

Should I Stay or Should I Go Now

Identifying the factors that influence your students' decision to persist or withdraw

or

**Resolving “the clash” between
rhetoric, research, and reality**

Sorry, I couldn't help it.

A quick review of retention research

- Integration: It's all about fitting in
 - Social integration
 - Idle hands are the devil's handiwork.
 - Academic integration
 - “If we just recruit smarter students, we'll fix our retention problem.”

A quick review of retention research

- Psychology: it's all in their head

Intent

I'll be back.

Self Efficacy

Here I come to save the day!

Self Confidence

They call me Mister Tibbs!

Reasoned Behavior

So far, so good.

Motivation

Just do it (swoosh)

A quick review of retention research

- Economics: show me the money \$\$\$
 - Direct and indirect costs
 - Balance between grants and loans
 - Time to degree completion
 - work
 - If you build it, they will come and stay
 - Wow them with architecture
 - Keep them with frappuccinos and football

A quick review of retention research

- Sociological Approach: *“You complete me.”*
 - Organizational Structure and Culture
 - “I feel like a number. A really long number.”
 - Norms and Values
 - Don’t bother me, I won’t bother you.
 - Social and Cultural Capital
 - “How was I supposed to know?”

Wow! That's a heap-a book learnin'

- After 20 years of research, what do we have to show for ourselves?
 - 1989 national retention rate - 75 %
 - 2009 national retention rate - 73 %

Gosh, we're good!

Two things are clear from mountains of research

- 1) The devil is in the details.
- 2) Each institution has its own devil.

Findings from the WNS

- A couple of starting assumptions
- We can't drastically change . . .
 - the students we enroll
 - our institution's fundamental structure
- Let's look at the data for clues that might lead to plausible solutions . . .

Findings from the WNS

- What elements of the college experience affect persistence?
 - In the classroom (academic experience)
 - Out of the classroom (social experience)

Findings from the WNS

We analyzed data from 2006 and 2007 cohorts

- 3,659 students
- 23 institutions

We focused on the effect of two types of college experiences

- Co-curricular involvement
- Instructional organization and clarity

Findings from the WNS

Instructional Organization and Clarity Scale Items

(5 response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Presentation of material is well organized.

Teachers are well prepared for class.

Class time is used effectively.

Course goals and requirements are clearly explained.

Teachers have a good command of what they are teaching.

Teachers give clear explanations.

Teachers make good use of examples and illustrations to explain difficult points.

Teachers effectively review and summarize the material.

Teachers interpret abstract ideas and theories clearly.

Teachers give assignments that help in learning the course material.

Findings from the WNS

Our model accounted for . . .

Race

Gender

SES (parent's education)

ACT Score

Intent to earn a BA

Institutional type

Living on campus

Work obligations

Grades (fall and spring)

Credits (fall and spring)

Cohort differences

Feedback received

Findings from the WNS

- Significant Findings
 - Instructional organization and clarity improved the likelihood of persistence
 - Even after accounting for grades and credits earned
 - Co-curricular involvement also improved the likelihood of persistence

Findings from the WNS

- Does institutional context matter?
 - At liberal arts colleges, increases in co-curricular involvement did not make a difference

However . . .

- Instructional organization and clarity mattered across all institutional types

Implications for your Investigation

- Your challenge (*should you choose to accept it*), is to find your institution's unique set of devils.
- Situate your findings within the context of your institution - its culture, its mission, its history; warts and all.
- This combined knowledge should allow you to craft some viable avenues to address your retention question.

Where do we go from here . . .

(. . . because we still have students leaving us)

- Some suggested first steps . . .
 - Find out more about the students who didn't come back
 - Are they demographically similar?
 - Do they share similar values or attitudes about their educational goals or academic engagement?
 - What does their academic experience look like in terms of grades and credits earned?
 - Do the educational good practices they experience influence their persistence? (You'll need good T2 data to do this!)

Where do we go from here . . .

(. . . because we still have students leaving us)

- Some suggested first steps . . .
 - grades/credits earned are often powerful predictors of persistence, so . . .
 - What predicts grades/credits earned?

(Note to self about future data collection!)

Any Questions?

Have fun storming the castle!

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