Retention Part II:

As discussed in the last edition of Beyond the Classroom, “Unraveling the Mystery of Retention”, Alan Seidman (2005) proposed a retention formula for student success that fits nicely with Florida Tech’s current retention initiatives. Seidman’s formula is actually quite simple to understand; however, implementing such a program does require significant initiative from as many perspectives as possible (faculty, staff, residence life, UE instructors, etc.). Seidman’s retention formula is:

\[ \text{RET} = \text{EID} + (\text{E} + \text{I} + \text{C}) \]

that is \( \text{RETention} = \text{Early IDentification} + (\text{Early} + \text{Intensive} + \text{Continuous}) \text{InterVention} \)

In Seidman’s formula, early identification is the earliest point at which a student may be at risk for being unsuccessful at college, either due to personal issues, academic deficiencies or both. The College Student Inventory (CSI) has been implemented on several occasions in the past as a useful tool that measures motivational and attitudinal issues related to academic success. The CSI also provides an early identification of dropout proneness that is more predictive than entry-level data (i.e. high school grades, SAT scores) based on national research. Based upon this inventory, which is taken on-line prior to the student arriving at Florida Tech, student specific information is available to advisors/faculty/retention managers, as is more general information regarding our freshman class of 2006.

Some of the general information compiled from over 400 incoming freshman who have completed their CSI survey include:

- 67% are male, 33% female
- 89% plan to live in residence halls
- 50% of their mothers and 52% of their fathers have a college degree
- 70% of the freshman plan to pursue graduate studies or obtain a professional degree
- 90% participated in a college prep program in high school
- The average student earned a senior GPA of 3.44 and SAT total of 1126
- The average student expects to study 12 hours per week
Additionally, according to the CSI Planning and Summary Report, our incoming freshman class scored slightly higher than the national average (which is 50th percentile on each scale) on several significant scales including: Study Habits (56th percentile), Intellectual Interests (57th percentile), and Positive Attitudes Towards Educators (60th percentile). Additional findings include that our Freshman Class of 2006 exhibited the following scores in comparison to national averages:

- The Desire to Finish College Scale (64th percentile) is significantly higher than the average national college student.
- Academic Confidence (68th percentile) is significantly higher which can at times be a “double edged sword” for college students who may feel too confident to seek help and study aggressively.
- Our incoming freshmen are below the national norm for Dropout Proneness (38th percentile), Predicted Academic Difficulty (36th percentile) and Educational Stress (40th percentile). All of these factors are highly favorable towards retention success.

Despite the aforementioned results:

- Approximately 20% of the freshman class have been identified as high dropout prone.
- Notably, the freshman class’ overall Receptivity to Institutional Help is lower than we would like (45th percentile), specifically Receptivity to Academic Assistance (38th percentile) was even lower.
- Social motivation or inclination to join in social activity is also lower (42nd percentile for males). Ease of Transition scale which measures a student’s overall feeling of security in the campus social environment and does predict adjustment difficulties was also somewhat lower than national norms (44th percentile).

Not surprisingly, gender differences were very apparent with female freshman exhibiting significantly better scores on Study Habits (65th vs. 51st percentile), Intellectual Interests (64th vs. 53rd percentile), Desire to Finish College (72nd vs. 59th percentile), Sociability (55th vs. 42nd percentile) and Leadership (60th vs. 50th percentile). Additionally, their Dropout Proneness score (28th vs. 42nd percentile) as well as Predicted Academic Difficulty (28th vs. 40th percentile) and Educational Stress scores (34th vs. 42nd percentile) were also significantly more favorable than males. Interestingly their Receptivity to Academic Assistance was lower than for males (35th vs. 40th percentile).

So what might be some of the implications gleaned from the CSI data for the freshman class of 2006? They certainly have high expectations of academic success and are extremely confident. As a group they are less receptive to institutional help than the average college student on a national level and expect to succeed with minimal effort (12 hours of studying per week) and exhibit a lower level of social initiative than the average college student. This is certainly one
dilemma we have observed with students in the past who “retreated” when their high expectations and confidence were met with less than expected outcomes. Unfortunately, when they should have been more actively involved with their faculty and support services on campus, they went into an “avoidant” mode of problem solving and frequently withdrew from social contact.

As mentioned, the Freshman Class of 2006 as a whole exhibits a lower than average inclination to participate in social activity opportunities. Despite their low level of social initiative, they are more receptive to Social Enrichment opportunities (63rd percentile) than the average college student on a national level. Hopefully this can be translated into marketing socialization opportunities and programs through Student Affairs as well as academic clubs/organizations that are desirable to our unique student population. The CSI also provides specific recommendations for our new students. Not surprisingly based upon the data reviewed above the ones with the highest priority were:

- Get help in meeting new friends
- Get information about student activities
- Get advice from an experienced student
- Get information about clubs and social organizations on campus

These recommendations can also be optimized by aggressive programming in Residence Life and Student Affairs, development of mentoring programs within academic departments, and engagement activities to integrate and introduce new students into their departments.

In an effort to increase the early intervention of at-risk students this year the following modifications and programs have been implemented:

- The Academic Support Center has created an on-line early alert system. Additionally as the result of on-campus research indicating that students who participated in the University Experience class (UE) in the past had a more favorable freshman to sophomore retention rate, UE will be mandatory this year. The curriculum has been significantly enhanced and UE instructors will be in an excellent position to intervene early on with students who are under-performing.
- A duplicate student copy of the College Student Inventory report will be provided to freshman in their first UE class and the students will complete a self-directed analysis form, which was created by CAPS and ASC for their first UE assignment. The obvious goal is to encourage the students to accurately assess their strengths, become aware of potential obstacles, explore areas of growth, and gain knowledge of support services and programs on campus.
- CAPS will be modifying the Panther Success Program by having doctoral students from the College of Psychology intervene with students who are under-performing based on the Early Alert System. The doctoral students plan to go directly into the Residence Life Halls during evening hours to meet with students. Hopefully this will optimize the opportunity to shift the students out of their “avoidant” mode into a more “proactive” one.
Florida Tech’s Retention Committee will be working with the current CSI data to further refine social programming efforts on campus to target the interests of our technical population.

CAPS has developed or modified several new programs consistent with the CSI data such as Speed Dating and other Social Adjustment Programs this year to increase socialization and support.

Students with specific needs in regards to learning disabilities and psychological services will also benefit from additional funding support from the administration at Florida Tech this year, which will improve accessibility to these services.

Residence Life and FITV have developed educational programming on a variety of issues including Alcohol Awareness, College Success and Study for Success that can be viewed in the residence halls.

Returning to Seidman’s retention formula, he further describes Intensive Intervention as creating an intervention that is intensive or strong enough to affect the necessary change. Interventions may include academic tutoring, weekly meetings with an advisor, obtaining psychological services to address personal issues or behavioral issues such as procrastination and time management, and reducing credit loads. The continuous intervention component of Seidman's formula refers to the fact that the intervention needs to last as long as it is required or until the change has occurred.

Seidman utilizes the medical model as an analogy for his retention formula. In the medical model, once a person becomes ill, many do not seek help, because they believe the symptoms will pass or they will spontaneously recover. Students in academic difficulty may have similar beliefs. Unfortunately, as with a medical illness, if left untreated symptoms tend to get worse. When they finally do arrive for help, the amount of treatment required is much more intense and despite the intervention little improvement may occur. This analogy emphasizes the point that early identification, proper diagnosis of the problems (both academic and social) and a prescription for an intervention over a period of time with periodic checkups, is the key to successful student college retention programs at Florida Tech. Hopefully some of these new initiatives will have a favorable effect on student retention and success at Florida Tech with the freshman class of 2006. As we prepare for the new freshman class we all could benefit from some refresher points:

- On the first day of class, discuss what you expect from each student and how many hours per week they should be committing to your class. Hopefully this will address the over confidence trend and the underestimate that our freshman have of the actual study time required to succeed.

- Don’t overlook the obvious. If a student is performing poorly academically and or not attending classes they are less likely to persist academically. Students don’t develop a decision or intention to leave a university overnight. If they continue to exhibit academic difficulties someone needs to ask them the obvious, “Are you considering leaving at the
“Those interested in affecting retention rates need to be profoundly aware that they are not just in the business of delivering services, but in delivering services in such a way that students develop a positive attitude toward school and toward their continued enrollment in school.” (Bean, 2005)

In the next issue: “Intervention Skills for Students who are Under-performing”

Previous Beyond the Classrooms including Recognizing Students At Risk, Alcohol and College Life, Suicide and College Students, and Managing Disruptive Student Behavior on Campus and Unraveling the Mystery of Retention are available at the CAPS website www.fit.edu/caps/

Beyond the Classroom is a joint effort of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and Student Services at Florida Tech