

Introduction

Retention efforts are vital to the success of any school. If students don't complete the programs they sign up for, both the school and the students suffer. The school loses tuition and another satisfied graduate to spread the word in the community. The student loses their time, money, and the possibility of starting a new and exciting career. So the success of the student is imperative and is, in one way or another, an essential goal for everyone involved.

Many studies have been conducted focusing on student retention. Based on that research and our own experiences, we have developed several theories about what leads to student retention. We believe that there are three major factors that affect retention success or failure.

1. **The Las Vegas Effect:** People go to Las Vegas to play the tables and slot machines. The people who win often think they are really good at gambling. The people who lose think they are really bad at it. But winning in Las Vegas is, arguably, really just a lot to do with simple luck. That's in part what successful retention is all about. You were lucky and some students got lucky and completed your program. Obviously, there is little we can do to affect this (other than carry a rabbit's foot in our pocket while teaching).
2. **Student Intentionality:** We also believe that at the time of enrollment, some students already have a plan in mind. Some plan to finish, some plan to eventually drop out, and some just plan to see how it goes. Consciously, or perhaps unconsciously, they have decided ahead of time whether they will stay and finish or withdraw/drop. Like the Las Vegas Effect, there isn't much we can do to change a person's private plans and thoughts ahead of time. So this leads us to the third factor.

3. **Proactive School Planning**: We believe that the school can do much to ensure student success. There are strategies that can be put into place throughout the students' tenure at your school that will help to ensure that they successfully complete your programs. That is what this workshop is all about!

This manual will cover retention strategies for just about every area of schools: admissions, orientations, mentoring programs, graduations, placement services, and more. At the end of each section, there are several discussion questions for you to use either individually or as a group to generate productive discussions. Use these questions to help generate retention strategies that will work for your school. Consider involving faculty, staff, graduates, current students, or even employers in the field in your group discussions. Put your ideas into practice with an eye for ways to physically measure whether your strategies appear to be working or not. Embrace those strategies that seem to work well, and change those that don't. Good luck and let's start talking about ways to increase student retention!