The Next Five Percent: Student Retention Strategies for Selective Public Universities

Custom Research Brief • May 15, 2008

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I. PROJECT OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVE

Despite attracting students of a high academic caliber, selective public universities in the Council membership report difficulty attaining freshmen-to-sophomore retention rates above 90% and six-year graduation rates above 80%. This project seeks to identify strategies appropriate for academically selective public universities to drive improvement in those rates.

METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted primarily through interviews with officials at more than a dozen selective public universities, whose identities were disguised in this report for the purposes of confidentiality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Undergraduate Enrollment</th>
<th>2008 US News Ranking</th>
<th>2006 Six-Year Grad Rate</th>
<th>Interviewee Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
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<td>First-Year Advising Director</td>
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<td>89%</td>
<td>Associate Vice Provost</td>
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<td>Top 100</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University G</td>
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<td>University I</td>
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<tr>
<td>University J</td>
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<td>Top 50</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>First-Year Advising Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University K</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>32,500</td>
<td>Top 100</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>Provost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*The Distinctive Challenges for Student Retention at Large, Selective Publics*

- Despite attracting students of high academic caliber, many selective public institutions in the Council membership report specific challenges retaining and graduating students as a consequence of their large, complex organizational structure:
  - Enrollments in the tens of thousands prohibit detailed understanding of the specific needs of individual students
  - Imprecise knowledge of specific student needs results in sub-optimal allocation of resources between the general student body and the sub-population of at-risk students
  - New students at large universities find it difficult to develop and sustain close connections with peers
  - Students have difficulty navigating disparate resources spread across expansive, complex campuses

*Four Approaches for Raising Retention Rates by Increasing Connections to Services and Peers*

- Interviews suggest that exemplars are addressing scale-related challenges through a combination of four approaches designed to increase utilization of university services proven to be effective in engaging and retaining students:

  1) **Comprehensive, Early Self-Identification of At-Risk Students:** Universities are redesigning personal statements in admission applications and attempting 100% participation in freshmen surveys to score specific attrition risk for each incoming student. High risks are automatically routed for advising with appropriate campus services.

  2) **Hard-Wiring Degree Maps in Academic Advising:** Many exemplars are placing clear, eight-semester degree progression models at the center of all academic advising to increase the rigor and transparency of planning sessions. Some are using degree maps as a platform for additional functionality, including student self-advising web portals, milestone audits to ensure students remain on track for four-year graduation, and forecasting demand for popular classes.

  3) **Audacious Targets and Significant Resourcing of Peer Learning Communities:** Peer learning communities are conceptually familiar, but so successful at driving retention that some universities are targeting 50-100% participation among first-year students.

  4) **Cross-Functional Advising Services:** Universities are bundling advising and counseling services together (online and in physical space) to help students navigate traditionally siloed offerings. Some are investing in unified records of support service interactions and engaging in centralized oversight of all retention-serving units.

- **Council View:** Results are not available for many of these practices; however, available data suggest that an estimated 5% gain in freshman retention rate may be attained from a combination of early identification (+1%), degree map milestones (+2%), and expanded learning communities (+2%).
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APPROACHES FOR ACHIEVING “THE NEXT 5%” IN RETENTION AT SELECTIVE PUBLICS

Comprehensive, Early Self-Identification of At-Risk Students

#1: Compulsory Risk Self-Assessments for Incoming Students
#2: Automatic Advising Referrals and Scheduling

Hard-Wiring Degree Maps in Academic Advising

#3: Mandatory Semester Course Maps for All Degree Programs
#4: Formalized Messaging of Graduation in Four Years
#5: Milestone-Based Advising Interventions
#6: Student Self-Service Academic Advising Website

Audacious Targets and Significant Resourcing of Peer Learning Communities

#7: Majority First-Year Participation in Cohort Learning Communities
#8: Compulsory First-Year Peer Mentoring

Cross-Functional Advising Services

#9: Unified Student Advising Record
#10: Innovative Positioning of Advising Services
#11: Cross-Silo Retention Oversight
#12: Online Student Support Portal
II. COMPREHENSIVE, EARLY SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

Many selective public members interviewed by the Council lament the disconnect between the university and students in accessing and providing advising resources: schools lack familiarity with the students’ specific needs, while students often fail to access available services on their own.

Some interviewees are capturing richer data on new students through compulsory self-reporting mechanisms used to proactively flag retention risks for referrals to the most appropriate advising services. These practices seek to channel at-risk students to advising sources within the first eight weeks of freshmen year before preventable problems manifest, improving chances for persistence.

Strategy #1: Compulsory Risk Self-Assessments for Incoming Students

Using Application Personal Statements to Identify At-Risk Students

University C has modified a short-answer personal statement on its admissions application to capture background risk information on all incoming students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Essay Personal Statement Cues</th>
<th>Student Attrition Risk (University C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• As part of the application process, students are required to respond to an essay question describing how their personal background has shaped their experiences and goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Application readers assign each student a “Life Challenge Score” based on cues of a disadvantaged or challenging background predictive of first-year attrition risk – this score is used to gain more robust understanding of the student and is not used to exclude students from admission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Matriculants with higher-than-average Life Challenge Scores and lower-than-average academic scores (compared to the rest of the incoming class) are routed to supplemental advising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Application Short Answer Essay Prompt**

“Describe the world you come from - for example, your family, community or school - and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.”

**“Life Challenge Score” Cues:**

- Quality of High School Instruction
- Low-Income Background
- Single-Parent Home
- Foster Home
- Family Drug/Alcohol Abuse
“First Fortnight” Freshmen Attrition Risk Survey Campaigns

A second approach for collecting self-reported cues of attrition risk from incoming students is through a comprehensive online survey of students’ backgrounds and attitudes toward college. University A has achieved 90% compliance among on-campus freshmen through assigning the survey in popular freshman classes, email reminders, leveraging parents, and encouragement from residential staff.

Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory

http://www.noellevitz.com

Description: A multiple-choice survey of student background, education history, stance towards college academics, and receptivity to advising

Administration: During second week of freshman year

Cost: $8 per student for the online version

Time Requirement: 20 to 50 minutes

Individual Student Reports Include:

- Summary score for Dropout Proneness, Receptivity to Help and related factors
- Detailed scores for Academic Motivation, Social Motivation, General Coping and Receptivity to Support Services
- Specific rank-ordered advising recommendations such as “Help find a summer job” and “Help with writing skills”

Summary Report Includes:

- Listings of students identified to have special advising needs
- Itemized dissatisfaction factors for each student with scoring for likeliness to transfer

Comprehensive Student Participation Attempted Via:

- Assigning CSI as homework in large freshman classes
- Encouraging parents to ask their students to take the survey
- Daily e-mail reminders during students’ second week in school
- Resident Advisors approach students who haven’t completed survey with face-to-face requests

RESULTS

- 90% compliance for on-campus freshmen within first two weeks
- 72% compliance for all students
Strategy #2: Automatic Advising Referrals and Scheduling

Universities are embracing the regrettable reality that at-risk students often fail to follow-through on explicit referrals to support services, to the detriment of their own self-interest. Students identified as attrition risks may be notified and referred to advising; however, many will lack the initiative to follow through with setting appointments and connecting to these services.

University A is striving to increase student participation in advising by automatically setting appointments for students based on their attrition risk self-assessment results.

**University A automatically schedules appointments for all new students based on the results of attrition risk self-assessments**

- After freshmen take an online survey of attrition risk, a group of academic advisors, personal counselors, career counselors, and residence hall directors are each assigned 30-40 students to meet with one-on-one to discuss the results
- During the meeting, the advisor makes a referral appointment for the student with the campus service (academic advising, career counseling, mental health services, financial aid office, etc) that he or she would find the most beneficial
- Students follow through with referral appointments at a rate of 60%

**A one-percent impact in freshman persistence:** University A did not use this model in 2005. Freshmen persistence fell by 1-2%, a drop attributed to the absence of automatic appointments.
III. HARD-WIRING DEGREE MAPS IN ACADEMIC ADVISING

The complexity of proper course pacing and progression is cited by many members as a preventable cause of attrition at large state universities. Students frequently put off required courses until the end of their careers, when limited seat availability can force additional semesters, decreasing the odds of graduation. Interviewees agree that these problems are largely avoidable if students follow proper course progression early in their collegiate careers.

Degree maps have long been familiar to students in professionally focused disciplines like Business and Engineering that adhere to strictly defined curricula. Now, many retention exemplars are placing clear, eight-semester degree progression models at the center of academic advising for all majors, in the expectation students will receive more consistent advising and improved transparency of requirements.

A handful of progressive institutions are exploring ways to use degree maps as a platform for additional function, such as milestone audits to ensure students remain on track and student self-advising websites.

Strategy #3: Mandatory Semester-by-Semester Course Maps for All Degree Programs

Interviewees report that eight-semester degree maps, while common in past decades, are now rarely available for all majors in all programs as a result of expansion in liberal arts degree offerings.

In response, progressive institutions are mandating that all departments articulate clear eight-semester degree maps for each major.

Creation of the degree maps requires a one-time commitment of faculty efforts, followed by occasional and periodic updates as degree requirements change.

Strategy #4: Formalized Messaging of Graduation in Four Years

Interviewees have noted repeatedly that the resources committed to advising, the number of students per advisor, and the quality of advisor training varies significantly across departments. As a result, students may not be fully aware of how to plan a four-year course of study, or they may receive inaccurate advisement that delays their progress towards graduation.

University F has made degree maps the basis of all advising interaction with students. Training efforts have resulted in 80-85% compliance among advisors. Positive effects include:

- **Messaging to students that four-year graduation is possible and expected.** Presented with degree maps during every advising meeting, students are made aware of and encouraged to follow the proper pacing required for degree completion within four years.

- **Creating a baseline standard of quality for academic advising.** Degree maps improve advisor familiarity with major requirements, reducing the chances for inaccurate advisement.
Strategy #5: Milestones Embedded in Degree Maps to Support “Intervention Advising”

The positive effect of degree mapping is reduced if the university has no mechanism to encourage compliance or intervene with students who have fallen behind. Several universities interviewed by the Council are requiring students to complete key courses and maintain minimum GPAs each semester. These “milestones” are dictated by the departments and embedded in the degree maps. Students who fail to meet milestones are blocked from registering until they meet with academic advising, allowing advisors to easily identify and optimize their efforts towards those students most in need of assistance. Because of this, degree milestone interventions will have the greatest benefit for schools that cannot advise all students every semester.

- **Milestone plans include a prescribed progression of course completions and minimum GPAs**

**Milestone Plan for the First Four Semesters of a Chemistry Major**

- **Semester One**
  - 2.0 Min GPA
  - One Chem Course
  - One Math Course

- **Semester Two**
  - Chemistry 101
  - Math 101

- **Semester Three**
  - Chemistry 102
  - Math 102

- **Semester Four**
  - 2.75 Min GPA on all milestone coursework

- **Students who miss milestones are automatically routed into advising.** These students are blocked from registration until they meet with an academic advisor and agree upon a plan to get back on course. It is estimated that 20-25% of students will require intervention during their careers, including 15% of all freshmen.
University E attributes a 2% raise in retention and graduation rates to their degree map milestone system.

![Improvement in Retention and Graduation Rates at University E, 1996-2004](http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0648rpt.pdf)

**Source:** University E attributes a 2% raise in retention and graduation rates to their degree map milestone system.

Degree Map Implementation Recommendations

- **Post milestones online side-by-side with degree maps:** Students' awareness of degree maps and milestones is reinforced if they view the two in juxtaposition.

- **Set milestones for undecided students in their field of interest:** Prepare undecided students to be on-track for a major by following “exploratory” degree maps comprised of common introductory and prerequisite courses in their general field of interest.

- **Perform milestone audits through central advising office:** Ensure comprehensive coverage of students by performing milestone audits through central advisors instead of delegating to departmental advisors.

- **Audit students twice a semester:** Conduct interventions after course schedules stabilize following Drop/Add and again after final grades are submitted.

- **Adopt a “Two-Strikes Rule” to force major switches for struggling students:** Require students flagged for a second intervention to explore a change of major to avoid further academic struggles.

- **Safeguard against enrollment management abuse by departments:** Do not allow departments to weed out weaker students and reduce the total number of majors by setting overly-strict milestones.

Note: While some of these gains may be explained by rising admissions standards, officials at University E believe that degree milestones played an important role.
Strategy #6: Online Degree Maps and Student Self-Service Academic Advising Website

Even when degree maps exist, they are often scattered across department websites and in a variety of formats.

University E and University K have created common templates for their degree maps. These maps have been collected into a centralized web portal hosted by the registrar office, allowing students to make easy comparisons when considering majors. Departments use this platform to offer additional information about the major, helping savvy students to self-advice and thus reducing the load on the academic advising services. Officials estimate that 60-80% of students successfully rely on this website instead of in-person advising.

Advantages of a Self-Service Degree Map Website

- One-stop shop for students to compare majors in standardized format
- Facilitation of central administration oversight
- Reduced strain on advising - as much as 80% of students can self-advice
Anatomy of a Degree Map Website (University E)

The following pages contain example screenshots from the centralized degree map website hosted by the registrar at University E. The main page is an alphabetical listing of the available majors at the university. Students can click on each major to see a page with descriptive information about the major, including the semester-by-semester degree map.

Degree Map Home Page: list of all available majors
Degree Profile Pages: specific information for each major presented in a common format for ease of comparison

- Technical information about the major
- A brief summary of the field of study
- Common careers pursued through this major
- Additional suggestions and helpful information
- Semester-by-semester degree map, including courses in the major, general education requirements, and electives
IV. AUDACIOUS TARGETS AND SIGNIFICANT RESOURCING OF PEER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

“Students tell us that they are constantly surrounded by people, yet they’ve never felt so alone”

–Interviewee at University A

Larger universities concede with regrettable frequency that many first-year students see their campuses as lonely and intimidating places. There is general concern that many students will not persist to their second year absent strong connections with friends with whom they can learn to navigate the university, a pursuit embodied in peer learning communities and peer mentoring.

Strategy #7: Majority First-Year Participation in Cohort Learning Communities

Peer learning communities are conceptually familiar; however, interviewees report that participants perform dramatically better and are retained at a rate perhaps 5-10% higher than their peers. Some universities interviewed by the Council are so persuaded by these results that they have begun aggressively targeting 50-100% freshmen participation in learning communities.

Learning Communities are Proven Drivers of Student Retention

- University D attributes a 1-2% gain in freshman persistence by making learning community participation mandatory. Already popular with students, learning communities were made mandatory for all freshmen enrolling in Fall 2004. Noticeable gains were realized the following year when the university increased faculty involvement, especially with undeclared students. Results from 2005 and 2006 suggest that this mandatory policy may have improved freshman persistence from 88% to 90% going forward.

Freshman Persistence at University D, 2000-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Matriculation</th>
<th>Percent Persistence to Sophomore Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(University D notes that the academic profile of incoming students has not changed meaningfully during this time period)
University I enrolls half of all freshmen in learning communities, whose participants are retained at a rate 9% points higher than non-participants. University I created its learning community program ten years ago to counteract the perception of the school as a large, impersonal place. University officials soon recognized the positive effect on freshman persistence, and have steadily increased resources and participation over the last five years.

Gains in freshman persistence at University J translate to gains in graduation rate. Freshmen who participate in learning communities graduate at a rate 10% higher than non-participants. Officials attribute this gain to the lasting effect of positive experiences with classes and faculty. Presently 10% of freshman participate, although current student demand could sustain 25% participation.
Three Models of Learning Communities

The Council encountered three learning community models during interviews. We present them here as fodder for discussion without recommendation or prejudice.

Residential-Based Cohorts (University D)
- **Cohort Size:** 20
- **Cohort Themes:** Majors or shared academic interests
- **Cohort Themes Determined By:** Departments and the First-Year Experience office
- **Coursework:** One intro class related to cohort theme; intensive one-credit University 101 course with group project led by peer mentor with faculty oversight
- **Residential Component:** 100% of cohorts are residential, cohort shares same residence hall

Department-Designed Cohorts Based on Pre-Requisite Courses (University I)
- **Cohort Size:** 20
- **Cohort Themes:** Majors
- **Cohort Themes Determined By:** Departments
- **Coursework:** Three intro courses appropriate for the major; non-credit University 101 course led by department advisor and peer mentor
- **Residential Component:** less than 10% of cohorts share the same dorm

Faculty Designed Cohorts Based on Interdisciplinary Learning (University J)
- **Cohort Size:** 20
- **Cohort Themes:** Interdisciplinary studies
- **Cohort Themes Determined By:** Individual faculty members
- **Coursework:** Two traditional freshmen courses, plus an interdisciplinary seminar designed by lead faculty member to link themes from the other two courses; no University 101 class
- **Residential Component:** cohort may share same dorm or live in adjacent dorms

Learning Communities Appeal to Students Because of Pre-Made Schedules

Learning communities offer new freshmen a pre-made schedule of three compatible and appropriate courses. Interviewees at Universities I and J report that this is a significant draw for incoming students who are unfamiliar with the course selection and registration process.
Strategy #8: Compulsory First-Year Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring is cited by interviewees as one of the most influential levers for freshman retention. The value of peer mentoring increases when the relationship between mentor and first-year students is formalized into a regular, structured format. The Council encountered two peer mentoring formats based on regular, structured interactions with cohorts of new students:

**Dedicated residential peer mentor devotes 20 hrs/wk to freshmen cohort** (University B)
Cohorts of 17 new students receive an intense, daily mentoring experience with a dedicated upperclass student who takes the place of a traditional dorm residential advisor.

- **Mentor makes daily contact with students, typically over meals:** For the first eight weeks of school, mentors are expected to eat one meal a day with their cohort and spend a total of 20 hours peer week providing an introduction to university life.
- **Mentors use their familiarity with students to serve as an early warning mechanism:** In addition to daily contact, mentors also perform one-on-one check-ins on students’ academic and social well being, referring problems to Residential Life Directors.
- **Mentors are compensated with free room and board, a stipend, and a dining plan covering five meals a week**

**Peer mentors teach compulsory one-credit University 101 course** (University D)
Cohort of 20 freshmen living in the same residence hall are taught mandatory, weekly one-credit University 101 courses by an upperclass peer mentors.

- **Freshmen get more value from a University 101 class when the primary instructor is a peer mentor teaching from experience.** Freshmen feel a more personal connection to the class material when it is taught from the experience of a peer, and many students develop friendships with their mentors outside of the course.
- **Mentor teaching efforts are supported by a faculty member and training.** Each section is paired with a faculty member or administrator who partners with the mentor to guide the cohort. Mentors also take a separate one-credit class on improving their teaching skills.
- **Mentors receive a $1000 stipend**
V. CROSS-FUNCTIONAL ADVISING SERVICES

Advising services are traditionally dispersed across campus, with functional silos resulting in redundant services and poor communication between units interacting with the same student. Students themselves experience difficulty when navigating this landscape, often not knowing where to find a service or even that a specific service exists.

Retention exemplars interviewed by the Council are exploring novel ways to bundle multiple student services together in physical and online spaces, providing students with an increased awareness of services and reduced barriers to access. Others are striving to improve communication and synergy between services to maximize impact.

Strategy #9: Unified Student Advising Record

Lack of connection between advising units on campus means that no one unit has a complete understanding of a student’s background and advising history, increasing the chance of overlooking a key piece of the student’s story, or providing conflicting advice. University A has developed a unified, online record of advising history that allows any unit on campus to log into a student’s file and see a summary of the student’s background, their prior experiences with advising, and their development over time. The system also provides advising units with an automated notification confirming when a referral appointment is made from another unit.

Strategy #10: Innovative Positioning of Advising Services

Convenient Locations for Services

- **Financial aid satellite office located in academic support center** (University G)
  Students targeted for supplemental or remedial instruction are often from disadvantaged backgrounds. These students have access to a satellite financial aid officer at the academic support center, allowing them to easily get answers to quick questions without waiting in line at the main financial aid office. Regular interaction allows students to develop a more personal relationship with the financial aid officer, allowing for easier conversations when a major problem arises. The academic support office pays for 50% of one financial aid FTE in exchange for 50% of their time.

- **Academic advising located in high-traffic student areas** (University K)
  University K has targeted academic advising as a lever for retention, aggressively lowering student-to-advisor ratios and increasing advising outreach to students. As part of this campaign, the university is offering walk-in academic advising in several high-traffic areas and analyzing student usage patterns to identify optimal locations. Preliminary results indicate that students prefer to meet with advisors in study-oriented environments instead of recreational-oriented environments. Time of day also has an effect, as students will make use of dining hall locations during dinner, but not breakfast or lunch.
**Holistic Approach to Academic Support**

**Mental Health Resiliency Counseling for Students on Academic Probation**  
(San Diego State University, University H)

Academic struggles lead to emotional strain, especially for students accustomed to success in the classroom. “Bounce Back” is an innovative program pioneered at San Diego State, and later adopted at University H, offering mental health counseling combined with academic skills training to students on academic probation. These students rebuild confidence and increase self-awareness while developing good study habits.

**Who:** Students on academic probation (two-thirds of these students are freshmen)

**Goals:** Academic skills training, positive change of self perception, increased engagement, and improved goal directedness

**Format:** Weekly one-credit group discussion class of 20 students led by a mental health professional. Discussion topics include:

- Building academic persistence
- Understanding personal learning styles
- Developing study skills
- Learning stress management skills
- Mastering emotion
- Choosing a personality-compatible major

**Results:** Bounce Back participants achieve higher GPAs and are cleared off academic probation at a rate nearly twice that of non-participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDSU Students on Academic Probation, Spring 2007</th>
<th>Bounce Back Participants (N = 195)</th>
<th>Non-Participants (N = 2900)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average GPA, Start of Semester</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average GPA, End of Semester</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleared from Academic Probation (Overall GPA &gt; 2.0)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining on Academic Probation (Semester GPA &gt; 2.0)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically Disqualified (Semester GPA &lt; 2.0)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Students on Academic Probation must have a semester GPA above 2.0 to remain enrolled and an overall GPA above 2.0 to be cleared off probation

For more information on the Bounce Back Program:  
[http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/cps/bounceback.html](http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/cps/bounceback.html)

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Strategy #11: Cross-Silo Retention Oversight

Student retention is widely recognized as owned by both everyone and no one. Without oversight, advising efforts and student services will develop redundancies, inefficiencies, and cross-silo barriers. Universities are responding by committing high-level administrators to retention committees and appointing dedicated retention officials.

Cabinet-Level Retention Committee

University K has made student retention a priority for the upper administration, convening a weekly, one-hour meeting of a cabinet-level retention committee. A different retention topic is discussed each week. Action steps are batched out to appropriate committee members, who are then responsible for reporting on progress one week later. University K reports success at using this committee to identify and overcome cross-silo obstacles to student retention.

Retention Czar

Many universities are overcoming cross-functional silos via a single dedicated official with a dual Academic Affairs / Student Affairs appointment who is tasked with improving student retention by bridging the gaps between advising and student service units. Responsibilities include:

- Assess effectiveness of retention programs
- Work with directors of existing retention-oriented units on campus (academic support, residential life, financial aid, counseling, etc) to find synergies and reduce redundancies
- Function as a clearinghouse for information flow between advising units
- Lead efforts for identifying at-risk students
- Shepherd at-risk students across advising and student services silos
Strategy #12: Online Student Support Portal

Self-Service Advisory Portals

A theme emerging from Council interviews is that advising services and engagement programs fail to achieve fullest retention impact due to a fragmentary, siloed delivery structure. Students and advisors alike “don’t know what they don’t know” about the range of advising and counseling services and on-campus events.

To reduce the search costs of learning about campus services and ensure transparency between students and advisors about the requirements and learning opportunities during each college year, several interviewees expressed intentions to create online, self-service advising portals, consolidating links to the full range of advising services with email reminders for students to investigate or comply with “next steps” in graduation.

The Council is aware of only one school that has implemented such a portal – Stanford University, in August 2007. While Stanford has a student body and administrative resource base different from those of the schools interviewed for this project, we are including a profile of its advisory portal as a reference point for future planning and prioritization discussions, given the obvious value of aggregating such information online.

Key Functionality of Stanford’s Self-Service Portal – http://ual.stanford.edu

- **Year-by-Year Grouping of Advising and Engagement Content**: Specific advising content for freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students
  - **Deadlines Calendar**: For submitting paperwork, applying for majors, etc., with links to required forms
  - **Academic Opportunities**: Processes, pros and cons of honors programs, study abroad, internships, grants, etc.
  - **Student Involvement Opportunities**: Student government, leadership development, residence hall positions

- **“Looking Ahead” Checklist for Rising Classes**: Prompts for students to engage early in thinking through important decisions in the next year (e.g., whether to live off-campus, how to begin career search)

- **Advertising of Campus Tutorial Services**: Writing center, tutoring centers, study groups, “Univ 101” courses

- **Advising and Tutoring Scheduling**: Students may schedule appointments through the portal, referencing a particular question for advance preparation by the advisor

- **Parents Resource Center**: A parents and family page provides link to content for parents

**A Complement, Not a Substitute, for In-Person Advising**

- Stanford emphasizes that the portal is not intended to replace in-person advising services, but to improve the quality and impact of in-person interactions by allowing students to ask more sophisticated questions on more important counseling matters (e.g., “What are the pros and cons of doing a double-major vs. study abroad in my junior year?”)
Self-Service Advising Portal Resource Requirements and Usage Data

Launched in August 2007, the student portal has not been online long enough for Stanford to assess impact on its key business-case metrics: utilization of and satisfaction with advising services, participation in academic and campus programs, and graduation rates. Likewise, steady-state site traffic and IT support requirements are difficult to estimate. Stanford’s portal administrator is able to offer the following approximations based on one semester’s use (Stanford enrolls ~ 6,500 undergraduates):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanford Student Portal Statistics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource and Utilization Metrics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unique Visits per Day</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Most Popular Page</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of Content Update</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Project Manager</strong></td>
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<td><strong>IT Support Staff</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Content Publishers</strong></td>
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<td><strong>One-Time Site Design Cost</strong></td>
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Hello, Class of 2011.

Bookmark this page. Use it as a navigational tool as you familiarize yourself with the nuts and bolts of your freshman year as well as the host of opportunities available to you.

:: The Freshman “Must Do” list

Take advantage of the resources and opportunities available to you. Know what’s required, what’s optional, and what you definitely don’t want to miss.

- Learn the university requirements for graduation
- Read the printed Quarterly Time Schedule from cover to cover
- Explore the search tools for course planning on Axess
- Take a Freshman Seminar
- Get good advice about course planning and your academic path by making an appointment with your advisor, Academic Director, or WAR Liaison
- Go to a professor’s office hours
- Know important prerequisites and course sequences -- meet with a professional advisor from the VPME
- Visit the Hume Writing Center
- Visit a Community Center
- Check out the Tutoring and Academic Resources
- Become familiar with Stanford libraries; take a tour
- Get to Know Faculty & Staff; take the initiative in developing relationships with your instructors, Resident Fellows, advisors, and student service representatives
- Discover good study spaces around campus
- Think about possible majors
- Visit academic departments and programs for in-depth information; speak with the student service representative whose role is to introduce you to the department offerings
- Have fun!
Sophomore “Choosing a Major” Page
http://ual.stanford.edu/AP/choosing_majors/ChoosingMajors.html
SELECTED SCREEN SHOTS FROM STANFORD’S SELF-SERVICE ADVISING PORTAL – CONTINUED

Junior “Must-Do” Page
http://ual.stanford.edu/NBY/Junior.html
Selected Screen Shots from Stanford’s Self-Service Advising Portal – Continued

Senior “After Stanford” Page
http://ual.stanford.edu/AP/after_su/AfterStanford.html