

## **RECRUITING FOR RETENTION: Hospitality Programs**

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### **Abstract**

Colleges and universities must take into account the impact the dwindling economy will have on college recruitment and attempt to recruit students for retention. Student retention is fundamental to the ability of a university or college to carry out its mission, a high rate of student attrition is not only a financial problem for students, but a symbolic failure of the school to achieve its mission. Innovation is the key to successfully retaining students and preventing high attrition rates. Most of the Hospitality schools use a three-pronged approach, the first focusing on academic support solutions and the second focusing on student resource initiatives, finally on financial support. Attrition is an expensive loss that colleges and universities can no longer afford. Within the past 20 years, most colleges and universities had added retention programs to their strategic planning efforts.

## Introduction

In today's uncertain economy even colleges and universities must buckle down and find what works for today's students and the educational institutions they attend. Attrition rates at institutions of higher education are extremely high. (Geraghty, 1996). Most estimates for student retention range from 45 -60%. Minority and socioeconomically challenged students appear to be especially susceptible to withdrawing from school. Brower (1992) notes that 65% of the Hispanic students, 55% of the African American students and 61 % of the students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile never graduate.

A large proportion of hospitality students at present must work one or more jobs to help pay for college or university expenses while attempting to balance curricular and program demands. Most hospitality programs also require the completion of externships, internships, cooperative education placements, and/or practicum as a part of their degree requirements. These program requirements as many as 1600 hours that must be completed prior to graduation and make hospitality programs unique from many other disciplines.

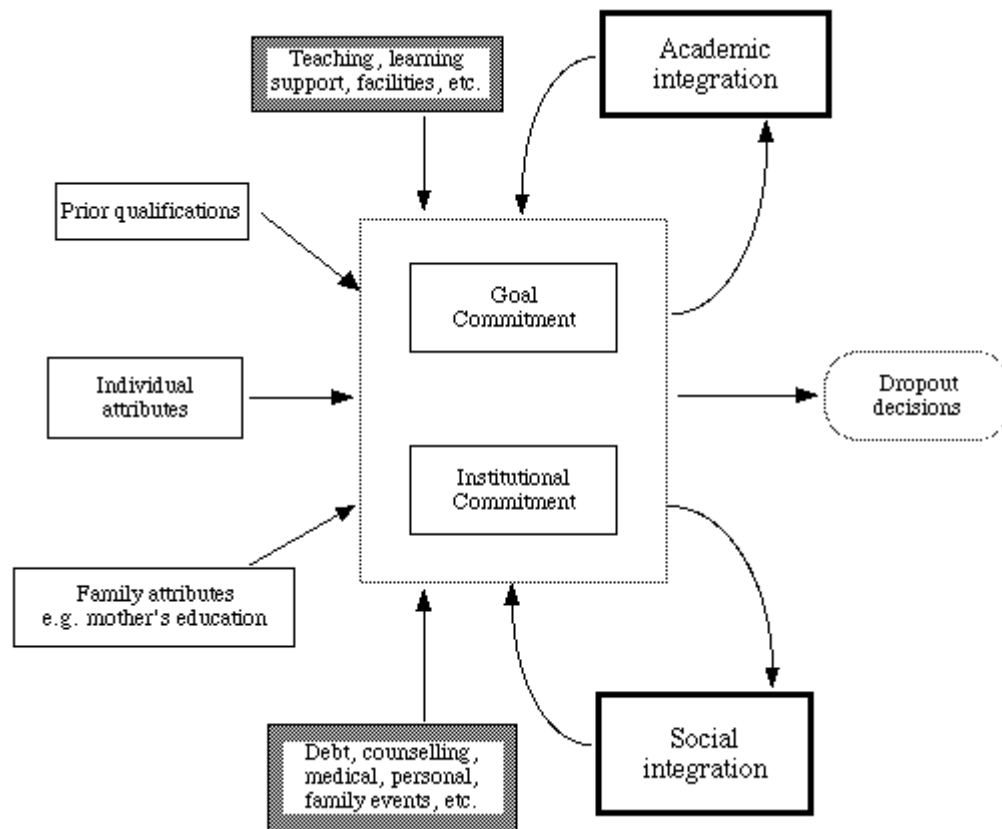
Financial burdens on academic institutions mean that innovative ways must be found to appeal to students, to encourage them to undertake educational endeavors that will further their own career and financial goals. It does no good to enroll 1,000 students and have only 500 complete their degrees. Attrition costs US educational institutions billions each year. Colleges and universities must do a better job of retaining students.

There are many ways to ensure student retention. One of the most important is to streamline recruiting efforts so retention becomes a part of recruitment efforts. What does this mean? It means that colleges must actively plan for the retention of students. Defending against attrition is of paramount importance, more so now than at any time in the history of US colleges and universities. As money grows tighter potential students are carefully weighing the advantages and disadvantages of a college education against their own financial burdens. It is up to the institutions to *obtain* new students and *retain existing* ones. Educational institutions must aggressively recruit students who are most likely to complete degrees and they must actively create and promote hospitality and programs and facilities which are most likely to result in student retention.

There is no doubt that it costs more to recruit new students than it does to retain already existing students and yet at many universities and colleges the focus remains on recruitment rather than on retention. Many college and university administrators do not view retention as a source of increased funding but the truth of the matter is that if colleges and universities could retain even half of the students they lose through attrition budgetary increases would be assured with very little increase in spending.

## Fostering Retention

There are several ways to foster retention including; developing outreach and bridge programs, orientation and student life classes/programs, academic and social/psychological counseling, participation in academic and social activities, increased on campus housing, and faculty advising (Astin, 1993). Factors that influence retention must be considered when developing a retention plan.



(Draper, 2002)

From the model above you can see that there are many factors that influence whether or not a student will be retained, including; academic integration, social integration, dropout decisions, family attributes, individual attributes, prior qualifications, financial considerations, and teaching/learning support. Since there are so many factors that influence student retention it behooves colleges and universities to develop programs and practices that address as many of these factors as possible.

Outreach and bridge programs are extremely effective methods that colleges and universities can use to cultivate student retention. Such programs act as a bridge between high school and college; preparing students for their freshman year. A prime example of such a bridge program is the Summer Bridge program at the University of California, San Diego. The program was established 30 years ago and "...is a four-week academic and residential experience designed to prepare incoming freshmen, especially those from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, to successfully transition to UCSD. Approximately 150 UCSD freshmen participate in the program each summer during which they learn and hone important academic, cognitive, social, and leadership skills that will serve them well during their critical first year in college, and beyond." (Dabney, 2003) The cohorts who graduate from UCSD within 5 years who took part in the program have a remarkable 81% graduation rate. The key to success in such programs is to make sure that they are not simply addressing the remedial needs of students but that they contain content that ensures students enter college with a clear understanding of the difficulties they may experience academically, socially and psychologically and what programs/people they can access when they encounter problems.

Orientation and student life programs can help universities and colleges retain students by helping students learn about university life which can be very different from the environment they are used to at

home. It has long been known that students in the sciences and engineering are particularly prone to attrition (Astin, 1993). Kettering University is an example of a university that has recognized this special group of students who are more prone to attrition and instituted a pilot program to stem the tide of students who were leaving without attaining a degree. Their “pilot orientation class ran fall 2006 and spring 2007 for the entire term to provide academic, co-op and non-academic assistance to students. This assistance included up-to-date information on how to prepare for cooperative education assignments; how to interact and communicate with companies and staff; instruction on incorporating better time management skills; more details on health and counseling services available while on campus, and where to go when a student needs help.” (Erwin, 2007) The program proved extremely successful with 100% of students retained into their freshman year. The Data is not yet available regarding graduation rates.

Increased on campus housing affects retention rates positively. Many universities and colleges require freshman to stay in campus housing for at least the freshman year and studies have shown (Astin, 1993, Reynolds, 2007) that staying on campus leads to better student retention the following year(s).

Faculty advising and the type and duration of student/faculty contact have a direct positive impact on student retention (Astin, 1993, Vivian, 2005). Advising has instantaneous and enduring benefits for individual students. Advising can motivate students to stay in programs during difficult times by providing one on one meaningful out of class contact with faculty. It provides faculty members with the opportunity to encourage, and advise students on academic and career choices fostering a sense of connection that can support a student’s stay in an academic program.

Robert Morris University hospitality program provides a combination of professional and faculty student advisement. During the admission process the hospitality program director is involved with the students acceptance, class advisement and selection, first semester orientation. During the semester the program advisor, faculty advisor and program director monitor the progress of freshmen and transfer students.

It is critically important that faculty communicate extensively with their students, making sure that they encourage students and build self-esteem. Faculty who support students provide positive reinforcement and the motivation for student’s to persist in college. Despite the importance of advising in relationship to student retention, there is little to no training provided to faculty. This is one area that can be improved in many colleges and universities (Habley and Crockett, 1988).

The relationship between faculty, classes and students particular University experiences are consistent with the assumption that these are key factors that influence student’s specific hospitality program experience. Students who have a positive hospitality program experience are more likely to be satisfied with University and hospitality program than students who do not have a positive program experience.

## **Recruiting Retention**

Retention is paramount in higher education. If the key elements for student persistent are the students linking with the institution, it would not only be at the University, college or department level First year student but also at the program level. A study by Prof. William J. of the University of Connecticut in 2004 selected determine the effectiveness of faculty program advising and special programs for career focused individuals in the hospitality field, for retention. Though unique positioning of the institution as a career focused institution, differentiates it from other institutions in the educational field. The results showed that first year students in rolled in hospitality programs persisted at a higher rate than their predecessors and at a rate higher than other students in rolled in different programs at the institution. The entire population our first year students was included in the study and a retention rate for the hospitality programs exceed the goals set by the University.(Day, 2004)

Students are concerned about various issues pertaining to their college experience. Students are considered by many educational administrators to be the customers of a hospitality program or university. If students are truly customers, schools must continually seek ways to make sure its customers are satisfied. Hospitality programs must be willing to listen to their students and prioritize the needs of their students in order to guarantee long term success and growth. Hospitality Schools must continue to gather input from students and make every effort to implement their suggestions. Schools can no longer play a guessing game in determining student needs.

Students most likely to complete 4 year degrees typically have the following traits in common; the single largest predictor of persistence is high school GPA followed closely by high SAT Mathematical and Verbal scores, socioeconomic status (father's and mother's educational levels and parental income), and a high leadership self-rating are also important indicators of persistence (Astin, 1993).

Given these traits it would behoove academic institutions to develop plans for the aggressive recruitment of students who are most likely to complete a four year degree program. Financially, retention of students throughout a 4 year degree program means the continued success of colleges and universities in these trying financial times.

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