

High Impact Retention Practices: Easy to Describe, Hard to Do Well

Gleaned from Multiple Sources
and Compiled by David Johnston

2014-2020



Contents

The “Big Ten” Retention Factors	2
Background	3
K-5	4
Grades 6-8	4
Before College	4
Summer After Graduation	7
Freshman Year	8
Continuous On-Campus Support	11
Adult Education: The Post-Script	13
Selected Articles	14



The mission of the **Center for Higher Education Retention Excellence (CHERE)** is to understand and improve policies and practices that lead to increased college retention, from high school graduation, to college entrance, first-year success, and to graduation and employment, for challenged, underrepresented and first generation students.

CHERE, created in 2012 and based in Connecticut, is a program of the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education, a 25 year-old not-for-profit agency focused primarily on college access.

To learn more, visit www.thechere.org

The “Big Ten” Retention Factors

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

1. Bridge programs (see p. 5): 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 (remedial) education (p. 8). 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 (p. 7): 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 (p. 7): 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 (p. 8): 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 (p. 9): 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 (p. 9): 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 (p. 8): 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 (p. 8): 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 (p.9): “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.

Background

Retention – the persistence of students from enrollment to graduation – results from many factors that occur over time. The “big picture” for retention is a continuum that links K-12 education to higher education, and that recognizes “risk factors” inherent to underrepresented children and youth that are often not eliminated when those youth enroll in some type of higher education. Efforts to address this achievement gap – sometimes called an “opportunity gap” – need to be viewed on a continuum requiring collaboration among public and private sector partners, and where no one partner (e.g., state government, public schools, public colleges and universities, private higher ed institutions, community-based organizations) can dictate strategies. Many of the elements of a long-term, “multi-sector,” comprehensive “retention/persistence plan,” an overall coordinating mechanism notwithstanding, could include the following elements. Several sources are mentioned, including many from [The Truth About Student Success](#), published in 2019 by the Chronicle of Higher Education (noted by [CHE](#)).

Importance of Leadership

All of these factors require longer-range vision at the top of organizations – the willingness of leaders to evaluate themselves (e.g., colleges, state government, community-based agencies, foundations) for innovation opportunities, and the willingness to work across organizational boundaries to fashion collaborative arrangements that decrease control but increase the potential for progress. Without bold leadership both within and outside organizations, most of not all of these “success factors” will not happen or if pursued, not go beyond token activity.

Funding for Innovation

Budgets at both the K-12 and higher education levels are stretched to the maximum today, all of them as they struggle to survive the pandemic, and many colleges and universities as they confront the shorter-range struggle to offer quality education on-line during the pandemic, and the longer-range “demographic challenge” of constantly declining numbers of traditional age students. Higher educational institutions, especially those without large endowments, must find creative ways to fund innovations, including identifying new sources of students, and to build or enhance partnerships with the philanthropic world to find funding for innovation. Many of the strategies and programs outlined below got their start with outside philanthropic funding from both major foundations and private giving.

“Key retention factors” or “Success factors” span the college continuum of K-12 through College:

K-5

Although the main focus of K-5 education is on basic academic and social skill-building to develop a solid foundation for continued education in grades 6-12 and beyond, what can be done to create a “higher education success model” from the start of a child’s education, both in the classroom, including high-quality reading education, and parental motivation? Clearly, parents are key at these ages and need to understand that much of what they do can support the expectation that education past high school, and indeed employment, are possible. Thus, parents of younger children should be invited to meetings with educators, and with college students of backgrounds similar to their children’s backgrounds, where this expectation is introduced and “normalized.” In addition, the importance of early reading instruction, phonics-based, cannot be overstated. (CHE, pp. 40-41, and see “A Kids Count Special Report on the Importance of Reading By 3, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, Baltimore, MD, retrieved by URL 2/22/20.)

Grades 6-8

Students in this critical transition period of early adolescence can and should be exposed to college life and the possibility of higher education beyond high school, whether as preparation for more education or for the workplace, via various types of bridge programs (see below), exposure to college students, visits to various types of campuses, and various types of employers. (See CHE, pp. 40-41.) Some campus-based bridge programs bring students of this age group to campus to see what a college looks and feels like, and ideally to meet with some actual college students. Such exposure will suggest to younger students that some form of higher education is their “normal” future beyond high school.

Before College, Grades 9-12

1. Creation of a “promise” program that provides (“promises”) a guaranteed college scholarships to underrepresented and first generation, lower-income students who meet GPA and attendance criteria. Addition of an “investment” incentive, requiring students’ families, and students who graduate, to “give back” to the program financially, as a way to sustain funding beyond the philanthropic support the program receives. Hartford Promise has also created a program, “The Nearlies,” that works with Hartford high school students whose record does not quite qualify them for a Promise scholarship, to help them get to that level. (www.hartfordpromise.org)

Note: Hartford’s and New Haven’s Promise Programs have raised substantial philanthropic funding to serve as the asset base for their commitments to high school students. Providence Promise also receives some philanthropic funding, but has built its 2019-created program on an “investment model,” whereby Promise students’ families pay into the asset base on a sliding fee scale, and Promise students who graduate from higher ed. must commit to a “payback,” again on a sliding fee scale. (pvdpromise.org)

2. Financial Aid: Careful, individually tailored help to complete the FAFSA, explore scholarship possibilities, and meet the financial aid requirements of each student’s target schools. Except for high schools in affluent communities, high school guidance counselors are often ill-equipped and/or

just too busy to be expert in the FAFSA, or have time to devote to every student's case, when their case loads are typically in the hundreds. (See 2/23/20 New York Times "Learning" section, article on "Confronting the Tuition Gap.")

3. Bridge programs for incoming freshmen, or younger, ideally on campus -- that combine skill-building, assessment, deficit reduction, and fun. An overnight stay, or a multi-week, on-campus summer experience goes a long way toward increasing first generation comfort level. . (See CHE, pp. 40-41. Also, Campuses in Connecticut with excellent bridge programs include Eastern Conn. State University, Manchester Community College, Goodwin University, and the University of Hartford, among others.)
4. Dual enrollment/"Early College" – exposing high school students to college-level work and instructors through partnerships between a campus and one or more feeder high schools. This is a good way for motivated, carefully-counseled high school students to gain college credits (in addition to or instead of via AP courses) and can be a good chance for "cross-sector" relationships when taught by college faculty or high school faculty certified by nearby college faculty.
5. Assessment of "college readiness" in multiple ways, including less emphasis on SAT, ACT and/or Accuplacer, and more on high school GPA, attendance, behavior, and sometimes the earned reputation of the high school. Documenting "achievement gaps," typically accumulated throughout the K-12 years, is a negative but necessary part of such assessment. (Note: Connecticut Public Act 12-40 mandates such multiple assessments, but community colleges generally use only the Accuplacer to make placement decisions – convenient but for many students, superficial, in our opinion.)
6. Introduction to financial literacy: enlisting college and other financial aid specialists, including campus-based peer mentors, to visit high schools to help students understand financial aid; but a second important part of "financial literacy" is education in practical life skills (e.g., banking, credit management, insurance, housing options and costs, car maintenance, and more. High schools generally have life skills courses, but it is usually not a requirement for all students. It should be. In some communities, community-based organizations are helping their program students complete the FAFSA (part of "seamless counseling" – see below) and teaching broader life skills.
7. Embedded Support (ES – p. 6): Many incoming students are not able to handle credit courses, but if given "supplemental instruction," attending regular credit classes – usually in English and math -- supplemented by 1-2 "lab classes" per week taught by faculty and/or TAs and/or peer mentors, such students are more likely to pass the credit course.
8. Mentors: Ideally, every "challenged" student in K-12, but especially in high school would benefit from a skilled mentor if there was an ample supply, based more or less on the Career Beginnings model practiced at the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education for many years – trained mentors backed up by HCHE staff who begin working with selected Hartford students at the beginning of 12th grade and continue to support them through their first two years of college ("seamless counseling").

9. Emphasis on reading and writing – in addition to the documented importance of “Reading by Three” about the importance of challenged kids reading “at grade level” by the end of third grade (see study by the Casey Foundation) a continuous push re. reading is a critical factor in preventing significant achievement gaps by the time students graduate high school. (See “The Writing Revolution,” by Peg Tyre, in the October 2012 edition of The Atlantic, re. a challenged high school that re-oriented its entire curriculum, except math, on writing.) A good mentor, and ideally parents and family, should be encouraging reading and writing.
10. Managing social media: Young people, and some older people, love their communications technology, especially smartphones; but their prevalence and addictive power can inhibit learning, *especially reading and writing*. Parents and teachers of K-12 students need to set limits, and students in both K-12 settings and in higher education need to be taught to balance their use with in-depth reading and writing, and to learn how to live without them occasionally. (See “Stop Googling, Let’s Talk,” New York Times Magazine, Sept. 26, 2015, by Sherry Turkle, and a follow-up book by the same expert. See also “Identifying Fake News,” below.)
11. Identifying “fake news”: Since 2016, and before, print and on-line media have been accused of “fake news..” Although this is sometimes just a label for news, accurate or not, with which someone does not agree, usually for ideological or political reasons. However, the 2016 presidential campaign demonstrated the size and severity of the “fake news” issue. Fortunately, an increasing number of high school and colleges have developed courses to help students sort out “fact from fiction,” and there are not software programs that can teach students and teachers to do this. (For example, the News Literacy Project offers a “virtual classroom,” Checkology -- \$3.50-5 per student – that does just that. See the New York Times “Learning” section on 2/23/20, 2 articles: “Finding the Fakes,” and “Lifelong Learning,” pp. 8-9.)
12. Gap Year: An idea, a retention strategy now coming into its own – an opportunity for students, perhaps burned out by high school and the pressure to get into college, to engage in something meaningful. An increasing number of colleges and universities are helping admitted students pursue gap years, and some have developed scholarship funds to open this to lower-income students – and a proven retention factor. This opportunity should be open to students of all backgrounds. (see Chronicle of Higher Education, June 8th, “The Best Freshman Year is a Gap Year,” p. A13)

Summer After Graduation

1. Summer melt prevention, via a funded program that employs and trains recent college graduates who help recent high school graduates meet their higher education enrollment requirements (e.g., financial aid, housing deposits), maintain motivation and overcome fear of “college culture,” and stay focused on their futures. Summer melt candidates should be identified by high schools for follow-up by community-based agencies funded and staffed to provide this important support. Ideally, such follow-up should go beyond texting to include face-to-face contact during the summer.
2. Emergency funding: Some lower-income students experience “summer melt” – do not show up to their chosen school – the summer after graduation from high school, sometimes because they cannot afford “minor” expenses (e.g., housing deposits, transportation, child care, student fees, even basic food). Similarly, some students experience a need for emergency, short-term funding during their first year on a campus, and/or beyond. Some colleges have created special funds, often provided by external sources, to meet such needs, including “food pantries.” (CHE, p.. 53-54).
3. Individually-tailored advising to do careful course selection at the chosen school – generally done by a community-based counselor and/or a skilled mentor, and ideally, in cooperation with the college’s counseling staff.
4. Application of “predictive analytics” to help campuses look at the risk factors of incoming students to anticipate challenges facing individual students and fashion support services to better address those challenges – a big challenge for thinly-staffed community colleges. (CHE, p. 10 re. tested approach at George State University, and pp. 20-24, especially p. 21, “Update Analytics Tools Constantly.”)
5. Seamless Counseling: Students lucky enough coming out of high school to work with a community-based organization gain a professional “extended family” to help them find an appropriate higher education choice, apply including for financial aid, stay focused and calm the summer after graduation, matriculate, and continue to help them all the way to graduation, and sometimes beyond.
6. Bridge programs (see no. 3 above)

Freshman Year

1. Before or during orientation, an “Envisioning Your Future” exercise (on-line or in a freshman group), including an essay on “how and why I did well in my freshman year” (hypothetical) – per Univ. of Texas Austin. (See “Who Gets to Graduate,” New York Times Magazine, May 15, 2014.)
2. Emergency funding: see above. Georgia State University began doing this as part of its “student Success Center” (CHE, p 10)
3. First Day, First Week, First Month, First Semester: First impressions are critical for many underrepresented and first generation students, especially if they have not been introduced to a campus via a bridge program (see p. 2). Ideally, someone (e.g., a peer mentor or skilled counselor/adviser) needs to meet new students on the first day and check in with them as they move into the school year to make sure they are going to classes, getting their homework done, getting enough sleep (a big challenge for residential students), exploring “engagement opportunities, finding on-campus resources, both academic and social, and more. While community college students do not have some of these challenges, doing “the basics” re. academics, accessing support services, and exploring engagement opportunities become even more important.
4. Quality First Year Experience program and/or involvement in a “Learning Community” (to build an immediate peer group that functions at both the academic and personal levels) – ideally, required. (See numerous reports from the National Center for First Year Experience and the John Gardner Institute for Excellence in Higher Education.) Some schools put students with the same majors together, while others have diverse groups with many interests represented.
5. New approaches to remedial/developmental education: Several individual schools, and several states (e.g., Conn., Florida, Tennessee, California) have developed new approaches to remedial education, allowing students to go right into credit courses, and with “supplemental instruction” (“embedded support”), or with a “gateway,” self-paced computer lab courses to help challenged students, both traditional aged and adult learners get up to speed (CHE, pp. 28-29). In recognition that some students will still struggle to qualify for credit-bearing courses, especially in math and English, some states have created time-limited “transition” programs to overcome achievement gaps. (See p. 7 re. “Adult Education.”)
6. Support of a trained peer mentor: in addition to “intrusive advising” (see below), peer mentors can be a key reason why freshmen persist during the typically difficult first (and second) semester. If such mentors come from backgrounds similar to those of students, the support is even more effective.
7. Embedded support: freshmen take regular intro courses (e.g, English and/or Math 101), supplemented by additional, intensive work outside regular class time, all for credit – replacing traditional “developmental” education – also known as “Supplemental Instruction.” The State of Tennessee has replaced traditional, non-credit remedial courses with such “embedded support,” but has experienced some criticism that some especially unprepared students still cannot succeed in this type of course. California has recently taken a similar approach.

8. Seamless Counseling continued, via a continued support person/mentor, or an on-campus mentor – for students fortunate enough to be connected to a community-based agency staffed to do this.
9. Continued application of predictive analytics, ideally begun before students matriculate. (See July 6, 2018 issue of Chronicle of Higher Education, “How to Best Harness Student Success Technology,” and CHE, pp. 12 & 20-24.) Georgia State University has one of the best known approaches, using predictive analytics to underpin its advising and instruction, and viewing it as the basis of its Student Success model
10. Guided Pathways (GP): Beginning students, especially at community colleges, are often overwhelmed by too many choices in the curriculum, and by confusing pathways to completion of their major. More schools, and entire states (e.g., Connecticut and its GP program begun in 2019) are using GP with a small number of “meta-majors” (faux majors” at LaGuardia Community College in New York, one of the pioneers in GP), to reduce such confusion and increase focus, and providing sustained (“intrusive”) advising to facilitate easy major changes. (CHE, pp. 9, 30, 31)
11. Intrusive Advising: Many schools talk about this, but few schools do it well. That generally requires commitment from the President and finding the funding to hire and train enough advisors/counselors/”success coaches” to allow manageable caseloads. Several schools have pursued this with real commitment. Counseling centers need to practice “cultural competence” and ideally, diversity in staffing, and be available with accessible hours (e.g., nights and weekends).
12. Early exposure to career interests: While many college students still enjoy, even seek “pure learning” for intellectual advancement, for many college students, “relevance,” or “experiential education” is a major key to their sustained motivation to pursue excellence in college. Hence, the importance of career planning starting in first year, efforts by professors to make “real world links,” and of course, internships and apprenticeships for students in technical programs. Such exposure could also be part of ‘guided pathways” (CHE, pp. 49, 51,52)
13. Part-time work, whether Work-Study or otherwise, is necessary for many students financially, and most effective for students if on campus, in some cases for the school itself as a way to promote “campus engagement.
14. Learning Communities promote campus engagement, potentially link students to a major or even a career direction and create a cohort of like-minded students that nurture peer learning. Residential learning communities, where feasible, are especially effective and linked to higher retention and graduation. (See “Adding Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement,” by Chun-Mei Zhao and George D. Kuh.)
15. Posse-Type Cohort Groups and/or mentors: Both have been shown to promote retention among students sharing similar backgrounds. “I found a mentor (from an organization) who looks like me.” (See “Black Male Student Success in Higher Education,” by Shaun Harper, Univ. of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.) The Posse Foundation (www.possefoundation.org) has developed a good track record of building cohort groups on individual campuses and contends that students in formal, sustained posse groups persist at higher levels than students not so involved.

16. Affinity/Support Groups: are the core of campus engagement and can help underrepresented and first generation students find a “safe place” on campus with like-minded students. They exist on every campus, but some schools do better than others to encourage involvement for freshmen and beyond. Some students will find mentors from such engagement. (See the Sean Harper study, “Black Male College Student Success.”)
17. Encouraging, in a variety of ways, campus engagement (“belonging”) – bonding with the campus – often leads to new friends and mentors. Similarly, once on campus, quickly getting to know a significant adult (e.g., faculty, counselor, Peer Mentor) who knows youths’ name and background – for some students, communication with high school counselor/advisor via “seamless counseling.” (See No. 7 above.)
18. Continued support to monitor financial aid requirements and explore each student’s situation and on-going needs for financial aid. Given the debate over the “value vs. cost” of higher education, along with declining state support, the financial aspect of college is even more significant.
19. Early exposure to the library, librarians and library resources – a proven correlation between this and retention (may or may not be “causal”) (See “Library data as an early predictor of student retention,” by Patricia S. Banach, Eastern Connecticut State University.)
20. Managing Social Media, continued. Many college freshmen come to a campus already “addicted” to their smartphones and the social media options those phones provide. Some professors use social media in class in creative ways, and others try to enforce a “no use in class” rule. Faculty, and perhaps advisers, should discuss the use of these tools and the potential for abuse with their students.
21. Identifying “fake news”: See above – just as relevant to college students.
22. Streamline the transfer process: For students who are transferring (e.g., from a community college to a 4-year school, or another type of transfer), having a smooth, understandable transfer process, including re. course credits, can make the difference between a successful transfer and dropping out. Connecticut’s process (“Compact?”) is a work in progress. (CHE, p. 34), Univ. of Central Florida’s “Direct Connect” program).

Continuous On-Campus Support

1. Continued assistance to students re. financial aid: maintaining eligibility, especially re. FAFSA audits (especially with recent, stricter Federal requirements).
2. Seamless Counseling continued. As with families with a “college-going culture,” seamless counseling agency staff “back off” if their target students are doing well, but move in for close support if they struggle. Most such organizations have an “early warning system, “ often connected to planned intrusive advising (see below).
3. Continued application of predictive analytics: risk factors persist, and good data trails can continue to point to both results of support services and the need for additional support/intervention for selected students. (CHE, pp. 6, 10, 20-24)
4. Growth Mindset – schools going “deeper” into retention success factors by teaching students (and faculty) how to alter all-too-common “negative mind sets” with “growth mindsets. A few scholars have created methods of teaching these ground-breaking critical skills and evaluating their attainment (per Professor Marianne Fallon at Central Conn. State University and Dr. Peter Arthur at Univ. of British Columbia at Okanagan (presenters at a 2018 CHERE conference).
5. Critical thinking skill development – campuses teaching students and faculty to develop critical thinking skills and evaluate their attainment – again, something many schools and faculty talk about but do not really have a “best practice” (per Professors Steven Pearlman and David Carillo at the Univ. of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Conn. and their pioneering “Critical Thinking Initiative”)
6. Continued emphasis on reading and writing, to build literacy skills, and to blunt the numbing addiction of social media, reading “only “ on devices, writing in “cellphone code” (increasingly with emoji), and more. Too many American college students risk limited success if “deep reading” and excellent writing are not valued and learned. Faculty, not to mention some parents, can help students find the needed balance.
7. “Flipped classrooms” – while there are many variations, today’s college students need to be the focus of classroom work, not the teacher; and teachers need to lecture sparingly, more necessary in some “hard” academic subjects, but engaging students in dialogue, Q & A, interactive as much as possible. Changing one’s teaching style is hard, even impossible for some faculty, but needs to be done to appeal to today’s students.
8. “Dialogue,” outside normal classes between students and faculty about academic and social issues., can foster more student “engagement” on a campus, and thus contribute to retention. While some faculty, often older ones, see their job as “teaching” in their area of training, and up to a point this makes sense, if faculty can find ways to engage in “dialogue” in class and out of class, all will benefit.

9. Creative use of technology, in the classroom and in the back 'n forth with students via Blackboard and other applications; however, faculty should also discuss and teach about the downside to our social media facility re. reading capacity, critical thinking skills, essay writing, research on impacts like “decline in empathy, “ per Prof. Sherry Turkle’s research at MIT., and learning how to identify “fake news” in their research and everyday web-surfing. (See no. 11 on p. 3.)
10. Internships and apprenticeships: what better way to expose students to the real world of work and perhaps lead to employment following graduation. Some schools are good at identifying possible placements (including on campus), placing students and monitoring their progress. (CHE, P. 52)
11. Schools should also provide a platform in which students can showcase their accomplishments – for example, “E-Portfolios” that incorporate student work and achievements from enrollment all the way to graduation, providing students a tangible way of seeing their progress towards reaching their goals.
12. Confronting racism and other “ism’s”: As student populations become more diverse, more schools are developing strategies to understand and confront racism and other “ism’s” directly. In contrast to some faculty members, most students are willing and eager to discuss their views on these issues, including having a comfort level with more inclusive classes and campuses in general. (CHE, p. 37, and see New York Times “Learning” section. 2/23/20, “The Mindful Classroom,” p. 8).
13. Finding Former Students: Most schools are not staffed or motivated to do this, as “data trails” get lost; but the University of Memphis has pioneered the return of former students to school with its “Finish Line” program that includes creative outreach (“data mining”), special advising, and emergency funding. Not only do students benefit, but the school benefits financially. (CHE, p. 25)
14. Study abroad: finding ways to offer this to all students, regardless of income – a proven enrichment opportunity to which all students should have access.

Leadership: The apparent success of all these factors result from insights about challenged students, careful program design, and above all, from great leaders who define “success,” find ways to bring it to their domains, including funding, reach out to partners on the campus and in the community, and sustain it over time. Such “promising” and “best” practices can only be replicated effectively through quality leadership that can think long-term. Real change – sustained positive impact on challenged students (and indeed all students) -- does not happen overnight.

Adult Education: The Post-Script

There are millions of potential “adult learners” in our country who have either failed at college, or never had the opportunity to attend. They are older, often have children and lower-paying jobs; and thus their personal circumstances are often barriers to sustained higher education. Yet in light of the declining enrollments of traditional age students (recent high school graduates) at traditional campuses, plus the challenge of on-line learning, more colleges, especially community colleges, state universities, and some private institutions, need to recruit these adult learners and provide programs that cater to their interests and needs, often via partnerships between community colleges and K-12 adult education centers, to introduce best practices for success with this population. Many are foreign-born adults who are highly motivated to improve their lot through additional education, including ESL classes to better prepare them for credit college courses. Traditional higher educational approaches, though still very important, are no longer enough in our rapidly-changing educational environment.

Working with adult learners is hard, maybe harder than with students in K-12 and traditional age college students. “Life” gets in the way of successful learning. Poor experience with, and performance in, K-12 leaves many potential adult learners with a “negative mind set” about education. Effective “adult education” has to find ways to nurture a “growth mindset” – easier said than done.

(Transparency: David Johnston is the Recruiter and Counselor in the “Transitions to College” program in Meriden, Conn., a 10 year-old program to help “adult learners” who have not been to college to qualify for credit courses at a local community college.)

Selected Articles

From an Op.Ed. in the May 1, 2017 New York Times “Review” section, entitled, “What Can Stop Kids From Dropping Out”

1. Personalized attention, from “the minute they hit the campus.” Many first generation students (and foster youth) are encountering a college environment for the first time, unless they have participated in a bridge program (see above) that “acclimates” them to a campus.
2. “Useful” academic feedback – from faculty and/or advisers
3. “Intrusive Advising,” including:
 - 1) Early intervention for low grades – reaching out at the first sign of trouble
 - 2) Using upperclassmen as (trained) tutors
 - 3) Having counselors spend time in dorms to look for troubled students.
4. Less lecture, more time in computer lab (with immediate on-line feedback), flipped classrooms, more student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction
5. Small “retention grants” for non-academic issues (e.g., housing)

From the Chronicle of Higher Education

June 8, 2018 “A Third of Your Freshmen Disappear, and “five most popular programs and initiatives to improve first year retention” --

1. First Year Seminar and Freshmen Orientation (see details in article)
2. Building a Sense of Belonging (see details in article)
3. Redesigning Gateway Courses (see details in article)
4. Supplemental Instruction (“embedded support”) (see details in article)
5. Early Alerts and Intrusive Advising (see details in article)

February 23, 2018 Chronicle of Higher Education: “Help Make Sure Freshmen Show Up”

Dec. 21, 2018 Chronicle of Higher Education: “Why We Need to Rethink Remediation”

Aug. 2, 2019 Chronicle of Higher Education: “The Dropout Scandal”

January 24, 2020 Chronicle of Higher Education: “A College Designed for Dropouts” (College Unbound in Providence, Rhode Island)

March 20, 2020 Chronicle of Higher Education: entire issue focused on “Coronavirus Hits Campus,” but especially “The Great Online-Learning Experiment” by Jonathan Zimmerman.

April 3, 2020 Chronicle of Higher Education: “What Now, especially “Teaching in a Crisis: Coronavirus pushed professors online – can they keep up?”

April 17, 2020 Chronicle on Higher Education, especially special section, “How Will the Pandemic Change Higher Education?” Responses from many higher ed professors, administrators and others.

See also, “CHERE Conference: “The Future of Higher Education, keynote address: “10 Contemporary Challenges for American Higher Education,” delivered Oct. 11, 2019, at Central Connecticut State University, by George Mehaffy, Vice President for Academic Leadership and Change, American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), Washington, D.C. (retired as of October 2019). Available at CHERE’s website: [wwwthechere.org](http://www.thechere.org)