

Book Review

Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action

by Vincent Tinto

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After World War II, increasing numbers of students clamored to enter college, and post-secondary institutions eagerly granted access. The open-door policy, however, became the revolving-door policy, especially for underprepared students. In the late 1970s, one of the voices raised in protest to taking student money without giving needed assistance was that of Vincent Tinto. Because he is an advocate of student learning assistance, Tinto's latest book focuses on institutional actions that promote student success and retention. He reviewed approximately 700 resources and identified four necessary conditions for college student retention and completion. For an institution, the most favorable result is produced when all four conditions are met in the classroom and during the first year. Since Tinto approaches retention and completion from an institutional level, he believes faculty, staff, and administrators need to work together to improve student success.

The first condition for student success identified by Tinto is to identify and communicate the expectations of the institution and the faculty to students. The second is to provide support to students, including academic, social, and sometimes financial support. Assessing student performance and providing feedback in a timely manner, the third condition, enables changes promoting student success in the behavior of students, faculty, and staff, and is most significant during the first year and in the classroom. Perhaps most important is the fourth condition, involvement, also known as engagement, of students both academically and socially with faculty, staff, and peers. Successful students

develop a personal network that provides social and emotional support and promotes a deeper involvement in academic activities and learning.

Chapter 1 of *Completing College* introduces Tinto's four necessary conditions for college student retention and completion, called the Framework for Institutional Action. The initial section of the chapter discusses the current state of student retention, and the next section identifies a need for action. The chapter concludes with statements about the need for the existence of all four conditions, especially within the classroom during the first year; the need for commitment from administrators, faculty, and student affairs staff to systematic implementation of the actions; and a caution about the responsibility of the students. Chapters 2 – 5 each discuss one condition and the actions appropriate to establish the condition on campus, and then provide case studies of successful implementations.

Chapter 6 presents administrative actions that address the kinds of policies an institution should adopt, how to organize and implement in a sustainable method that allows for scaling up over time, and the need for a systematic, intentional aligning of the various administrative units and people on campus to the single goal of student success. The final chapter issues a call to institutions to commit administrators, student support staff, and faculty to deliberate, organized, and unified actions to attain the goal of student success. Two appendices are included. Appendix A analyzes data on and defines student retention and persistence. Appendix B addresses student accountability and retention.

The main focus of *Completing College* is the first year and what happens in the classroom. No superficial change, what Tinto refers to as add-ons, will sufficiently enhance student retention and graduation without fundamental changes to the classroom and the alignment of classes from the freshman year through graduation. As Tinto emphasizes,

In sum, students are more likely to succeed in settings that establish clear and high expectations for their success, provide academic and social support, frequently assess and provide feedback about their performance, and actively involve them with others on campus, especially in the classroom. (p. 5)

Because *Completing College* addresses the range of institutional actions needed to improve undergraduate education, it is required reading for administrators and faculty at all levels who are serious about retention and graduation.