Eastern Illinois University

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Fall to Spring Retention Increases

Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

Gurkan Akalin

Cindy Boyer

Dagni Bredesen

Mona Davenport

Joe Eichman, secretary

Jacquelyn Frank

Jennifer Hedges

Shelley James

Alexis Jones

Josh Norman

Karla Sanders, chair

Jody Stone

Ed Treadwell

Tanya Willard

Melody Wollan

Jie Zou

For other retention information, go to our web site at http://castle.eiu.edu/~core

National retention rates compare student populations from fall of their freshman year to fall of their sophomore year, and these are the rates you will see Eastern using for retention as well. However, CORE also looks at students who leave after one semester in college, and we track the same risk factors that we analyze for the annual retention rates. For the past four years, we have been using 8 risk factors as the most predictive of student attrition for freshman students at Eastern. These factors are given in the table below in order of the most significance in our prediction model. Overall, we are up 1.4% from last year.

This year nearly all of the risk factors show a lower fall to spring retention rate than the class average. Financial factors are especially significant since students with one of these factors—need gap of $7000 or more, % of need met at less than 60%, and financial aid verification—were retained at a rate 20% lower than the class as a whole. Students with both a need gap and a % of need met indicator have a 58% retention rate, so 42% of these students left after one semester in college. Students with an ACT composite below 20 had an 82.3% retention rate whereas students with a 23-25 ACT composite were retained at 97.5%.

Students in the provisional admissions programs, Review Admits, Gateway, SAGA, were retained at 80.4%. These students may have financial risk factors and do have some academic risk factors. The Gateway program also dismisses students who fall below a 1.01 gpa, so some students did not leave voluntarily.

High school grade point average can also be a predictor of attrition. Students whose high school gpa fell between 2.5-2.99 were retained at 81% compared to those students whose gpa was a 3.0 or above who had a 90% retention rate.

Students with 4 or more factors were retained at 82% compared to those with 3 or fewer risk factors—90%.

Freshman Fall to Spring Retention Rates by Risk Factor				
Variable	FA16	FA17	FA18	FA19
Need Gap $7000 or more	81.68%	47.29%	84.48%	67.07%
% Need Met 60% or less	92.14%	64.98%	86.22%	69.18%
Financial Aid Verification	77.78%	75.00%	89.47%	66.67%
Academic Index	83.85%	77.12%	85.63%	91.55%
HS GPA 2.9 or lower	84.09%	70.44%	86.22%	83.76%
Admit Month March or later	82.39%	79.25%	89.71%	84.29%
Ethnicity (Hispanic, Af-Am, Multi, Internat'l)	85.63%	84.21%	85.57%	85.62%
Chicago Public School	79.41%	71.05%	90.09%	57.14%
Overall	88.61%	86.22%	86.34%	87.72%
Fall to Fall Retention	75%	70.32%	73.67%	

Universal Design's Retention Potential

By April Jackson

Universal Design is a set of principles for designing curriculum that offers all individuals equal opportunities to learn, so it can be a great way to design your course to encourage student success and retention. Eastern's Faculty Development and Innovation Center as well as its Student Disability Services have been promoting UDL as a path to success for all types of learners. It may be especially useful as we all prepare for online learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is based on the three M's: multiple modes of information presentation, multiple modes of student action and expression, and multiple modes of student engagement .(Cast.org) UDL acknowledges that learning is unique and rather than adjust the learner to fit the needs of each class, it provides suggestions on how to adjust the learning environment in order to ensure access for all learners and learning styles. These suggestions could be anything from providing a standing desk to posting all class material on D2L with captioning when applicable. UDL allows for students to be engaged and involved regardless of their learning style.

Belonging is one key to retention and so is good academic standing. A more obvious key to retention is student academic success. UDL can help promote each of these elements of retention as it provides more opportunity for students to access material, process material, and show that they have learned the material.

Some ways that UDL can be incorporated into most courses include:

- Use D2L or other avenues to share power points, lecture notes, FAQ's.
- Use closed captioning on all videos.
- Share the essential elements to do well in your course. Think of a job posting where a requirement is that the candidate must be able to lift 40 pounds. Applicants who cannot do that,

would not be a good fit for the job. So, what must a student be able to do in order to be successful in your course? Ideally, this information would be developed for each major program.

UDL can be used to promote student involvement in individual courses as well. Faculty can allow for different opportunities for students to show what they know rather than requiring the same kind of work from everyone. For example, could a presentation tell you as much as a quiz? Could a trifold with information replace a paper? Could a speech become a power point where the student shared specific information?

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Disability Resource Center offers 10 Steps to UDL for online courses (retrieved https://ualr.edu/disability/online-education/):

1. Include a welcoming access statement that provides guidance for students who encounter barriers.

2. Provide simple, consistent navigation with as few clicks as possible.

3. Choose tools carefully. Not all online tools work for students who use adaptive technology, for example.

4. Model and teach good discussion board etiquette and organization.

5. Use color with care. Black text on white or a light background is the easiest for most people to read.

6. Make sure text is readable with a font like Arial or Helvetica.

7. Provide accessible document formats like word or pdf.

8. Describe graphics and visual elements.

9. Caption videos and transcribe audio clips.

10. Rethink, re-design powerpoint presentations because what works in a f2f environment may not translate to all online learning.

Retention During the Pandemic

Clearly, we are in the midst of unprecedented times for the world and for our corner of higher education. As we navigate delivering education remotely for all our students and classes as well as providing academic services to our students, we know that many students will struggle with these changes and with dealing with new stresses brought on by the world, and as a result, retention may be impacted.

Eastern has had good retention and graduation rates over the years because of the faculty and staff who care about students and provide that personal touch. We now have to determine how to do that while adhering to social distancing. Below are a few ideas for staff and faculty as we work at a distance:

- Reach out to students via D2L, email, texts, zoom, and Microsoft teams. Ask them specific questions about how they are doing and what they need to continue their classes.

- Let them know how to contact you, when they could talk to you on the phone or through the computer, and how to do that.
- Reach out multiple times during the Executive Order. It's easy to lose touch when students are not in your classroom or office.
- If you have student workers or GAs, give them specific tasks to complete for you that they can do remotely.
- As much as possible, allay the fears brought on by uncertainty and change. Whether you are a student's professor, advisor, or work supervisor, hearing from you is what they need right now.

Mostly, during this time of isolation, we want to show our students how much we care about them and their education, and although we are at a distance, they are not alone in navigating these new educational challenges.

First Generation Students and Retention

Students who are first in their families to attend college often experience struggles that students whose parents graduated from college do not. As a result, nationally, being a first-generation college student can be a risk factor for attrition.

Eastern uses the definition of students whose parents did not attain a bachelor's degree as first-generation. Nationally, this number is still 56%.

For the past couple of years, CORE has had a subcommittee devoted to the retention of first-generation students on our campus. The chart to the right compares freshman cohorts of all new students to the first-generation, new freshmen. On average, first-generation students are approximately 40% of Eastern's population overall.

According to the Center for First-Generation Student Success (CFGSS), nationally, first-generation students are about 4% behind their continuing-generation peers at public 4-year institutions when looking at first to second year retention rates. The median parental incomes for first-generation students is $41,000 compared to $90,000 for continuing-generation students. This discrepancy is very significant for Eastern since our top risk factors are financial.

Also according to the CFGSS, first-gen student are less likely to use health services, academic advising, or academic support services—especially in their first year of college when these services could be crucial to their success and retention.

First Generation Retention at EIU			
Cohort	1st Gen	Class	Difference
FA13	73.48%	75.25%	1.77%
FA14	73.01%	75.38%	2.37%
FA15	67.81%	71.47%	3.66%
FA16	66.88%	73.87%	6.99%
FA17	68.40%	70.32%	1.92%
FA18	71.16%	73.67%	2.51%

Freshman Connection: New Program Planned

Several members of CORE along with Dr. Heidi Larson, Counseling and Higher Education, have been working this year on launching a new program for freshmen in fall 2020. This program, Freshman Connection, will pair new freshmen with returning sophomores, juniors, and seniors in small mentoring groups. These groups will meet once a week for a meal and conversation.

Josh Norman, Associate Vice President for Enrollment, said he saw the program's potential to give new EIU students the best chance to succeed as they navigate what can be a difficult transition from high school to the University environment. "I think the program will develop a sense of community for our new students, provide support and resources, and ultimately, aid in their success as they navigate their first year of the University experience."

Freshman Connection is based on a project that Dr. Larson started at Mattoon High School called Believe It Or Not I Care (BIONIC) based on a national movement at the high school level aimed at deterring suicides and other self-destructive behaviors while at the same time helping students become stronger leaders and mentors. Dr. Larson learned of the program 8 years ago at a professional conference.

The program has been very successful at MHS. Dr. Larson explains, "I believe this program has been tremendously successful in several ways. We have seen an increase in attendance and graduation rates, a decrease in behavioral referrals, and a larger presence of community across all high school students. One of our greatest successes is just how many upperclassmen desire to be a mentor to their fellow classmates. Data and anecdotal research has also shown that mentors have received several benefits from serving others including the enhancement of their soft skills, confidence, and leadership experience."

Dr. Larson and her graduate students will train EIU students to mentor new freshmen living in Lawson Hall. These new students will also take our freshman seminar, University Foundations.

Each mentor will have 3-5 mentees and will meet once a week for an agreed upon meal with their group. These meals will be in the dining halls and will be in addition to the meal plans the students have purchased.

At the high school level, all BIONIC meals are at lunch, so juggling schedules is something that will need to be considered at the college level.

As Dr. Larson notes, "One of the benefits of the college experience is that there is a lot more freedom and opportunities. However, we foresee this as one of the challenges freshmen in college face. For that reason, we have created a curriculum to help incoming college freshmen acclimate to their new role as a university student, such as time management skills, getting involved at EIU, and financial literacy."

New students can choose to be part of this pilot program, and continuing students are being recruited to be mentors. Norman hopes the program will expand beyond the initial 150 freshmen in future years. "I really hope that Freshman Connection is wildly successful and becomes available for all incoming students in the future. This pilot could be the beginning of a self-sustaining community promoting student success through the common virtue of altruism. New incoming students will be the mentors of tomorrow as they are invested in and in turn want to do the same for future students. From the standpoint of differentiation, now and in the future, Freshman Connection can be something that sets EIU apart as students navigate their college choice process."

Freshman Connection also has the potential to increase student retention through the connections its fosters among new students and mentors.