

This Month's Topic: Supporting Growth by Increasing Retention and Decreasing Attrition

In collaboration with the San Bernardino Community College District Enrollment Management Committee, Crafton Hills College established targets to grow student enrollment (as measured in full-time equivalent students—FTES) by an additional 4% in the 2016-2017 academic year to 5,010 FTES in order to better serve the Inland Empire. Simultaneously, Crafton Hills College, like other community colleges, is facing counter-cyclical economic pressures which typically correlate with decreases in enrollment. While outreach and recruitment are important aspects to growth, retention (i.e. course completion) and attrition (i.e. [dropping out of college](#)) are equally important considerations. Findings and possible implications from research on increasing retention and decreasing attrition are presented to inform campus-wide and departmental dialogues among faculty, administrators, classified, and students:

Research Findings:

- Students stated [intrinsic motivation](#) supported by extrinsic motivators helped continue their determination to persist.
- Seventy-nine percent of students stated that connecting their success in college to their personal life goals was pivotal to their continued progress.
- Students of color stated their continued enrollment was heavily influenced by their personal finances. Furthermore, of students dropped for non-payment of fees, only 62% re-enrolled in the same section from which they were dropped, and they were statistically significantly and substantially less likely (63%) to complete their courses successfully than students in the same section (73%).
- Students cited the most common reasons for missing class was for work or to care for family.
- Students reported feeling less connected to the campus if their instructors—especially part-time instructors—were perceived as distant.
- Students of color identified a lack of academic support as a very important factor in deciding not to continue enrolling.

Possible Implications:

- Develop career and educational goal exercises in the classroom that connect content in the classroom to the student's personal ambitions.
- Promote student education plans to establish clear goals and markers of success as students persist.
- Provide opportunities for students to purposefully connect to the college community through service projects, both in and out of the classroom.
- Provide opportunities for additional peer-to-peer assistance, especially between students with different backgrounds and common goals.
- Review registration policies and procedures to provide additional support and guidance to students facing financial barriers.
- Research possible impact of matriculation processes, policies, and procedures on student enrollment.
- Explore ways to more seamlessly wrap student and academic support services around the classroom and expand program awareness.
- Increase use of Early Alert/Starfish referral services for students exhibiting behaviors that could threaten success in their course or program of study.

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