

# A Timeline of Indicators & Strategies for At-Risk Student *Prediction, Identification, and Intervention*

At-risk student alert and student intervention strategies may be conceptualized along a temporal continuum ranging from (a) pre-college predictors based on student behavior that took place before beginning college to (b) at-risk behaviors displayed by students during college through (c) college-exit interviews with students departing from college. This document organizes at-risk indicators and intervention strategies along separate segments of this temporal continuum.

## I.

### Predicting Students “At Risk” Prior to College Entry

#### 1. Predicting At-Risk Students Based on Academic Preparation & Performance Prior to College

Common At-Risk *Indicators*:

- \* Low Standardized Admissions Test Scores (SAT or ACT)
  - \* Poor Academic Performance in High School (low GPA or Class Rank)
  - \* Non-Rigorous High School Curriculum
    - No Math completed beyond Algebra II
    - Poor grades earned in academically rigorous high school courses
    - No or few college-prep and AP courses
  - \* Low *Course-Placement Test Scores*
    - Placement in developmental (remedial) *reading*
    - Placement in developmental *writing*
    - Placement in developmental *math* (particularly if student’s intended major requires math prerequisites)
    - *Total number* of developmental-course placements
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#### 2. Group Profiling: Predicting At-Risk Students Based on Demographic Characteristics at College Entry

Common At-Risk *Indicators*:

- \* First-Generation Students
  - \* Low-Income Students
  - \* Underrepresented (Minority) Students—e.g., by race, ethnicity, national citizenship, or gender
  - \* Undeclared/Undecided Students
  - \* Commuter Students
  - \* Transfer Students
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### 3. Predicting At-Risk Students on the Basis of Behavioral, Attitudinal, or Personal Characteristics Exhibited at College Entry

- \* Late College Application/Matriculation—suggesting student ambivalence about going to college in general or attending the particular college at which the student is currently enrolled)
  - \* High Score on Instruments Designed to Predict Students Who are At Risk for Attrition  
For example, students answering “no” to a question asking about whether the student intends to graduate from the college or “no” to a question asking if the college is the student’s “first choice”. (See Appendix for sample instruments.)
  - \* Required to complete a significant number of developmental courses before earning college-level credit
  - \* Academically demanding first-term schedule—e.g., total # of course units the student is carrying, nature of courses in which the student is enrolled, such as courses with historically high D, W and F rates—especially for students with low levels of college preparedness.
  - \* Unrealistic major/career plans given student’s level of academic preparation for college
  - \* Intent to major in a competitive, oversubscribed (impacted) major despite poor pre-college preparation
  - \* Admitted to the institution with largely-unmet financial need, or with the expectation of incurring significant debt before graduation
  - \* Number of hours student expects to work per week off campus (e.g., more than 20 hours per week)
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## II.

### Identifying Students Exhibiting At-Risk Behavior after College Entry

#### 1. Indicators of At-Risk Academic Behaviors/Habits *Early in the Term*

- \* Classroom behavior displayed during first 2-4 weeks of class (“early alert/warning signs”):
  - > frequent class absences
  - > chronic class tardiness
  - > failure to complete reading assignments
  - > failure to acquire textbook or other course materials
  - > premature departure from class sessions
  - > missing or poor performance on early exams/quizzes
  - > missing, late, or poor performance on early assignments
  - > poor basic academic skills exhibited on course assignments
  - > disengaged or disruptive behavior in class (e.g., not taking notes, talking, texting, or unwillingness to participate in class discussions)
  - > academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating or plagiarism)
- \* Failure to respond to or discuss early-alert notice
- \* Failure to implement strategies recommended during early-alert intervention
- \* Poor midterm grades (especially in more than one course)

- \* Low midterm course grade in a first-year seminar or first-year experience course
  - \* Number of course withdrawals or incompletes during the first term in college
  - \* Low first-term college GPA
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## **2. Indicators of At-Risk Behavior at any Point in the College Experience**

Retention “Red Flags”:

- \* Making insufficient academic progress to sustain financial aid
- \* Making insufficient academic progress to eventually gain acceptance into the field in which the student intends to major
- \* Failure to pre-register for the following academic term
- \* Failure to declare a major by the second semester of sophomore year
- \* Failure to renew financial aid or work study for the following academic year
- \* Failure to renew campus housing
- \* Requesting copies of transcripts before eligibility to graduate.

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### III.

## A Retention-Intervention Timeline: Identifying Proactive-to-Reactive Strategies for Promoting Student Persistence

#### *PROACTIVE*



1. *Summer Transition/Summer Bridge* Program (i.e., 4-6 week summer program for at-risk students conducted between high school graduation and college matriculation)
2. College-Entry *Assessment of Basic Skills* for First-Term *Course Placement* (e.g., Accuplacer)
3. College-Entry Assessment Designed to Identify *At-Risk Students* (e.g., CSI)
4. New-Student *Orientation & Convocation* (i.e., welcoming induction ceremony for new college students and their families)
5. *Extended-Orientation* Course (a.k.a., *First-Year Experience* or *College Transition* Course)
6. *Early-Alert/Warning* System (i.e., at-risk behavior reported during first 2-6 weeks of the academic term)
7. *Midterm-Grade* Reports (i.e., reporting student grades at midpoint of the academic term)
8. “*Red Flag*” Procedures (i.e., non-classroom-based signals of potential attrition, such as failure to pre-register or renew financial aid for next term)
9. *Exit Interviews/Surveys* (administered at the time of student withdrawal) (See Appendix A on p. 5 for additional information)
10. End-of-First-Year *Student Satisfaction* and/or *Student Engagement* Surveys (e.g., comparing responses of students who return vs. those who fail to return for their sophomore year)
11. *Already-Withdrawn/Departed-Student* Surveys (e.g., administered by mail or phone after student withdrawal to ascertain causes for withdrawal)
12. *Re-Recruitment of Withdrawn Students* (i.e., contacting withdrawn students to encourage their re-enrollment)(converting them “dropouts” to “stop-outs”)



#### *REACTIVE*

## Appendix A

### ***Exit Interviews:*** Rationale & Research

The scholarly literature suggests that *exit interviews* should be routinely conducted with withdrawing or non-returning students (Tinto, 1987). There is some evidence that the exit-interview process can generate productive feedback, and may also increase the possibility that the exiting student change have a change of heart and decide to stay, because a college representative has taken the time to meet with and express personal interest in the student's welfare and experience at the college, which in itself may be retention-promoting. Also, during the interview process, the student may learn about a college service or an alternative solution to the problem that is underlying the decision to leave (Noel-Levitz, 1985).

Research conducted at California State University, Long Beach in the late 1960's revealed that 10% of students planning to drop out of the university decided not to withdraw as a result of an exit interview (Demos, 1968). Cook College (New Jersey) also instituted an exit-interview procedure aimed at "underachieving" students, i.e., students whose GPAs were significantly lower than their predicted GPAs, based on entrance test score and high school rank. Data collected by the college comparing students who participated in the exit-interview process with a control group of similar underachieving students who did not participate in the process, revealed that only 2 of the 85 exit-interviewed students withdrew from the college—compared to 14 withdrawals among the control group of un-interviewed students (Levitz, 1988) A strategy used by one college for encouraging students to complete the exit-interview process is to assess them a matriculation fee during their first registration session. This fee is refunded to the student at graduation or, if the student decides to withdraw from the institution, the fee is refunded after s/he completes the exit-interview process (Jones, 1988).

#### *Retention through Re-Recruitment*

Student retention may be promoted by collecting information during the withdrawal process about whether the student intends or would consider re-enrolling at a later point in time. If successful, this practice would, in effect, convert drop outs into stop outs. In a based-on-a-true-story movie, titled "Stand and Deliver," a high school math teacher accidentally runs into a former female student at a local restaurant who had dropped out of high school and was working as a waitress. During their chance meeting, the teacher (Jaime Escalante) persuaded the student to return to school and complete her degree—which she did. If this coincidental contact and encouragement led this student return to school, why couldn't it be done *intentionally*, rather than accidentally?

A key factor in the student's decision to return to school was that the encouragement came from someone with whom she had a *positive prior relationship*. To replicate this at the college level, withdrawn students could be contacted by someone with whom the student had a good relationship during their prior enrollment or, at least, someone the student knew and respected. (This information could be gathered by including a question in the withdrawal form that asks: "Was there any particular member of the campus community that you admired and respected, or will miss most?")

Re-recruiting students who previously withdrew from campus might be particularly timely in the current economic climate because students who have lost their jobs, or who are working at reduced hours, are more likely to strongly consider an invitation to return to school. (See Appendix for a sample exit-interview form that includes a prompt for student re-recruitment.)



## Sample Exit-Interview Form

Please help us assess the quality of your experience here. If you would take a few moments to respond to the following items, the information you provide may help us improve the Marymount experience for future students. Your written comments, in particular, would be especially helpful. Thanks.

Note: To receive the most honest answers during the withdrawal process, ideally, this form should be administered by someone with whom the student feels comfortable—e.g., a trusted teacher, advisor, or peer—such as a peer leader who may be trained for this purpose; in other words, someone with whom the withdrawing students has developed a relationship, or at very least, someone with whom the exiting student has had some contact.

For which *reason(s)* are you leaving \_\_\_\_\_?

Please read the options below and circle the appropriate answer(s).

*Academic* reasons Yes    No  
If yes, please explain:

*Financial* reasons Yes    No  
If yes, please explain:

Concerns about *student life* at Marymount Yes    No  
If yes, please comment:

*Personal* reasons other than those listed above. Yes    No  
If yes, please comment:

Are you *transferring* to another institution? Yes    No  
If yes, which institution?

Is there anything else about your experience (positive or negative) at \_\_\_\_\_ that you think we should know about, which might improve the experience of future students?

Is there anything we can do to help your transition to what you will be doing next (e.g., transfer to another school; obtain a job)?

Note: This question is suggested, not only because it is the altruistic thing to do, but also because it allows one question that asks what the college could for the student—in midst of an interview that is otherwise flooded with institution-centered questions designed to obtain information that will benefit the college. Perhaps, inclusion of a question such as this may also serve to increase the cooperation and self-disclosure of the respondent.

Do you think there is a possibility you might be interested in *re-enrolling* at \_\_\_\_\_ in the future? Yes No Maybe

Note: A yes or maybe answer to this questions would allow the exit interview to function not only as a reactive mechanism vehicle for determining the student's reason for withdrawal, but also as a proactive strategy for re-recruiting a withdrawn student, converting that student from a "dropout" to a "stop-out"—i.e., from a student who was temporarily unable to persist to a student who is eventually retained to graduation.

If yes, or maybe, would you like us to send you registration information in the future?

Yes No

(Note to Student: You may return without reapplying for admission, if you miss only one semester.)

Address we should keep in our records as your permanent address:

Thanks for coming to \_\_\_\_\_ and for providing use with feedback.