

Retention Strategies for South Dakota Technical Institutes

The technical institutes realize that the educational needs of the students are changing and institutions are challenged to find innovative ways to meet the basic needs of incoming students. The institutes are looking at new ways to facilitate learning in order to reach each and every student. The classrooms are becoming more and more diverse and a variety of teaching methods are used to enable the instructors to meet the needs of as many students as possible. Some specific methods include: cooperative learning, experiential activities, integrating technology, real life associations and empowerment strategies.

All of our technical institutes see retention as the core to all aspects of their operations. And all technical institutes are doing well, both in the negotiated retention standards as well as compared to other educational agencies. The institutes know that the reasons vary for losing students: academic difficulty which includes lack of preparedness for higher learning, motivation, financial issues, personal reasons, lack of commitment to reliable attendance or high achievement of learner outcomes. Also, for technical institutes, retention levels can be affected by economic changes such as businesses need for labor force which can entice students to work before they finish their program.

Following are Retention Strategies that focus on student success and are already in place at the technical institutes.

Orientation Session Prior to school beginning, the institutes have an Orientation Session with all new students. The new students are introduced to instructional staff, counselors, tutor/mentor coordinator, disabilities staff member, student activities coordinator, financial aid staff, registrar and other personnel. This encourages and supports communications, a key to the successful experience for students.

Departmental Efforts Departments monitor and assist students on a daily basis. Programs identify students having difficulty with academics or labs and provide assistance through a number of means.

Also, departments/programs with the assistance of state staff, Advisory Committee Members, faculty and administration continually review curriculum for rigor and relevance. Technology and curriculum that are up to date are necessary to retain students.

Early Alerts Referrals made to the retention coordinator to help facilitate discussions regarding tutoring, counseling and attendance issues.

Measures and Standards Reports Annual reports, such as measures and standards provide a formal means of documenting and tracking retention.

Exit Surveys The technical institutes have implemented a withdrawal process/exit interview for each student, providing they notify the school of their intentions to withdraw. This process includes a form that must be signed by staff members. The goal is that perhaps one person can help the student and address their reason for leaving. It also provides the institutes with data on each program as why the student withdraws.

Classroom and Course Evaluation Students provide evaluations (anonymous) on a semester basis that are also key sources of information on retention. Issues with instructors, materials or lab environments are noted and addressed.

Admissions Since retention issues tend to be connected to students' ability, motivation or expectations, the institutes examine their admissions processes and standards. If needed, these procedures and standards are adjusted.

Student Activities Campus Climate/Campus Life plays an important role in student retention. Retention data shows that students who join one or more activities are far more likely to stay in school than students who don't. When students join something they are interested in, they meet friends, they enjoy themselves and they have a safe environment in which to grow. The institutes have found this is especially true for students who live off campus and have no compelling reason to stay around after class. Institutions offer a variety of

entertainment including family nights, holiday family activities, dodge ball tournaments, movie nights, intramurals, hypnotists and/or comedians, community rec center usage and much more.

Instructor Training Inservice and continuing education efforts on retention are provided.

Task Force Institutes have addressed the recruitment and retention issues by establishing Retention and Recruitment Task Forces consisting of representatives from faculty, Student Services and Administration.

Assessment Institutional accreditation (Higher Learning Commission/ the AQIP Process) and the State Program Improvement Process require all post-secondary institutes to continually monitor, assess and address retention and to develop action plans that address the needs of the programs and of the institutions regarding retention. Institutes develop strategies and work toward retention solutions. A key factor in program survival is whether retention is a systemic problem or an anomaly. These action plans have become the priority of the institutes and result in yearly reports.

Preparatory Coursework Preparatory course work in math, reading comprehension, and English Grammar is offered for students that do not meet the entrance requirements. (ACT or **ACCUPLACER** is used to assess students.)

Student Advising Student Advising has become an integral part of the institutes plans for retention. Each semester students are required to meet with faculty advisors. If advising reveals a student issue, intervention processes are in place at all institutes.

Technology Student Management modules have improved student and faculty access to unofficial transcripts, financial information, course/class schedules, schedules for tutoring and counseling and various student services information. Online access to grades has also improved the communication process.

Online and Hybrid Classes Because the technical institutes recognize that many students want flexibility in their class schedules, the institutes have greatly expanded the number of online and hybrid classes. These alternative delivery methods provide students with one more way to complete their degree.

Loan Counseling Sessions All students meet with a financial aid representative to discuss the responsibilities that come with being a student loan borrower. The financial aid person may discuss scholarships and work study opportunities at this session.