



The “Big Ten” Retention Factors

1. BRIDGE PROGRAMS

Several types, for different ages; but any bridge program exposing pre-college students to college life can greatly ease the transition to college.

2. NEW APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Several schools and states have developed new approaches to remedial education, allowing students to go right into credit courses, and with “supplemental instruction,” helping both traditional aged and adult learners get up to speed.

3. EMERGENCY FUNDING

Many underrepresented and first generation students arrive on campus with little or no “extra” money, financial aid notwithstanding. Some are hungry; some cannot afford books or transportation. An “emergency fund,” and a food pantry, can make a huge difference.

4. PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

Retention/persistence needs to be anticipated for the most challenged students, with a solid data system that can lead to thoughtful “intrusive advising” from day one ongoing.

5. FIRST DAY, FIRST WEEK, FIRST MONTH, FIRST YEAR

First impressions, first experiences, first contacts with other freshmen and older students, can launch new students in good or not so good ways.

6. GUIDED PATHWAYS

For many first semester students, especially at community colleges, they are easily overwhelmed by course and major choices. More schools are using guided pathways (e.g., “meta majors”) to simplify this initial challenge.

7. INTRUSIVE ADVISING

Effective advising, especially at staff-limited community colleges, is hard to do, requiring presidential leadership and enough funding to hire more advisers and counselors.

8. PEER MENTORING

An increasing number of colleges are able to train and provide peer mentors to help freshmen. Mentors can provide both academic and social/emotional support. Freshmen who get involved quickly in a campus activity (e.g., club, sports team) will sometimes find a mentor with interests similar to theirs and thus a key incentive to persist.

9. EMBEDDED SUPPORT

Freshmen take regular intro courses supplemented by additional, intensive work outside regular class time, all for credit – replacing traditional “developmental” education – also known as “Supplemental Instruction.”

10. CAREER EXPLORATION

“Contextual” or “experiential” education is what many of today’s students need – both traditional-age and “adult learners” – pointing to real jobs and real careers and hence a purpose for higher education. While liberal arts education should still be valued for its inherent ability to teach students how “to live,” a very important albeit amorphous skill, “Generation X” students and adult learners trying to improve their lives need to see a path to a stronger financial future as soon as they begin college.

*Drawn from CHERE Director David Johnston’s Summary of
“Retention Practices Gleaned from Multiple Sources”*