



# Taking Action on Student Equity

21 Strategies to Advance Underserved and  
Nontraditional Student Success

# Community College Executive Forum

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# Supporting Members in Best Practice Implementation

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## Resources Available Within Your Membership

This publication is only the beginning of our work to help members improve student success. Recognizing that ideas seldom speak for themselves, our ambition is to work actively with members of the Community College Executive Forum to decide which practices are most relevant for your organization, to accelerate consensus among key constituencies, and to save implementation time.

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# Executive Summary

## The Urgent Need to Address Student Equity

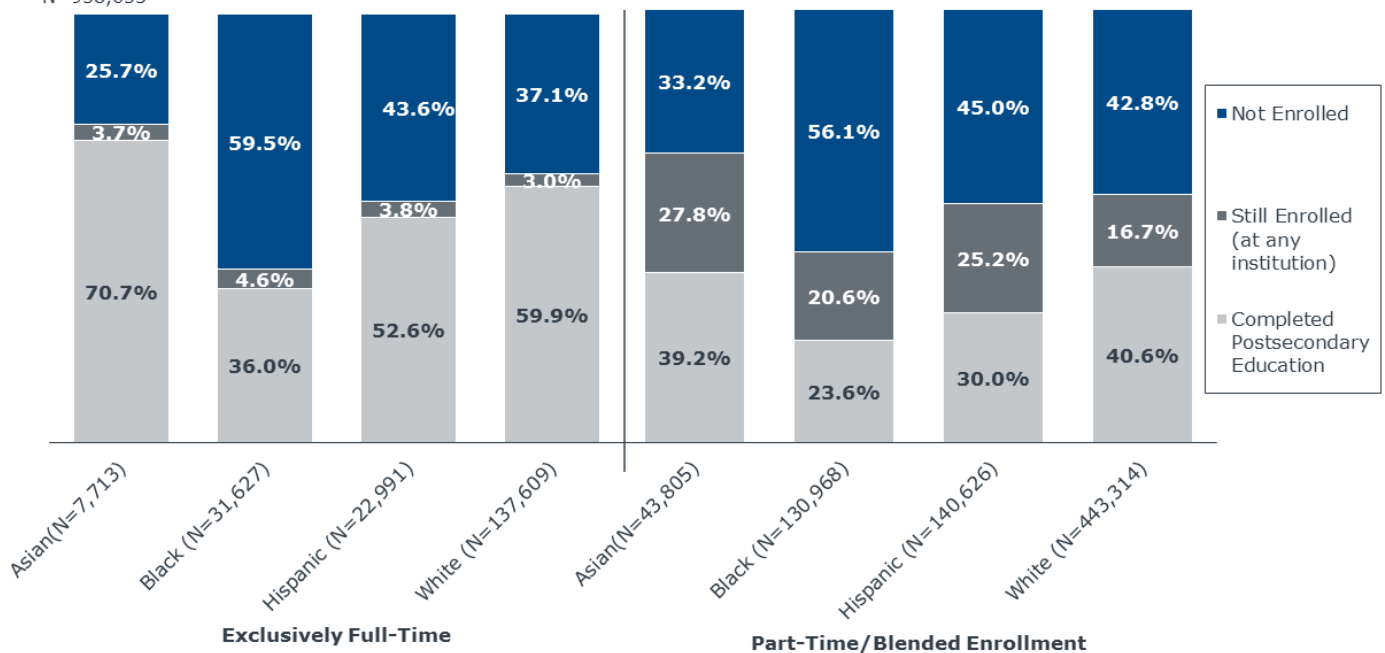
The community college landscape continues to evolve, and as it does, college leaders are met with a critical imperative: improve student outcomes for at-risk populations to close chronic gaps in achievement.

The number of historically underserved (e.g., racial/ethnic minority, low-income students) and nontraditional students (e.g., first-generation, part-time college students) continues to grow dramatically in the two-year sector. 56% of Hispanic students, 44% of black students, and 38% of first-generation college students turn to community colleges for a path to their career goals. Additionally, a growing number of community college students are attending part-time, many of whom are also juggling work and family commitments. These populations now comprise the majority of today's community college students, yet their completion rates continue to lag behind those of the traditional student.

### Gaps in Student Achievement Linked to Race and Enrollment Status

*Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started at Two-Year Institutions by Race/Ethnicity and Enrollment Intensity*

N=958,653



Source: National Student Clearinghouse, 2017.

The changing needs and circumstances of today's students coupled with outdated institutional policies and practices result in persistent barriers to success that widen existing achievement gaps. With this growing sense of urgency comes heightened pressure for community college leaders to confront the challenges that delay underserved and nontraditional student success.

This action plan examines strategies to tackle these challenges and to promote equitable opportunities by addressing the following five areas:

- Engaging Faculty in Equity Efforts (page 9)
- Redesigning Classroom Practices Through an Equity Lens (page 13)
- Preparing Incoming Students (page 19)
- Implementing Innovative Advising Solutions (page 25)
- Supporting Nontraditional Student Populations (page 29)

# Strategies to Support Equitable Student Outcomes

Questions	Priorities	Strategies	Personnel
<b>1</b> <b>How Do We Make a Cross-Campus Faculty Investment in Equity?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broaden faculty participation in initiatives to deepen campus investment in equity reforms</li> <li>Invest in training to prepare faculty to address equity-related issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cascade faculty accountability</li> <li>Recruit for faculty strengths</li> <li>Embed inclusive practices in new faculty training</li> </ul>	<b>Owner:</b> Administration  <b>Participants:</b> Faculty
<b>2</b> <b>How Do We Promote Equitable Academic Outcomes?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform pedagogical practices to ensure relevance and inclusivity for diverse populations</li> <li>Evaluate and revise course-related materials to advance equitable access and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use low-stakes assessments</li> <li>Engage students through active learning</li> <li>Reduce jargon in course materials</li> <li>Highlight industry-aligned competencies in existing curricula</li> </ul>	<b>Owner:</b> Department Chairs  <b>Participants:</b> Faculty
<b>3</b> <b>How Do We Ease the College Transition for Underserved Students?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage the pipeline of prospective students through preparatory academic programming</li> <li>Support underserved and nontraditional students through matriculation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare students through easy-access programs</li> <li>Establish on-demand student support</li> <li>Provide pre-enrollment assistance with success course</li> </ul>	<b>Owner:</b> Student Services  <b>Participants:</b> Students
<b>4</b> <b>How Do We Devise Sustainable Advising Structures?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the number of student-to-advisor interactions for highest-risk students</li> <li>Optimize advising technology to promote student persistence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure easy access to advisors with temporary advising stations</li> <li>Target unresponsive and high-risk students with tiered outreach</li> <li>Build student confidence through pre-enrollment resilience primer</li> <li>Reinforce productive student behavior</li> </ul>	<b>Owner:</b> Student Services  <b>Participants:</b> Advisors
<b>5</b> <b>How Do We Create Systemic Change to Support Nontraditional Populations?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide more comprehensive support for nontraditional students</li> <li>Institutionalize practices that accommodate nontraditional student needs and promote completion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shift perceptions of student involvement</li> <li>Maximize resources with personalized nudges</li> <li>Advance term-to-term persistence with outreach</li> <li>Automate student withdrawal surveys</li> <li>Target late-term stop outs for reenrollment</li> <li>Expand access to PLA</li> <li>Facilitate completion with multi-term registration</li> </ul>	<b>Owner:</b> Administration  <b>Participants:</b> Student Services

# Assessing Current Practice

Faculty Engagement	Yes	No
Are faculty made aware of their role in achieving campus-wide strategic goals? Are faculty personally committed to advancing equitable student outcomes? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 1 on p. 9-10.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the college have a system of soliciting initiative proposals from the campus community? Do faculty leverage their expertise when volunteering on a team or committee? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 2 on p. 10.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faculty Development	Yes	No
Are new faculty made aware of the college's commitment to equity and inclusion? Are they equipped with the pragmatic tactics and foundational knowledge needed to create a culturally responsive classroom at the beginning of their tenure? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 3 on p. 11-12.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classroom Practices	Yes	No
Are students assessed multiple times outside of the midterm and final? Do faculty provide feedback and information on relevant campus services based on those assessments? Do ongoing assessments use various testing approaches (e.g., multiple choice, short essay, online mini-tests, etc.)? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 4 on p. 13-14.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do students report being engaged in class? Are small-scale active and blended learning pilots and initiatives communicated across the faculty? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 5 on p. 14-15.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Course Materials	Yes	No
Are all course materials written at an appropriate grade level to ensure all students can easily understand the content? Do course materials avoid opaque jargon? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 6 on pg. 16-17.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does academic course content explicitly align with in-demand industry skills? Are students made aware of the employability of skills they are learning in class? Are they prepared to articulate this skill development to employers? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 7 on p. 17-18.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Engagement	Yes	No
Does the college offer adequate preparation to bridge student learning gaps prior to their first term? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 8 on p. 19-21.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Navigation Assistance	Yes	No
Are incoming students provided adequate assistance to complete all necessary onboarding steps? Does the college take sufficient steps to combat summer melt? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 9 on p. 22.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do incoming students use a variety of support services? Are they aware of the resources available to them? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 10 on pg. 23.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Assessing Current Practice (cont.)

Advising Touchpoints	Yes	No
Are advisors housed in an easy-to-access building on campus? Are students with limited time to spend on campus easily able to see advisors or schedule appointments? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 11 on p. 25.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do advisors have sufficient structures in place to reach unresponsive and at-risk students? Do traditional forms of student outreach prove to be effective? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 12 on p. 25-26.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology Optimization	Yes	No
Are high-risk students exposed to growth mindset and other theories that could increase grit and resilience? Do advisors incorporate these principles in conversations with students? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 13 on p. 27.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the college's early alert software used to its maximum capacity? Is there a system in place to praise students for their progress? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 14 on p. 28.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support Services	Yes	No
Are career services and student support staff prepared to embrace alternative student experience beyond traditional on-campus involvement? Are nontraditional students prepared to market their experiences to future employers? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 15 on p. 29-30.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nontraditional students take advantage of relevant campus resources? Are students fully aware of the services available? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 16 on p. 30-31.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Institutional Practices	Yes	No
Does the college have a system in place to track students and intervene when they are unregistered for future terms? Do interventions occur early enough to provide ample support? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 17 on p. 32-33.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are student course withdrawal requests centrally tracked? Are students required to give a reason for withdrawing upon submitting their requests? Are students advised of the potential consequences of withdrawing? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 18 on pg. 33-34.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are late-term stop outs centrally tracked? Does the college have a structured approach to reengage and incentivize these students' return? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 19 on p. 34-35.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nontraditional students use prior learning and other alternative credits to advance towards their degree? Are they aware of these options? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 20 on p. 36.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nontraditional students map their long-term education and career plans to inform course registration? Are students incentivized to create these plans? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 21 on pg. 36-37.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# How Do We Make a Cross-Campus Faculty Investment in Equity?

## Introduction

Developing and engaging faculty in equity reforms tends to be one of the most frequently cited goals among colleges looking to advance student success. Many colleges expect faculty compliance, but even enthusiastic faculty might fail to see why and how they need to change their current practices when college leaders enforce new policies. Leading colleges prioritize faculty participation by providing greater faculty ownership over cross-campus initiatives and training in equity-based practices. To enlist faculty support as champions of systemic equity reform, the following strategies empower faculty to engage in key aspects of change.

## Priority: Broaden Faculty Participation in Initiatives to Deepen Campus Investment in Equity Reforms

Assessing Current Practice: Faculty Engagement Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are faculty made aware of their role in achieving campus-wide strategic goals? Are faculty personally committed to advancing equitable student outcomes? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 1 on p. 9-10.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the college have a system of soliciting initiative proposals from the campus community? Do faculty leverage their expertise when volunteering on a team or committee? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 2 on p. 10.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **Strategy 1: Create Cascading Accountability for Equity Initiatives**

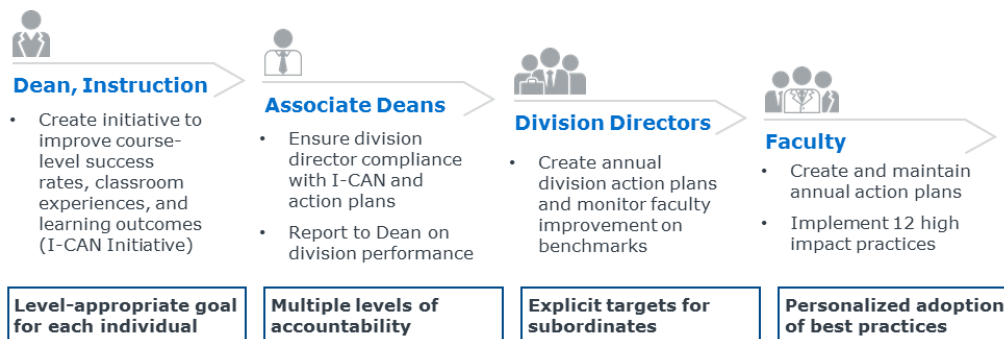
Many colleges' strategic plans create top-down mandates that overlook faculty perspective and individual accountability. One strategy for structuring faculty engagement is to involve all levels of the campus in equity-based strategic action planning by implementing a cascading approach. Each level of the academic affairs division creates individual action plans focused on equity and inclusion. This system allows for multiple levels of accountability and generates role-appropriate goals that faculty are personally engaged in achieving. Further, requiring investment at every level of the institution sends the message (to both employees and students) that the college is serious about promoting equity.

**Case-in-Point:** When **Wallace Community College** identified a course completion crisis on its campus, the college's leaders immediately engaged all faculty, staff, and administrators in creating a solution. As part of their Improvement-Constant and Never Ending (I-CAN) initiative, employees at each level of the academic affairs division are required to create individual action plans for the areas under their supervision. For instance, each faculty member must write an annual action plan explaining how he or she plans to incorporate pedagogical best practices into their instruction. As division directors monitor and support their faculty members, they also create an action plan for their division's adoption of the I-CAN techniques. This strategy holds stakeholders accountable for creating the plan but also provides flexibility for the adoption of the practices, allowing faculty to feel motivated and supported as they work to advance student success. Since implementing the initiative, **WCC has seen a 67% increase in degree completion rates and a 16% increase in fall-to-fall retention rates**, suggesting that a cross-campus investment in student outcomes promotes positive change.

## Cascaded Strategic Action Planning

### Strategic Plan

**Initiative 1:** Achieve increased excellence in student success in educational programs



## Strategy 2: Recruit for Faculty Strengths When Enlisting Input in Equity Planning

Failing to tap into the diversity of passion and experiences of all faculty members can present a missed opportunity for colleges. Instead of relying entirely on the administration or a committee to launch new initiatives, leading colleges solicit input and engagement across the entire campus by encouraging any student, faculty or staff member to participate in new initiatives.

**Case-in-Point:** In response to declines in student success, **Southwestern Community College** appealed to faculty's diversity of interests, skills, and experiences to increase widespread faculty participation and engagement and boost student retention. The college's central student success committee invites any faculty or staff member to submit a proposal for a new project. This committee then serves as the vetting and approval body for new student success projects. If approved, the Provost sends an email to the campus community seeking volunteers by listing out the diverse skills, (e.g., data analytics), experiences (e.g., policy review), and interests (e.g., minority male advancement) needed to make that project successful. Because participants are solicited based on their specific content knowledge or skillset, they are highly engaged in the planning and implementation of initiatives. In fact, the majority of teams receive more volunteers than are needed. They are also highly successful; **SCC raised student retention rates by 29% and saw nearly a 9% increase in students earning 12 credits per year** since launching the initiative.

### Examples of Strengths-Based Initiatives



## Resource Investment: Low

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Create Cascading Accountability for Equity Initiatives	Minimal
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruit for Faculty Strengths When Enlisting Input in Equity Planning	Mass emailing to the campus community

## Priority: Invest in Training to Prepare Faculty to Address Equity-Related Issues

Assessing Current Practice: Faculty Development Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are new faculty made aware of the college's commitment to equity and inclusion? Are they equipped with the pragmatic tactics and foundational knowledge needed to create a culturally responsive classroom at the beginning of their tenure? (If you answered no, see strategy 3 on p. 11-12.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **Strategy 3: Embed Inclusive Practices in New Faculty Training**

While typical faculty and staff training focuses solely on institution-specific policies and protocols, leading colleges broaden the scope of existing training sessions to include techniques on inclusivity. One way to accomplish this is to use orientation training for new faculty hires as an opportunity to inspire a commitment to equity and inclusion at the inception of a faculty member's tenure at the college. Colleges can task a diversity office administrator or a student services staff member to deliver a brief presentation during new faculty orientation each year. This training is simply embedded in the existing orientation curriculum and paired with a session on employee benefits or other crucial information. This alerts faculty that the college views inclusive environments as a critical issue and makes new hires aware of resources available to them.

**Case-in-Point:** To extend the benefits of equity training for new faculty, **Clackamas Community College** created a mandatory First Year Faculty Experience course for all recently hired full-time faculty that embeds training and community building within their entire first year at the college. New hires are granted a course release so that they can participate. The goals of the program include developing learner-centered curriculum and assessment, familiarizing faculty with the CCC student population and their needs, creating dynamic teaching philosophies, and strengthening faculty relationships across campus. There is also a strong emphasis on viewing students as individuals, rather than just statistics, and modifying teaching practices to meet student needs.

## Clackamas Community College First Year Faculty Experience Course

### 1 Content Overview

- ☐ **Curriculum and Classroom:** curriculum development, assessment and classroom management
- ☐ **Navigation:** maneuvering the college's systems, policies, campuses, and resources
- ☐ **Community and Culture:** building and strengthening the college community and culture of learning
- ☐ **Student Life:** understanding student learning needs, engagement, and experiences as well as available resources
- ☐ **Instruction:** exploring the role, practices, and expectations of an excellent instructor

### 2 Program Outcomes

Faculty will be able to...

- ☐ Articulate the mission, values, and core themes of the college
- ☐ Design, develop, and deliver courses based in the best practices of learner-centered curriculum design and instruction
- ☐ Assess student learning using a variety of techniques aligned to the outcomes and objectives of a course
- ☐ Articulate, describe, and assess the role and associated expectations of an instructor
- ☐ Develop and articulate a dynamic teaching philosophy and practice
- ☐ Create and nurture professional relationships within the college community

## Resource Investment: Medium

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Embed Inclusive Practices in New Faculty Training	Training materials; new faculty course release (if adopting the First Year Faculty Experience program)

# How Do We Promote Equitable Academic Outcomes?

## Introduction

Although student support services hold immense potential for reaching the most at-risk students, research points to the classroom as the primary opportunity for students to engage with and make connections to their college. However, it is often in the classroom where underserved students experience achievement gaps that can ultimately delay their progress towards completion. To promote inclusivity and equitable outcomes in the classroom, leading colleges revise day-to-day pedagogical strategies and existing course materials to ensure coursework is engaging and accessible for all students.

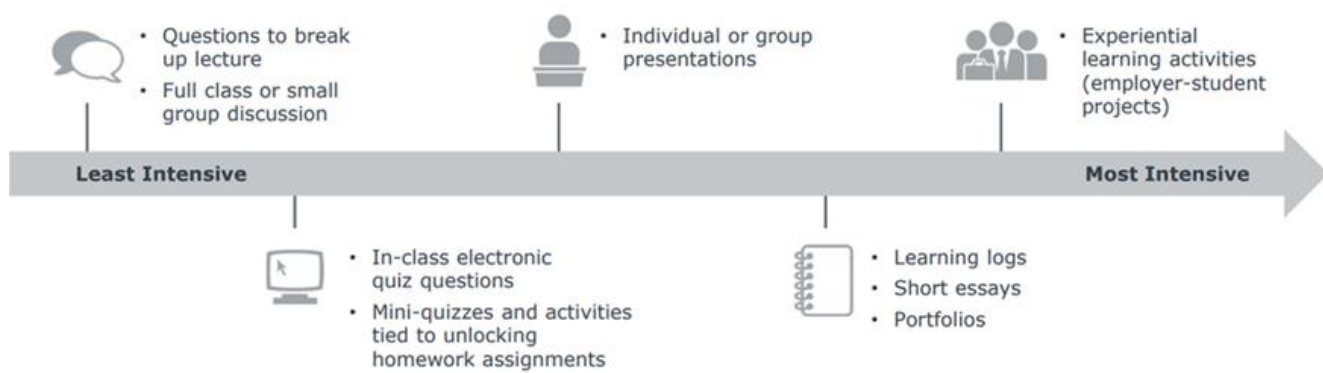
## Priority: Reform Pedagogical Practices to Ensure Inclusivity for Diverse Populations

Assessing Current Practice: Classroom Practices Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are students assessed multiple times outside of the midterm and final? Do faculty provide feedback and information on relevant campus services based on those assessments? Do ongoing assessments use various testing approaches (e.g., multiple choice, short essay, online mini-tests, etc.)? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 4 on p. 13-14.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do students report being engaged in class? Are small-scale active and blended learning pilots and initiatives communicated across the faculty? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 5 on p. 14-15.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Strategy 4: Use Low-Stakes Assessments Early and Often to Intervene Before Learning Gaps Develop

Courses that rely on a few summative assessments (such as midterm and final exams) impose success barriers for many students. Students who are unable to measure progress incrementally often realize they are not on track to pass the course when it is too late to seek additional support or withdraw. Frequent, low-stakes formative assessments allow students to check their progress in a course continuously and seek proactive assistance. Instructors who implement early assessments can provide targeted feedback to students, connect them to resources, and follow-up with them prior to high-stakes summative assessments.

### Sample Formative Assessments

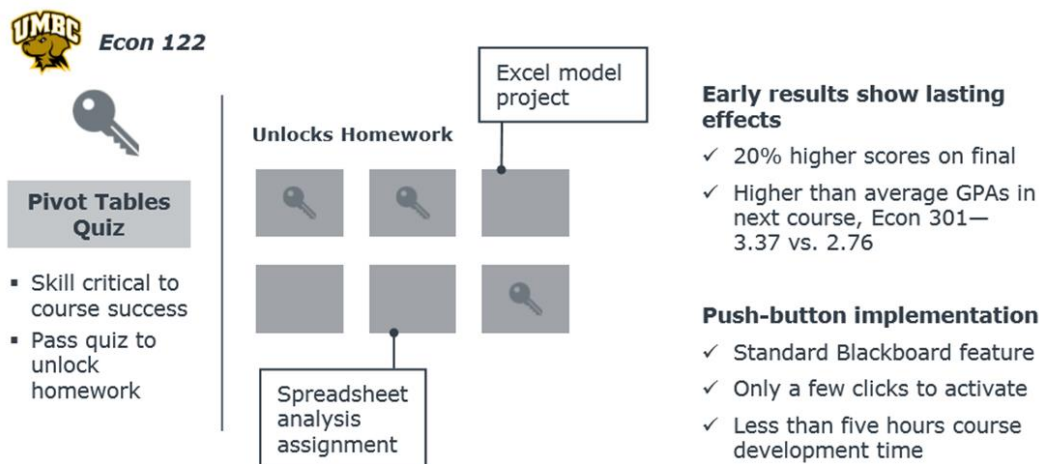


**Case-in-Point:** To standardize this strategy, the **University of Maryland, Baltimore County** initiated a policy known as adaptive release, which requires students to pass incremental quizzes evaluating their mastery of fundamental concepts before “unlocking” access to future assignments. These adaptive release modules can be integrated into the LMS for both online and face-to-face courses to ensure students identify and address knowledge gaps early in the course of the semester. UMBC has found that **students in course sections using adaptive release perform better than students in sections without it**. Econ 122 students using adaptive release not only scored higher on the class final, but their improved performance continued in the next course, Econ 301. Specifically, students who had used adaptive release in their prior course earned above-average GPAs.

### Implementation: Questions to Consider

- Do our low-stakes assessments align with the teaching of foundational concepts?
- Have we provided sufficient low-stakes assessments prior to critical institutional dates (e.g. add/drop dates, start dates for accelerated course variation, etc.)?
- Are we using low-stakes assessments to teach students strong study habits (e.g. peer collaboration outside of class)?
- Do our summative assessments require students to build on prior knowledge and make connections to previously mastered concepts?
- Are we using a variety of active assessments that encourage students to place course material into larger, more practical contexts?
- Though these assessments do not need to be graded, are we ensuring that students receive prompt and specific feedback on their performance?

## Adaptive Release Overview



## Strategy 5: Promote Student Engagement Through Active Learning Practices

In addition to using formative assessments to provide ongoing feedback, leading colleges strive to embrace active learning in all courses. Entirely lecture-based courses often fail to engage students, ignoring the challenge of attention spans which research suggests can be as short as 15 minutes. Student-centered and interactive learning serves to improve student mastery and support underprepared students, ultimately increasing the likelihood of completion. However, hands-on classroom activities are difficult to scale, especially in introductory gateway courses that typically have large maximum capacities. To integrate the scaled content exposure of lectures with the experiential benefit of active learning, leading colleges implement small group collaboration within large classes.

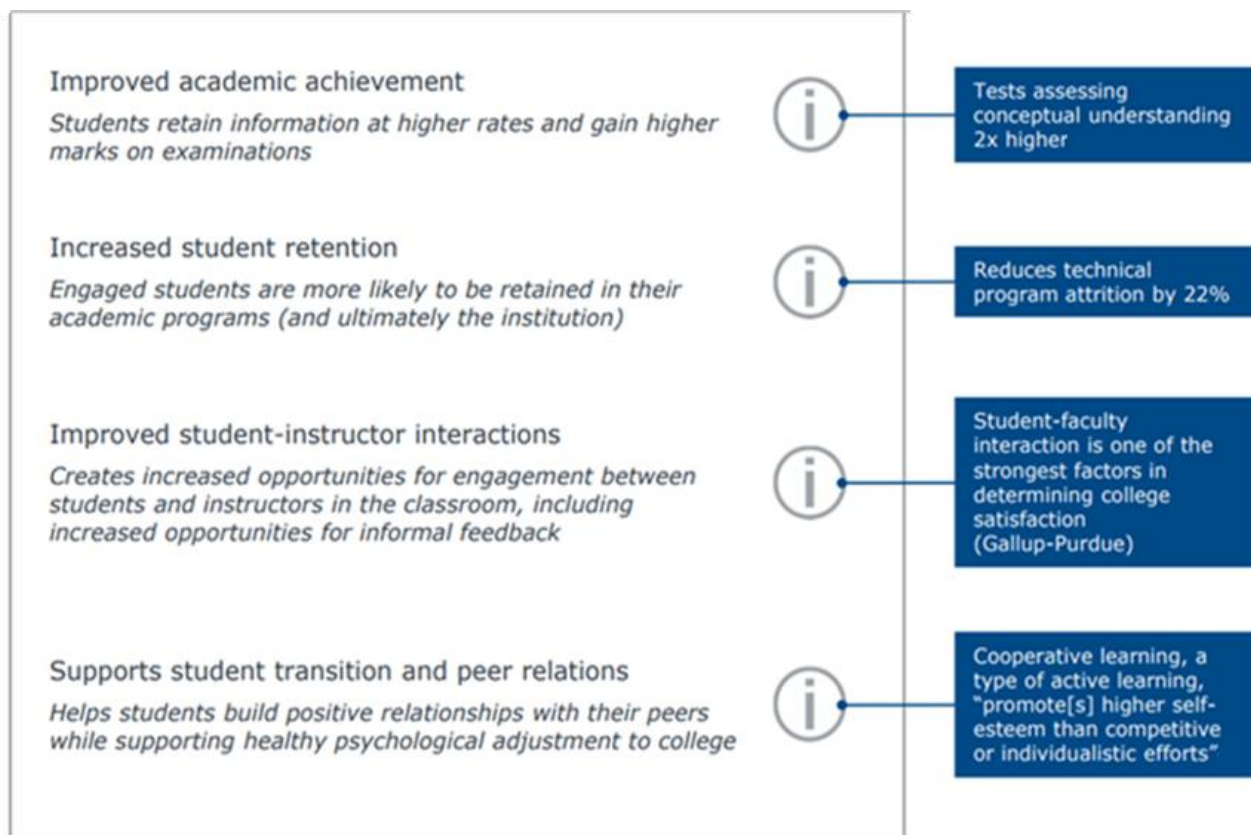


## Key Components of Scaling Active Learning:

1. Group problem-solving is critical to shift student engagement from passive to active.
2. Small group sizes (preferably three) necessitate individual student participation.
3. Shared work apparatus (such as a laptop or hand-out) facilitates group collaboration.
4. Instructor engages with students by moving constantly around the classroom.
5. Web-based program delivery and grading systems allow for scale and easy student access.
6. Faculty are provided adequate active learning resources and training to embrace proven pedagogical methods related to content delivery, assessment, and classroom management.

**Case-in-Point:** In an effort to embrace active learning in large lectures, **North Carolina State University** developed the SCALE-UP (Student-Centered Active Learning Environment with Upside-down Pedagogies) classroom. In the SCALE-UP classroom, the instructor explains concepts, facilitates discussions, and leads hands-on activities in a single session. The university divides large class sizes into small groups of three seated at round tables, which are often more conducive to collaboration than traditional rows. Using one laptop per group, students collaborate to solve problems and answer questions, while the instructor showcases the work of individual groups on projectors. There are now over 100 colleges and universities that use a version of the SCALE-UP classroom.

## Benefits of Active Learning







### Looking for additional resources on active student learning?

Visit any of the following links for resources to increase active engagement and equity in the classroom.

- "Tools and Strategies for Equity and Engagement," Berkeley City College <http://www.berkeleycitycollege.edu/wp/teaching-and-learning/resource-libraries/resource-library-ii-tools-and-strategies-for-engagement-and-equity/>
- "Six Models for Course Redesign," The National Center for Academic Transformation, [http://www.thencat.org/PlanRes/R2R\\_ModCrsRed.htm](http://www.thencat.org/PlanRes/R2R_ModCrsRed.htm)
- "Five Principles of Successful Course Redesign," The National Center for Academic Transformation, [http://www.thencat.org/Workshops/MOSys/Workshop%20I%20Packet%20\(MO\).pdf](http://www.thencat.org/Workshops/MOSys/Workshop%20I%20Packet%20(MO).pdf)
- "Large Course Redesign," The Center for Teaching and Learning UNC Charlotte, <http://teaching.uncc.edu/services-we-provide/large-course-redesign>
- "Active Learning Classrooms," University of Minnesota Office of Classroom Management, <http://www.classroom.umn.edu/projects/ALCOverview.html>
- "IMPACT: Redesigning Education," Purdue University, <http://www.purdue.edu/impact/>

### Resource Investment: Low

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Use Low-Stakes Assessments Early and Often to Intervene Before Learning Gaps Develop	Faculty time to create formative assessments and provide additional feedback
<input type="checkbox"/> Promote Student Engagement Through Active Learning Practices	Minimal

## Priority: Evaluate and Revise Course-Related Materials to Advance Equitable Access and Outcomes

Assessing Current Practice: Course Materials Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are all course materials written at an appropriate grade level to ensure all students can easily understand the content? Do course materials avoid opaque jargon? (If you answered no, see strategy 6 on pg. 16-17.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does academic course content explicitly align with in-demand industry skills? Are students made aware of the employability of skills they are learning in class? Are they prepared to articulate this skill development to employers? (If you answered no, see strategy 7 on p. 17-18).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Strategy 6: Conduct a Jargon-Reduction Audit to Ensure Course Materials Use Accessible Language

For first-generation and historically underserved college students, college terminology can be opaque and act as an access barrier. Many colleges have limited the use of jargon in communication materials related to administrative processes and policies, but few consider the complex terminology often used in classes. Though often overlooked, course-related jargon can be just as complex and overwhelming. In order to evaluate and address the use of inaccessible language on syllabi and assessments, leading colleges engage faculty and staff in a jargon-reduction audit of course materials.

## Jargon-Reduction Audit Instructions:

1. **Reduce Multisyllabic Words:** Underline all words with more than two syllables. Identify and replace them with shorter words (even if this requires using multiple words in the place of one multisyllabic word).
2. **Remove Passive Voice:** Highlight all language in passive voice; rephrase sentences to be in active voice.
3. **Group Related Information:** Condense all text that pertains to the same topic in a specific area and use white space to separate it from information pertaining to another topic.
4. **Translate Jargon:** Replace jargon (where appropriate) with translations for a non-higher education audience.
5. **Evaluate Accessibility:** Copy and paste the revised text into the free [Gunning Fog Index](#) website to evaluate its grade-level equivalency. The score indicates the number of years of education needed to easily understand the text.

## Course Materials Jargon-Reduction Audit Example

### ✖ Original Text:

#### Class **Absence** Policy

All students should arrive to class on time and fully prepared. *Students are not permitted* to miss more than two classes within the semester. Those who do *will be subject to* a half point deduction for every additional missed class. Students should avoid missing any course exams or presentations, which *have been designated* on the syllabus. However, students who miss a major course assessment due to an emergency may retake the exam at another date determined by the instructor. In the case of extenuating circumstances, all aforementioned policies are subject to reevaluation at the discretion of the instructor. Students to whom this applies should direct their concerns to the instructor as soon as possible to ensure adequate accommodations are made.

Key:  
*Passive Voice*  
**Jargon**  
Multisyllabic

**Gunning Fog Index Score: 14.83**

### ✔ Revised Text:

#### If You Need to Miss a Class...

Even though teachers expect students to come to every class on time and prepared, they know that sometimes you will need to miss a class. Please try not to miss more than two classes during this term. If you must miss more than two, you will lose a half point for each extra class you miss.

Please do not miss a class during any of the scheduled exams or presentations, which are listed on the course outline. If there is an emergency, then you may take the exam at a later date. But keep in mind that your teacher will choose the date.

If something comes up and you are having trouble making it to class, please tell your teacher as quickly as you can. Your teacher can then decide how to proceed.


**Gunning Fog Index Score: 8.43**

## **Strategy 7: Highlight Industry-Aligned Competencies in Existing Curricula**

While career connection is not typically thought of as a solution to equity challenges, data on low-income student stop out rates suggests this is an under-invested area of focus. Helping students understand the long-term value of a credential can promote completion for nontraditional and underserved students. Embedding marketable industry-aligned skills in academic courses is a valuable way to ensure students connect their classroom experiences to future careers. This strategy also helps students learn to market their skills mastery when entering the workforce.

**Case-in-Point:** Faculty members, deans, and administrators at **Memorial University** developed a set of workplace-related competencies that could be matched to routine activities in coursework, such as group presentations and essays. They aim to show students explicit competencies that are already in the curriculum without requiring faculty to redesign courses. Once faculty identify the core competencies taught in the context of their courses, they teach students the importance of these skills and assist them in articulating their skills mastery. Faculty simply list the pre-identified competencies alongside corresponding assignments on course syllabi. To evaluate progress, they administer student surveys three times throughout the semester.

### Example Syllabus Call-Out of Employer-Demanded Skills

<p>Sample Syllabus – English 111</p> <p><b>Presentation – 30%</b>  <i>Students will form groups and present on a course topic.</i></p> <p>Portfolio – 30%  <i>Students keep a journal to record reading, reflections, and experiences.</i></p> <p>Class Participation – 10%  <i>Students are expected to attend, be prepared, and actively participate.</i></p> <p>Final Exam – 25%  <i>Written exam taken in class at the end of the semester.</i></p>	 <p><b>Competencies Developed by Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Working within the dynamic of a group</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Research skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Oral presentation skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Leadership skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ability to work within a set time frame</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Critical-thinking skills</li> </ul>
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### Resource Investment: Low

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct a Jargon-Reduction Audit to Ensure Course Materials Use Accessible Language	Minimal
<input type="checkbox"/> Highlight Industry-Aligned Competencies in Existing Curricula	Research and data analysis to determine employer-demanded skills; faculty time updating syllabi

# How Do We Ease the College Transition for Underserved Students?

## Introduction


Nontraditional and underserved students often arrive on campus already at a disadvantage to their peers. Many are underprepared for the rigor of college-level coursework, and few have experience navigating the bureaucratic practices of the college system. Colleges that engage students prior to their arrival can address these challenges through academic and student services programming.

## Priority: Engage the Pipeline of Prospective Students Through Preparatory Academic Programming

Assessing Current Practice: Student Engagement Diagnostic	Yes	No
Does the college offer adequate preparation to bridge student learning gaps prior to their first term? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 8 on p. 19-21.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Strategy 8: Prepare Underserved Students Through Easy-Access Summer Programs





Rather than provide static outreach to prospective students, leading colleges personalize their recruitment to engage underserved students. Bridge programs build connections with prospective students while preparing them for upcoming college coursework. The programs enable colleges to reach the students who can benefit the most through a targeted recruitment campaign in conjunction with local districts.



### Implementation Guidelines

- ☐ Coordinate with local high school counselors to target the right students.
- ☐ Provide counselors with the necessary recruitment and registration information.
- ☐ Prepare counselors to discuss the bridge program with students at critical junctures of the high school experience (e.g. class registration, application deadlines).
- ☐ Expand access to as many students as possible by hosting several summer sessions of basic introductory core content.
- ☐ Incorporate career-oriented, hands-on activities that have real-world applications to make classes experiential.
- ☐ Include a campus tour in each session and opportunities for students to learn about the college's program offerings.
- ☐ Offer recordings of the sessions online for the students who were unable to travel to campus to participate in the bridge program

## Summer Bridge Program Implementation Components

PROGRAM LOGISTICS		STUDENT RECRUITMENT	ONLINE PORTAL
 <b>Multiple Sessions Available</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-week sessions held throughout the summer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Monday through Thursday</li> <li>–2 hours/day</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <b>Relevant Content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content specific to introductory college classes</li> <li>• Taught by instructor teaching the class during the year</li> <li>• Average of 4-5 different classes per summer</li> <li>• Require a minimum of 8-10 students to offer a bridge for a particular course</li> </ul>	 <b>Targeted Personalized Recruitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertise signup aggressively during course scheduling with high school counselors</li> <li>• Calls or school visits made as needed to get most at-risk students to attend</li> </ul>	 <b>Maximized Access</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers some recorded videos and all supporting content covered during the Summer Bridge</li> <li>• Provides alternative for students who cannot attend due to personal or family obligations</li> </ul>

**Case-in-Point: Georgia State University's** Success Academy is an intensive early start cohort program that awards credit for preparatory coursework. Realizing that non-credit bearing developmental education delays and often prohibits completion for many underprepared students, Georgia State prepares students by enrolling them in college-level coursework the summer before their first semester while providing additional support. As a cohort, these incoming students attend courses already offered in the summer term. To eliminate extraneous costs, the university enrolls participants in the same courses as returning students who serve as confidence-building role models. The early credit accumulation builds momentum that propels students towards completion. The Success Academy **increased fall-to-fall retention rates for student participants from 50% to 87%; these students earn an average GPA of 3.29.**

### Key Features of Intensive Early Start Cohorts:

1. Underserved students with low high school GPAs or SAT scores are automatically enrolled in the intensive early start.
2. Aid-eligible students must complete two FAFSA applications (i.e., one for the summer term and one for the fall term).
3. Students enroll for six or more summer credits in core requirements.

## Intensive Credit-Bearing Summer Cohort Overview

### Early Start Success Program

**What It Is**

The Early Start Success Program gives students the opportunity to get onto campus early, build relationships, study skills, and start earning credits towards their degree. Students receive support and guidance throughout the program.

**Why Participate**

Students develop essential skills for success, like study habits, financial literacy, and leadership skills. Students also have the opportunity to work closely with academic advisors and peer mentors to build a degree plan and learn about other students' experiences.

<p><b>Requirements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Complete online participation form</li> <li>✓ Complete FAFSA for previous year</li> <li>✓ Complete FAFSA for coming year</li> <li>✓ Earn a minimum of a 2.5 GPA</li> <li>✓ Attend orientation</li> <li>✓ Participate in weekly supplemental instruction sessions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Course Requirements</b></p> <p><i>Courses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Orientation (1)</li> <li>• English Composition (3)</li> <li>• History 101 (3) OR Political Science 101 (3)</li> </ul> <p><b>How to Participate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go to the Early Start Success Program portal</li> <li>• Contact the program director</li> </ul>	<p><b>Important Dates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation forms due Friday, April 14</li> <li>• Early Start Summer Program registration and welcome Wednesday, May 31</li> <li>• Early Start Summer Program Orientation begins Thursday, June 1</li> <li>• Classes begin Monday, June 5</li> </ul>
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"The Early Start Success Program allowed me to become more comfortable on campus and made me feel prepared for my first fall semester."

"I learned a ton during the Early Start Success Program from study and communication skills to where to get help on campus!"

"The Early Start Success Program was really challenging at times, but I'm so proud of all I accomplished!"

**Make sure students (and parents) understand what the program is**

- Keep the message positive
- Avoid using terms like at-risk and remediation

**Call out the benefits of participating in the program**

- Lay out the connections they'll make and the skills they'll build
- Consider including information on student success rates due to participation in the program

**Clearly lay out program requirements**

- What are the requirements?
- What activities will they participate in?
- How do students sign up to participate?
- What dates do they need to be aware of?
- Include any links to further information and application materials

**Quotes from past participants**

- Testimonies from past participants can help get new students excited about the program and interested in participating

## Resource Investment: High

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare Underserved Students Through Easy-Access Summer Programs	Reserved campus space for programming; content preparation; faculty staffing; marketing materials; online portal preparation



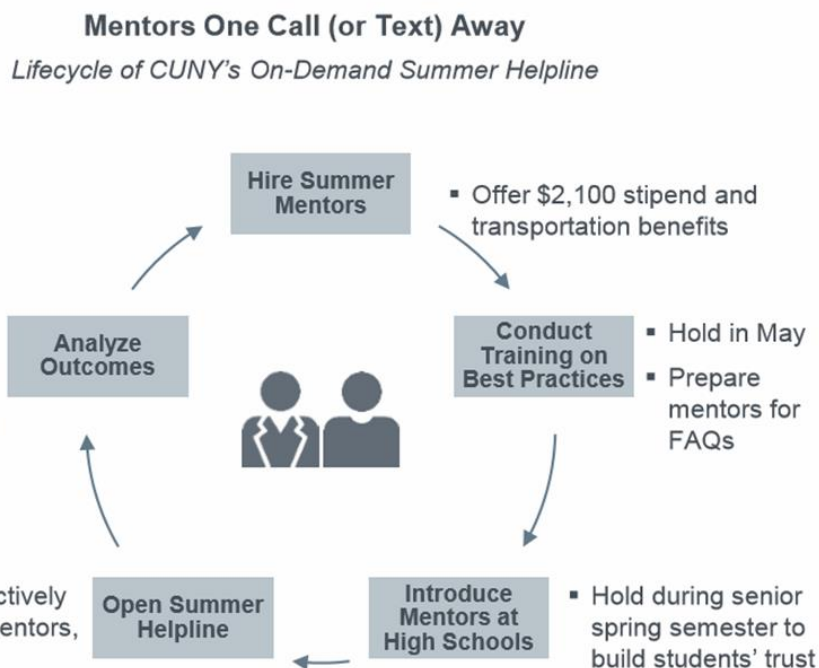
# Priority: Support Underserved and Nontraditional Students Through Matriculation

Assessing Current Practice: Navigation Assistance Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are incoming students provided adequate assistance to complete all necessary onboarding steps? Does the college take sufficient steps to combat summer melt? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 9 on p. 22.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do incoming students use a variety of support services? Are they aware of the resources available to them? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 10 on p. 23.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Strategy 9: Establish On-Demand Student Support

Navigating decades-old policies and procedures in a complicated college terrain can be overwhelming for nontraditional students and those from underserved backgrounds. During this pre-enrollment phase, colleges lose a number of students who never matriculate. To combat summer melt, leading colleges alleviate some of the application and onboarding challenges through supplemental support for incoming students by providing remote, on-demand assistance throughout matriculation.

**Case-in-Point: City University of New York** tackled this challenge by offering a summer helpline for prospective students that provides on-demand answers to last-minute questions about health forms, financial aid packages, transportation routes, etc. This program requires no commitment from students but is instead offered as a service that is tailored to meet student needs. Students can call or text the school to discuss their questions and concerns; the use of a voice- and SMS-based helpline makes resources more easily available for students who don't have ready access to the Internet. The helpline is staffed by professional advisors and trained student mentors, which makes the experience more accessible for those who prefer talking to a peer rather than an administrator. CUNY's on-demand summer helpline **contributed to a nine percentage point enrollment increase.**





## Strategy 10: Provide Pre-Enrollment Assistance with Equity-Driven Success Course

While onboarding assistance is critical, students are also in need of ongoing support throughout their entire college experience. However, students who are unaware of how to seek help and who fail to do so are less likely to complete their degree on time—or at all. To ensure incoming students are prepared for success, leading colleges host a summer workshop that not only provides pre-matriculation assistance but also nudges students to continuously use the resources available to them beyond the first semester.

**Case-in-Point: Hocking College** launched a free, 8-week course to assist incoming students with critical enrollment steps while developing ongoing student success skills. The course, which is primarily marketed to prospective students age 25 and older, includes campus tours highlighting where to locate key resources, an introduction to student support opportunities, FAFSA workshops, and an overview of necessary academic skills. The director of enrollment typically facilitates the course, while instructors and student services staff provide weekly lessons on key topics related to the enrollment process and student success. For example, guest speakers, students/alumni, and faculty from underserved backgrounds can host sessions discussing the unique challenges that students may face and the best strategies to overcome them. At the end of the course, advisors meet with students to chart out a college success plan that addresses their unique needs. The course also provides students with the opportunity to establish a network of peers who may share similar backgrounds and experiences, thus increasing feelings of belonging for underserved and nontraditional students. Those who complete the course are awarded one credit and receive a scholarship for an additional 3-credit course the following semester.

### Sample Success Course Curriculum

Topic	Week	Description	Session Leader	Recommended Materials
Introduction	1-2	Admissions office student volunteers provide a tour of the campus. Students visit academic departments and meet with faculty. Students explore the academic success center, disability and student services building, and the library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student Tour Guides</li><li>• Enrollment Director</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• College Welcome Day Tour</li><li>• College Welcome Day Information Session</li></ul>
Financial Aid	3	Financial aid staff guide students through the process of paying for college. Students learn how to complete the FAFSA and create a FSA ID. Financial aid staff explain the scholarship portal and available work-study opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial Aid Staff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FAFSA Primer</li><li>• Computer lab</li></ul>
Placement Exams	4	Placement testing staff introduce students to the ACCUPLACER exams. Students receive an overview of the exams, their components, testing procedures, and expected scores. Students also receive a math tutorial and study materials from a developmental math instructor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Placement Testing Director</li><li>• Developmental Math Instructor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accuplacer Primer and Study Guide</li><li>• College Math 101 Study Guide</li></ul>
Academic Skills	5-7	A student success instructor teaches students study and test taking skills. Skills include highlighting, learning keywords, preparing for class, taking notes, and asking for help. A guest instructor delivers a 10-minute lecture on an unfamiliar topic to help students practice the skills. Students observe an actual class in a field of their choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First-Year Experience Course Instructor</li><li>• Guest Professor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Guest lecturer PowerPoint</li><li>• Notebooks</li><li>• Pens</li><li>• Highlighters</li><li>• First-Year Experience Course Guidebook</li></ul>
Review and Express Registration	8	The pre-enrollment course facilitator reviews content presented throughout the course. Students conclude the course by attending a quick registration event. They register for next semester's classes and meet with an academic advisor in their field of interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pre-Enrollment Success Course Facilitator</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Course Registration Computer Lab</li></ul>

## Resource Investment: High

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish On-Demand Student Support	Staffing; stipend for student mentors; voice- and SMS-enabled technology
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide Pre-Enrollment Assistance with Equity-Driven Success Course	Reserved campus space for the course; faculty staffing; assistance from student support services staff; course content preparation

# How Do We Devise Sustainable Advising Structures?

## Introduction

Disproportionate advisor-to-student ratios remain a consistent challenge for colleges looking to increase the number of advising interactions and bolster the quality of student advice. While many colleges resort to adding advisors to address the challenge, this option proves prohibitively expensive and does not guarantee improved advice. In order to create sustainable advising solutions, leading colleges prioritize increased ease of access and targeted interventions while optimizing existing technology to increase the number of advising touchpoints and improve overall effectiveness.

## Priority: Increase the Number of Student-to-Advisor Interactions for Highest-Risk Students

Assessing Current Practice: Advising Touchpoints Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are advisors housed in an easy-to-access building on campus? Are students with limited time to spend on campus easily able to see advisors or schedule appointments? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 11 on p. 25.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do advisors have sufficient structures in place to reach unresponsive and at-risk students? Do traditional forms of student outreach prove to be effective? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 12 on p. 25-26.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **Strategy 11: Ensure Easy Access to Advisors with Temporary Advising Stations**

Colleges express interest in increasing the number of advising touchpoints, but nontraditional students struggle to find the time for appointments, creating unintentional student access barriers. In order to provide greater support for students—especially those who spend very little time on campus (e.g., part-time students, working adults)—leading colleges make interactions with advisors more accessible.

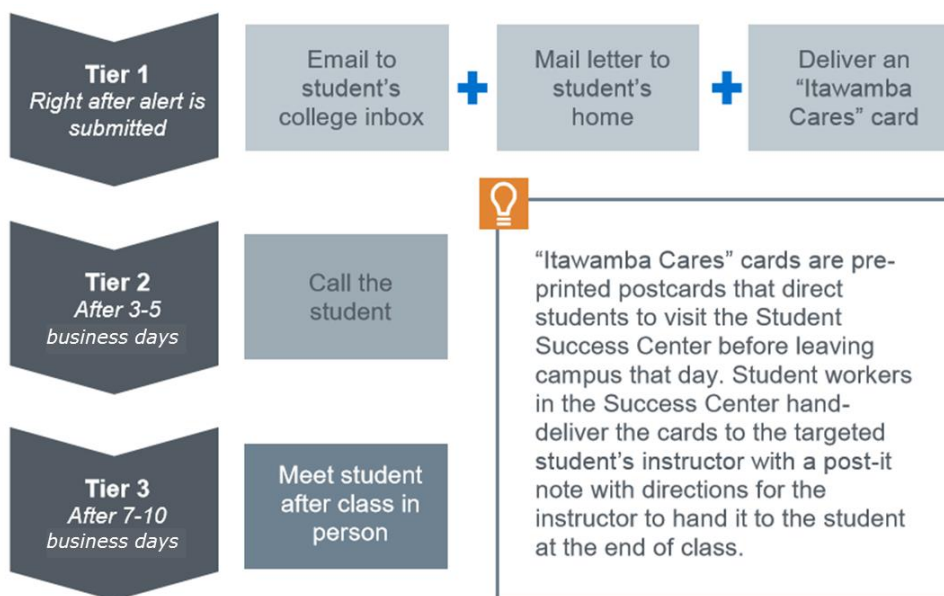
**Case-in-Point: Davidson County Community College** increases student-to-advisor interactions with their “Advisors on the Go” program. Each week advisors set up advising stations in high traffic locations inside the campus buildings that house the most popular classes. This is simply a matter of relocating advisors to be highly visible and accessible. The goal is to meet students where they are and not wait for them to come to the advising center. “Advisors on the Go” creates opportunities to engage students, faculty and staff with advising services. Advisors rotate through different buildings to boost the frequency of interactions with students and to share important information to students who may not have time to make regular office visits.

### **Strategy 12: Target Unresponsive and High-Risk Students with Tiered Outreach**

Most colleges rely on an early alert system to notify advisors of at-risk student behaviors, but these systems tend to be underutilized. Upon receiving an alert flag, advisors reach out to these at-risk students, often to no avail. A targeted and tiered outreach approach can yield greater results by diversifying communications through multiple media. This strategy forces advisors to narrow their focus and allocate the greatest amount of time to the students most in need of support.

**Case-in-Point:** Advisors at **Itawamba Community College** employ a tiered approach to outreach. After receiving a student alert, advisors send an email, a letter, and a pre-printed card directing students to visit student support resources. These cards are directly handed to students at the end of class. If a student fails to respond to any of these tier 1 interventions within a week, an advisor then calls the student to speak with them directly. Alternatively, advisors may use text messaging to contact students during tier 2 outreach. Finally, for those who do not respond to tier 2 interventions, tier 3 involves the advisor meeting the student in person immediately after a class.

### Itawamba Community College’s Tiered Outreach Model



### Resource Investment: Low

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure Easy Access to Advisors with Temporary Advising Stations	Minimal
<input type="checkbox"/> Target Unresponsive and High-Risk Students with Tiered Outreach	Outreach materials (i.e. emails, letters sent home, and pre-printed care cards directing students to student services)

## Priority: Optimize Advising Technology to Promote Student Persistence

Assessing Current Practice: Technology Optimization Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are high-risk students exposed to growth mindset and other theories that could increase grit and resilience? Do advisors incorporate these principles in conversations with students? (If you answered no, see strategy 13 on p. 27.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the college's early alert software used to its maximum capacity? Is there a system in place to praise students for their progress? (If you answered no, see strategy 14 on p. 28.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Strategy 13: Build Student Confidence Through Pre-Enrollment Resilience Primer

Advisors often strive to help students build grit in the face of adversity and to embrace a growth mindset. However, advisors' time is limited and much of it is spent providing transactional support, such as registration assistance. To ensure that students understand the concepts of intellectual and social growth prior to arriving on campus, colleges can use their website to engage students in a resilience primer, educating all incoming students of growth mindset theory. This online pre-orientation module serves to increase the likelihood of a smooth college transition and a successful first term.

**Case-in-Point:** To address the gap in student confidence between incoming traditional and nontraditional students, the **University of Texas at Austin** integrated a resilience primer exercise called "The UT Mindset" into existing online information for new students. Researchers at the university tested the effectiveness of this strategy in a controlled experiment. Some students received a set of readings and activities that emphasize growth (i.e., intelligence is not fixed but something that can be improved over time) and belonging (i.e., it is normal to feel disconnected from others when adjusting to new environments but connection will come with time), while the control group read general passages about Austin's climate and culture. Then, students reflected on what they read by writing a personal message to another student struggling to acclimate to college, reinforcing and personalizing the key lessons in the readings. For the control group, there was no clear impact measured by credit completion after the first term. For low-risk students, neither intervention made much of an impact. But **for high-risk students, the growth and belonging exercise had a significant impact: the gap between their credit completion rate and that of the low-risk population was cut in half, from 12% to 6%.** Administrators now include this exercise in pre-orientation for all incoming students.

### Effectiveness of Resilience Primer on Student Motivation Compared to Control Group



## **Strategy 14: Reinforce Productive Student Behavior with Positive Alerts**

While colleges commonly use early alert systems to flag detrimental student trends or behaviors, few use such systems to laud student progress. Colleges can supplement traditional early alert software to enable faculty to track and notify advisors of productive student behavior.

**Case-in-Point: Northern Virginia Community College** modified its early alert system to accommodate for positive alerts that are visible to both students and advisors. These positive alerts, known as “kudos,” trigger an automated email to the student praising them for their demonstrated progress. The notifications also make advisors aware of student growth, which can be used in forthcoming conversations to promote student persistence. Colleges can ensure simplicity of use for faculty by making the kudos recommendations easy to navigate. They can also pre-write emails based on general kudos categories to be sent to students, automatically notifying them of their progress.

### **Alert Flags and Kudos Descriptions**

<b>Flag Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Assignment Concerns	Faculty has concerns about a student’s low scores on assignments
Attendance Concerns	Faculty has concerns about a student’s poor attendance habits
In Danger of Failure	Student requires immediate intervention to avoid failing the course
Low Participation	Faculty has concerns about student engagement in the course
Low Quiz/Test Scores	Faculty has concerns about a student’s low scores on quizzes and tests
Never Attended	Student never (or has not yet) attended the course section
<b>Kudos Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Keep Up the Good Work	Faculty wants to encourage a student to maintain a strong work ethic and produce positive results
Outstanding Academic Performance	Faculty wants to congratulate a student on academic success
Showing Improvement	Student shows significant improvement from previous performance or behavior

### **Resource Investment: Medium**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Build Student Confidence Through Pre-Enrollment Resilience Primer	Module creation (i.e. designated readings, writing prompts, and scenarios)
<input type="checkbox"/> Reinforce Productive Student Behavior with Positive Alerts	Time to reconfigure early alert system; pre-written kudos descriptions and email notifications



# How Do We Create Systemic Change to Support Nontraditional Populations?

## Introduction

According to national survey data, the primary reason nontraditional students fail to persist is attributed to non-cognitive pressures. Although advising and support services can help reduce attrition, external demands often prevent the students who benefit most from a college's resources from accessing them. However, meeting the needs of nontraditional student populations does not necessitate an entire overhaul of institutional policies and services. Rather, leading colleges maximize existing resources to help facilitate student persistence.

## Priority: Provide More Comprehensive Support for Nontraditional Students

Assessing Current Practice: Support Services Diagnostic	Yes	No
Are career services and student support staff prepared to embrace alternative student experience beyond traditional on-campus involvement? Are nontraditional students prepared to market their experiences to future employers? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 15 on p. 29-30.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nontraditional students take advantage of relevant campus resources? Are students fully aware of the services available? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 16 on p. 30-31.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **Strategy 15: Shift Perceptions of Student Involvement**





Nontraditional students often lack the time to involve themselves in on-campus leadership and extracurricular activities. Instead of encouraging first-generation, part-time and working students to spend more time on campus, leading colleges recognize their off-campus involvement and help them market that involvement to future employers. To accomplish this, colleges can expand existing leadership programming and career services to embrace students' experiences and to help these students align their off-campus involvement with marketable skills. This support allows part-time students to maximize their college experience and promote themselves to the workforce.

#### **Implementation Guidelines**

- ☐ Train advisors, student support, and career services staff to expand their conception of student involvement beyond the traditional student's experience.
- ☐ Encourage collaboration among these staff members as they determine a list of possible nontraditional student experiences and related professional benefits.
- ☐ Combine this list into a student-friendly graphic that supports students as they build resumes and prepare to apply to future jobs.
- ☐ Post the graphic on the college website, and provide hand-outs to students in classes and at meetings with advisors.



## Sample Student Experience Guide

 <b>Traditional Student Involvement</b>	 <b>First Generation Student Alternative</b>	 <b>Part-Time Learner Alternative</b>	 <b>Career Development Outcome</b>
<b>Internship</b>	<b>Off-campus job</b>	<b>Off-campus, full-time job</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and professional development</li> <li>• Experience juggling multiple responsibilities</li> </ul>
<b>Peer mentor</b>	<b>Mentor at local YMCA</b>	<b>Supervisor who trains new hires</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community involvement</li> <li>• Communication and coaching skill development</li> </ul>
<b>President of student organization</b>	<b>Student athlete</b>	<b>Member of training development team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork and collaboration experience</li> <li>• Opportunity to explore an area of interest</li> </ul>
<b>Tutor at nearby high school</b>	<b>Ambassador to former high school</b>	<b>Coach for child's soccer team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resume-building volunteer experience</li> <li>• Opportunity to build communication and coaching skills</li> </ul>

### **Strategy 16: Maximize Student Service Access with Personalized Resource Nudges**

Students face a surprising challenge when seeking support: a paradox of choice. Although students have an abundance of resources available to them, they often fail to take advantage of any without guidance as to which ones are most relevant. To encourage increased use of available services, leading colleges align student needs with campus services and invite students to take advantage of the appropriate resources.

**Case-in-Point:** To maximize access to student services, **Mount Wachusett Community College** uses personalized resource nudges. First, administrators take an inventory of all current services provided to students. The inventory informs the creation of a student survey: each question on the intake survey corresponds with relevant services. Then, to identify individual student needs prior to matriculation, the college administers the survey early in the college experience—such as when students take placement exams.

The survey solicits feedback related to a variety of needs, including access to technology, confidence in academic decision-making, and transportation to campus, all of which contributes to the student profile in the student information system. Based on each student's needs, administrators send custom invitations via SMS encouraging students to participate in relevant programs and services. Students who indicate a specific area of need on their intake survey (e.g., support caring for young children) receive personalized nudges that connect them to resources that would suit those specific needs (e.g., on-campus child care). Since the survey's launch, **Mount Wachusett's persistence rates improved 20%**, which is largely credited to increased use of on-campus services.

## Sample Student Intake Survey

<b>1</b>	<b>Do you need information about housing options?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>2</b>	<b>Are you comfortable using a computer on a daily basis?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>3</b>	<b>Do you have regular (daily) access to a reliable computer with reliable Internet access?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>4</b>	<b>Do you plan on joining any social or extracurricular groups?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>5</b>	<b>Would you like to learn more about accommodations from Disability Services?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>6</b>	<b>Do you have reliable transportation to and from class?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>7</b>	<b>Do you feel confident in your major and/or career pathway selection?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>8</b>	<b>Are you sure of your declared program/major?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>9</b>	<b>Do you plan to work while attending college?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>10</b>	<b>Do you have a financial plan to pay for all present and future semesters?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>11</b>	<b>Are you responsible for the care of children and/or other dependents?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>12</b>	<b>Are you or a family member a veteran or a current member of the armed forces?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>13</b>	<b>Do you or a family member need assistance understanding English?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>14</b>	<b>Do you have trouble feeding yourself or a family member?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes
<b>15</b>	<b>Do you feel comfortable managing stress?</b>	No	Unsure	Yes

## Resource Investment: Medium

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Shift Perceptions of Student Involvement	Staff training; graphic creation
<input type="checkbox"/> Maximize Student Service Access with Personalized Resource Nudges	Survey data collection and analysis; student outreach (resource invitations)

# Priority: Institutionalize Practices that Accommodate Nontraditional Students

Assessing Current Practice: Institutional Practices Diagnostic	Yes	No
Does the college have a system in place to track students and intervene when they are unregistered for future terms? Do interventions occur early enough to provide ample support? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 17 on p. 32-33.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are student course withdrawal requests centrally tracked? Are students required to give a reason for withdrawing upon submitting their requests? Are students advised of the potential consequences of withdrawing? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 18 on pg. 33-34.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are late-term stop outs centrally tracked? Does the college have a structured approach to reengage and incentivize these students' return? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 19 on p. 34-35).</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nontraditional students use prior learning and other alternative credits to advance towards their degree? Are they aware of these options? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 20 on p. 36.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nontraditional students map their long-term education and career plans to inform course registration? Are students incentivized to create these plans? <i>(If you answered no, see strategy 21 on pg. 36-37.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Strategy 17: Advance Term-to-Term Persistence with Proactive Outreach**

Because they face a host of external challenges, community college students are especially prone to early attrition. Changes in work schedules and access to transportation or childcare are common contributors to premature stop out. Many colleges remain unaware of these external barriers and are unable to provide the timely assistance students need to persist. Leading colleges target students who are unenrolled for the following term, proactively communicating ways the college can address their needs in order to prevent attrition.

**Case-in-Point:** To prevent unnecessary stop out for nontraditional students, **Regis University's School of Professional Studies** looks ahead at next term enrollment and targets unregistered students with proactive intervention. Administrators compile a list, or registration census, of currently enrolled students who are not registered for upcoming courses. This should be done as early in the term as possible. Once the list of "at-risk" students is created, the school sends each student on the list a templated email the following week. These emails include links to financial aid and other relevant resources. By the middle of the semester, the list is updated to include any remaining unregistered students. At this point, advisors, or "reenrollment counselors" as Regis calls them, begin contacting students directly. (This outreach is conducted preferably through personalized phone calls, but automated calls prompting students to see their advisors can be more efficient for large colleges.) The goal at this point of the outreach is to determine specific student needs and identify how the college can best support them. The final step is to follow-up with an automatic "last chance" email to any students who are still not registered for the following semester. As a result of this outreach, Regis **enrolled an additional 830 students**, yielding more than one million dollars in tuition revenue.

## Outreach Strategy to Connect with Unregistered Students



### **Strategy 18: Automate Student Withdrawal Surveys to Identify Greatest Student Barriers**

Stop outs can be the result of a number of student challenges—from academic barriers to financial holds. Though some may seem minor and unavoidable, to many nontraditional students, an unexpected flat tire can be the financial burden that forces an early stop out. Colleges that do not have an established system to retrieve and process student feedback related to the root cause of course withdrawals are missing an opportunity for growth. Leading colleges solicit this input to identify cases where intervention proves appropriate and to improve advising services.

**Case-in-Point:** To ensure students were not impulsively withdrawing from courses for avoidable reasons, **Penn State University** built a web-based withdrawal survey module to transform a one-click transaction into an opportunity for personalized advising. Students who wish to withdraw from a course are required to complete the online survey module before processing the withdrawal. The online module—based in the existing student information system—takes students through a series of prompts to identify their greatest needs and reason for withdrawing from the course. First, students are shown a list of potential implications, such as loss of financial aid, delay in degree progress, or changes in academic standing. If students continue with the withdrawal, they must then choose among a comprehensive list of reasons, each prompting pre-determined feedback and links to relevant contacts on campus that might address their given concerns and discourage any unnecessary withdrawals. Finally, if students persist, the module lists all potential implications of withdrawal once more and requires the student to re-enter their password to finalize the decision. Penn State reports that **nearly 40% of students who begin the module do not complete the withdrawal process**, illustrating the value of this more involved process.

## Student Withdrawal Survey Guidelines



Withdrawal survey module  
accessible through Penn State's  
ELion student dashboard

### 1 Student confirms desire to withdraw from course or institution

- Module provides definition of withdrawal and distinction from course drop, and leave of absence

### 2 Student acknowledges withdrawal consequences

- Module includes resources for learning consequences to veteran benefits, housing and dining options, and financial aid

### 3 Student selects one or more withdrawal reason(s)

- Students can choose from 22 academic, personal, and other reasons for withdrawing
- Students select a primary reason and any number of secondary reasons

### 4 Withdrawal module displays targeted recommendations

- Based on selected withdrawal reason(s), students are given alternatives to withdrawal
- Provides positive and encouraging message

### 5 Student confirms withdrawal decision

- Students must review consequences and alternatives one additional time before processing institutional withdrawal request

#### Sample Withdrawal Implications

*If withdraw from course*

- Grades:** You will receive "W" grade symbols for current semester courses.
- Financial Aid:** If you are receiving financial aid, you may lose some or all of your grants, loans or scholarships. You should contact the Office of Student Aid before withdrawing.

*If withdraw from institution*

- Health Insurance:** You may become ineligible for health insurance benefits. You should contact your insurance company before withdrawing.
- Previous Semester Courses:** Courses from previous semesters with deferred grades "DF", no grades "NG" or Research "R" will not be affected by a withdrawal for the current semester.

#### Sample Withdrawal Reasons

*Students will be given personalized recommendations based on the selected reasons.*

- Academic Risk:**
  - Failed a major assignment
  - Poor overall grade in course
  - Didn't meet conditions for major acceptance
- Study and Time Management Skills**
  - Overwhelmed by course workload
  - Can't balance class with job schedule
  - Struggling with completing assignments
- Personal or Family Health Concerns**
  - Child care needs
  - Personal or family illness
  - Feeling homesick
  - Feeling depressed or unmotivated
- Major and Career Planning**
  - Major not a good fit
  - Unsure about career
  - Desired major not offered at institution
- Low Campus Engagement**
  - Considering transferring to a new institution
  - Not sufficiently challenged
  - Feeling bored or socially disconnected

## Strategy 19: Engage Late-Term Stop Outs Through Targeted Reenrollment Campaign

Even with personal outreach and additional support, some students will inevitably withdraw from a course, and many will stop out altogether even though they are only a few credits short of their degree. This late-term stop out can be especially common for nontraditional and part-time students whose demanding lives create roadblocks on the path to graduation. Often, personalized communication from a caring advisor and some kind of financial assistance is all these students need to return to the college to earn their credentials.

**Case-in-Point:** The **University of New Mexico** launched a targeted reenrollment campaign to reengage late-term stop outs and incentivize their return to campus with a simplified reentry process. The university identifies recent stop outs with the academic and financial qualifications necessary to reenroll and complete their degree quickly. First, the University identifies students who left the school at least one semester prior, were in good financial standing, and had earned a GPA of 2.0 or better at the time of stop out. Then, university leaders mail letters to the most recent address on file for each student; most students stop checking their campus email accounts after withdrawing. For students who are hard to locate, the university contacts credit reporting agencies to obtain mailing addresses. UNM offers the students a small financial incentive (e.g., up to \$750 in grant aid) and streamlines their reenrollment into necessary courses by overriding enrollment caps. On average, **UNM reenrolls 50 to 70 students** each term.




## Implementation Guidelines



- ☐ Target eligible students.
  - Use student exit survey results or pull data from the SIS to compile a list of stopped out students who were just 20 or fewer credits shy of completion. Verify that the students were in good academic and financial standing at the time of stop out.
- ☐ Reengage through personal outreach.
  - Recruit these students back to campus with a mailed invitation to reenroll and complete their degrees.
- ☐ Alleviate financial burdens.
  - Offer a small financial aid allotment to assist with the cost of tuition.
- ☐ Simplify the reenrollment process.
  - Create a simplified reentry process that waives fees.
- ☐ Provide ongoing support.
  - Enlist a dedicated advisor who can override enrollment caps to get students into the courses they need to reduce the likelihood of further delays. The advisor monitors the students' registrar and bursar accounts closely and communicates with the students regularly to alert them of upcoming deadlines.

## UNM Sample Reenrollment Campaign Letter



THE UNIVERSITY of  
NEW MEXICO

May 25, 2009

Dear Student,

We at the University of New Mexico care about you and your academic success, and have contacted you because our records show that you left UNM in good standing without finishing your bachelor's degree.

We have pre-qualified you for the Graduation Project—a program that makes it easier for you to return to complete your studies. Please let us know your continued interest in achieving a bachelor's degree:

☐ **YES, I would like to finish my bachelor's degree at UNM.**  
(Complete the reverse side of this letter and the enclosed admissions application, and then return both in the pre-paid postage envelope provided.)

We would like to help by offering the following services:

- **Admissions:** Simplified re-admit application: shorter than UNM's regular application and no application fee.
- **Correspondence and Online Courses:** Along with these courses, evening and weekend classes are available.
- **Tuition Assistance:** Students with a minimum GPA of 2.5 automatically qualify for the Regents' Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), which awards a tuition credit up to 50% of your tuition, not to exceed \$750 per semester (up to a total of \$3,000).
- **Tuition Payments:** The Graduation Project allows for monthly tuition payments (no additional fees) rather than requiring students to pay the entire amount of tuition before the semester starts.
- **Degree Summary:** We will provide you with a PROGRESS report to help you determine which classes you need to graduate, and recommend that you meet with your advisor (every semester) to create and revisit your plan.
- **Enrollment:** If you find that you are "shut-out" of a course that is a specific requirement needed for your degree, call our office by Thursday before financial disenrollment and we will make every effort to get you into that class.

☐ **NO, I am not interested in completing my degree at UNM because** (please check below and return in the pre-paid postage envelope provided):

☐ I completed my degree at another university. Please note university and semester completed: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I'm not currently interested, but might be later, so please keep me on your mailing list.

☐ I'm not interested; please take me off your mailing list.

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions or would like further information regarding the Graduation Project, please contact our office at (505) 277-0896. We wish you well and hope UNM will be a part of your future success.





Sincerely,  
Vanessa Shields, M.S.  
Project Coordinator

## Strategy 20: Expand Student Access to Prior Learning Assessment Opportunities

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) awards credit to students who demonstrate mastery of college-level content through experiences occurring outside of the classroom. Although PLA can expedite completion especially for part-time and adult learners by helping them capitalize on their off-campus engagement, it remains largely underutilized. Many colleges do not market their PLA offerings, leaving prospective adult learners unaware of the opportunity. However, even students who know about the opportunity fail to use it because they struggle to navigate the opaque policies.

Leading colleges outline their institution-specific PLA policies and offer this information as a resource to all incoming students to help them self-select the PLA that aligns with their experiences and goals. For increased ease of access, colleges can provide hard copies of this outline at all admissions and student services buildings and include a digital copy on the college website.

### Sample PLA Key Characteristics Outline

Prior Learning Assessment Taxonomy				
	 Standardized Exams	 Course Challenge Exams	 Evaluated Training, Certification, or Licenses	 Portfolio Assessments
<b>Format</b>	Credits offered for multiple-choice tests that assess mastery of college-level content	Credits offered for exams developed by department, similar to course finals	Credits offered for standardized training from approved non-academic institution	Credits offered for skills documented through résumés, essays, projects, letters, etc.
<b>Skills Assessed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General education skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical skills</li> <li>General education skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional skills</li> <li>General education skills</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom study</li> <li>Independent study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work experience</li> <li>Classroom study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Military training</li> <li>Apprenticeship or licensure training</li> <li>Standardized corporate training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work experience</li> <li>Extracurricular learning</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test-taking skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test-taking skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transcript from training provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong writing skills,</li> <li>Portfolio course (at some institutions)</li> </ul>
<b>Assessor</b>	Exam provider (e.g., College Board, ETS)	Faculty	Faculty or third-party organization (e.g., ACE, NCCRS)	Faculty or third-party organization (e.g., LearningCounts, KNEXT)
<b>Time to Earn Credits</b>	90–180 minutes long, depending on provider	Typically no more than 3 hours	No additional time investment	Up to 15 weeks for portfolio completion
<b>Number of Credits Available</b>	Typically 3 credits per exam passed	Typically 3 credits per exam passed	Typically 3–40 credits, depending on training	Typically 3–15 credits, depending on experience
<b>Cost to Student</b>	\$80–\$91 per exam, depending on provider	\$20–\$100 per exam, depending on institution	\$40–\$45 transcript fee, if ordered from third-party organization	\$100–\$1,000 total, depending on course provider and assessor

#### Looking to establish your own PLA system on campus?

Consult [EAB's PLA Playbook](#) for tips on how to implement prior learning and competency-based assessments.



## Strategy 21: Facilitate Completion with Multi-Term Registration

Most colleges use term-by-term registration, which can serve as a detriment to students whose busy schedules necessitate long-term planning. Leading colleges facilitate future education and career planning through a multi-term registration process that allows students to plan external commitments further ahead. The benefits of this practice apply to the faculty and the institution as well, since instructors can plan their own courses a year in advance and the college can strategically align resources and faculty workload with enrollment in the most cost-effective manner possible.



**Case-in-Point:** When **West Hills Community College** set out to help more students create long-term plans, they decided to restructure the traditional term-by-term registration process. The West Hills Reg365 program incentivizes long-term educational planning by allowing the students who have crafted such a plan to enroll in a full year of courses (i.e., fall, spring, and summer) at one time. Students work with an advisor to map their long-term educational and career plans and determine the relevant necessary courses. Administrators use the data collected during registration to predict course demand and allocate resources accordingly; faculty collaborate to plan the upcoming year's courses and only need to do so once a year. Students then register for a full year of courses. This long-term focus and commitment expedites time to completion for full- and part-time students by giving them a guarantee that they are enrolled in the classes they need. Prior to Reg365, **14% of WHCC students enrolled in 30 or more credits during their first year and only 35% of students had an education plan; now over 18% of students enroll in 30 credits per year and 80% of students create long-range plans.**

## Lessons Learned from Multi-Term Registration Implementation

### 1 Conduct Pre-Requisite Checks Multiple Times

Staff use degree audit system to notify and drop students from summer, fall, and spring courses if prerequisites are no longer satisfied because of dropped (previous semester) courses



Conduct degree audit two times prior to each semester:

- Spring: early January, late April
- Summer: late May, mid-July
- Fall: early August, mid-November

### 2 Reduce Number of Course Scheduling Meetings

Faculty assemble once annually to plan a full year's worth of courses, rather than meeting two to three times per year to plan the schedule for each semester



College realizes advantage of long-term schedule planning:

- Forecast for budget needs
- Plan personal life around anticipated courses
- Identify course capacity and faculty demand earlier

### 3 Emphasize Full Course Load

Students urged to enroll in 15 credits per semester, instead of 12, during educational planning session with advisor; encourage students to adhere to previously developed educational plan



"15 credits is our standard. Anything less is an intervention."

*Stuart Van Horn, Vice Chancellor  
West Hills Community College*

### 4 Adjust Student Billing Timeline

Students billed in a two-part process for the entire year's tuition because district requires student payment within 24 hours of registration



- Fall and summer tuition due within 24 hours of registration
- Reminder statements sent out on October 1
- Spring tuition due on November 1

### 5 Market Multi-Term Registration Transition

Registrar works with marketing department to disperse clear information on new multi-term registration system



Learn from West Hills' Mistakes:

- Clarify who is eligible for multi-term registration
- Publish and explain new payment schedule proactively

## Resource Investment: High

Strategy	Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Advance Term-to-Term Persistence with Proactive Outreach	Email creation; phone calls
<input type="checkbox"/> Automate Student Withdrawal Surveys to Identify Greatest Student Barriers	Online withdrawal survey module creation
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage Late-Term Stop Outs Through Targeted Reenrollment Campaign	List compilation; address identification; letter construction and mailing; financial incentives; dedicated advising support
<input type="checkbox"/> Expand Student Access to Prior Learning Assessment Opportunities	Minimal
<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate Completion with Multi-Term Registration	Redesigned registration process; advisor time to devise education plans