

## **What Does the Research Say?**

### **Retention of Underrepresented or At-Risk Students:**

- Up to 75% of all dropout decisions are non-academic in nature
  - Financial: Non-tuition expenses; required part-time/full-time employment
  - Psychological: Feeling out of place; lack of family support; required additional family responsibilities
- Low achievement may be more of a result of external pressures rather than a student's inherent inability
- Major barriers to success include:
  - Lack of self-confidence
  - Inappropriate expectations or knowledge about the college environment
  - Lack of connection to the college community or external community
  - Lack of early validation within the college environment
  - Family members who do not understand the goals of college
  - Not involving faculty in summer bridge programs and the transition process
- Institutions use five types intervention strategies to retain students:
  - Transition Programs
  - Mentoring
  - Learning Communities
  - Faculty/Student Interaction Programs
  - Advising
- Offering some form of instruction specifically for freshmen is one of the most common and highly recommended intervention strategies

### **Noteworthy Structural Features of Summer Bridge Programs:**

- 4-6 week activity prior to the first full term/semester
- Seeks to enhance student academic performance, personal performance, and/or focus on the transition to college and the expectations associated with that (Programs vary based on goals)
  - Remediation/Developmental Learning in an area (math, writing, reading)
  - Students within specific majors, especially STEM to target math and science coursework
  - Gifted/accelerated students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Has a clearly defined mission statement and goals/objectives that can be assessed
- Focuses on a target population of students who are typically at-risk (FGIC, low SES, remedial)
- Academic support initiatives (tutoring, supplemental instruction, study skill development, small group collaborations)
- The program is supported by administration, in terms of resources and funding
- Intensive, developmental academic advising (At-risk student groups need to have access to specialized advising options designed to meet their specific needs)
- Helping students to develop relationships on campus

### **Strongly Recommended Components of Summer Bridge Programs:**

- Residential program (require students to live on-campus, and together in learning communities)
- Incorporate service learning/community service
- Inclusion of a program-specific orientation where expectations are clearly delineated
- Create a safe, social space for students to interact; required programming; diverse offerings
  - Student involvement: creating a club/organization around the summer bridge program
- Structured schedule of classes/activities

- Career counseling components/programming
- Scholarship/financial aid opportunities involving stipends, book vouchers, tuition/fees covered, meal plans, etc. (High attrition factor; state and school administrators should create or redevelop financial aid programs to deal with these types of hidden costs in a meaningful way.)
- Time devoted to explaining the goals of a liberal arts education or general education and discussions about college life
- Parent involvement component
- Peer mentor program
- Computer literacy components
- Journal writing and self-reflective activities
- Development of partnerships within the community to enhance students' experiences
  - Partner with businesses to provide future internship possibilities for students
- Build students' self-confidence; focus on character development

**Evaluation/Assessment of Summer Bridge Programs:**

- Many institutions offer more than one summer bridge program
  - Conducting an audit of your institution's needs is essential
- Begin by developing a mission statement and goals – the foundation to any evaluation
- Programs need to be realistic about their goals
- Determine range of activities and target population
- Examine length of program, schedule, learning approaches used (lecture versus small group learning), technology, involvement of different members of campus, and other issues important to program success
- Receive regular feedback (throughout program and after) from students, faculty, and staff
- Implement changes based on the changing needs of students, institutional climate and needs

**Model Programs Are:**

- Individualized
- Have strong faculty support and involvement
- Tied to the institutional mission
- Have partnerships with area K-12 schools
- Are supported by senior administration
- Use small-group collaborative learning
- Build community
- Conduct student assessment/evaluation

**Resources Cited**

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