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First 100 Days Persistence-Retention Plans

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ABSTRACT

Taking environments, persistence-retention, and social capital theories to the individual student as the level of analyses, and placing them within a "First 100 Days" strategy of prioritized urgency and energy as utilized by presidents of the United States since Franklin D. Roosevelt, the author challenges broad-based, long-term approaches to student persistence and institutional retention of students. A framework for "First 100 Days" persistence-retention plans for improved student and institution success is outlined.

INTRODUCTION

The values, vision, and mission of an institution are the ideological and inspirational foundation for strategies to improve an institution of higher education and its people. Strategies must be made practical for implementation that will improve the campus physically, relationally and culturally, organizationally for the engagement of people and resources to meet goals, and for the inclusion and success of every professional and student.

Informed by campus environment, persistence-retention, and social capital theories considered at the individual student level of analysis, enrollment management persistence-retention strategies should target individual student's social capital and experiences, develop institution-student partnerships, and inaugurate with the prioritized urgency and the energy of a "First 100 Days" agenda. The theoretical basis and "First 100 Days" traditions that support this thesis, a framework for "First 100 Days" persistence-retention plans are presented.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Numerous related theories and models justify this thesis; student-environments interface, persistence-retention, and social capital. That persistence-retention plans should be framed by individual student's social capital and experiences, and institution-student partnerships, is a logical progression from two influential bodies of this literature that stress the student-institution interface impacting outcomes.

Astin's (1970a, 1970b) Inputs-Environments-Outcomes Model (I-E-O) spotlights the interface of the students themselves, the student's *inputs* (I), with the institutional *environment* (E) of collegiate experiences and interventions, and the resulting outcomes (O) of that interface. Astin's model was the first to significantly, broadly describe the student-institution relationship and remains a conceptual framework for much persistence and retention research.

Elaborating on Astin's environment (E), Strange and Banning (2001, 2015) use an ecological model to assess the influence of four intersecting collegiate environments (physical, human aggregate, organizational, constructed) that impact student and institutional learning, growth, and development. They consider the interface of the student with the environment in

terms of attraction and persistence. Their approach has become a standard for broadly understanding the student-institution interface.

Numerous persistence-retention theories/models are conceptually rooted in Astin's I-E-O. They detail the importance of persistence-retention as a phenomenon and as a plan being connected to a student's social capital and experiences, and to institutional partnerships with a student. In chronological order, four theories/models, of various impact and perspectives, are very concisely introduced.

Tinto (1994) presents a longitudinal model of voluntary institutional departure that includes student characteristics and goals, interfaces and integrations within the academic and the social systems of the institution, and the balance of intentions, and commitments within and beyond the institution. Bean and Eaton (2000) present a psychological model of student departure that accentuates the student's psychological processes and outcomes within the environment that shape outcomes, attitudes of fit and loyalty, and intention and behavior regarding persistence.

Borland's (2001-2002) paradigms of improving retention is a paradigmatic discussion of the institution's economical, academic/learning, and student affairs/development frameworks, and the student's persistence frameworks of curricular/certification and social/connection objectives. Terenzini and Reason (2005) present the "parsing the first year of college" conceptual framework for studying the impacts of precollege characteristics and experiences, and their college experience (organizational context and peer environment) on the outcomes of learning, development, change, and persistence.

Concerning student social capital, Bourdieu and Coleman are considered the modern "fathers" of social capital theory. Bourdieu (1973, 1986) oriented social capital to yield economic and dominant cultural capital; attitudes, behaviors, credentials, education, and possessions required to promote social mobility. To Coleman (1988), social capital was oriented toward creating human capital; agency, skills, knowledge, and abilities to influence one's own outcomes. Shaped by Bourdieu and Coleman, oriented toward upward social mobility and positively influencing one's own outcomes, the theory of social capital has become important in its application to student persistence and institutional retention.

Almeida (Tierney & Duncheon, 2015), illustrating social capital as a basis for persistence and retention in higher education, infers the value of educators and others helping to develop students' social capital. In particular, developing the social capital of low income youth so they may become successful in regard to the persistence-retention issue of college readiness.

"FIRST 100 DAYS" AND "FIRST SIX WEEKS" TRADITIONS BASIS

Undergirded by tradition more than science, there are two models for accomplishing high priority, time sensitive actions with urgency and energy. They are motivationally and practically useful to higher education institutions seeking to immediately improve persistence-retention. "The First 100 Days" is a motivational and practical model used by American presidents, and by businesses divesting or acquiring a business. "The first six weeks" is a higher education parallel related to first year persistence-retention.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first U.S. president to use the first 100 days strategy to urgently and energetically implement a high-priority, time-sensitive agenda. In his *First Inaugural Address* (1933), he spoke of urgency, immediacy, and action to a desperate nation experiencing "The Great Depression" and the global unrest that soon led to World War II.

> *There are many ways in which it can be helped, but it can never be helped merely by talking about it. We must act and act quickly. ... There are the lines of attack. I shall presently urge upon a new Congress in special session detailed measures for their fulfillment, and I shall seek the immediate assistance of the several States. ... Through this program of action we address ourselves to putting our own national house in order. ... The (sic) emergency at home cannot wait. ... It is the way to recovery. It is the immediate way. It is the strongest assurance that the recovery will endure.*

An immediate, three-month legislative-executive blitz, the "Hundred Days," yielded the most wide-sweeping passing of legislation ever observed in such a concentrated period of time. The strategy was so effective, American presidents' are judged for accomplishments in their first 100 days. Famously, John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address* (1961) expressed this. "All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Businesses use the first 100 days strategy in the divesting or acquisition of one business by another. The first 100 days are "the most important days post-close because the acquired company is more disposed to handle change. This propensity is simply due to the expectation of change by most employees, and consequently delivers the most energy from those same employees for a buyer to implement change that can realize immediate value." The catalyzing of growth and the "low hanging fruit" of improvement can be quickly initiated, and "value can be created or risk mitigated" in relation to "retention" of customers and employees, "and making sure cultures are properly aligned" (Divestopedia, n.d.).

"The first six weeks" is an often cited belief in higher education that the end of the first six-weeks of a student's first term at an institution is a crossroads for success to persistence. Betsy Barefoot (personal correspondence, 2001), a national leader in first-year student persistence and interventions, held that there was no scientific support this perception of the first six weeks. Given the contemporary economy, attendance patterns, and diversity of students, that may be truer today. However, there remains a traditional belief in "the first six weeks."

"The Rule of the First Sixes" for persistence-retention (Borland, 2012) suggests there are numerous critically important persistence-retention junctures or decision-points leading to the first six weeks and beyond, making a strategic approach to persistence-retention issues and interventions advantageous during those first days. "The Rule of the First Sixes" is that persistence-retention will be influenced and must be improved by interventions within the individual student's first six minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months (and six years, not addressed herein) at the institution. These are those decision points with illustrative questions.

- 1st Six Minutes: Where can we park to unload, are these people friendly, am I already lost?
- 1st Six Hours: Have I found my room, had a good experience with a roommate, been made to feel welcome and safe, been able to get a meal, missed my family?

- 1st Six Days: Have I found all of my classes and felt confident, are the syllabi overwhelming, have I found people I can consider friends, am I functioning ok away from home?
- 1st Six Weeks: Am I successful a third to a half way through my first term of coursework, am I connecting to this place and the people and organizations, is college for me, can I find answers or support when I need it, do I want to come back for another term?
- 1st Six Months: Is my career plan working out, how is my money situation, as much as I miss home is this place feeling like "my home away from home"?

I-E-O, campus environment, persistence-retention, and social capital theories considered at the individual student level of analysis rather than the cohort support the design of persistence-retention plans targeting individual student's social capital and experiences, and developing institution-student partnerships. Yet, many persistence-retention plans are long-term, general, and could be improved with an intensive, inaugural strategy. The motivationally and practically oriented traditions of "The First 100 Days" the "first six weeks," and multiple persistence-retention decision points from the first six minutes to the first six months, support persistence-retention plans designed with the prioritized urgency and energy of "The First 100 Days."

"FIRST 100 DAY" PERSISTENCE-RETENTION PLANS

Therefore, "First 100 Day" persistence-retention plans must be unique to a student and a campus to address individual student's social capital and experiences, develop institution-student partnerships, and to work with prioritized urgency and energy in the student's first 100 (+/-) days. Plans must focus on individual student's inputs (I), interface with the environment (E), and student-institution co-ownership of the student's persistence-retention outcomes (O).

Analyze individual student's inputs (I); attending to specific student and human aggregate identity, academic and relational ability, pre-college experiences, life skill and higher education social capital, and other individual characteristics. Knowing the student in this way, analyze and intervene to improve each student's characteristics and persistence-retention at pre-college and at each of the 1st Sixes persistence decision points. Give special attention to the student's life skill and higher education social capital, as it is influential at each of the 1st Sixes persistence decisions points, and the development of social capital prior to reaching the next of the 1st Sixes persistence decision points.

Agree to and require student interfaces with the institution's environments (E); the physical, human aggregate, organizational, and constructed. Tell each student the plan for them and that its success is due to a 100 day institution-student partnership, requiring co-ownership, investment, prioritized urgency, and great energy, in institution interventions and in student efforts. Require and monitor student interfaces with the environment to analyze and refine interventions to improve each student's interface with the institution; especially, with the institution's physical, human aggregate, organization, and constructed environments.

This portion of the plan is informed by the individual inputs portion of the plan: The individual input information must be coordinated and accessible to leaders and innovation designers within the institution's environments. The analyses and the interventions regarding the interface with the environment are conducted at pre-college and at each of the 1st Sixes persistence decision points. Student social capital acquisition/development and utilization within

and/or relative to each environment is essential. This planning must reach the organizational unit level throughout the institution in order to design environment-specific persistence-retention improvement interventions. Co-ownership of the outcomes (O), between the student and institution, is very important. The plan and its outcomes must be co-owned in its entirety even though it is a partnership in which the student and institutional responsibilities are distributed.

One portion of the plan is focused on what the student must do: Be aware of their own characteristics, experiences within and beyond the institution; especially, their interface with the four environments of the institution and their need of additional social capital. They must engage the interventions and self-report. The institution must have a plan to interface with each student. Every part of the institution must engage students with all of the above built into their persistence-retention plans. Professional development and resource allocation are necessary. Both the individual student and the institution share in the implementation as well as the failure or success of the First 100 Day persistence-retention plan.

CONCLUSION

Persistence-retention is a major concern for many higher education institutions. Yet, when looking at persistence-retention theories and models, traditions, and practices, there is little in place to strategically, with prioritized urgency and great energy, address persistence-retention within a student's first 100 days. The introduced framework for "First 100 Days" persistence-retention plans is very generically described so institutions can tailor their work to individual students in their own campus environment. Yet, it is a starting point for students and institutions to motivationally and practically co-own persistence-retention success.

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