

Student Success Management

Effectiveness in Core Learning-Centered Processes

To achieve effectiveness, campus academic managers must implement data-driven strategies from the curriculum and course design stage, to teaching and retention management processes. While many attributes are necessary to successfully manage the academic enterprise, among the most important attributes to achieve effectiveness are the ability to identify processes that are truly essential to produce outcomes that meet the more stringent expectations that stakeholders are placing on colleges; second the ability to assess the quality of the processes; and finally the ability to translate assessment results into data-driven decisions that positively impact outcomes, following a continuous improvement cycle for the identified essential processes.

Graduation Rates as Measures of Institutional Success

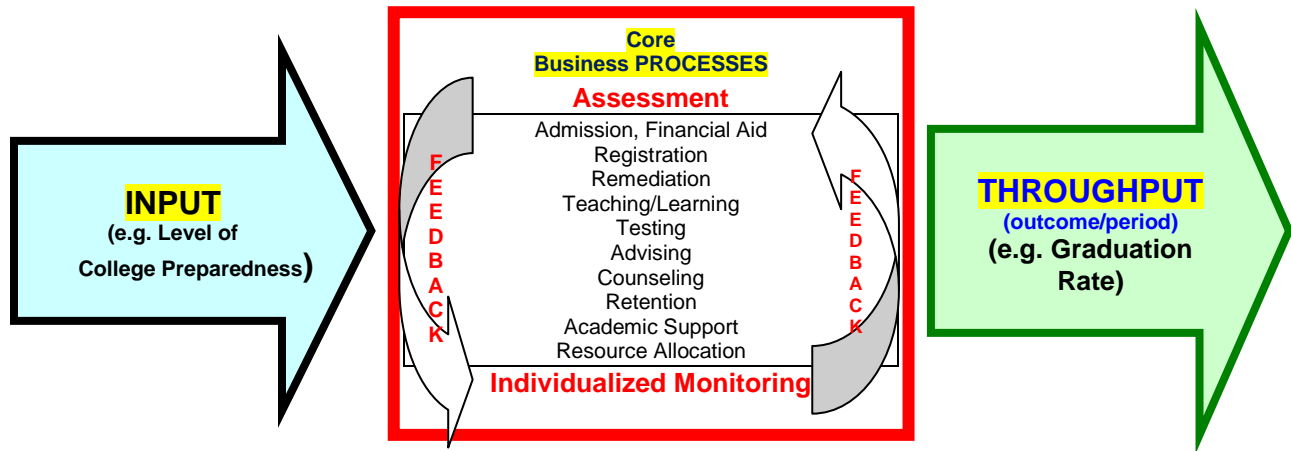
Among the most significant performance measures by which institutional success is being judged by legislatures and accrediting agencies, retention and graduation rates continue to stand out. A valid question that is being posed is that while Institutions keep continuously developing and maintaining initiatives to increase retention and graduation rates, year after year a significant increase in such KPIs still remain relatively elusive. Is it due to lack of theories or is it lack of research? Probably neither, but results suggest that something seems to be missing which needs to be addressed.

Formal theories of student retention emerged in the 1970s leading to sound explanatory models and constructs of the student attrition phenomenon. As a result, and as theories became mainstream models, copious empirical research on the causes of attrition proliferated during more than half a century, bringing an ensuing plethora of prescriptive remedies. Yet, the success and adequacy of such prescriptions still remains questionably elusive, if not unproven at many colleges where, despite decades of thriving retention initiatives, graduation rates have remained unchangeably stagnant.

A conjecture herein posed points at the fact that the outcomes derived from current retention efforts might be explained due to a deficiency, not in the theories and models per se, but rather in a lack of an integrative element of learning management and retention-supporting programs, this result in a fragmentation that leads to seemingly meager increments that fail to meet expectations. To address this conjecture, we must study the difference between retention efforts without an integrative effort and those to which the integration element is incorporated as part of the overall process. Also, we need to devise a robust and comprehensive integrative strategy which first takes into account the joint interaction effects of distinct simultaneous retention interventions. For this to be effective, we need to infuse a practice of a continuous assessment and introduce an intrusive monitoring of student success that goes beyond degree audits, in order to effectively integrate instruction, advising, testing, tutoring and other learning-centered processes to have an impact on the learner on a continuous basis as opposed to just between-terms transcripts reviews.

Traditionally, the process of institutional research and assessment usually provides the necessary data to support federal, state and accreditation compliance reports, however, schemes to derive data-driven decisions are sometimes absent. As an exacerbating factor, an increase in accountability during distressful retrenchment times, has created greater demand for evidence that gauges institutions' ability to guarantee effectiveness and greater ROI. While institutional research provides most of the needed core information, a process of continuous assessment must be present to measure performance and measure process quality. To achieve this, a model must be designed to guide the strategies and actions that lead to the attainment of levels and quality of outcomes that meet constituents expectations. Under these assumptions, a simple model is conceived to design, assess, simulate and monitor academic processes performance. The model has three elements: input, processes and throughput.

The I-P-T Model:
(Input + Process) → Throughput



Postulates of the Student Success Relational Model

1. **INPUT-PROCESS-OUTCOME:** The **quality** and attributes of the **inputs**; combined with the **quality** and attributes of the business **processes**, determines the quality of **outcomes** (throughput), or simply put, the quality of outcomes is a function of input and processes.
2. **ENTRANCE ATTRIBUTES:** Selective colleges use admission strategies to remain within desirable ranges of selectivity indexes as a means to exert control on cohort quality. At many other institutions, though, most of the inputs associated with the level of academic preparedness of entering cohorts, are not under the institution's control until after students register for courses based on academic placement procedures.
3. **CONTROLLABLE FACTORS:** Most processes are, to great extent, under the control of the institution. This assumption plus postulate #2 above, entail that the cohorts entrance attributes will be a the determinant factor of the quality of outcomes, demanding from the academic manager induce improvement via quality improvement of academic business processes.
4. **CHANGE AGENTS:** This postulate lead us to the conclusion that business processes, such as the ones listed in the above input-process-output diagram, lead us to the real improvement opportunities through the continuous assessment of the determinants of quality of the outcomes.
5. **CULTURE OF QUALITY:** Without continuous assessment there is no measure of gradual progress under a continuous quality improvement plan. Likewise, there will be no evidence of progress toward the attainment of success.
6. **INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRESS MONITORING:** The I-P-T model includes, as one of its key processes, the individualized monitoring of student progress beyond usual degree audits. Individualized attention to the student entails the continuous gauging of student engagement, to enable academic managers to receive and provide feedback and the necessary stimuli that foster and maintain student success as a continuous quality improvement process.