.8%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Identifying re-entry dates for students who are leaving	17.2%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Student success coaching (outsourced)	14.1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Programs for part-time students	14.1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Required on-campus housing for first-year students	6.3%	NA	NA	NA	NA

Usage and Effectiveness of 12 Practices Specifically for Retaining Online Learners—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Two-year public institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Mandatory training program for online faculty	39.1%	32.0%	40.0%	28.0%	72.0%
Faculty advisor assigned to each online learner	21.9%	28.6%	35.7%	35.7%	64.3%
Mandatory academic advising	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	75.0%
Faculty development and support in online technology and online teaching pedagogy	57.8%	24.3%	37.8%	37.8%	62.2%
Early-alert and intervention system for online learners	48.4%	22.6%	32.3%	45.2%	54.8%
Technical support to address online connection issues	59.4%	21.1%	36.8%	42.1%	57.9%
Academic support services specifically for online learners	45.3%	20.7%	34.5%	44.8%	55.2%
Mandatory online interaction between faculty and students	39.1%	20.0%	56.0%	24.0%	76.0%
Assessment to identify program improvements for online learners	34.4%	18.2%	36.4%	45.5%	54.5%
Orientation program or course for online learners	50.0%	12.5%	34.4%	53.1%	46.9%
Student services geared to online learners, including registration and financial aid	34.4%	9.1%	40.9%	50.0%	50.0%
Online readiness assessment for incoming students	35.9%	8.7%	30.4%	60.9%	39.1%

Usage and Effectiveness of 33 Internal Operations Practices—Ordered by Percent Rated “Very Effective”

Rankings of Internal Operations

Two-year public institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Institutionwide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	65.6%	33.3%	47.6%	19.0%	81.0%
Title III or Title V funding	62.5%	27.5%	40.0%	32.5%	67.5%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	51.6%	24.2%	33.3%	42.4%	57.6%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	71.9%	23.9%	47.8%	28.3%	71.7%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	73.4%	23.4%	42.6%	34.0%	66.0%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	78.1%	22.0%	54.0%	24.0%	76.0%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	78.1%	22.0%	36.0%	42.0%	58.0%
Assessing what’s important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	79.7%	21.6%	37.3%	41.2%	58.8%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	43.8%	21.4%	46.4%	32.1%	67.9%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	73.4%	21.3%	44.7%	34.0%	66.0%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	73.4%	21.3%	34.0%	44.7%	55.3%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students’ needs	54.7%	20.0%	37.1%	42.9%	57.1%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	73.4%	19.1%	51.1%	29.8%	70.2%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	75.0%	18.8%	41.7%	39.6%	60.4%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	50.0%	18.8%	40.6%	40.6%	59.4%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	42.2%	18.5%	25.9%	55.6%	44.4%
Setting expectations for student engagement during hiring process for new faculty	43.8%	17.9%	28.6%	53.6%	46.4%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	43.8%	17.9%	25.0%	57.1%	42.9%

Rankings of Internal Operations, Continued

Two-year public institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Minimally effective	Very or somewhat effective
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	75.0%	16.7%	52.1%	31.3%	68.8%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	84.4%	16.7%	40.7%	42.6%	57.4%
Development of faculty skills in instruction, advising, and student interaction	75.0%	16.7%	37.5%	45.8%	54.2%
Tracking credit hours attempted vs. completed for each term	57.8%	16.2%	48.6%	35.1%	64.9%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	78.1%	16.0%	40.0%	44.0%	56.0%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	39.1%	16.0%	28.0%	56.0%	44.0%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	40.6%	15.4%	42.3%	42.3%	57.7%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	82.8%	15.1%	39.6%	45.3%	54.7%
Tracking rates of academic probation	59.4%	13.2%	50.0%	36.8%	63.2%
Adjusting admissions standards to address attrition	39.1%	12.0%	48.0%	40.0%	60.0%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	67.2%	11.6%	44.2%	44.2%	55.8%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	45.3%	10.3%	48.3%	41.4%	58.6%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make campus atmosphere student-centered	60.9%	10.3%	41.0%	48.7%	51.3%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	32.8%	4.8%	33.3%	61.9%	38.1%
Financial incentives for faculty and staff tied to retention increases	6.3%	NA	NA	NA	NA

General Trend of Cohort Graduation Rate Over Past Three Years

Two-year public institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Percent in agreement
Increased 10 percentage points or more	4.9%
Increased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	9.8%
Increased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	31.1%
Remained stable (within +/- 1 percentage point)	42.6%
Decreased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	8.2%
Decreased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	3.3%
Decreased 10 percentage points or more	0.0%

Planning and Leadership Practices

Quality Ratings* for Four Leadership Practices—Ordered by Percent Rated “Excellent Quality”

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Institutions using method	Excellent quality	Good quality	Fair quality	Poor quality	Excellent or good quality
Retention committee to lead and coordinate retention efforts	70.3%	15.6%	15.6%	32.8%	6.3%	31.2%
Written plan to guide student retention and college completion efforts	62.5%	14.1%	15.6%	26.6%	6.3%	29.7%
Individual position within our institution charged with primary responsibility for leading and coordinating retention activities and for getting retention results	57.8%	14.1%	18.8%	17.2%	7.8%	32.9%
Written plan to facilitate faculty/student engagement	46.9%	3.1%	12.5%	21.9%	9.4%	15.6%

*Respondents rated the quality of these practices on the following scale: “Excellent quality,” “Good quality,” “Fair quality,” “Poor quality,” or “Practice not used.”

Practice of Annually Creating or Updating a Written Retention Plan

Respondents whose institutions had a current, written plan to guide student and college completion efforts were asked to indicate (yes/no) if they created or updated their plan annually.

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Percentage in agreement
Yes, we create or update this plan annually.	33.9%

Role of the Retention Committee

Respondents whose institutions had a retention committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the committee's role.

Two-year
public
institutions

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Percentage of respondents
The retention committee is empowered to make decisions that affect multiple areas of campus.	9.3%
The retention committee is charged to make recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	30.2%
The retention committee gathers and shares information that affects multiple areas of campus.	60.5%

Chief Retention Officer Reports to Which Office or Division?

Respondents were asked to choose the best response from the five options below for the reporting responsibility of their chief retention officer (or top officer in charge of retention initiatives).

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Percentage of respondents
President	17.3%
Academic Affairs	19.2%
Student Affairs	36.5%
Enrollment Management	9.6%
Other*	17.3%

Respondents were instructed to choose only one response from the responses above.

***Other** responses varied, with none of the same responses being identified by two or more respondents except for two responses which both indicated "Academic Affairs and Student Affairs."*

Influenced by Performance-based Funding?

Respondents were asked to indicate (yes/no) if their institution's attention to retention and college completion has been influenced by performance-based funding.

Survey items—Two-year public institutions	Percentage in agreement
Yes, performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to retention and college completion.	57.1%

Respondent profile

Representatives from 199 colleges and universities participated in the Ruffalo Noel Levitz 2015 national electronic poll of student retention and college completion practices conducted between April 21 and May 18 of 2015. The poll was emailed to accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States. Respondents included 79 four-year private institutions, 55 four-year public institutions, and 65 two-year public institutions.

Thank you to those who participated.

Four-year private institutions

Note: Any participating two-year private colleges are included on this list.

Abilene Christian University (TX)
 Agnes Scott College (GA)
 Alderson Broaddus University (WV)
 Anderson University (IN)
 Augsburg College (MN)
 Bluefield College (VA)
 Brevard College (NC)
 Calvary Bible College and Theological Seminary (MO)
 Cazenovia College (NY)
 Chamberlain College of Nursing (IL)
 Colby-Sawyer College (NH)
 Columbia International University (SC)
 Concordia University (OR)
 Cornell College (IA)
 DeVry College of New York (NY)
 Edgewood College (WI)
 Elms College (MA)
 Freed-Hardeman University (TN)
 Hastings College (NE)
 Heritage Bible College (NC)
 High Point University (NC)
 Houston Baptist University (TX)
 Humacao Community College (PR)
 John Brown University (AR)
 Johnson University (TN)
 King University (TN)
 Knox College (IL)
 Lake Forest College (IL)
 Lakewood College (OH)
 Lane College (TN)
 Lenoir-Rhyne University (NC)
 Life Pacific College (CA)
 Lincoln College of Technology (CO)
 Long Island University (NY)
 Lynchburg College (VA)
 Lynn University (FL)
 Manhattan Christian College (KS)
 Manhattanville College (NY)
 Marian University (IN)
 Marquette University (WI)
 Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design (WI)
 Milwaukee School of Engineering (WI)
 Moody Bible Institute (IL)
 Mount Saint Mary College (NY)
 Mount St. Joseph University (OH)
 North Central University (MN)
 Ohio Mid-Western College (OH)
 Ohio Northern University (OH)
 Olivet College (MI)
 Oral Roberts University (OK)
 Penn View Bible Institute (PA)
 Piedmont College (GA)
 Pillar College (NJ)
 Prescott College (AZ)
 Quinnipiac University (CT)
 Randolph-Macon College (VA)
 Saint Xavier University (IL)
 Santa Clara University (CA)
 Seattle University (WA)
 Shepherds Theological Seminary (NC)
 Shimer College (IL)
 Siena College (NY)
 Silver Lake College of the Holy Family (WI)
 Southwestern Assemblies of God University (TX)
 St. Ambrose University (IA)
 St. Edward's University (TX)
 Taylor University (IN)
 The King's University (TX)
 The New School (NY)
 Toccoa Falls College (GA)
 United States Sports Academy (AL)
 University of Bridgeport (CT)
 University of Charleston (WV)
 University of Denver (CO)
 University of Mobile (AL)
 University of Phoenix (AZ)
 University of Saint Francis (IN)
 Warner University (FL)
 Western Technical College (TX)

Four-year public institutions

Albany State University (GA)
 Auburn University at Montgomery (AL)
 Bismarck State College (ND)
 California State University-Fresno (CA)
 Central Michigan University (MI)
 Chicago State University (IL)
 Christopher Newport University (VA)
 College of Central Florida (FL)
 Eastern Illinois University (IL)
 Eastern Oregon University (OR)
 Eastern Washington University (WA)
 Ferris State University (MI)
 Fort Valley State University (GA)
 George Mason University (VA)
 Georgia College & State University (GA)
 Metropolitan State University of Denver (CO)
 Minnesota State University Moorhead (MN)
 Minot State University (ND)
 Morgan State University (MD)
 North Dakota State University Main Campus (ND)
 Northeastern Illinois University (IL)
 Northern Kentucky University (KY)
 Penn State Greater Allegheny (PA)
 Peru State College (NE)
 Pittsburg State University (KS)
 Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania (PA)
 Southern Connecticut State University (CT)
 Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (IL)
 Southwestern Oklahoma State University (OK)
 Sul Ross State University (TX)
 Tennessee Tech University (TN)
 The University of South Dakota (SD)
 The University of West Alabama (AL)
 United States Merchant Marine Academy (NY)
 University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (AR)
 University of Central Arkansas (AR)
 University of Central Florida (FL)
 University of Central Oklahoma (OK)
 University of Hawaii at Hilo (HI)
 University of Idaho (ID)
 University of Kentucky (KY)
 University of Louisiana at Lafayette (LA)

University of Louisiana at Monroe (LA)
 University of Minnesota-Crookston (MN)
 University of North Carolina at Greensboro (NC)
 University of North Dakota (ND)
 University of Pittsburgh (PA)
 University of Puerto Rico-Humacao (PR)
 University of South Florida (FL)
 University of West Florida (FL)
 Utah Valley University (UT)
 Valley City State University (ND)
 West Virginia University (WV)
 Western Connecticut State University (CT)
 Western Illinois University (IL)

Two-year public institutions

Amarillo College (TX)
 Atlanta Technical College (GA)
 Bates Technical College (WA)
 Bellingham Technical College (WA)
 Carroll Community College (MD)
 Central Alabama Community College (AL)
 Central Arizona College (AZ)
 City University of New York Queensborough Community College (NY)
 Clarendon College (TX)
 Cleveland State Community College (TN)
 Clinton Community College (NY)
 Coastal Pines Technical College (GA)
 College of The Albemarle (NC)
 College of the Ouachitas (AR)
 Crafton Hills College (CA)
 Danville Area Community College (IL)
 Delaware Technical Community College (NJ)
 Diné College (AZ)
 East Mississippi Community College (MS)
 Eastern Gateway Community College (OH)
 Eastern Iowa Community College District (IA)
 Erie Community College (NY)
 Gadsden State Community College (AL)
 Genesee Community College (NY)
 Grand Rapids Community College (MI)
 Hillsborough Community College (FL)
 Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Lincoln Trail College (IL)
 Inver Hills Community College (MN)
 Iowa Lakes Community College (IA)
 Jefferson College (MO)
 Kaskaskia College (IL)
 Kishwaukee College (IL)
 Luzerne County Community College (PA)
 Madison Area Technical College (WI)
 Mesalands Community College (NM)
 Midlands Technical College (SC)
 Miles Community College (MT)
 Mitchell Technical Institute (SD)
 New Mexico Military Institute (NM)
 New Mexico State University at Alamogordo (NM)
 North Central State College (OH)
 North Hennepin Community College (MN)
 North Idaho College (ID)
 Ocean County College (NJ)
 Paris Junior College (TX)
 Pennsylvania Highlands Community College (PA)
 Piedmont Technical College (SC)
 Prince George's Community College (MD)
 Richland Community College (IL)
 Rock Valley College (IL)
 Rockingham Community College (NC)
 Sauk Valley Community College (IL)
 Savannah Technical College (GA)
 Schoolcraft College (MI)
 Skagit Valley College (WA)
 Snow College (UT)
 South Central College (MN)
 South Louisiana Community College (LA)
 Southeast Community College (NE)
 Southeast Technical Institute (SD)
 Tyler Junior College (TX)
 University of Hawaii Leeward Community College (HI)
 Western Nebraska Community College (NE)
 Westmoreland County Community College (PA)
 York County Community College (ME)

Questions about this report? Want to discuss the findings?

We hope you found this report to be helpful and informative. If you have questions or would like to discuss student retention and college completion strategies with an expert from Ruffalo Noel Levitz, please contact us at 800.876.1117 or ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com. Our consultants are available to come to your campus to present the report findings and to offer retention management counsel.

About Ruffalo Noel Levitz and our higher education research

A trusted partner to higher education, Ruffalo Noel Levitz helps systems and campuses reach and exceed their goals for enrollment, marketing, and student success. Our consultants work side-by-side with campus executive teams to facilitate planning and to help implement the resulting plans, using data and research to guide decision making.

For more than 20 years, we have conducted national surveys to assist campuses with benchmarking their performance. This includes benchmarking student retention and marketing/recruitment practices and outcomes, monitoring student and campus usage of the web and electronic communications, and comparing institutional budgets and policies. There is no charge or obligation for participating, and responses to all survey items are strictly confidential. Participants have the advantage of receiving the findings first, as soon as they become available.

For more information, visit www.RuffaloNL.com.

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