

Article

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A Student-Centered Individual-Level University Retention Program Where Attrition is Low

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Abstract:

Retention research and intervention strategies at low attrition institutions can often benefit from approaches other than the traditional methods that employ sampling techniques and statistical analysis. For example, many students will predict the likelihood of their own dropping out and then follow-up by requesting university-based counseling services. The difficulties such students describe are often idiosyncratic and may not lend themselves to large-scale categorizations. Often, the students themselves are not fully aware of the reasons for their anticipated withdrawal and make misleading attributions of cause, frequently adopting commonly identified university challenges. Furthermore, in order to initiate prevention programs, it is not always necessary to know the real reason for which a student might withdraw. Rather, individual counseling and/or referrals within a university network, in a package of investigative and clinical services, can further retention while maintaining a neutral stance on the true reasons students choose to leave an institution. In many cases, such one-on-one interventions can improve retention even when an actual resolution of the individual's stated problems is not achieved. The current article describes a systematic student centered retention program developed under the auspices of a university Psychological and Counseling Center. Through self-identification and follow-up, individuals are assisted with complex issues, which if not addressed, commonly lead to withdrawal. One principle suggested by our work is that, at high retention schools, a useful alternative is promoting reasons for students to stay rather than attempting to predict and resolve the multiple reasons for which they might choose to leave. Additionally, the student-centered retention approach may lead to the identification of university-wide issues, and hence to long-term structural change in the institution.

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