

Running Header: **[Improving Academic Success and Building Retention]**

Improving Academic Success and Building Retention By “Forc’n It”:

Academic success through denial, concessions, and re-admittance requirements

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Background

According to Vincent Tinto, “Student departure may serve as a barometer of the social and intellectual health of college life as much as of the students' experiences at the college. The quality of faculty-student interaction and the student's integration into the school are central factors in student attrition,” (1987). As a student practitioner, much alarm came with supporting students, as an advisor, to understand and track their own academic progress. Through the first three months of employment, the student practitioner utilized time to reconcile student academic programs and conference with each individual student supported by the institution’s coined 1st generation and historically underrepresented retention program. In the beginning of tracking student progress, the student practitioner was dismayed to learn 4 students had reached probation 2 without a formal process and understanding of probation severity, while 2 students were at probation 1 without needed acknowledgements.

To remedy this issue, the student practitioner arranged meetings with the most urgent students first to clear student academic probation (SAP) papers for the institution’s financial aid office and began advising them through an academic probation hearing. Out of these hearings, the student practitioner observed the following:

1. Students were not informed of their academic standing because of employee turnover
2. The department lacked a student development theory to guide freshman and sophomore student learning outcomes
3. Students were not advised during the employee hiatus
4. Students were not adhering to the academic re-admittance requirements originally put in place (i.e...)
 - a. Biweekly meeting with advisor
 - b. Academic plan for moving off probation
 - c. Probation 1: lose book scholarship

- d. Probation 2: lose institutional tuition discount
- 5. Students were not given the tools to track their own academic progress making the advisor/department the responsible party

Institutions in the Practice

Looking at the needs of students to be more self-regulated, the student practitioner looked at models of other institutions who supported similar demographics, and looked at student development theories that would support the specified demographic of undergraduates. When observing practices of other institutions, the student practitioner learned that most institutions do not allow students to repeat failed classes without students “paying into their education as a responsible party” or allow students to continue their academic program without some form of tracking.

At a local Jesuit Christian institution, administrators invest in students by allocating resources that will help students manage time and procrastination. Students also received an assigned academic services coordinator who supports their progress through one-on-one sessions, connecting students to tutoring services, and holding workshops (Marquette, 2015). This institution also provides niche’ advisors who personally assist students of this demographic by increasing “student touch” to make more personalized support with career planning, student skills, as well as assistance with selecting student organizations and extracurricular opportunity that promote personal growth. Within an institution of similar, private and Christian, demographic has a carved out retention program for first generation students, academic advising, counseling (short term and crisis management), tutoring, and supplemental grant aid are wraparound services for students within their *Promise Program*; and, because of

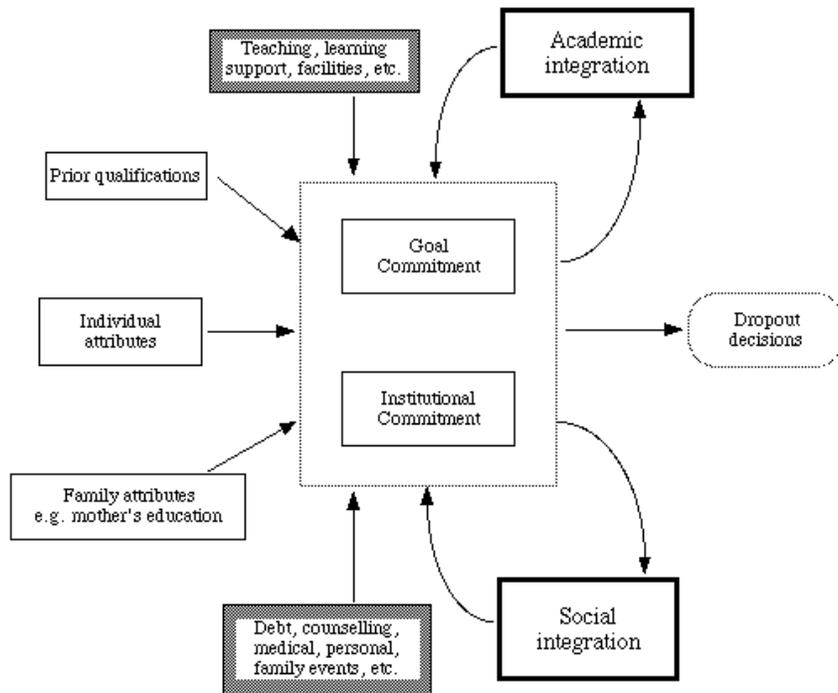
these wraparound services, this institution publicizes yearly their average 3.102 GPA statistic (Mt. Mary University, 2016).

When looking at student developmental theories, the best fit for support the program's demographic was Astin's student involvement and Tinto's student retention. Astin, describes involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience," (1999). By creating a more involved student, the student practitioner made strides in making students active learners and participants by:

1. Being required to track their academic progress through their student evaluation transcript
2. Meeting with academic advisor before registering for classes
3. Meeting with academic advisor at the end of each semester
4. Understanding the academic expectations for remaining in the program

From these expectations an awareness was created for students, especially students who were considered on academic probation.

Considering Vincent Tinto's theory on student retention, for this demographic, the extremes of the student demographic's need and academic history heavily relied on needs being met, as well as motivation, to determine student persistence and/or student drop out. Under this theory Tinto considers the following cycle (1975):



This is adapted by me from Tinto, V. (1975) "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research" *Review of Educational Research* vol.45, pp.89-125.

To best support students in their academic endeavors, the student practitioner had to consider wraparound services for “at risk” and/or academic probation students. These services considered were:

1. Mental/emotional health access
2. Bi-weekly check-ins
3. Tutoring services
4. Service learning opportunities
5. Financial stability

Once wraparound services were identified, the advisor proceeded in constructing academic probation essay (s) for probation 1 and probation 2 as well as student contracts.

Research

Looking at the needs of students to be accountable and supported, the student practitioner looked at scholastic studies that supported similar demographics of students. To support the system constructed, the student practitioner found that according to Austin and Crowner, the more “intrusive” the intervention was to at-risk student performance and persistence, these students showed the most improvement and retention rated of most at risk-students (2001). Looking at Edward Danis’ research at Penn State, I appreciated his perspective in sharing, “As advisers, we have the opportunity to give many academically deficient students hope for a second chance. It is a privilege to spend our days trying to make a difference in such students' lives – one person at a time” (2002). Having the ability to acknowledge the “love and logic” of supporting students move from academic probation to academic success motivated me complete the construction of the academic process. Out of this research, the student practitioner felt confident in the processes made to support student success and accountability.

Conclusion

With research and institutional profiles that reflect the demographic of students, the student practitioner has been able to not only set standards, but grow students into “academic toughness” in excellence and learning outcomes. Within the first round of this process, students remained on probation two semesters; however, in its second phase students have needed only one semester to move off of academic probation (see latest GPA roster graph):

So GPA Semester	So GPA Cumulative	Fr GPA Semester	Fr GPA Cumulative
2.6	2.47	2.67	2.41
1.53	1.94	2.09	2.24
2.87	2.89	2.2	2.29
1.17	1.67	3.27	2.67
0	1.57	1.67	1.9
0.53	1.87	3.27	2.97
3.05	2.77	2	2.63
2.05	2.26	3.39	3.05
2.6	3.06	2.46	2.53
2.47	2.56	1.87	1.97
1.87	2.13	3.6	3.41
1.42	3.06	2	2.41

Off probation
Early Warning
Dismissed

Having a system that empowers students, while creating accountability, has served as an excellent tool for creating a more resilient student who serves as a near-peer support to the culture of the program for academic excellence (recording shared).

Resources

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Office of Student Educational Services. (n.d.). Retrieved June, 2016, from <http://www.marquette.edu/academic-services/>.

Promise Program. (n.d.). Retrieved May 28, 2016, from <http://www.mtmary.edu/campuslife/academicsupport/promise-program.html>.