

Reflections: Experience Commentaries by Urban Developmental Studies Students, Maria Valeri-Gold, Carol A. Callahan, Mary P. Deming, & M.Tony Mangram, Georgia State University, Maryann Errico, Dekalb College

Abstract. This descriptive study assessed the perceptions and experiences of 125 developmental studies students during their initial quarters at a commuter, urban, southeastern university. Students responded to ten prompts asking them to reflect on academic, social, family, and personal issues. Analysis of students' responses revealed that they experienced problems integrating socially with peers and with the institution. They encountered financial difficulties and felt personal, social, work, and academic pressures. Further analysis indicated that students did not understand developmental studies placement or the grading system. The results of this study will serve as guidelines for establishing retention programs.

Retention is a problem in higher education. Research studies on why students leave college are extensive, and researchers have provided educators with insight into what committed can do to improve retention rates (Astin, 1977, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini, 1994; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, Russo, & Stephanie, 1994). Tinto (1987) reported that of the 2.8 million students who entered college for the first time in 1986, 1.8 million would leave their first institution without earning a degree. The American Council on Education (1995) noted that nearly 37% of students in open admission institutions dropped out before their sophomore year. Investigators conducted studies to identify the variables that lead to increased retention of college students. Researchers have used formative and summative measures to collect data on the demographic, individual, educational, academic, social, and commitment factors that contribute to retention rates (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Kinnick & Ricks, 1993).

Retention models were developed for collecting qualitative and quantitative data to analyze why college students remain in school (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Gillespie & Noble, 1992; Kinnick & Ricks, 1993; Lyons, 1991; Pavel, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, standardized testing measures such as the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACO; Baker & Siryk, 1989) have been created to assess college students' attitudes, values, social, academic, and personal-social development and adjustment. Informal methods of assessment such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups have also been used (Lyons, 1991; Nordquist, 1993; Terenzini, 1994).

Researchers have found that students remain in college for various reasons. Tinto's (1975, 1993) retention model states that students stayed in college because they integrated personally, educationally, socially, and academically. Students were more inclined to remain in college when they developed academic and social goals and when they committed to a high quality educational program. They also made the transition from high school to college and integrated into the institution's ongoing social and intellectual life (Tinto, 1993). Fewer than 15% of student departures were the result of academic dismissal. Most students left voluntarily and had adequate to superior grade point averages (Tinto, 1987). According to Kalsner (1991), withdrawal decisions were based on personal, social, and financial problems. Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) tested Tinto's model with college students who attended commuter schools and found that persistence was an important predictor of student retention. Bean and Metzner (1985) noted similar findings with nontraditional students.

King (1992) found that academic advising played a significant role in retaining students. An integrated academic advisement, counseling, and admissions program that offered support programs and services helped retain students (Seidman, 1991). Establishing workshops for college students that discussed academic and social issues such as admission standards, programs of study, and financial concerns raised retention rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1992). Although few research studies addressed the effect of financial aid on retention, Voorhees (1985) found that the direct effects of financial resources on retention were significantly positive. Nora (1990) noted similar results with Hispanic community college students. She concluded that information regarding both financial aid availability and assistance in the completion of necessary forms and applications when made accessible to students and their parents affected retention.

The classroom teacher has a major effect on student retention. Students who interacted with their teachers developed a support network (Tinto, Russo, & Stephanie, 1994). In addition, the classroom teacher's instructional methods for presenting study strategies increased motivation for learning, fostered social and academic integration, and affected retention rates. Caprio (1993), working with freshman biology students, found that study groups, collaborative group projects, information-sharing, computer-assisted instruction, and field trips enhanced college students' understanding of the subject matter. Collaborative assignments fostered social and academic integration. Ashar and Skenes (1993) concluded that better retention rates were noted when students integrated socially with their peers.

Researchers generally agree that findings in the area of retention studies are institution specific. Tinto (1987) suggests institution type, setting, and student body composition are factors that cause variations in the rate of retention. A review of the literature revealed a scarcity of qualitative research in the area of retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that qualitative and ethnographic research may produce improved information about students. They further predicted that such research would increase during the following decade and challenged investigators to use results to explain rather than simply describe the findings of their studies in higher education. Kinnick and Ricks (1993) stressed the importance of qualitative research in capturing the perspective and phenomenon of college experiences for the individual student by pointing out the

importance of identifying local intervening variables that quantitative methods cannot uncover.

The studies conducted by Kinnick and Ricks (1993) at Portland State University, and the Prompts Project completed at Virginia Commonwealth University (Hodges, 1992; Yerian & Green, 1994) provided the framework for this study. These studies were of particular interest to the researchers because the institutions involved have a large, urban, commuter population as subjects. The time element of the Prompts Project was important because students' experiences could be captured as they occurred without the bias of hindsight. In his interview with Gail A. Kluepfel (1994), Michael Hovland, retention consultant, stressed the importance of early assessment of students, including academic and affective information. Thus, we conducted a descriptive study to assess the perceptions of developmental studies students in their initial quarters at a commuter, urban, southeastern university. After consultation with the local Office of Institutional Research, we designed this study to assess the perceptions and experiences of developmental studies students during their initial quarters of enrollment. The results of this study are specific to this institution and may direct retention planning in addition to contributing to qualitative research in the area of retention of developmental students.

Method

Participants

One hundred twenty-five developmental studies students in first-level composition classes participated in this study and were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (American Psychological Association, 1992). Students enrolled in these developmental classes based on their scores on a national standardized admissions test and a state-mandated placement test.

Of the students in the study, 59% were female and 41% were male. Eighty-six percent were between the ages of 17 and 19, and 14% were over 25. Sixty-two percent were African-Americans, 24% were Caucasian, 6% were Asian, 3% were Hispanic, and 5% self-reported the category "other." Thirty percent were first generation college students. Sixty-six percent were enrolled in 11 to 15 hours of college courses; 34% were enrolled in less than 11 hours. Twenty-one percent worked 31 to 40 hours; 53% worked 20 hours or less; 26% did not work at all. Seventy-four percent lived at home with their parents; 26% lived on their own.

Instrumentation

We designed ten prompts asking students to reflect on and write about their perceptions and experiences of academic, social, family, and personal issues in their initial quarters at this university. During each of the 10 weeks of the 1995 academic fall quarter, developmental studies students in entry level composition classes free wrote their responses to one prompt. Journal writing, usually a component in composition classes provided a vehicle for these responses.

Procedure

During the first week of classes, we explained the purpose of the study to the students and secured their permission to participate. We administered a demographic questionnaire and the first prompt. Instructors then gave one prompt each week for the remaining weeks. We received permission to modify prompts used in a retention study for the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Prompts Project (Hodges, 1992; Yerian & Green, 1994).

We designed a coding procedure, then five raters met each week for ten weeks to read, code, and categorize that week's prompt. Five model prompts randomly selected from the sample were duplicated for reading at each rating session. As an example of a session, the raters classified prompt one data according to "hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations." A miscellaneous category, termed "asides," was used to classify data that did not fit into the four main categories. Discrepancies in interpretation were discussed and negotiated. Then the prompts were randomly and evenly distributed to the raters in packs of 25 to be read and classified. Each rater tabulated the raw data and summarized the findings. At the next rating session, before examining the next prompt, the raters discussed any discrepancies discovered while analyzing the data. At the end of the study, each rater was assigned to recheck the data for two responses, summarize the results, and note trends. Finally, raters met to report the results of their two prompts and to discuss implications. Responses did not always total 125 because not all students answered all questions, and multiple responses existed for some questions.

Results

Prompt One

The first prompt stated, "You are here at the university. You've worked hard to get here. Write for ten minutes about your hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations for the quarter." The words hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations were not defined, nor the differentiation between the terms explained. Consequently, the data were coded as the students reported it. Overlaps may exist. An analysis of the responses to prompt one showed that students' hopes can be grouped into three categories: academic, social, and affective.

Academic Hopes. Thirty-five students wanted to achieve As and Bs. Students' comments did not surprise the researchers because a number of students, even though they were developmental studies students, attended college on a state-funded academic scholarship. This scholarship provides free tuition, fees, and a book stipend for any student attending a public state institution who earned a B average in an in-state high school. To keep the scholarship, students must maintain a B average in college. These students were realists, knowing that if they lost their scholarships, they would not be able to afford college.

Twenty-five students stated they wanted to exit developmental studies classes as soon as possible. A number of students viewed these classes as a waste of time and an embarrassment. Many students felt a strong obligation to finish college in four years and feared that developmental studies classes would slow them down. Other students expressed general academic hopes, such as "doing their best" and "becoming a successful college student," whereas 13 students hoped to improve specific skills such as reading, writing, and math.

Social Hopes. Sixteen students reported they wanted to meet new people and to make new friends. Four students wanted to join clubs and participate in social activities. An analysis of their comments indicated that students wanted the university to provide them with opportunities to interact with their peers and to participate in campus activities and events.

Affective Hopes. Twenty students addressed the need to stay focused, to persevere, to follow goals, to fit in, and to balance life's activities. Thus, affective hopes were closely related to academic aspirations.

Dreams. Students' dreams were future-oriented. Nineteen students described their dreams as working in their chosen profession as a doctor, lawyer, pilot, accountant, physical therapist, business owner, boss, or teacher. A few students mentioned wanting to become rich, and one student stated marriage as a dream. Five students expressed a desire to earn a degree, five dreamed of making all As, and seven hoped to learn specific skills.

Fears. More than 40 students shared how fearful they were of failing classes or of failing out of school entirely. Equally disturbing was the extensive list of personal fears: students were afraid of not being smart enough, being exposed ("others will think I am stupid"), losing focus or balance, depending on others, working hard, experiencing stress, adapting to a new environment, disappointing family members, dropping a class, losing hope, having poor skills, or being disliked.

Expectations. Students' expectations were academic in nature and primarily set in the near future. Thirteen of the students' responses indicated that they expected to exit developmental studies classes. Six students expected to set goals; nine, to work hard; four, to make good grades; and eight, to graduate. In addition, five students said they expected to join clubs; five, to participate in activities; and three, to make friends. Four students expected to receive help from faculty members. One student's response seemed to summarize the feelings of these freshmen during their first week in school: "I expect to take this quarter one day at a time because everything I do is overwhelming."

Sample student responses to the first prompt included, " I have found it hard to get around here.... The people that work in the library and that work in the (orientation) program haven't been the friendliest or very helpful." and "I hope that I maintain my endeavor to persevere in L(loser) S(science) English."

Prompt Two

The second prompt asked, 'What have you heard, seen, done, or had happen to you in these first two weeks at the university that has made the biggest impression?' In responding to this prompt, students' comments can be grouped generally into three categories: academic, social, and personal. Social and personal categories received 92 responses, while the academic received only 27. The greatest impact was noted in non-academic areas.

Academic Impressions. Academically, 13 students praised the faculty mentoring they received and reported they were learning. Six students -gave high marks to the learning atmosphere, varied instructional techniques, and study skills suggestions. Nine students said that classes were not as hard as they had expected, and four students reported that faculty seemed more interested in teaching than they had expected because of what they had been told to anticipate by their high school teachers. Students praised study strategies, support services such as tutoring, the athletics study hall, and faculty assistance.

Six of the students who responded negatively reported that they felt trapped in developmental courses. Twelve students complained about the workload, stress, and the difficulty of trying to catch up with their assignments if they missed a class. A bad tutoring experience and an intimidating professor made major negative impressions. Both those students who were content and those who were not reported academic issues in terms of self-esteem. Students reported feeling inadequate, depressed, and disadvantaged by academic failures and those who were meeting academic success felt confident and enthusiastic.

Socially. 20 students found the student body friendly and liked the diversity and the downtown location of the campus. Others cited the number of clubs and organizations, live music on campus during the 10:00 a.m. institutional break, and recreational opportunities as social benefits. By contrast, four night students felt most campus activities were limited to daytime and thus were not as available to them. Fifteen students reported social concerns and three worried about their ability to make friends and how to handle their new freedom.

Personal Impressions. In terms of interpersonal experiences, 14 students liked the student interaction; one, clubs; two, student unity; and two, racial harmony. However, student service areas produced 36 negative responses. Specifically, three mentioned slow registration, two had scheduling problems, two noted a lack of published information, and four reported poor student service. For instance, students did not like waiting in lines or being in a smoking atmosphere on campus. Twelve students complained about the slow processing of financial aid payments and 13 about the lack of adequate campus parking. Social and personal impressions outnumbered academic impressions.

Sample student responses to prompt two included, "Professors are not just here to get paid and "I'm glad faculty and staff do not look like they just walked out of Gone With The Wind."

Prompt Three

The third prompt inquired, "Classes have been in session for nearly a month. How are you feeling about being a student at the university? If you're feeling positive, why? If you're not, what's missing for you?" Researchers tallied 120 positive replies and 51 negative responses, perhaps indicating a negative shift in students' attitudes in the third week. Students who responded with positive statements noted classes and people. They were content, felt comfortable, and mentioned the diversity of the student body as a plus. Initial academic successes resulted in reported high self-

esteem. Freedom from rigid, secondary school scheduling also appeared to be important to them.

However, of the 51 students who expressed dissatisfaction, 15 felt discouraged by developmental studies classes and continued to feel stupid because of their placement in the courses. The researchers felt that these comments were significant because the quarter was one-third over, and students continued to harbor negative feelings. Some students reported that the bookstore still did not have the books necessary for their classes. Time was a problem for some students: management, pressure, and slow adjustment to college. Students also missed their high schools and their friends. They experienced financial difficulties and felt drained of energy by course demands. Students reported that the university was too crowded. Parking was still a major issue. Dormitories, activities, time for activities, information sharing, assistance with financial aid, a "campus life," and football were missing from their college experience.

Sample student responses to the third prompt were, "I feel stupid in DS classes and don't know where I went wrong." and "The environment seems to only be made for 25 or older people." (Note: the average student age at the university is 27.)

Prompt Four

The fourth prompt noted, "It's midterm. Do you know what your grades are? Describe feedback you have received so far." Students' responses can be grouped into two areas: knowledge of their grades and feedback from their instructors. Sixty-one students said that they did not know what their grades were. Of these 61 students, only ten reported receiving any feedback from their professors. Many of the students did not know what their grades were in their courses. The phrases "I'm not sure," "I have no idea," "I guess," "I suppose," and "I don't know" were often used to describe what they knew about their grades. Students did not know what the criteria for grading were, nor did they know how test and quiz grades related to their overall grades in their classes. These students reported getting less feedback from their professors. However, students who did receive feedback reported it as helpful.

Sample student responses to prompt four included, "I wish I knew what my grades were so I can see how much harder I need to work." and "My instructors have been detailed with me and my work as far as my strengths and weaknesses."

Prompt Five

The fifth prompt stated, "Life does not always go smoothly. Difficult situations such as the following happen to students, relatives, or friends: financial crisis, lack of adequate child care, involvement with alcohol and drugs, separation or divorce, relationship problems, health problems, and a victim of crime. Describe what kinds of difficulties you, your friends, or your family have experienced this quarter. What have you and they done to cope with these problems?" Students' responses can be grouped into two categories: financial concerns and relationship problems. Thirty-eight students reported financial problems such as not having enough resources to stay in school, pay for books, afford apartments, and enjoy social activities. Students often asked for financial

assistance from parents, relatives, and friends, many of whom sacrificed resources to help them. Students also mentioned that they and their parents prayed to God for help during a crisis. Any external factor impacting on the student or family also affected the other.

Students desired a close, personal relationship, and they reported relationship problems with boyfriends or girlfriends. Twenty students stated that they, their friends, or family had relationship problems. The amount of time spent with boyfriends and girlfriends, strained dating relationships, and ending relationships was distracting and emotionally difficult.

A sample student response to prompt five was "My family and me had some financial crisis(sic) at the beginning of the quarter. My family had to get the bills paid for us to have the necessary utilities. Then I had to pay for school but I could only pay for so much. They had to find a way to get the bills caught up and help me with school."

Prompt Six

The sixth prompt sought information regarding contact with the faculty, asking "Have you spoken to your professors on a one-to-one basis? What issues have you discussed?" Sixty-three students had spoken to their professors on a one-to-one basis, while 49 students had not. Students who met with their teachers discussed academic issues such as grades, exit requirements, classroom assignments, tardiness, absences, classroom participation, study habits, time management, registration, and dropping a class.

Sample student responses to prompt six included, "I spoke to two of my professors about my progress in the class, my grades and participation." and "Yes, I have spoken to my professor. We have discussed my grades and progress in that class. She asked if I had any questions or comments about the class."

Prompt Seven

The seventh prompt addressed involvement in student activities. "Describe the opportunities for social life here at the university. Talk about the activities in which you participate. What other activities would you like the university to provide?" Students' responses can be grouped into three categories: the social activities available, the social activities they participated in, and the social activities they would like to have available. In response to category one, students stated that the campus offered opportunities for social participation, such as membership in fraternities and sororities, participation in sports (soccer, basketball, baseball, wrestling), and social clubs. Category two responses indicated that they did not participate in social activities offered on campus due to work and school demands. In answering category three, some students stated that they would like to have a football team on campus.

Sample student responses to prompt seven included, "I don't get involved because I am concentrating on my school work." and "A football team adds excitement and a sense of belonging, but it may be hard to gather a good team so late in the season."

Prompt Eight

The prompt administered in the eighth week read as follows: "Diversity has long been a distinctive characteristic of this university. As a university student, react to this statement: Students of various racial and diverse backgrounds get along well." Responses indicated that 61 students agreed with the statement, and 35 disagreed. Four students stated racial harmony depends on circumstances. One repeated comment was that multicultural respect appears evident in the classroom, and students from different ethnic backgrounds seem to communicate well in school-related conversations. However, some students also observed that racial cliques seemed to form in social settings and during the 10:00 a.m. institutional break.

Sample student responses to prompt eight included, "Ethnic groups blend together. I chose this school because of its diversity. You don't have to have any social criteria." and "All I can say is that many races can interact and have friends from other races, but when it comes down to sticking together in racial situations, everyone sticks to their own race and forgets about friendship. Racial tension will always occur. People just need to know how to deal with it in a calm and mature way with communication instead of violence."

Prompt Nine

For the ninth prompt students were asked: "Describe what you need to help you be a successful student here at the university." Students' responses can be grouped into three categories: cognitive, affective, and external factors. Sixty-six students acknowledged affective variables and specific behaviors that contribute to success; 24 students saw their learning as the university's responsibility.

Forty-six responses indicated that students were cognizant of specific behaviors that contributed to their success. They expressed the need for better time management skills; the difficulty of balancing personal, social, and academic responsibilities was overwhelming. However, some students appeared to recognize the importance of prioritizing. Other students discovered the need to study more and develop effective study habits. Students gave contradictory responses citing both "great, caring professors" contributed to their success; "boring, disinterested instructors" hindered their progress. Other students acknowledged that resources are available; however, they had not utilized them. Many of the students noted external factors as obstacles to their learning such as poor living conditions, a stressful commute, an unreliable vehicle, and "stuck-up" women.

A problem that seems to be specific to this university is the impending conversion from a quarter system to a semester system. The decision had been finalized, and the transition had begun. Students felt this prompt was an appropriate vehicle to vocalize their concern. Many students saw the conversion as stressful and detrimental to their success.

Sample responses to prompt nine included, "Manage my time; stop being so lazy and waiting for the last minute to do things." and "Keep quarter system because students will be more stressed out, and they will drop out because of the work load."

Prompt Ten

During the last week of the quarter, students were asked to reflect on how their perceptions may have changed. The tenth prompt asked, "Think about what you said when you wrote the first week of school about your hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations. Compare your thoughts with the realities of your experiences. Talk about what may be the same and what may be different." Students had to rely on their memories concerning their responses to prompt one. Responses in general were shorter, as students recorded fewer specific hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations. It appeared that students may have tired of participating in the study at this point, or tired from the academic term in general and its various demands. Typically, prompt responses were shorter later in the academic term.

Hopes. Sixteen students claimed that their hopes remained the same. Students said that they had the same goals as in the beginning of the quarter. Six students listed nothing under the "hopes" category. Twelve students stated that they wanted to make good grades, As and Bs, while 35 stated in prompt one that they wanted to make good grades. Three students hoped to pass their classes, while two wanted to be successful, exit developmental studies, get a degree, and find a job.

Dreams. Students listed fewer responses in the dream category, but these results cannot be interpreted as students having fewer dreams. Rather, responses in general, as mentioned above, were shorter, with fewer responses in each category (hopes, dreams fears, expectations). Three students dreamed of professions; while three dreamed of doing well in their classes. Others reported their dreams were the same: they wanted to pass their courses and graduate.

Fears. Students reported fewer fears at the end of the academic term. The fears students were still experiencing included being considered a freshman, earning low grades, failing classes and exams, not doing well in regular classes, losing their scholarships, and failing to make friends. Many students, however, wrote about having overcome their fears.

Expectations. Likewise, students reported fewer expectations at the end of the academic term. This change might be attributed to the way the prompt was written, asking students to compare their expectations from the beginning of the term to the present. As in the beginning of the study, however, students reported that they expected to do their best in classes, study hard, make good grades, exit developmental studies, and graduate. Students also expected to keep their scholarships and to have fun with their classmates and teachers. Some students had underestimated the difficulty of the work, and others wrote about dashed expectations of earning As and Bs, forming relationships, and exiting developmental studies.

Sample student responses to prompt ten included, "I did not do as well as I had planned for this quarter. I am about to write my exit exam for class and my average stands at 74. My other classes are okay, but after my calculations I am a couple of points shy of a B average to keep my scholarship." and "I had visions of not meeting people... I am continuing to reach people far and near... I was an inexperienced college student. Now, I can say that my feet have tested the waters

and I am now ready to plunge in. "

Discussion

Social Integration

Previous researchers debated the importance of social integration. Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated that social integration at commuter institutions is not as important a factor for students leaving college as it is for students at residential institutions. In contrast, Terenzini, Allison, Miller, Rendon, Upcraft, Gregg, and Jalomo (1992) reported commuter students wanted to socialize, feel involved, and make out-of-class connections. In this study, students mentioned the importance of social integration early in their academic careers. The analysis of responses from prompts one (social hopes), two (social expectations; social impressions), three, seven, and ten (expectations) revealed that students wanted the university to provide opportunities for them to interact with peers and to participate in campus activities and events. Students stated that social activities existed on campus and opportunities for interaction were available, but they found it difficult to become involved in campus activities due to personal, work, and academic demands. Further analysis of replies indicated that students experienced external social problems, in particular, relationship problems (prompt five). Consequently, institutions might consider programs designed to foster social integration.

Financial Resources

Past studies confirm that financial resources affect student retention (Nora, 1990; Voorhees, 1985). The analysis of responses from prompts one (academic hopes; affective hopes), two (personal impressions), three, five, and ten (expectations) revealed that lack of financial resources worried students.

Pressures

Previous studies reveal that students felt overwhelmed and experienced stress from the pressures that were placed on them (Higher Education Research Institute, 1994), and they experienced "role overload" from school, family, work, and friends (Cleveland-Innes, 1994, p.424). "Role overload" refers to the increasing number of roles students are involved in as learners, workers, family members, parents, and friends as well as their inability to fulfill each role. In analyzing students' responses, they also experienced external pressures from family, school, work, and friends as indicated in response to prompts one, two, three, nine, and ten. Terenzini et al. (1992) reported that commuter students exhibited an emotional state of fear. In this analysis of responses, students revealed academic, social, and personal fears in their responses to prompts one and ten.

Teachers

The analysis of students' comments for prompts one and three revealed some negative perceptions about developmental studies programs. Previous studies indicate that the interaction between the classroom teacher and the student has major effects on students (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Caprio, 1993; Tinto, Russo, & Stephanie, 1994). The analysis of students' responses to prompts one, three,

four, and seven revealed that their interactions with teachers affected them personally and academically.

Locus of Control

Students' responses to all prompts indicated external locus of control. They attributed their success to parents, teachers, friends, and God. Smith and Price (1996), in their study on attribution theory, conclude that this is a common trait among developmental learners and call for attribution relearning, suggesting that educators and counselors train students to replace passive attribution that leads to continued failure. Increased academic effort can result in improved self-efficacy. The resulting shift to internal locus of control empowers students to become responsible for their own learning.

Implications

The results of this study have a number of implications for establishing guidelines for retention programs. Retention programs should be established based on student issues identified at each institution. Using formal and informal measures of assessment, institutions can establish retention programs that reflect the diverse student population.

Social integration is a concern of students. Faculty, staff, administrators, students, and parents can work together to create comprehensive in-class and out-of-class social activities and events that address the needs of the student population. Program developers need to be aware of the culturally diverse backgrounds of the students. Careful attention can be given to develop social experiences for both day and evening students.

Lack of financial resources affects students. The financial concerns of college students must be addressed early and continuously at each institution. Admissions counselors, financial aid officers, and academic advisors can develop workshops, seminars, or training sessions to discuss ways that students and their parents can finance a college education. High school counselors and college financial aid advisors can work together to assist parents and students in completing paperwork.

Fear is another factor that impacts students. Addressing students' personal and academic fears early in the academic term may reduce anxiety and stress. Instructors and academic advisors can encourage students to discuss their fears throughout the term. Establishing focus groups, conducting interviews, or forming mentoring programs may alleviate students' fears. Instructors can schedule conferences with students who are experiencing fears or refer them to trained professionals.

Students' academic perceptions of their teachers and developmental studies curriculum also have an impact. Negative perceptions of developmental studies persist and interfere with student learning. Admissions officers, academic advisors, and classroom instructors can offer seminars during freshman orientation week. These seminars may address the purpose of the institution's developmental studies program, its policies and placement procedures, and students' personal,

academic, social, and financial needs.

Recommendations

1. Although this study is specific to a particular commuter university, it might be replicated at any postsecondary institution. The present study was conducted with a developmental studies population; a similar investigation should be conducted with a representative sample of an institution's total population consisting of both developmental studies and non-developmental studies students. Further analysis of demographic data, such as race, gender, age, and first-generation status, might yield more information about particular groups of students.
2. Few studies have been conducted to identify the effects of financial aid on student retention (Nora, 1990; Voorhees, 1985). Researchers can conduct investigations on how financial aid affects students and their learning. The effort and stress involved in earning tuition and living expenses hinder time on task and prevent integrating socially with the institution.
3. Other informal methods of assessment, coupled with qualitative measures and open-ended responses, can be used to assess the personal, social, and academic factors that affect incoming first year developmental studies students and regularly admitted students. Specifically, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, inventories, and surveys can help identify internal and external variables that affect students' adjustment to college.
4. In this study, students' negative perceptions of developmental studies seem to affect their self-esteem and learning. Additional research needs to be conducted to investigate students' perceptions of developmental studies programs and its effects on students.

Conclusion

From this study, the researchers agree that retention is a by-product of improving students' experiences in college, and it is not an end in itself (Kinnick & Ricks, 1993). Educators need to develop intervention programs early in students' academic careers to help them focus on the personal, social, and academic factors that impact their lives. These programs may include orientation courses (Salter & Noblet, 1994; Starke, 1994) or precollege orientation courses (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986) . Such orientation programs can establish a bridge between students' needs and available campus resources. They can help students develop the necessary study strategies and time management techniques proven essential for college survival. The implementation of orientation programs needs to be unique to each institutions strategic plan, mission statement, goals, and curriculum.

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