IMPROVING STUDENT RETENTION

USING THE BASIC RETENTION STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In September 2011, The President of The University of Texas of the Permian Basin initiated a Task Force on Improving Student Success. The purpose of the Task Force was to make recommendations aimed at improving student retention and persistence to the degree. The Task Force submitted its report and recommendations the following December. As a consequence of the Task Force's recommendations, in Fall 2012, the office of Dean of Undergraduate Success was created and most academic support services were re-organized to report to that office. Subsequently, freshman to sophomore retention rates have increased over 10% during that time, and there has also been a substantial increase in retention to the third and fourth year; four year graduation rates have also increased. This paper will describe the principles underlying the Task Force's recommendations and the

subsequent retention strategies employed to enhance student retention and persistence to the degree.

Keywords: student retention, student success, student persistence

Improving Student Retention Using the BASIC Retention Strategy: A Case Study

Located in Odessa, Texas, The University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB) is one of eight academic universities of The University of Texas System, and is a rapidly growing four-year Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) offering bachelors and masters degrees. The university's Fall 2015 total enrollment was 5937, a 54.97% increase over fall 2011, when 3,831 were enrolled. Most students have traditionally come from the surrounding area, and many are non-traditional first-generation students who live off-campus, work part- or full-time, and have dependents. UTPB has proudly embraced its role in providing access to higher education to students from the surrounding communities, but in providing access have come challenges with retaining and graduating students.

Schuetz (2005) noted, "These are challenging times…...enrollment is up, funding is unreliable, and colleges are increasingly held responsible for learning outcomes of an ever more diverse student population" (60). Colleges and universities throughout the nation have come to be evaluated more and more on outcome measures such freshman-to-sophomore retention, bachelor degree production, and 4- and 6-year graduation rates. Consequently, more and more colleges and universities have expanded their missions from

simply providing access to higher education to providing students with more tools and resources to be successful once accepted. Tinto (2011a) made this point very clear, stating:

> For over 40 years access to higher education has improved, and college enrollments swelled from nearly 9 million in 1980 to over 20 million today. But while enrollments have more than doubled, overall college completion rates have increased only slightly. Only about half of all college students in the U.S. earn a degree or certificate within six years… The facts are clear. Despite our success in improving access to college, we have been unable to convert these gains into higher completion rates (pp. 1 & 2).

Tinto (2011b) bluntly stated that if a campus' retention rates are less than desirable, the retention program is broken.

David Watts, President of UTPB, initiated the first step to overhaul the university's retention efforts by constituting the University Task Force [1] on Improving Student Success in September 2011. The purpose of the Task Force was to make recommendations aimed at improving scores on measures of student retention and persistence. The first responsibility of the Task Force was to gather "baseline" retention data for freshmen. These data are presented in Table 1. These data were of particular concern because they revealed little or no improvement with each successive annual cohort into their second year. The second task of the Task Force was to review the literature on student retention and persistence. The third task was to design an effective retention strategy at U.T. Permian Basin. The members of the Task Force viewed the foundation of its charge as using the best evidence from empirical studies, case studies, and survey-validated student preferences to inform the strategy.

The evidence regarding retention can be divided into two general categories: (1) student-based variables; and (2) institution-based variables. Student variables include

factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and commitment to earn a degree. Institutional variables include factors such as academic support services and class sizes. Some have argued that colleges cannot control retention and graduation rates, and that the primary causes are students' lack of academic preparation, lack of campus engagement, work, and family responsibilities. However, Schuetz (2005) reported that graduation rates vary significantly between colleges for students sharing similar demographics and curricula. Consequently, retention research has come to focus both on students and the institutions they attend. Bean (1990) wrote that, "a student's leaving school is the joint responsibility of the school and the student" (p. 149). The Task Force developed the BASIC Retention Strategy in order to address both student and institution-based variables.

The BASIC Retention Strategy

No single factor determines retention or persistence. Each student brings with him or her a unique history, and each campus, likewise, is unique in tradition and student support systems. Both retention and graduation rates are affected by student characteristics, choices, and behaviors and by institutional characteristics and programs. Thus, the reasons for students dropping out of college before completing their bachelor's degrees or persisting to their degrees are complex. (Bean, 1990). Noteworthy is that research and opinion over the past 20 years have moved from examining isolated student factors to a broader "campus ecology" position that encompasses the entire institutional environment (Banning, 2008). The BASIC Retention Strategy designed by the Task Force used the concept of the whole campus ecology and focused on the various and sundry

interdependent interactions between students, faculty, staff, environments, buildings, and behaviors with emphasis on how UTPB's campus ecology could be modified to better support freshman retention and hence graduation.

The BASIC Retention Plan consists of five components. The first letters of each of these components for the acronym BASIC: "B" refers to the buildings and grounds, including student housing, classrooms, and the university's website; "A" refers to the administration of those units of the campus having a bearing on student success, particularly during the first-year experience; "S" refers to scholastics, the academic component, again, particularly during first-year experience; "I" refers to the individual, the unique history that each student brings to the first-year experience, strengths and weaknesses; and "C" refers to the community, the social environment in which the student interacts with others on campus and the local citizenry. The components of the BASIC Retention Strategy are summarized in Table 2 below. The assumption is that the BASIC Retention Strategy comprises the entire range of interactions with a student at UTPB to not only support scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience, but, in so doing, to make productive gains in student success.

The "B" in the BASIC Retention Strategy, Buildings and Grounds

Colleges and universities must work toward providing students with an environment conducive to learning by enhancing their feelings of connectedness to the institution. While there are a multitude of complex and interrelated reasons offered for the failure to retain students, leaving the institution may be due, in part, to a failure of the

institution to create a satisfying and pleasurable environment both inside and outside of the classroom. The importance of the environment in which an individual interacts has been empirically examined both in the workplace and the academic world. For example, it has been found that employees in the work place consider the working environment to be the number one reason they stay or leave a job (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Similarly, research in both secondary schools and schools of higher education has revealed that the physical environment is important to lower the frequency of misbehavior and increase the frequency of behaviors leading to success in academics (Kumar, O'Malley, & Johnston, 2008). An environment where students and faculty feel safe and enjoy positive relationships increases the positive outcomes for students as they interact with their professors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Schuetz (2005) and Strange and Banning (2001) offer many suggestions about the physical environment in which students negotiate their way from class to class, including classroom set up and study areas. Although it may not seem to be a building and grounds issue, academic programs aimed for student success should be centralized by clustering units in the same location as much as possible (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997). While there have been many physical changes since the Task Force's recommendations, such as more congregation and study areas, both inside and outdoors, two large changes were: (1) to merge the various locations throughout campus of existing programs aimed at student academic support into one location as far as possible; and (2) to create a new administrative position, Dean of Undergraduate Success, to oversee and coordinate the various student support programs, such as academic advising, tutoring,

mentoring, and supplemental instruction on campus. This leads us to the "A" in the BASIC retention program.

The "A" in the BASIC Retention Strategy, Administration

Several authors have suggested that centralized student academic support programs lead to higher retention rates than decentralized programs (e.g., Roueche & Baker, 1986; Boylan et al., 1997). Here, a centralized support program consists of one administrative unit with its own director who oversees all developmental courses and associated services, such as tutoring. A decentralized developmental program is one in which the academic department, such as English and mathematics, provide the remedial courses. Boylan et al., examined characteristics of 6,000 students semi-randomly selected from 160 2-year and 4-year campuses. They reported that students on 4-year campuses participating in centralized developmental programs had higher cumulative GPAs, and were more likely to pass developmental courses than those who had participated in decentralized programs. In its report of 2011, the Task Force noted three prevailing themes at UTPB regarding student support services: (1) it had multiple small administrative programs (or "silos"); (2) there was a lack of coordination/integration between various student success units; and (3) it had no general strategies overarching all units to facilitate student learning, retention, and persistence to the degree. The Task Force recommended someone be in charge of "connecting the dots." As a result, UTPB created the position Dean of Undergraduate Success (see Figure 2).

The Task Force also recommended that: (1) administration (including department chairs) should always have classroom teaching effectiveness (and online teaching effectiveness) at the forefront; and (2) administration, faculty, and staff need to emphasize at all levels the benefits of engaging with students in and outside the classroom, and the need to treat students with unconditional positive regard, fairness, and value.

The "S" in the BASIC Retention Strategy, Scholastics

The scholastics component of the BASIC retention program has several components. Those briefly discussed here are: (1) academic advising; (2) faculty accessibility; (3) classroom and online teaching effectiveness; and (4) tutoring support services. Regarding academic advising, Martinez (2004) cited qualitative data indicating that students who felt more informed about their course of study were more likely to stay in college. Consequently, the Task Force recommended that whenever possible, academic advising for freshmen and sophomores should be on a drop-in basis, without having to "sign-up" for tomorrow, or the next day, or next week. The Task Force added that a student who had completed 45 hours, who has declared a major, and has explored the services offered by the Career Center, be switched to a faculty member to continue the advising process until the student graduates. The value of this suggestion is in linking the student with a faculty advisor who would also serve a mentoring role in the major.

Roberts & Styron (2010) found that faculty accessibility and approachability were key factors in retention. Heverly (1999) found that compared to non-returning students, returning students had a much more favorable attitude toward their faculty interactions,

quoting students: "Instructors know when students do not know the material"; "My instructors seem to show respect for me as an individual"; and "My instructors are concerned with my success" (p. 10). Muraskin, Lee, Wilner, & Swail (2004) examined selected public and private 4-year institutions selected on the basis of their high graduation rates and compared these with comparable institutions with low graduation rates, and found numerous factors that contributing to enhanced graduation rates. In particular, a caring, accessible, and dedicated full-time faculty was very important to retention. Surveying 313 students of all ranks in a 4-year university Patti, Tarpley, Goree, and Tice (1993) found that in general, students who perceived that administration, faculty and staff had a genuine concern for them as individuals accounted for much of the retention rate variance. Clearly, the general attitude that administrators, faculty and staff show to their students is detected and is important in retention, and, as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted, the more positive student-faculty contacts, the greater the likelihood of retention/persistence.

Martinez (2004) cited several studies showing factors generally construed to reflect poor teaching (e.g., boring lectures, poor lecture/course organization, etc.) were correlated with withdrawing from college. Tinto (2011a) offered several attributes of college teachers whose students are more likely to succeed: (1) set student expectations high, not low; (2) provide academic and social support outside of the classroom (tutoring, etc., especially for the underprepared students); (3) provide early and frequent assessment of performance (before midterms) so that early alert systems can work most effectively; (4) provide speedy feedback of performance; and (5) be involved with students outside of the

classroom. The Task Force recommended that every instructor teaching development courses and general education courses should be, at a minimum, in the top 50% of teachers based on end-of-semester student evaluations. In addition, oversight, training, and annual monitoring processes need to be in place for all faculty.

Cooper (2010) found that freshmen who visited the tutoring center at a large 4-year campus ten or more times (on a drop-in basis) had significantly higher rates of persistence than cohorts who had not visited the tutoring center. One might argue that students who report for tutoring services may be more motivated, and that motivation is the critical variable at work here. However, Landrum and Chastain (1998) found productive results of tutoring at the end of the semester even with motivation levels controlled. Of interest is that although U.T. Permian Basin had many outlets for tutoring, tutor training had not been addressed as whole. The Task Force recommended that all tutoring/mentoring activities at U.T. Permian Basin be unified in a holistic-style and be provided training, oversight, and a central focus under the Dean of Academic Success.

The "I" in the BASIC Retention Strategy, the Individual Student

The Task Force examined characteristics of the student body at UTPB in light of the evidence on retention and made several recommendations. Seven risk factors have been found to correlate negatively with retention and degree attainment (Horn & Premo, 1995). These factors are: (1) enrolled part-time; (2) have children or dependents; (3) work full-time while enrolled; (4) are single parents; (5) are financially independent; (6) delayed postsecondary enrollment by one or more years; and (7) have a GED or high school

dropout. Students with three or more of these risk factors have been found to graduate at substantially lower rates than other students (Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, & McCormick, 1996). In a follow-up study, Horn, Peter, and Rooney (2002) reported that three quarters of students had at least one of these seven risk factors, while the average number was 2.2. Noting that the seven risk factors are "largely related to age" they found that traditional-aged students had fewer risk factors than those aged 24 or more years. They found that the students with the most risk factors are undergraduates who are parents. These students were more likely to work full-time and attend college part-time, with an average of 4.3 risk factors, nearly double that for "all" undergraduates.

Three of the risk factors are measured in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE data for U.T. Permian Basin freshmen for Fall 2011 revealed that 40% cared for dependents, 40% worked 20-plus hours per week, and 9% were age 24 years or older. The Task Force recommended that those students who work and care for dependents, who for various reasons cannot commit to a college education as his or her first priority, should be identified early and advised with particular care—and be prevented or at least discouraged from taking large course loads. The literature isn't clear on the role that the receipt of financial aid plays in retention and persistence to the degree, clearly this variable requires more research. One striking factor observed in the Task Force's collection of internal university data was the role that developmental coursework plays in predicting success at U.T. Permian Basin. Taking any developmental coursework appears to place one at a much higher risk of dropping out, and, as stated before, attention should be focused on these courses by selecting the best teachers to teach these courses.

An additional risk factor is presented in the test scores of incoming students. While that factor has varied slightly from year to year, it has not changed much over time. In the six UTPB freshman cohorts between 2008 and 2013, the highest average SAT score was the 2012 cohort with a 1027. The lowest average SAT score was the 2011 cohort with a 996. The characteristics of the "I"ndividual students UTPB serves are consistent and largely stable over time.

The "C" in the BASIC Retention Strategy, the Community

We've touched on this variable a little in passing. Namely, the value of a student's participation in the community of the university he or she attends as a positive predictor of retention. As a complement to the academic course of study, extracurricular activities—including student activity clubs, intramural sports, participation or attendance at athletic events, honors societies, theater groups, the school newspaper, lab and other research with faculty members, veteran groups, and so forth. All avenues provide for students to feel a sense of belonging to the larger college or university community, and aid in retaining students. Elkins-Nesheim et al. (2007, p. 436) argue that "high levels of student engagement are associated with a wide range of educational practices and conditions, including purposeful student-faculty contact, active and collaborative learning strategies; and collaboration among faculty, academic affairs units, and student affairs units to produce programs and services". Such collaboration lends itself to something that Kuh (1996) has called "seamless learning environments," in which the educational experience of students extends throughout the university, from classroom instruction to social

activities. Elkins-Nesheim et al. (p. 437) further explain "seamless learning environments" as being "characterized by coherent educational purposes, comprehensive policies and practices consistent with students' needs and abilities, and a 'widely shared ethos of learning'".

One form that a "seamless learning environment" can take is a "learning community", "partnership programs", "faculty mentoring programs", or other forms of first-year programs. Elkins Nesheim et al. (2007) note that through participating in such programs, students learned to navigate the campus environments and programs with greater confidence.

In 2011, the Task Force designed the BASIC strategy as a response to the needs of the UTPB student population. The next section of this study describes how the BASIC program was implemented over the next four years.

Establishing the Success Center: The Beginning [2]

For a retention program to be successful, there needs to be collaboration, coordination, monitoring, and unit proximity, all components of the BASIC Retention Strategy. First, given acceptance of the design of the retention strategy put forward by the Task Force in November 2011, U.T. Permian Basin had to strongly advocate its institutional mission aimed at student learning and success, and provide solid budgetary support. Whitt et al. (2008, p. 239) argue that the "importance of clear connections between institutional mission and institutional policies, practices, and programs for creating educationally effective opportunities for students has been well established". Whitt et al. (2008m p. 239)

write, "Effective partnership programs are grounded in, and extend the influence of, the institution's mission in their purpose, design, implementation and assessment."

The Task Force recommended the creation of the new position, the Dean of Undergraduate Success. The criteria for this dean were that the individual come through the faculty ranks and have demonstrated excellence in the classroom, a record of scholarly activity, and possess a nurturing and caring approach to students. A new budget line was created, and the new dean was selected in 2012. He had been a member of the Task Force and had started serving in 2011 as the director of the First Year Experience course. He was to be responsible for coordinating and proximally re-locating a host of academic services. Eighteen distinct programs and offices were involved, including tutoring, mentoring, freshman seminar, academic advising, and many others. Able (2012) noted that there is no 100% solution to student success. Rather, students are made successful through a series of interventions that solve the retention problem one or two percent of the time. Heeding this suggestion, after establishing a supervisory umbrella over all these services and re-locating many, the new dean began making a series of small, subtle improvements—one step at a time.

The most immediate task of the new dean was to establish the new Success Center. Previously, a Math and Science Center, University Writing Center, Literacy Center, and freshman seminar center were housed in separate locations with each having its own unit directors. Each director had his or her own philosophy on hiring, training employees, and general administration procedures. With the advent of the Success Center, each of these former directors became peers in a shared location. All employees (including student

employees), would receive training in student friendliness, and pedagogical training that would be from a common platform. This would allow students to hear a consistent message between support providers. Consistent training was thus the first change made; this was a behind-the-scenes attempt to improve the student experience. Similarly, student tutors and student supplemental instructors had previously been scheduled on an inconsistent basis. The dean studied which hours students were reporting to the Success Center to receive assistance and matched tutoring resources to meet student demand. In addition to more sensitive hourly scheduling, the decision to assign tutors and supplemental instructors to subject areas based on the number of students who earned a grade of D, F, withdrew, or received an incomplete (DFWI rates). Classes with a combination of high DFWI rates and high enrollments were given particular attention in scheduling academic assistance.

In 2011 the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Business operated separate advising centers, and those centers provided varying levels of support for students. Students from the School of Education were generally seen by the Arts and Sciences Center, although who they were supposed to see was often unclear. Theoretically, underclassmen were advised by professional staff advisers housed in the students' college or school, while upper division students were advised by faculty in their majors. However, this was implemented inconsistently. In Fall 2012 the advising centers were provided consistent training, and in Spring 2013 they were consolidated into one center in one location. At the time of the consolidation, changes were made to more consistently enforce the 2+2 advising model which has led to a more consistent student advising experience.

A number of other more or less subtle interventions have been implemented. Perhaps the most significant of the efforts was the early registration effort first begun in Fall 2011 and enhanced in subsequent years. U.T. Permian Basin had traditionally been a late-registering campus. All too many students (Table 3) enrolled for classes shortly before they began, and sometimes after classes had already begun—and textbooks had not yet been purchased. However, it was observed that students who registered for classes early had a higher likelihood of returning the subsequent semester. Over the years, a strong effort has been made to pre-register freshmen and sophomore students for classes in the subsequent semester. That effort involved cooperation with the freshman seminar sections and teachers in the general education courses. We have continually observed that students tended to return for classes once registered, and that early enrollment decreased the advising burden of last minute registrations.

Although returning for the sophomore year is an important goal, it is only a stepping stone on the way to graduation. Depending on which year is used as the base, U.T. Permian Basin has begun to see a substantial increase in retention to the third and fourth year. Changes made in 2011 would begin to impact the Fall 2008 cohort, and 2012 changes would impact the 2009 cohort. Moving from the base of the 2007 cohort, then, retention to Year 3 is up 20.5%. Retention to Year 4 is up even further on 22.9%. UTPB saw an increase in graduation rates following these interventions, with 23.8% of the 2011 cohort graduating in 4 years—25.6% including those who graduated from other publicly funded institutions in Texas. This compares to 12.8% who graduated in four years for the 2007 cohort. Table 4 reveals success in keeping students into their third and fourth years and,

hopefully, serves as a predictor of future increases in graduation rates. While there was a slight dip for Fall 2015 figures due to the challenges associated with implementation of a new Student Information System, gains have been strong well past the first year. Unfortunately, the implementation of these interventions has been accompanied by significant challenges.

Challenges and Future Steps

While there were a number of challenges to implementing the BASIC approach to increase student retention and persistence to the degree, one central problem has stood out above the others—the university attempted so many simultaneous interventions that it is hard to say with precision which ones were helpful and which were not. This is not all bad news—retention rates are clearly improved to the second, third, and fourth years. 4 and 6 year graduation rates are higher. Generally, the concepts woven into the BASIC strategy have worked, and it has come from the overarching concepts of doing many small things well, and in a coordinated fashion. However, knowing precisely which interventions worked, or worked best, would allow more resources to be devoted to them while fewer resources were allocated to less effective interventions.

With the deployment of the BASIC strategy and some reflection, it was clear information technology and statistical analyses was not being effectively used. With appropriate technology choices, we could better monitor and identify which interventions were effective and which individual students were in greater need of some form of outreach. While those technological needs will be addressed in the next section of this

paper, had they been addressed earlier more substantial progress may have been made more quickly.

The challenge becomes keeping the momentum. UTPB was founded as an upper level institution in 1973, and much of its technological infrastructure was created on an ad hoc basis since the first freshmen and sophomores arrived in 1991. Unfortunately, this led to systems that were difficult to work with and which often did not provide students, faculty, and staff the information they needed to most efficiently and effectively do their jobs. The challenges in implementing new systems have been sometimes rather profound given the complex nature of simultaneously adopting new software for student information, finances, and most other major functions of the university. The deployment of these systems does, with time, offer opportunities. For example, the program *Peoplesoft* will empower students and advisors with more information for effective decisions about course enrollment. In addition such information will allow professional staff advisers to devote more time to students with particularly complex challenges to resolve. With a sufficient underlying student information system, one can also consider the adoption of add-on software packages which will further enhance this process. For example, in Spring 2016 UTPB is implementing the Education Advisory Board's (EAB) Student Success Collaborative software. This predictive analytic software should be fully implemented later in the calendar year, and it will allow decision makers at every level of the organization to take ownership of the success of their students. UTPB recognized the challenges in the early stages of its BASIC program and hopes this software will help overcome them.

The next challenge was acquiring additional physical space to assist in the student retention mission. When the Success Center was created in Fall 2012, it was planned based on usage figures of the existing academic support centers at that time. However, the Success Center has been fantastically successful in drawing students to use its resources. A Spring 2015 survey indicated that only 6.4% of visits were due to instructor requirements. Other visits were born of a desire to study course materials and prepare for assignments with the assistance of tutors. Tutor satisfaction rates were very high, and during the 2014-15 academic year, 1961 students visited the space a total of 21,097 times. While 48.8% of these visits were to use the computers, those students were still in the same physical space and sometimes spontaneously saw a tutor after working on the computer. UTPB ameliorated this challenge in Fall 2015 when the Success Center, Retention Office, and Dean of Undergraduate Success moved into a much larger space previously occupied by the Student Union. Early indications are that this space has met its intended goal of serving even more students.

Most of the UTPB retention and graduation efforts so far have been focused on tasks which can be accomplished by professional staff and student employees under the supervision of the Dean of Student Success. Needless to say, the faculty are the central component of a student's educational experience at a university. Beyond providing better technology and facilities, another challenge is to do a better job of promoting faculty ownership of student success. Tinto (2011a) offers several attributes of college teachers whose students are more likely to succeed: (1) set student expectations high, not low; (2) provide academic and social support outside of the classroom (tutoring, etc., especially for

the underprepared students); (3) provide early and frequent assessment of performance (before midterms) so that early alert systems can work most effectively; (4) provide speedy feedback of performance; and (5) be involved with students outside of the classroom. The BASIC program was designed with this in mind. Setting high expectations and providing appropriate support for students creates an atmosphere where responsibility for academic success is shared between students and faculty.

How do faculty learn these tools? Faculty in higher education rarely receive training on how to be effective and caring teachers, much less training in classroom ethics (i.e., implicit bias, favoritism, dual relationships, and so forth). Quality control of teaching effectiveness appears nominal at best, and often *pro forma,* especially for tenured faculty. For faculty who do need assistance in classroom effectiveness at U.T. Permian Basin, there are no formal avenues to travel to gain help or coaching. This is not an unusual state of affairs across colleges and universities. The Task Force recommended that someone needs to coordinate, train, coach, and provide avenues to remediate classroom and online teachers who, based on performance reviews, are substandard in the face-to-face and online teaching formats. One means among many of addressing this issue is that beginning in the 2015-16 academic year "new faculty orientation" will last throughout the faculty member's first year. Where that orientation has typically taken place over one or two compact days in August, extending it to monthly sessions throughout the first year should allow for greater opportunities to learn the tools relevant to helping students succeed. Over the long term, U.T. Permian Basin plans to expand a campus culture of caring faculty and quality teachin*g.* The Dean of Undergraduate Success has taken an additional step in

increasing faculty involvement by shifting some duties—notably for the freshman seminar and provision of retention services to athletes—to faculty members who are paid a stipend in addition to their normal salary.

Since the hiring of the Dean of Undergraduate Success and the opening of the Success Center, two things are very apparent. First, the issue of retention and progress to the degree is a large and complex issue requiring a coordinated and proactive effort to bring about productive change. Second is to remember to keep doing the small and subtle things well. Sometimes major initiatives are necessary, and one such initiative here allowed for all of the smaller things which have since happened. However, the bulk of the changes have come from many small decisions such as having offices talk to one another to coordinate plans, scheduling tutors to match student demand, helping students register earlier, and consistently training tutors and supplemental instructors. Such changes have been coincident with gains in retention to the second, third, and fourth years, and we are beginning to see increased graduation rates. Our failure has been implementing various obvious and subtle initiatives in a way which cannot tie overall progress to any particular intervention, although that problem can be overcome with the appropriate application of planning and technology. We are in the process of adopting such technology to allow us to make better measures to inform future decisions.

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Footnotes

[1] The members of the Task Force were all faculty members: Ramiro Bravo, Department of Mechanical Engineering; Douglas Hale, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science; William Harlow, Department of Communication; Christopher Hiatt, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science; Jason Lagapa, Department of English; James Olson (Chair), Department of Psychology; and Diana Younger, Department of

Psychology. The authors of the present paper would like to thank each for their contributions to the original Task Force report.

[2] Many the components U.T. Permian Basin established as a consequence of the Task Force's report have been described elsewhere by Harlow (2015). Many of those details have been omitted in the present paper.

Table 1
First-time/Full-time Freshman Cohort Retention Rates at UT—Permian Basin by Cohort Year

Entering fall cohort	Fall cohort size	Students who re-entered the subsequent spring semester		Students who re-entered the fall of their second year		Students who re-entered the fall of their third year		Students who re-entered the fall of their fourth year		Students who re-entered the fall of their fifth year*	
Semester	***N***	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**	***N***	**%**
Fall 2006	308	265	**86.0**	192	**62.3**	147	**47.7**	124	**40.2**	74	**24.0***
Fall 2007	367	310	**84.5**	199	**54.2**	139	**37.9**	108	**29.4**		
Fall 2008	328	284	**86.6**	202	**61.6**	148	**45.1**				
Fall 2009	325	283	**87.1**	199	**61.2**						
Fall 2010	338	292	**86.4**								
% Retained			**86.1**		**59.6**		**43.3**		**48.6**		**24.0***

* 14.2% graduated at the end of their fourth year.

Table 2

The Five Components of the BASIC Retention Strategy

Buildings (and virtual campus)	**Administration (organization of retention program)**	**Scholastics (academics)**	**Individual (student characteristics)**	**Community (social opportunities)**
Signage	Someone responsible	Advising	Age	Student Involvement
ADA issues	Oversight of teaching quality	Career services	Gender	Sense of belonging
Study areas, comfort	Attitude of staff, administration, & faculty	Class size & Student/faculty ratio	Financial Status	Student life issues
Classroom tidiness & arrangement	Coordination of programs aimed for student success	Programs for Student Success	Preparation for College, SAT, GPA, etc.	Student housing & social opportunities
A/C & heating		Library	Marital status	Clubs, etc.
Student housing		Teaching Effectiveness	Dependent children	Athletic events
Webpages: friendliness		Faculty Access & Availability	1st semester grades & 1st year grades	Campus events on campus
Outdoor campus tidiness		Developmental courses	Physical Health & Mental Health	Student life issues
Parking		Student Orientation	Provisional Admission or Regular status	Work-study for freshmen
Grounds upkeep		Early Alert Program	Athletics	Student Involvement
		Faculty-Student Engagement, including scholarly activities and extracurricular activities	Work	Sense of belonging

Table 3

Subsequent Fall Enrollment as a Function of Early Registration.

		First registered for the following fall semester by month (cumulative values)						
Cohort Year	**Cohort Total**	**1-April**	**1-May**	**1-June**	**1-July**	**1-August**	**1-Sep**	**Census data**
2012	365	8	135	181	192	206	241	242
		2%	37%	50%	53%	56%	66%	66%
2013	314	6	156	183	190	203	223	217
		2%	50%	58%	61%	65%	71%	69%
2014	410	0	222	266	256	269	296	290
		0%	54%	65%	62%	66%	72%	71%

Table 4

Retention Past the First Year

Cohort	**To Year 2**	**To Year 3**	**To Year 4**
2007	54.0%	37.6%	31.7%
2008	61.7%	45.2%	40.1%
2009	61.0%	49.7%	43.6%
2010	59.2%	44.9%	39.6%
2011	65.7%	54.3%	54.6%*
2012	66.3%	58.1%	48.8%**
2013	69.4%	54.8%**	NA

* One would not normally expect an increase in retention from Year 3 to Year 4 of the same cohort. In 2011, it appears that a small number of students stopped out of school and then returned.

** UTPB implemented a new student information system in 2015. Challenges in that implementation led to not being able to properly re-enroll some students.

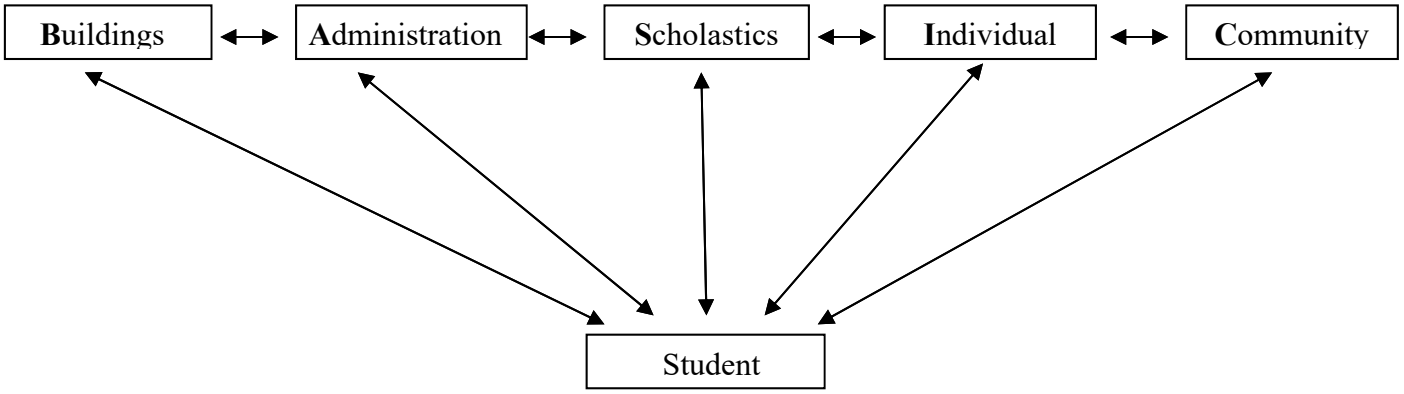

Figure 1. Interactions of the five components of the BASIC Retention Strategy with student success.

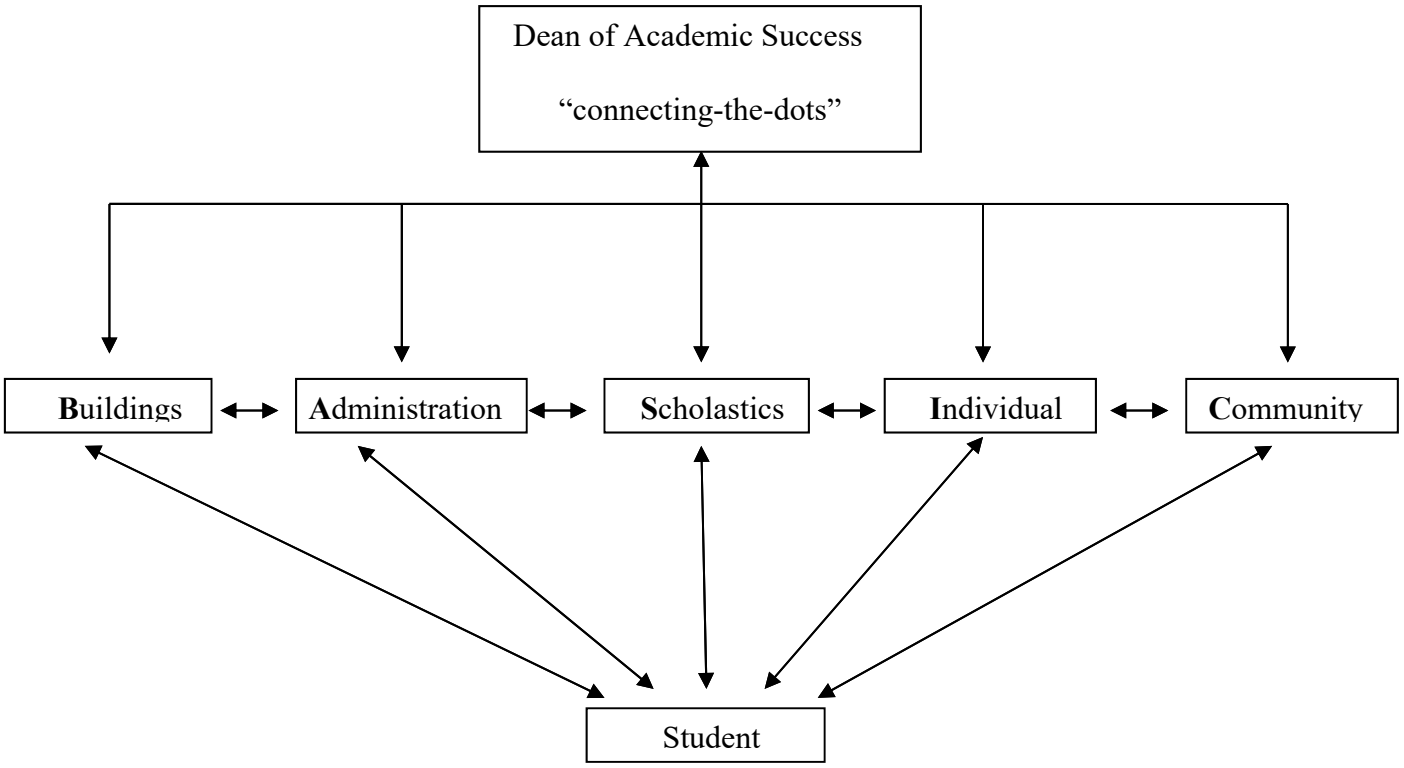

Figure 2. Interactions of the five components of the BASIC Retention Plan with the Dean of Academic Success