



2021 Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion Report



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Most Widely Used Strategies and Tactics for Student Success, Retention, and Completion

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	87%
Student success coaching	83%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	80%
Student life program supporting student success	76%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	98%
Student success coaching	85%
Student life program supporting student success	81%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	73%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	70%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%
Required developmental education courses	85%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	79%
Student success coaching	78%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	72%

Most Widely Used Programs and Strategies Targeted to Specific Populations to Increase Student Success, Retention, and Completion

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	91%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	71%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	64%
Programs designed specifically for international students	50%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	90%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	75%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	74%
Programs designed specifically for international students	64%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	61%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	70%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	50%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	45%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	41%

Management Practices for Optimizing Student Success, Retention, and Completion

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	89%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	88%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	87%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	86%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	86%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	91%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	89%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	88%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	88%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	86%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Development of faculty skills in instruction	93%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	90%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	88%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	88%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	86%

Technology

Percentage of institutions using retention management software to track retention



TOP FUNCTIONALITIES OF THE PLATFORM



Percentage of institutions using incoming student assessment to identify students' needs



Percentage of institutions using assessment to determine student satisfaction



Percentage of institutions using a predictive model to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion



New Strategies

Given the disruption caused by the pandemic, RNL updated this edition of the poll to ask about new student success strategies that were developed or expanded in the past year. Not surprisingly, virtual and tech-enabled strategies dominated the responses.

STRATEGY	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Virtual student life programs and activities	69%	81%	60%
Virtual career services programs	67%	75%	68%
Virtual faculty advising	43%	44%	35%
HyFlex courses	33%	44%	43%
Asynchronous tutoring	33%	40%	35%
Virtual group advising	19%	33%	35%

General Trend of Cohort Graduation Rate

Four-year institutions: First-time, full-time freshmen who completed a four-year degree within six years.

Two-year institutions: First-time, full-time freshmen who completed a two-year degree within three years.

INCREASE/DECREASE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC			TWO-YEAR PUBLIC		
	2021	2019	2017	2021	2019	2017	2021	2019	2017
Increased 10 percentage points or more	0.0%	2.9%	1.3%	3.2%	4.2%	0.0%	4.9%	4.7%	0.0%
Increased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	5.9%	9.6%	6.6%	14.5%	6.9%	7.4%	12.2%	9.4%	27.3%
Increased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	30.7%	33.7%	43.4%	29.0%	36.1%	33.3%	31.7%	32.8%	27.3%
Remained stable (within +/- 1 percentage points)	44.6%	43.3%	36.8%	38.7%	37.5%	48.1%	39.0%	42.2%	42.4%
Decreased 1 to 4.9 percentage points	13.9%	9.6%	6.6%	11.3%	11.1%	11.1%	12.2%	10.9%	3.0%
Decreased 5 to 9.9 percentage points	5.0%	1.0%	2.6%	3.2%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Decreased 10 percentage points or more	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

What Guides Retention Planning Efforts?

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Institutional strategic plan	69%	57%	65%
Strategic enrollment plan	14%	25%	30%
Neither	17%	18%	5%

Percentage of institutions where a written plan guides efforts aimed at student success, retention, and completion



How many institutions create or update their written plan annually?

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC			TWO-YEAR PUBLIC		
2021	2019	2017	2021	2019	2017	2021	2019	2017
2021	2019	2017	2021	2019	2017	2021	2019	2017
76%	49%	51%	65%	55%	67%	77%	55%	54%

Quality of your student success, retention, and completion plan

QUALITY	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Excellent	18%	10%	16%
Good	61%	57%	63%
Fair	18%	32%	19%
Poor	3%	2%	2%

Student Success, Retention, and Completion Committee

Respondents who indicated a committee leads and coordinates efforts for student success, retention, and completion.



Role of committee

Respondents who had a committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the role of their committee for student success, retention, and completion.

COMMITTEE ROLE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
The committee gathers and shares information that affect multiple areas of campus.	22%	25%	19%
The committee is charged to make recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	59%	54%	51%
The committee is empowered to make decisions that affect multiple areas of campus.	19%	21%	30%

Quality of your student success, retention, and committee

QUALITY	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Excellent	27%	15%	30%
Good	50%	66%	57%
Fair	22%	19%	11%
Poor	1%	0%	2%

Chief Retention Officer

How many institutions have an individual position charged with leading and coordinating activities for getting results in the areas of student success, retention, and completion?



Which office does the chief retention officer report to?

CRO REPORTS TO...	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
President	18%	10%	44%
Academic affairs	46%	41%	14%
Student affairs	18%	18%	21%
Enrollment management	13%	25%	0%

Quality of your chief retention officer

QUALITY	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Excellent	35%	31%	42%
Good	50%	51%	47%
Fair	14%	18%	7%
Poor	1%	0%	5%

Influence of Performance-Based Funding?

Respondents were asked to indicate if their institutions' attention to student success, retention, and/or completion has been influenced by performance-based funding.

PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Yes , performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to these areas.	18%	47%	51%
No , performance-based funding has not influenced us to pay more attention to these areas.	82%	53%	49%



Appendices

Top General Strategies and Tactics for Student, Success, Retention, and Completion

Sorted by percentage of institutions using the practice.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS				
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)		
		ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	81%	99%	92%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	87%	86%	98%	87%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	84%	87%	99%	86%
Student success coaching (internal)	83%	87%	97%	93%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	83%	80%	99%	87%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	81%	89%	93%	86%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	80%	76%	93%	88%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	80%	89%	94%	95%
Student life program supporting student success	76%	81%	94%	90%
Use of social media to engage students post enrollment	76%	89%	87%	85%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	73%	97%	97%	93%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	71%	76%	74%	78%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	67%	67%	91%	83%
Peer mentoring	66%	88%	94%	95%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	66%	85%	92%	90%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	65%	58%	85%	80%

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

STRATEGY/TACTIC	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	65%	92%	96%	88%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	65%	87%	86%	80%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	64%	98%	100%	92%
Required developmental education courses	61%	72%	93%	76%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	60%	88%	91%	92%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	59%	82%	95%	81%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	52%	80%	91%	81%
Supplemental instruction	51%	88%	96%	85%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	43%	75%	85%	75%
Learning communities	42%	82%	93%	84%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	38%	76%	89%	88%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	37%	85%	86%	86%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	36%	64%	76%	78%
Summer bridge program	35%	83%	97%	91%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	28%	86%	95%	67%
Please list any other effective practice not mentioned above	19%	67%	100%	100%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	10%	100%	100%	100%
Digital badging	10%	63%	71%	71%
Digital diaries	6%	100%	100%	100%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

STRATEGY/TACTIC	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	100%	100%	100%	100%
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	98%	84%	100%	94%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	98%	98%	92%	94%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	93%	93%	100%	93%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	93%	93%	100%	94%
Use of social media to engage students post enrollment	89%	89%	81%	85%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	88%	88%	89%	77%
Student success coaching (internal)	85%	82%	98%	93%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	83%	83%	90%	80%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	82%	82%	93%	80%
Student life program supporting student success	81%	64%	96%	79%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	77%	77%	98%	97%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	77%	77%	96%	91%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	74%	74%	100%	87%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	73%	70%	92%	88%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	73%	73%	72%	65%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	70%	91%	88%	89%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	68%	87%	97%	96%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	68%	80%	98%	97%
Peer mentoring	68%	83%	100%	91%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

STRATEGY/TACTIC	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Learning communities	68%	53%	89%	77%
Supplemental Instruction	67%	82%	89%	89%
Please list any other effective practice not mentioned above.	67%	67%	100%	100%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	64%	63%	95%	84%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	62%	87%	90%	93%
Required developmental education courses	61%	58%	83%	71%
Digital badging	60%	60%	67%	67%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	57%	74%	97%	89%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	56%	70%	89%	75%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	56%	56%	97%	85%
Summer bridge program	48%	65%	93%	91%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	46%	69%	79%	71%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	26%	70%	77%	67%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	10%	60%	60%	60%
Digital diaries	6%	50%	67%	67%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS				
STRATEGY/TACTIC	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	85%	98%	97%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	94%	94%	94%	94%
Required developmental education courses	85%	81%	97%	90%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	83%	83%	83%	83%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	83%	83%	83%	83%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	79%	78%	97%	93%
Student success coaching (internal)	78%	81%	97%	97%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	72%	74%	83%	77%
Mandatory first-year experience or orientation course	72%	89%	91%	89%
Student life program supporting student success	71%	60%	87%	77%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	70%	70%	70%	70%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	68%	68%	68%	68%
Use of social media to engage students post enrollment	65%	65%	65%	65%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	64%	93%	93%	94%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	64%	64%	64%	64%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	62%	69%	85%	90%
Supplemental Instruction	61%	80%	96%	86%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	58%	58%	58%	58%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	55%	55%	55%	55%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	54%	72%	76%	84%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS				
STRATEGY/TACTIC	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	53%	53%	53%	53%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	52%	85%	80%	80%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	48%	48%	48%	48%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	40%	53%	87%	79%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	40%	40%	40%	40%
Peer mentoring	34%	86%	80%	90%
Learning communities	33%	67%	69%	70%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	29%	85%	90%	90%
Summer bridge program	27%	100%	90%	100%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	23%	89%	86%	86%
Digital badging	21%	21%	21%	21%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	12%	12%	12%	12%
Please list any other effective practice not mentioned above.	8%	8%	8%	8%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	7%	100%	100%	100%
Digital diaries	7%	100%	100%	100%

Top Programs and Strategies Targeted to Specific Populations to Increase Student Success, Retention, and Completion

Sorted by percentage of institutions using the practice.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS				
PROGRAMS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR:	USING	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)		
		ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
First-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	91%	83%	96%	88%
Academically advanced students	71%	78%	93%	91%
Students who are at risk academically	64%	88%	94%	87%
International students	50%	74%	94%	81%
Online learners	39%	85%	76%	76%
First-generation students	39%	67%	97%	82%
Students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	38%	83%	88%	79%
Transfer students	37%	92%	91%	79%
Veterans	37%	93%	94%	87%
Black/African American students	36%	83%	94%	95%
Adult/nontraditional students	27%	85%	82%	79%
Latinx students	19%	83%	88%	82%
Members of LGBTQ+	19%	80%	94%	82%
Second-year students	14%	70%	100%	71%
Part-time students	13%	80%	88%	44%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PROGRAMS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR:	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
First-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	90%	73%	92%	85%
Students who are at risk academically	75%	68%	88%	85%
Academically advanced students	74%	79%	98%	96%
International students	64%	79%	100%	100%
Veterans	61%	90%	100%	90%
Transfer students	58%	71%	81%	68%
Black/African American students	54%	64%	94%	84%
First-generation students	50%	67%	93%	89%
Students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	48%	62%	81%	74%
Members of LGBTQ+	45%	82%	91%	92%
Online learners	43%	96%	67%	80%
Latinx students	42%	68%	87%	88%
Adult/nontraditional students	22%	78%	50%	67%
Part-time students	15%	86%	83%	60%
Second-year students	9%	75%	75%	75%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PROGRAMS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR:	Strategy is very effective or effective. (only out of those institutions using the strategy)			
	USING	ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
First-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	70%	79%	89%	83%
Academically advanced students	50%	82%	89%	87%
Online learners	45%	94%	71%	92%
Veterans	41%	85%	100%	100%
Students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	33%	91%	100%	90%
Students who are at risk academically	29%	78%	100%	100%
First-generation students	28%	78%	100%	100%
Transfer students	22%	100%	100%	100%
Black/African American students	22%	100%	100%	100%
International students	22%	71%	100%	100%
Part-time students	18%	100%	100%	100%
Adult/nontraditional students	13%	100%	100%	100%
Latinx students	13%	100%	100%	100%
Members of LGBTQ+	11%	100%	100%	100%
Second-year students	9%	50%	100%	100%

Management Practices for Optimizing Student Success, Retention, and Completion

Sorted alphabetically by answer.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS									
PRACTICE	USED			2021 EFFECTIVENESS RATING			VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	2021	2019	2017
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	88%	83%	94%	27%	53%	20%	80%	78%	77%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	77%	83%	86%	12%	58%	30%	70%	63%	66%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	77%	79%	N/A	19%	53%	28%	72%	67%	N/A
Development of faculty skills in advising	73%	N/A	N/A	21%	43%	36%	64%	N/A	N/A
Development of faculty skills in instruction	87%	N/A	N/A	25%	54%	21%	79%	N/A	N/A
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	74%	N/A	N/A	15%	52%	33%	67%	N/A	N/A
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	60%	66%	65%	22%	49%	28%	72%	72%	65%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	75%	86%	82%	35%	45%	20%	80%	81%	88%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	70%	84%	84%	38%	47%	15%	85%	80%	80%
Institution wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	85%	89%	N/A	37%	49%	14%	86%	75%	N/A
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	85%	90%	86%	22%	52%	26%	74%	78%	65%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	57%	51%	N/A	21%	36%	43%	57%	47%	N/A
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	62%	71%	60%	13%	44%	44%	56%	62%	72%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	66%	80%	71%	33%	46%	20%	80%	73%	78%

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			2021 EFFECTIVENESS RATING			VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	2021	2019	2017
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	82%	83%	80%	22%	53%	25%	75%	70%	75%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	55%	57%	60%	20%	56%	25%	75%	58%	66%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	86%	87%	80%	32%	46%	22%	78%	71%	83%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	52%	58%	54%	27%	44%	29%	71%	66%	81%
Title III or Title V funding	52%	45%	46%	35%	41%	24%	76%	60%	69%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	63%	72%	71%	23%	51%	26%	74%	75%	76%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	86%	94%	82%	39%	55%	6%	94%	85%	88%
Tracking rates of academic probation	76%	77%	83%	24%	57%	19%	81%	69%	76%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	80%	86%	82%	30%	51%	19%	81%	84%	88%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make campus atmosphere student-centered	63%	64%	63%	20%	45%	35%	65%	57%	74%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	73%	70%	63%	30%	52%	19%	81%	67%	72%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	63%	64%	58%	24%	45%	30%	70%	71%	82%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	75%	79%	73%	22%	49%	29%	71%	52%	71%

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017				2021	2019	2017
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	78%	74%	76%	24%	66%	10%	90%	73%	88%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	48%	52%	46%	39%	45%	16%	84%	71%	81%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	59%	66%	N/A	14%	59%	27%	73%	54%	N/A
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	77%	80%	78%	16%	63%	21%	79%	76%	74%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	89%	89%	91%	25%	51%	25%	75%	73%	87%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			2021 EFFECTIVENESS RATING			VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	2021	2019	2017
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	85%	81%	81%	31%	44%	25%	75%	66%	64%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	83%	83%	81%	11%	52%	37%	63%	74%	55%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	72%	81%	N/A	24%	50%	26%	74%	57%	N/A
Development of faculty skills in advising	73%	N/A	N/A	28%	41%	30%	70%	N/A	N/A
Development of faculty skills in instruction	86%	N/A	N/A	35%	43%	22%	78%	N/A	N/A
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	73%	N/A	N/A	39%	28%	33%	67%	N/A	N/A

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017				2021	2019	2017
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	66%	65%	74%	19%	55%	26%	74%	49%	55%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	88%	92%	85%	38%	40%	22%	78%	83%	91%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	89%	91%	89%	51%	20%	29%	71%	88%	96%
Institution wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	78%	88%	N/A	39%	45%	16%	84%	68%	N/A
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	84%	89%	93%	19%	65%	17%	83%	72%	72%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	46%	47%	N/A	24%	48%	28%	72%	60%	N/A
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	61%	70%	81%	19%	43%	38%	62%	73%	52%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	68%	80%	85%	27%	51%	22%	78%	62%	78%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	82%	85%	89%	26%	54%	20%	80%	81%	92%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	75%	73%	81%	22%	49%	29%	71%	75%	91%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	86%	89%	100%	23%	52%	25%	75%	81%	89%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	59%	64%	78%	19%	67%	14%	86%	77%	90%
Title III or Title V funding	66%	62%	64%	41%	34%	24%	76%	76%	63%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	67%	83%	85%	27%	51%	22%	78%	79%	83%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	88%	85%	93%	40%	43%	17%	83%	81%	92%
Tracking rates of academic probation	83%	89%	89%	22%	47%	31%	69%	76%	79%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017				2021	2019	2017
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	91%	89%	96%	44%	42%	15%	85%	78%	88%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make campus atmosphere student-centered	60%	70%	88%	30%	43%	27%	73%	69%	50%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	74%	68%	63%	33%	44%	23%	77%	70%	88%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	64%	58%	70%	28%	44%	28%	72%	67%	68%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	72%	77%	85%	27%	48%	25%	75%	67%	52%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	78%	80%	96%	32%	53%	15%	85%	80%	88%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	68%	69%	56%	55%	26%	19%	81%	84%	87%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	72%	66%	N/A	17%	59%	24%	76%	69%	N/A
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	74%	77%	80%	27%	51%	22%	78%	64%	65%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	77%	77%	85%	31%	40%	29%	71%	62%	61%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			2021 EFFECTIVENESS RATING			VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	2021	2019	2017
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	81%	79%	83%	29%	53%	18%	82%	62%	60%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	73%	86%	83%	30%	50%	20%	80%	75%	63%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	67%	70%	N/A	39%	46%	14%	86%	62%	N/A
Development of faculty skills in advising	57%	N/A	N/A	33%	33%	33%	67%	N/A	N/A
Development of faculty skills in instruction	93%	N/A	N/A	32%	55%	13%	87%	N/A	N/A
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	71%	N/A	N/A	30%	50%	20%	80%	N/A	N/A
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	62%	48%	58%	19%	69%	12%	88%	52%	57%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	78%	81%	78%	38%	47%	16%	84%	79%	82%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	86%	83%	89%	28%	58%	14%	86%	75%	72%
Institution wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	71%	75%	N/A	24%	52%	24%	76%	69%	N/A
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	73%	89%	74%	23%	43%	33%	67%	72%	65%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	60%	66%	N/A	24%	40%	36%	64%	60%	N/A
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	40%	59%	64%	18%	59%	24%	76%	54%	43%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	80%	78%	86%	39%	42%	18%	82%	82%	71%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	83%	89%	86%	41%	50%	9%	91%	86%	74%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	63%	76%	58%	19%	62%	19%	81%	67%	62%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

PRACTICE	USED			2021 EFFECTIVENESS RATING			VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	2021	2019	2017
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	88%	94%	86%	33%	50%	17%	83%	78%	65%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	45%	41%	36%	32%	47%	21%	79%	58%	54%
Title III or Title V funding	73%	78%	76%	37%	47%	17%	83%	86%	73%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	83%	86%	69%	24%	45%	30%	70%	76%	68%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	80%	84%	89%	33%	61%	6%	94%	85%	78%
Tracking rates of academic probation	63%	77%	81%	27%	35%	38%	62%	67%	48%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	88%	91%	81%	36%	53%	11%	89%	81%	79%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make campus atmosphere student-centered	69%	86%	N/A	31%	45%	24%	76%	65%	N/A
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	71%	68%	67%	27%	50%	23%	77%	67%	54%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	43%	48%	58%	17%	44%	39%	61%	77%	57%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	67%	71%	69%	29%	36%	36%	64%	64%	52%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	71%	81%	75%	41%	45%	14%	86%	73%	70%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	45%	49%	44%	37%	47%	16%	84%	73%	44%

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS									
PRACTICE	USED			2021 EFFECTIVENESS RATING			VERY OR SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE		
	2021	2019	2017	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE	2021	2019	2017
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	62%	56%	71%	15%	46%	38%	62%	58%	52%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	50%	62%	64%	19%	38%	43%	57%	49%	74%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	90%	86%	89%	18%	50%	32%	68%	61%	69%

About this study

SOURCE OF DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data in this report reflect responses from **296** four-year and two-year colleges and universities that collectively enroll approximately **1,700,000** undergraduate students (according to data reported to IPEDS). Respondents participated in the RNL national electronic poll of Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion between **March 8 and April 8, 2021**. The poll was emailed to student affairs, academic affairs, and retention officers at accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States. Respondents to the poll included **132** four-year private institutions, **93** four-year public institutions, and **71** two-year institutions, as listed below.

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness **options that were given to respondents: “very effective,” “somewhat effective,” and “minimally effective,”** and do not include the fourth response, **“practice not used.”**

PARTICIPATING TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Adirondack Community College (NY)

Cape Fear Community College (NC)

Alamo Community College District Central Office (TX)

Central Maine Community College (MA)

Alexandria Technical & Community College (MN)

Central Virginia Community College (VA)

Blackfeet Community College (MO)

Chatfield College (OH)

Bunker Hill Community College (MA)

Chippewa Valley Technical College (WI)

Two-Year Public Institutions (cont.)

Clinton Community College (NY)
College of Lake County (IL)
College of Southern Maryland (MD)
College of the Albemarle (NC)
College of Western Idaho (ID)
Collin County Community College District (TX)
Community College of Beaver County (ND)
Cowley County Community College (KS)
Danville Community College (VA)
Des Moines Area Community College (IA)
East Central College (MO)
Emory University-Oxford College (GA)
Estrella Mountain Community College (AZ)
George C Wallace Community College-Dothan (AL)
Hillsborough Community College (FL)
Hudson County Community College (NJ)
Iowa Valley Community College District (IA)
Ivy Tech Community College-South Bend (IN)
Ivy Tech Community College- Main campus (IN)
Ivy Tech Community College-Muncie (IN)
Jefferson Community College (NY)
Johnson County Community College (KS)
Kankakee Community College (IL)
Kansas City Kansas Community College (KS)
Kirkwood Community College (IA)
Lehigh Carbon Community College (PA)
Luzerne County Community College; Main campus (PA)
Luzerne County Community College; Berwick Center (PA)
Maysville Community and Technical College; Rowan Campus (KY)
Maysville Community and Technical College; Main Campus (KY)
Mid-Michigan College (MI)
Middlesex County College (NJ)
Milwaukee Area Technical College (WI)
Mineral Area College (MO)
Mitchell Technical Institute (SD)
Montcalm Community College (MI)
Montgomery County Community College (PA)
New Mexico Military Institute (NM)
North Central Kansas Technical College (KS)
North Iowa Area Community College (IA)
Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College (OK)
Northwest Louisiana Technical College (LA)
Northwest Vista College (TX)
Ozarka College (AR)
Ozarks Technical Community College (MS)
Pearl River Community College (MS)
Pennsylvania Highlands Community College (PA)
Quincy College (MA)
Rockingham Community College (NC)
Saint Paul College (MO)
San Bernardino Valley College (CA)
San Diego Miramar College (CA)
Southeast Technical Institute (SD)
Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College (WV)
St. Philip's College (TX)
State Fair Community College (MO)
Tunxis Community College (CT)
Union County College (NJ)
West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)
Wharton County Junior College (TX)
Tyler Junior College (TX)

PARTICIPATING FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

Andrew College (GA)
Assumption College (MA)
Atenas College (Puerto Rico)
Aultman College of Nursing and Health Sciences (OH)
Barton College (NC)
Bloomfield College (NJ)
Bluefield College (VA)
Boston Colleg (MA)
Bryant University (RI)
Bryn Athyn College of the New Church (PA)
Cairn University-Langhorne (PA)
Carolina University (NC)
Catholic University of America (DC)
Central College (IA)
Chaminade University of Honolulu (HI)
Charleston Southern University (SC)
Claflin University (SC)
Clarke University (IA)
College of the Albemarle; Elizabeth city (NC)
Columbia College Chicago (IL)
Compass College of Cinematic Arts (MI)
Cornerstone College of Virginia (VA)
Curry College (MD)
Davenport University; Main campus (MI)
Davenport University; Great Lakes Bay (MI)
Denver Seminary (CO)
DeSales University (PA)
Dillard University (LA)
Drake University (IA)
Duquesne University (PA)
Eastern Nazarene College (MA)
Evangel University (MO)
Excelsior College (NY)
Fairfield University (CT)
Andrew College (GA)
Assumption College (MA)
Atenas College (Puerto Rico)
Aultman College of Nursing and Health Sciences (OH)
Barton College (NC)
Bloomfield College (NJ)
Bluefield College (VA)
Boston College (MA)
Bryant University (RI)
Bryn Athyn College of the New Church (PA)
Cairn University-Langhorne (PA)
Carolina University (NC)
Catholic University of America (DC)
Central College (IA)
Chaminade University of Honolulu (HI)
Charleston Southern University (SC)
Claflin University (SC)
Clarke University (IA)
College of the Albemarle; Elizabeth city (NC)
Columbia College Chicago (IL)
Compass College of Cinematic Arts (MI)
Cornerstone College of Virginia (VA)
Curry College (MD)
Davenport University; Main campus (MI)
Davenport University; Great Lakes Bay (MI)
Denver Seminary (CO)
DeSales University (PA)
Dillard University (LA)
Drake University (IA)
Duquesne University (PA)
Eastern Nazarene College (MA)
Evangel University (MO)
Excelsior College (NY)
Fairfield University (CT)
Faith Bible College International (ME)
Florida Institute of Technology (FL)

Four-Year Private Institutions (cont.)

Franklin Pierce University (NH)
Frontier Nursing University (KY)
Gallaudet University (DC)
Geneva College (PA)
Georgian Court University (NJ)
Gods Bible School and College (OH)
Gordon College (MA)
Goshen College (IN)
Grace College and Theological Seminary (IN)
Grantham University (KS)
Gwynedd Mercy University (PA)
Hawaii Pacific University (HI)
Herzing University-Madison (WI)
High Point University (NC)
Hood College (MD)
Huntington University (IN)
Huston-Tillotson University (TX)
Indiana Wesleyan University-Marion (IN)
Inter American University of Puerto Rico-Ponce (Puerto Rico)
Ithaca College (NY)
John Brown University (AR)
Kansas City Art Institute (MO)
King University (TN)
Laboure College (MA)
Lackawanna College (PA)
Lancaster Bible College (PA)
Lebanon Valley College (PA)
Lehigh University (PA)
Lesley University (MA)
Lindenwood University (MO)
Livingstone College (NC)
Marquette University (WI)
Medaille College (NY)
Methodist College (IL)
Missouri Baptist University (MO)
Morris College (SC)
Mount St. Mary's University (MD)
National University (CA)
Nebraska Methodist College of Nursing & Allied Health (NE)
Neumann University (PA)
New England College of Optometry (MA)
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (LA)
New School of Architecture and Design (CA)
Newberry College (SD)
Newman University (KS)
Northwest Nazarene University (ID)
Northwestern College (IL)
Northwestern College (IA)
Notre Dame of Maryland University (MD)
Oakland City University (IN)
Oberlin College (OH)
Oklahoma Christian University (OK)
Oral Roberts University (OK)
Ouachita Baptist University (AR)
Ozark Christian College (MO)
Pacific Lutheran University (WA)
Penn View Bible Institute (PA)
Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences (PA)
Philander Smith College (AR)
Point Park University (PA)
Presbyterian College (SC)
Rider University (NJ)
Rocky Mountain College (MT)
Russell Sage College (NY)
Saint Ambrose University (IA)
Saint Augustine's University (NC)
Saint Francis University (PA)
Saint Martin's University (WA)

Four-Year Private Institutions (cont.)

Saint Norbert College (WI)	University of La Verne (CA)
Salish Kootenai College (MT)	University of Mobile (AL)
Spring Hill College (AL)	University of Northwestern-St Paul (MN)
St Lawrence University (NY)	University of Puget Sound (WA)
Syracuse University (NY)	University of Saint Francis-Fort Wayne (IN)
Taylor University (IN)	University of Valley Forge (PA)
The Art Institute of Atlanta (GA)	Utica College (NY)
The Master's University and Seminary (CA)	Virscend University (CA)
Toccoa Falls College (GA)	Warner Pacific University (OR)
Trinity University (TX)	Wayland Baptist University (TX)
Trocaire College (NY)	Whitworth University (WA)
Tufts University (MA)	William Peace University (NC)
Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York (NY)	Wilson College (PA)
United Tribes Technical College (ND)	Xavier University (OH)

PARTICIPATING FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Alabama A&M University (AL)	Framingham State University (MA)
Alabama State University (AL)	George Mason University (VA)
Austin Peay State University (TN)	Georgia Institute of Technology-Main Campus (GA)
Ball State University (IN)	Governors State University (IL)
Bemidji State University (MO)	Great Basin College (NV)
California State University-Fresno (CA)	Idaho State University (ID)
California State University-San Bernardino (CA)	Indian River State College (FL)
Central State University (OH)	Indiana University-Southeast (IN)
Citadel Military College of South Carolina (SC)	Iowa State University (IA)
Clemson University (SC)	Jackson State University (MS)
Colorado State University-System Office (CO)	Kean University (NJ)
Delaware State University (DE)	Kent State University at Geauga (OH)
East Georgia State College (GA)	Marshall University (WV)
Eastern Kentucky University (KY)	Mississippi University for Women (MS)
Eastern New Mexico University-Main Campus (NM)	Missouri Western State University (MO)
Elizabeth City State University (NC)	Montana Technological University (MT)
Fairmont State University (WV)	Morgan State University (MD)
Fort Hays State University (KS)	New Jersey City University (NJ)

Four-Year Public Institutions (cont.)

Northwest Florida State College (FL)	University of California-Riverside (CA)
Northwestern State University of Louisiana (LA)	University of Central Missouri (MO)
Oakland University (MI)	University of Central Oklahoma (OK)
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Abington (PA)	University of Hawaii at Hilo (HI)
Radford University (VA)	University of Idaho (ID)
Rogers State University (OK)	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (IL)
Shawnee State University (OH)	University of Louisiana at Lafayette (LA)
Sitting Bull College (ND)	University of Louisville (KY)
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania (PA)	University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth (MA)
South Dakota State University (SD)	University of Memphis (TN)
Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville (IL)	University of Minnesota-Crookston (MN)
Southern Oregon University (OR)	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (MN)
St. Mary's College of Maryland (MD)	University of Missouri-Columbia (MO)
State University of New York at New Paltz (NY)	University of Missouri-Kansas City (MO)
SUNY College at Oswego (NY)	University of North Carolina at Pembroke (NC)
SUNY System Administration (NY)	University of Northern Iowa (IA)
Tennessee State University (TN)	University of Vermont (VT)
Texas A&M University System; Rellis (TX)	University of Washington-Tacoma Campus (WA)
Texas A&M University-Texarkana (TX)	University of Wisconsin Extension (WI)
The University of Alabama (AL)	University of Wisconsin-Platteville (WI)
The University of Montana (MT)	Virginia Commonwealth University (VA)
The University of Tennessee-Martin (TN)	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VA)
The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (TX)	Washburn University (KA)
University at Buffalo (NY)	West Virginia State University (WV)
University of Alaska Southeast (AK)	Western Kentucky University (KY)
University of Arizona; University of Arizona Online (AR)	Western Michigan University (MI)
University of Arkansas (AR)	Western Nevada College (NV)
University of Arkansas at Little Rock (AR)	Winona State University (MN)
University of Baltimore; Robert L. Bogomolny Library (MD)	

ABOUT RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. More than 1,900 colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations rely on RNL for advanced analytics, personalized engagement, and industry-leading insights to achieve their missions. The firm is distinguished by its powerful portfolio of solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right college or university, graduate on time, secure their first job, and give back to support the next generation. RNL conferences, research reports, papers, and articles help clients stay on top of current trends.

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