



**RETENTION  
BEST PRACTICES**

*A collection of best practices from  
North Carolina Community Colleges.*

Compiled by Student Development Services  
North Carolina Community College System

# Introduction

According to Noel-Levitz, best practices for improving student retention include recognizing and rewarding excellence in advising, teaching and service; training in advising and customer service; special programs for honor students and under-prepared students; academic support programs for all students; and having a “regularly developed” retention plan that includes goals, strategies and action plans. Presented in the following pages, are the best practices of several North Carolina Community Colleges in their efforts to address and improve retention by providing increased services, caring strategies, early interventions, and other methods and/or courses of action. Best practices are listed by college and topic with campus contact information included.

We would like to thank all the colleges who responded to the request for best practices and their willingness to share.

Student Development Services will be revising this document with relevant links and additional information as needed. If you have best practices or other retention information you would like to share, please forward it to Karen Yerby at [yerbyk@nccommunitycolleges.edu](mailto:yerbyk@nccommunitycolleges.edu).

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## RETENTION BEST PRACTICES

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### ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Dennis King, Vice President for Student Services

- **Transfer Advising Center:** For some time now we have been dissatisfied with academic advising for university transfer students. These students number in excess of one fourth of our 6000 student body. Advising for this large group has suffered for a number of reasons: first, most of the faculty who advise transfer students have nine-month contracts and do not work during the summer when advisees plan fall semester schedules. Second, because of the nature of the curriculum, transfer students do not bond with advisors the way they do in applied science programs; transfer students often have never had their advisor in the classroom as is the common case for applied science programs. For these reasons and others, academic advising for transfer students was not working well.

In the summer of 2004, we opened a Transfer Advising Center, which is staffed by faculty members of the Arts and Sciences Division. These faculty members do not have specific advisees assigned to them; instead, they work specific hours at the Transfer Advising Center seeing any student who walks in. The Center is permanently staffed by a director, a clerk who has full capacity of registering and processing registration changes, and a part-time faculty coordinator who is responsible for scheduling faculty and counseling them when mistakes occur. The clerk also creates a file on each student on his or her first visit; that file is passed on to each faculty member who subsequently sees the student.

While the Center is less than six months old, it has received rave reviews from students who find the service they receive superior to our old system and from faculty who feel that they are providing improved service through this supportive environment.

### BEAUFORT COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Sue Brookshire, Director of Retention Services

- **Early Alert Student Referral:** Faculty sends referral form on students that are experiencing academic, personal, etc. problems. Students are mailed a letter to inform them of services provided and to schedule a meeting with the Director of Retention Services. Students are provided an opportunity for counseling.
- **Workshops** on stress, study skills are provided upon request. (meet with Nursing Students and Developmental Students) These are taught/provide by the Director of Retention Services.
- **ACA 111:** College Student Success courses are required for completion of degree programs. ACA 111 classes are taught by Student Development personnel which

enables students to learn about campus resources and to identify with Student Development personnel. This tends to strengthen ties with Student Development and students.

- **Exit surveys** are mailed to early student departures each semester to determine reasons students withdraw prematurely.

#### **BLADEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Contact: Jerry Kornegay, Vice President for Student Services and Personnel

- We have an **early warning system** but have to resurrect it every 2-3 years. Faculty will use it for a while and often forget about it. This system is somewhat effective when used on a consistent basis.
- One of the things we have done recently is to **limit the number of days to register late**. We allow 2 days after registration and that is it. We do not register up to the 10% point as we have done previously. We found that those students were much harder to retain.

#### **CARTERET COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Contact: Dr. Kay Dennis, Director of Distance Learning

- **Distance Education Orientation:** For the past four years we have required students taking their first Carteret CC online (or partial online) class to complete a Distance Learning/Blackboard Online Orientation. It is available 24/7 to anyone. (<http://blackboard.carteret.edu> use "onlinestudent" for username and password.) While we have no data to correlate this intervention directly with student retention, we do have anecdotal evidence that this 1:1 contact, instruction, and support are constructive and of value to students (as well as faculty).

#### **COASTAL CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Contact: Paula Gribble, Chair, Nursing and Allied Health

- Counselors have **information sessions** for many of our NAH programs. The sessions are used to inform applicants of the common stumbling blocks to success. Efforts are made to assist students in planning for these "blocks" before they occur.
- Department Heads and instructors of related courses communicate at the beginning of each semester and at the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> week to **discuss student progress** in related courses. Department Heads then follow-up and meet with students having academic difficulty.
- Several of the NAH programs, with the assistance of Student Services Staff, utilize a **modified Learning Community** for students in the gate keeper courses. Topics of discussion include time and stress management, note taking skills, study skills, and test taking skills.

- **Grade warnings** are sent to students with grades of 80 and below. Faculty requests that students meet to identify problems and plan strategies.
- Students in the Practical Nursing program all complete a **CAI on Test-Taking Skills** the first week of school. They also view a video, "Professional Nightengale" that discusses test-taking skills.
- The **ADN and PN programs use Educational Resources, Inc. testing**. Students are required to complete any remediation that is recommended following completion of the CAP tests.
- The Dental Assisting faculty **learn the students' names** in the first 2-3 days of the semester and use them often. The students don't feel like a number and recognize that the instructors care about them.
- Students are encouraged to **visit the faculty** in faculty offices with or without appointments. However, appointments are encouraged.
- The Dental Assisting faculty hold **mandatory conferences** with all students after the 4<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. The Department Head provides the students a progress report and talks to them about study habits, etc. It seems that students are more comfortable visiting the department head after the first visit.

#### CLEVELAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Ron Wright, Vice President, Academic Programs

- We **telephone students** who (a) drop from courses, and (b) drop from programs.

#### CRAVEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: John Fonville, Vice President for Student Affairs

- The **Learning Communities** at Craven CC were established to facilitate student success. The goal of establishing Learning Communities was to provide students with support needed for the transition from non-student to college student, and the result of established learning communities to increase retention. The communities are typically made up of two or three independent courses working dependently on a common theme throughout an academic semester. Teaching is delivered in a traditional classroom setting as well as through outside activities such as field trips and club activities. Scheduled for Spring 2005 are seven learning communities. Themes include *Swing Into Music With ACA* (ACA & MUS), *Crossing the Digital Divide* (CIS & ENG), *Write to Work* (ENG & OST), *Money Talk* (BUS, ENG & COM), *Humanities Plugged In* (HUM & CIS), *The Way We Live* (ENG & SOC), and *Chartered Courses* (ACA, MAT & ENG).

### DAVIDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Thomas Walker, Dean for Student Services and Enrollment Management

- **Enrollment and Career Services Center (ECSC):** The college recently created a one-stop enrollment area that facilitates the successful transition of student inquiry to student matriculation. The Center allows the areas of Admissions, Financial Aid, and Career Services to serve students simultaneously in the same area. In addition, the area houses an assessment room, which is used for academic placement assessment and career interests inventories. This function allows students, who may be apprehensive about the college experience, a smoother transition into the campus community.
- **Financial Aid Appeal Procedure:** The office of Financial Aid has established new guidelines to improve the retention of students who are recipients of Pell awards. Students who have not made satisfactory academic progress in order to receive Pell funding may appeal to the office of Financial Aid in order to receive another term of Pell funding. Students who now are in the circumstance will have their appeal confirmed only if the student agrees to participate in, and is eligible for, the College's Student Success Program. This program assists students with academic, career and personal counseling, as well as, intensive tutoring. This summer will be the initiation of these new guidelines and the resulting impact on retention will be known next fall.
- **Career Interest Inventory:** The office of Career Services will begin having interested students to complete a career interest inventory as part of the admissions process. This instrument, which takes approximately ten minutes to complete, will allow students to make more informed decisions regarding career selection. Currently, the college is attempting to reduce the number of times students change majors. This phenomenon is having a substantial impact on retention where Pell grant recipients are concerned, since there is a time/credit limit on students' receiving funds to complete a program. The results of this effort will be available fall 2006.

### DURHAM TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Nan Derner, Counselor/Retention Specialist

- **The Mentor Project:** Imagine the life of a student who finished only a middle school education, but had to put her life on hold to put her kids through school and college. After 25 years of putting off your education, it's not easy coming back to finish a high school degree. Or, imagine the life of a young student who has recently graduated from high school, but academics were never the focus. Now that this student's ready to make a commitment to academics, he's not sure where to start. Or, imagine the life of a middle-aged professional who is seeking retraining due to lay-offs from the only employer he has ever known. He feels like he's starting all over again. If you can imagine these lives, and the lives of others who make up the diverse population of Durham Tech, you can imagine the lives of students who enter the Mentor Project. While the backgrounds are diverse and varied, the goal of these students becomes one. Each person wants to become a successful student, graduate, and obtain a job

in their chosen career. The Mentor Project, a success-based retention program, has touched these lives, thanks to many people outside the college.

The Mentor Project started in the fall semester of 2000 as a collaborative venture between the Developmental Studies Program and the Counseling and Student Development Department. The goal of the Project is simple: help new students make the connections necessary to become successful within the college environment. We started with 5 mentors and 12 students. Today, we have an average of 10 mentors who serve more than 100 students each semester. Mentors connect students with campus resources, model good academic behavior, and teach student skills. The students meet with their mentor once a week, attend two group meetings a semester, complete a journal of their experiences, and attend a minimum of six Student Success Workshops. These workshops focus on a wide range of topics that are applicable to the beginning college student: time management, test taking, memory and wellness, to name a few. We also ask the students participating in the Mentor Project to complete a self-assessment to gauge confidence in many factors of student development. These are the same factors that we teach in our workshops (mentioned above). Participants complete these self-assessments when they begin and when they finish the Project. From the completion of these activities, we see a wide range of success. 96% of the students who complete the requirements of the project continue with the college and sign up for classes the following semester. These results indicate that the students are learning the skills necessary for success, feel more confident, and have made a solid connection with the college!

The Mentor Project at Durham Tech has become successful in part due to the generous support we receive from our faculty and staff, the Durham Technical Community College Foundation, and various community funding sources. This support allows the project to creatively enhance the retention options of our students. Without this support, many of the students that return to the community college setting would not be successful. We hope to expand the Mentor Project in the future to serve many more of the students we enroll each semester.

#### **EDGECOMBE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Contact: Thomas Anderson, Vice President of Student Services

- **Special Services:** We hired a Student Support Specialist to deal with specific student problems that would potentially lead to a student's withdrawal from school. Finding transportation, childcare, emergency funds, special tutoring services are examples of services that have been provided on a frequent basis. This position has been at the college for 6 years and now students are well aware of where to go when there seems nobody else to turn to when they need help.

This position serves as both a resource and an advocate for the students. As a liaison between faculty and students, the Student Support Specialist assists in maintaining a line of communication, which is very important to the effectiveness of retention matters.

An important outreach strategy involves visits by the Student Support Specialist to all ACA 111 classes each semester. These visits provide an opportunity for ECC students to meet the Specialist and to hear about the services offered. In short, the Specialist is available to do whatever it takes to help students be successful at ECC.

Student needs come to the attention of the Student Support Specialist either by self-referral or by instructor-referral. To facilitate the instructor-referral process, instructors submit "Retention Alerts," describing their concerns, which are largely attendance or academic problems. A contract is then made with the student to offer help in resolving the problem. Follow-up information is provided to the referring instructor.

- **Curriculum Learning Center:** This is a place where students come to for tutoring in math, English and basic computer skills. Professional tutors man this area, not peer tutors. Their expertise in their field, plus their ability to know when to make referrals to other people for additional services make them more valuable from a retention standpoint than peer tutors (which we also use for other causes).

#### HALIFAX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Barbara B. Hasty, Dean of Student Services

- We utilize the "**early alert**" system. Instructors send the early alert form to the School Counselor for students that have missed more than one or two classes. This is done after the instructor has made initial contact with the student to inquire why the student missed more than two class days or shows early signs of having problems with the classroom/home work assignments. If the student continues to miss classes, or appears to have continued problems in the classroom or with homework assignments and there are repeated absences from class the early alert form is utilized. The School Counselor attempts to contact the student to ascertain the specifics of the problem and offers assistance to the student or refers him/her to other sources that may assist him/her in resolving the problem. Tutoring is also available to assist students in various classes if the student meets criteria for eligibility for assistance from the Student Support Services Program. If the student does meet the eligibility criteria for Student Support Services, every effort is made to assist the student in locating tutorial services.

#### ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Maggie Killoran, Director, Enrollment Management

- **ACA 115:** Success and Study Skills Course required for all students graduating with an Associate's Degree. The course offers intensive orientation to the college and all its processes, information on study skills, self-awareness, and career development.
- **One-Stop Testing Sessions:** These are unique placement testing sessions designed specifically for new students. The sessions are smaller, and allow students to receive an orientation to the college as well as registration in the same visit.

- **Financial Aid Awareness and Outreach:** Financial Aid does many workshops within the college as well for local high schools and community groups to ensure that students have the most accurate and useful information when considering options for financial aid.
- **Enhanced Systems Process Committee:** This committee addresses a variety of issues on campus to improve the college experience for students and staff/faculty alike. Some of their initiatives have been directly related to student request that come to them through ACA focus groups sessions with students.
- **High School Testing Program:** By offering our placement testing services to the high schools on their premises, we recruit high school students by ensuring they all fill out an application, are invited to our summer high school orientation and registration session.
- **Disability Services:** These services are offered to students to help facilitate their success in the classroom through support and accommodations; to help problem-solve any disability-related barrier during the semester; and monitor students' attendance and progress to ensure that they are getting what they need to complete the semester.
- **Academic Advising Day:** Two days are set aside each year (one in fall and one in spring) to release students from class so they have an opportunity to meet with their advisor regarding their current or future registration. This helps to ensure that students are being informed about their best course of action before registration opens.
- **Academic Fresh Start:** Students are allowed to apply to the Admissions Committee to have F's removed from their transcript. The student must meet specific criteria to be eligible for this. If eligible, it will help their GPA and their opportunity to transfer to a four-year university.
- **Customer Service Orientation:** The entire college works hard ensuring that staff and faculty provide a friendly customer service orientation. Students are more likely to attend if their experience of registration and academic support is a positive one.

**JAMES SPRUNT COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Contact: Debra Morrissey, Dean of Student Services

- **Student Support Services Program:** Federally funded program which provides academic, personal, social and career counseling, tutoring, workshops and seminars, and remedial instruction to 210 curriculum students.
- **Academic Support Center:** Supports the educational function of the College by providing computer-assisted instruction, tutorial assistance, academic advising and individual learning modules for remedial and supplementary instruction.
- JSCC provides **free tutorial support** for all curriculum students.
- JSCC provides **childcare assistance** through state and federal funds.
- **Student/Community Leadership Training Program:** This program enhances the leadership skills of students and community representatives. It is free to all participants and sponsored through the James Sprunt Foundation.

## JOHNSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Joan McLendon, Director of Admissions and Counseling

- **A Retention Quality Improvement Team** was established in 2002 to review ways to effectively retain students, review current practices and make recommendations for additional retention efforts/solutions. JCC has implemented several of the recommendations of the Team that are now working effectively.
  - Changes in the **Probation/Suspension Policy** to put in place a procedure to work with students in academic difficulty.
    - Letters go out to students with a GPA less than 2.0
    - Student is required to see a Counselor
    - Student receives *Opportunity for Success Contract* (Referral Form) from the Counselor with selected services checked
    - Counselor sends copy of contract to advisor
    - Student takes advantage of required services and has services initialed by service provider
    - Student meets with Department Chair or designated probation advisor, has registration form signed and leaves contract with advisor
    - Student registers during new student registration
  - **An Early Intervention Form** enables instructors to have a set procedure to identify students experiencing difficulties in individual classes and a form to submit to the designated Early Intervention Counselor. The Counselor contacts the student and invites him/her in to discuss the situation and assess action to eliminate the issue(s). This could be in the form of providing a tutor for the class, personal counseling, referral to Financial Aid or Job Link, or simply to promote discussion between the instructor and student.
- **Student Support Services (TRIO)** has been successful in working with first generation college, low income students in providing tutorial, counseling, advising, early intervention, career and educational planning and mentoring services.

## PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Nydia M. Morales, Dean of Student Development

- **Textbooks on Library Reserve:** This program is geared to help middle income students who do not qualify for Pell grant and cannot afford to buy textbooks, and for students who apply late for financial aid and are not eligible for book vouchers during the first weeks of classes. Textbooks for general education courses with high enrollment, and for other courses when a student requests it, are placed on reserve in the library. Students can use them, in the library for two hours at a time; longer if there are no immediate requests.
- **Minority Male Mentoring Initiative:** This program provides an environment where minority male students feel connected to the college, empowered and motivated to succeed, and supported by services that meet their needs.  
Program features:
  - A counselor/advisor (1/2 time position) that works exclusively with MMMI participants.
  - Extensive mentoring, counseling and monitoring of academic progress

- Fifteen to twenty participants
- Weekly counseling sessions
- Monthly group sessions
- Enrichment activities
- **Services for Students on Academic Probation:** This initiative provides support for students on academic probation as opposed to the traditional punitive action of simply limiting the number of hours a student on academic probation can take.
 

Program features:

  - The student must see a counselor in the Counseling Center in order to register
  - The student negotiates with the counselor the items to be included in an Educational Contract. The contract includes: courses the student will take, frequency of meetings with the counselor, workshops the students will attend during the semester, and other retention activities such as tutoring alternatives.
  - Early warning system. Instructors send feedback to the counselors if the student is not making satisfactory progress.
  - Academic Probation Prevention Campaign each semester. Students are informed of the importance of making good grades through pamphlets, electronic messages and during New Student Orientation and ACA 111 College Student Success.
- **New Student Orientation:** New students are invited to participate in a New Student Orientation session before the beginning of classes each semester. Students are introduced to the college and receive instruction in programs of study, financial aid, the catalog, special services, importance of GPA, graduation requirements, and how to take advantage of the support services available.
- **Early Warning System:** Instructors can use the Early Warning System Referral Form to notify the Counseling Center when a student is having academic difficulty. The Counseling Center follows up with the student to provide the services needed to remedy the problem.
- **TRIO Programs:**
  - Mentoring as a Means of Retention: The mentoring component of TRIO programs at Piedmont Community College serves as an additional connection to students, an avenue of sharing, an arena for problem solving, and an opportunity for encouragement. Mentors are able to spend valuable one-on-one time with students to hear their concerns, successes, and grievances. This time is uninterrupted by other students, staff members, or class schedules.
  - PCC's Outreach Trio Program best practices:
    - Frequent Contacts – Being in contact with your student on a personal basis is beneficial to the fact that it creates trust in the student teacher relationship. When a student feels there is a shared trust in the relationship, the student is less likely to cheat, miss classes, or fail classes because they feel they have an obligation to receive the information or ask for additional help to pass the class based on the instructor's standards.
    - Follow-up – Follow up on your assessment findings. Provide the help the students and staff need.
    - Assessment – Assess the students for their individual needs. Assess your staff to evaluate if they can provide the tools needed to help students. Assess if the style of classes meet the community's needs and expectations. Example of tutoring assessment: After determining a participant's need for tutoring, the tutor coordinator will set up the tutoring sessions, which are performed on a one-to-one basis twice a week. Mid-semester the counselor sends out an Academic Monitoring Form for each participant to see how the

participant is progressing. The form covers; attendance, exam performance, exams taken, grades, assignments and recommendations.

- Leadership Roles – Encourage leadership on the college campus and in the community. Leadership positions encourage the students to finish tasks because they are awarded according to tasks being completed. Sometimes a two or four year goal can be a long time to receive something positive from the work toward a degree. Leadership roles may provide some short-term awards, which may be an incentive to go further in his or her studies. Several presidents, vice presidents and ambassadors for PCC's student body have been Trio participants. Most of them transferred to a four-year university.
  - Recognition – Recognition is always a positive tool to reward the achievers and to inspire those who wish to become more active in their college activities. Train your staff well and reward them as well for continuing to achieve great things. Retention of staff members that are great providers for your team can be one of your best retention tools.
- **The Channel: (TRIO Book Club):** The purpose of forming the book club was to 1) increase each participant's sense of self-awareness, self knowledge, and self-discovery through communication with others about the book readings, 2) provide an avenue for TRIO participants to share different perspectives and different ideas, and 3) allow those who love to read the time to read more and to better understand themselves in the world around them.

The Channel is in its third year of existence with 50 + members, including students and some faculty/staff. They read at least one book a quarter or four books a year including summer months. They establish three meetings a quarter so that all members may get a chance to discuss the book. As Channel members, the participants and/or TRIO counselors provide the discussion questions for the meeting. Students are required to attend a meeting on each book read. This promotes student motivation and involvement in a cultural enrichment activity that promotes socialization as well as cooperation among each other.

The feedback from students has been very positive. Students say they love the book club because it allows them the rare opportunity to meet and talk to people that they would not have ordinarily met.

**RANDOLPH COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Contact: Kimberly A. Price, Dean of Student Services

- **Peer tutoring** is provided through Special Services for a variety of courses, specifically developmental math, English, and science. Tutors and staff members provide academic services and personal support to first-generation college students, and to those who have academic and financial needs, as well as to students who have disabilities that may substantially impair their ability to perform academically. Students are assigned to available peer tutors for one-on-one assistance and in groups. Additionally, all students enrolled in curriculum courses may request tutoring assistance through Student Services counselors with the approval of the instructors in their respective courses.

- **Distance Education Help Center:** During each semester students can receive individual assistance with online courses from staff in the Help Center of the Learning Resources Center. Students may attend, as their schedules permit; no appointment necessary. Both day and evening students have access to services. Personalized technical assistance is also available via e-mail, phone, and in-person visits to the distance education office.
- **Counselors' Success Workshops:** Student Services counselors offer intensive workshops to students during each semester. Weekly sessions explore issues and offer options in developing skills in stress management, time management, test taking, and successful study habits.
- **Focus groups** are frequently used to engage students in the college's decisions making process. One recent example is eliciting student input regarding the Success Center.
- A **peer-mentoring program** was initiated in Fall 2004 and should help to improve retention of new students. Mentors guide new students through their first semester on campus and connect them with resources.

#### WAKE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Contact: Dr. Neil McLeod, Sr. Vice President of Student Services

- By **reorganizing the admissions and counseling division** in 2001, the college is now in a position to provide proactive, intrusive counseling services. The new formation of a counseling department has allowed us to offer academic, personal, career counseling and student success workshops. Since the college has expanded its counseling services, the number of students using the career center has grown by 22.7%. The counseling department continues to grow and more and more students are using our resources.
- **Student Success Committee:** The Student Success Committee was formed in 2002 to discuss issues and policies that have an impact on student success. The membership included six faculty, six staff members from Student Services and student representatives appointed by the Student Ambassadors of SGA. The committee reviews Wake Tech processes and policies, often at the request of the student, and makes recommendations for improvement. This committee has been the catalyst for change and has had an impact on retention.
- **Individualized Learning Center** offers academic support geared to an individual's personal needs or interests. The ILC consist of Math Center, Writing Center, Study Skills Center and Computer Center. Each center consists of one on one tutoring as well as small group tutor sessions. The Center also has workshops, computers, videos, and other supplemental materials for student use.
- We have found that the **development of learning communities** does increase retention as the research suggests. The use of learning communities is an approach in which Wake Tech provides two or more courses, such as English 090 and Psychology 118, for a select group of students who bond together and serve as a support group.

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