

Improve Student Retention Through Better Data Analytics



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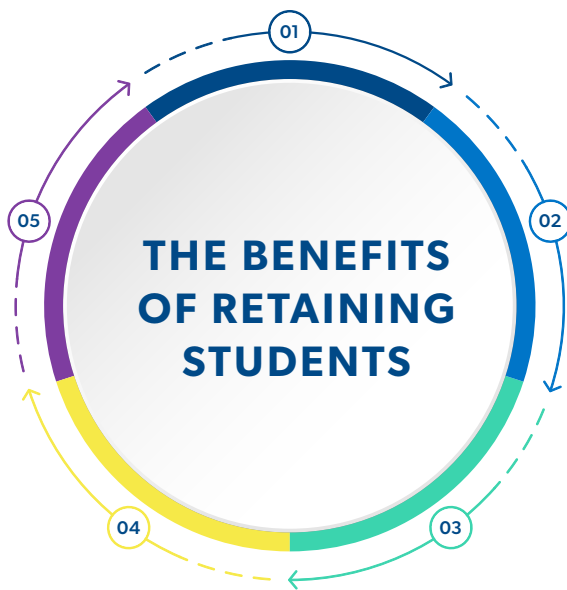
How data tells a more complete story of student success

Five important factors for identifying students who need help

Where students succeed, institutions thrive

The wealth of student data universities collect from initial college visit to graduation and beyond can sit idle—or it can support the success of students who might've fallen through the cracks. Where retention lags, expenses increase, and recruitment becomes a greater challenge. And the cost is high: The median cost to recruit a public university student in 2022 was \$494; for private universities, that number surges to \$2795. (RNL—PDF)

Lean on advanced data analytics for the insight that helps students succeed and your institution thrive in an increasingly competitive environment. Only when you have a full view of factors like academic performance, health and well-being, and extracurricular activities can you move from dropout rates that deter new students to graduates who are your best advertisement.



For just one class of new U.S. two- and four-year degree students, an 84% graduation rate would:

- 01 Increase employment by **107,400**
- 02 Increase annual wages for **730,000** additional two-year degree holders by an average of **\$4,849**
- 03 Increase annual wages for **520,000** additional four-year degree holders by an average of **\$19,034**
- 04 Reduce the number of people in poverty by **48,000**
- 05 Over the course of their lifetimes increase the amount of local, state, and federal tax revenue by more than **\$90 billion**

Source: [Third Way](#)

THE COSTS OF ATTRITION ARE ENORMOUS

Students who don't succeed in a degree program are worse off than those who never tried, in terms of debt incurred and time lost. And the truth is that not every individual should set their sights on college. Schools that work hard to identify the students who will succeed in their programs—and then provide tools to help along their way—maximize their recruitment and retention budgets while they improve their graduation rates.

The alternative, which so many schools are currently struggling with, is a scattershot approach that brings students who don't necessarily align, leads to big losses for the school (and student), and keeps a student who could have gone the distance from ever matriculating.

HOW DATA ANALYTICS SUPPORT STUDENT RETENTION

Utilizing data for student retention means:

- ✔ **Finding the red flags**—anything from lack of social interaction to financial or family worries—at the earliest possible moment to be best equipped to support students who need it.
- ✔ **Better understanding the student experience** to improve outcomes by helping them find their most appropriate career path, guiding them toward the major that aligns with their skills, or providing support to help them pivot after academic struggle.
- ✔ **Identify poor-performing faculty members**, because attrition can result from just one subpar academic experience. Students who are resistant to a class because of its instructor tend to feel they can't get help, and that frustration often spirals outward.
- ✔ **Efficient degree completion management** that provides students with a clear path for attaining all the credits they need within the ideal timeline, which not only supports graduation rates but greater success in the job market.

Barriers to retention

Students struggle for a host of reasons, and understanding the particular challenges affecting each of them is critical to planning and executing an effective intervention. These are the most common barriers to graduation:

- **Academic Performance:** The moment an academic struggle begins is also the moment confidence and motivation wane, creating a vicious cycle that can easily lead to dropout. Adequate support and resources tailored to diverse learning needs help students avoid becoming overwhelmed and discouraged, or developing performance anxiety that further compounds these issues and can lead to higher dropout rates.
- **Financial Difficulty:** The rising costs of tuition and associated expenses can create immense stress for students. Inadequate financial aid and unexpected costs for essentials like textbooks and housing force many students to work long hours, often at the expense of their academic performance. The struggle to balance work and study not only leads to burnout but also makes the prospect of continuing education seem untenable for many.
- **Wavering Social Connection with Peers:** Without a sense of social belonging or a supportive network of their peers, students may struggle to cope with the pressures of academic and personal life. Cultural differences and a lack of inclusive practices can further exacerbate feelings of alienation, making it difficult for students to fully engage with and persist in their studies. Isolation and disconnection from other students can be the starting point for drops in academic performance.
- **Lack of Connection with the Institution:** Students who feel detached from their institution are less likely to remain committed to their studies. Impersonal interactions with faculty and staff, coupled with an unresponsive administration, can make students feel undervalued and unheard. Without ample opportunities for meaningful engagement in campus life and activities, students may struggle to develop a strong sense of loyalty and belonging, leading to higher attrition rates.

HOW DATA TELLS A MORE COMPLETE STORY OF STUDENT SUCCESS

In a traditional university setting, the data that can reveal trouble in its earliest stages gathers metaphorical dust while students fall deeper into the holes that lead to attrition. Advanced data analytics provide useful insights that enable early interventions—and help students achieve success.

A student success story built from details across a broad range of categories presents a more robust method for identifying struggle. Student Affairs can receive a report detailing academic, financial, and social factors, for example, and initiate outreach.

Finding this critical insight is not the obstacle you might think. The data is there; it's just underutilized until you set up the early warning system—and build the processes and tools you need to intervene where the system guides you. A thoughtfully built solution will include a dashboard that presents not just a list of students who could use support but the interventions that specifically align with that student's situation.

Depending on the specifics of your university, your interventions will be guided by research, experience, and the tools you have available. Maybe suggesting an RA check on the student makes the most sense in one situation and setting up a tutor in another. The important thing is that you'll have a clear list of students who're struggling, aligned with targeted interventions to help them progress toward graduation.

FIVE IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WHO NEED HELP

You can tailor analytics to the factors that make sense for your school. Our Campus Analytics Engine can include a predictive model that evaluates 400 features toward your most productive retention insights. Ultimately, five factors in particular lead the most-important list:

1. **Class attendance:** When attendance is spotty, lags, or shows a significant shift, it typically indicates a problem.
2. **Financial viability:** Whether a student is part of a work/study program, utilizing financial aid, self-funding, and so on, can make a big difference in their decision-making about staying in school. Certain solutions present their own risks to academic success—that is, a student who rises at 5 a.m. every day to clean the library before classes start might be more distracted, tired, and isolated.
3. **Social and emotional health:** Students who feel like they belong and are integrated into the social fiber of school in some way—clubs, activities, Greek life—typically are more likely to stay in school.
4. **Institutional health:** Sometimes the problem is not with the student but with some element of the institution, like course design or faculty inclusivity. Maybe the university doesn't have an efficient completion plan. Understanding where the issues lie is essential to addressing them.
5. **Demographics:** Greater insight comes from expanding the lens to include more of the student's life, like family situation, health and disability, background and life experiences. Responses can be better tailored with every detail you can gather about a student.

WHERE STUDENTS SUCCEED, INSTITUTIONS THRIVE

It is no longer enough to provide learning opportunities. Universities that thrive have mechanisms in place to support their student success—and that means drawing insight from data. As recruitment becomes more competitive, a strong graduation rate is critical, and data helps you get there. You already have the data. What's holding you back from making the most of it?

