

Public Abstract

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Title:A Utilization-Focused Evaluation of Institutional Persistence and Withdrawal in an Academic Unit

Student continuance in college and universities is important. A college education is the avenue through which students will likely reap social and economic benefits. For institutions, student persistence results in increased revenues.

The purpose of this study was to provide input to improve the retention rate within one academic unit. The framework guiding the study was Utilization-Focused Evaluation (Patton, 1997), so the research questions, means for data collection, instrumentation and analysis were developed with the primary intended users of the evaluation results. After initial discussions with a larger group of primary intended users, the researcher focused remaining interactions with a retention committee, serving as an evaluation task force.

Methods and instruments for data collection included a satisfaction survey, focus groups, graduate exit surveys, student records data, and contact with students who withdrew.

In general, the results of this evaluative study indicated the academic unit was doing many things well. The recommendations developed by the retention committee were grouped under the following headings: experiential learning, instructional content, classroom strategies, campus resources, intentional student contacts, value of a liberal education, communication with students, graduate follow-up surveys, student finances, transfer students, advising, student involvement, facilities and equipment, and recruitment. The retention committee will determine which recommendations to implement and what strategies to use. Moreover, they will make decisions about measurements and further evaluations which will lead to further recommendations. This continuous quality improvement cycle is what sets institutions, and academic units, that focus on improving student persistence apart from those who do not.