

# The Evolution of Student Success

and 360+ Best Practices to Help You Adapt

The definition of student success has evolved considerably since the mid-20th century, when the issue first emerged in earnest. Looking back 50+ years, EAB identified six eras and ten practice areas that define student success theory and response. For those tasked with leading student success, the scope of responsibility during this time has expanded dramatically. New practices seem to accrue upon the old, rather than replace them.

In the last decade, the pace of change has accelerated due to student demographic shifts, technological innovations, and the economic fallout from the Great Recession. In response, EAB has amassed a growing library of student success research, including more than 360 proven, replicable practices to help colleges and universities adapt to the evolving landscape. Explore this framework to help contextualize how your own student success strategy is evolving.

## Key to EAB Best Practices

Bar height represents quantity of practices available in our library



### 1930s to 1960s

#### Pre-history of Student Success

In the late 1930s, the federal government surveys 60 schools in the first-ever study of "student mortality." Post-war enrollments swell as a result of the GI Bill and baby boom until the late 1960s, when the impact of expanding college access to new populations combines with the effects of student movements to generate the first widespread concerns over student attrition.

### 1970s

#### The Dawn of Retention Theory

William Spady and Vincent Tinto develop the first widely recognized theories of college student retention. These sociological models describe how a student's commitment to earning a college degree hinges on their integration to the college community and environment. This work will form the intellectual basis for subsequent student engagement programming and practice.

### 1980s

#### Bridging the Achievement Gap

Declining enrollments in the 1970s lead to the advent of enrollment management in the 1980s. As admissions offices collect more information on student backgrounds, researchers see that certain demographics graduate at lower rates than others. Schools respond by developing programming and services targeted to support specific student populations.

### 1990s

#### (Over-) Investment in the First Year

Attention shifts to supporting students through academic transitions, particularly from high school to college. In response, institutions invest heavily in first-year experiences and university colleges, and in the professional advisors to support these programs. The emphasis on first-year retention rates begins to overshadow graduation rates.

### 2000s

#### A Technological Revolution

New early alert technologies allow advisors for the first time to understand risk in terms of behaviors, not just demographics. Emphasis returns to graduation rates, and long-term degree planning becomes more commonplace as schools strive to translate first-year retention gains into degree completions. Developmental education reform launches to the forefront at many schools.

### 2010s

#### An Era of Rapid Change

The diversifying needs of a new generation of students intersect with the financial pressures of the Great Recession to dramatically accelerate change. Advising offices transform into student success offices. Concerns over the rising costs of college put an increased emphasis on shortening time to degree. Elevated rates of underemployment among new graduates makes career development an increasingly important part of the student success conversation. Some schools begin to experiment with strategically deploying small grants to support persistence.

## Selected Student Success Practices from the EAB Library

