

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS FORUM



Hispanic and First-Generation Student Retention Strategies

Custom Research Brief

Research Associate

Amanda Michael

Research Manager

Nalika Vasudevan

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Education Advisory Board

2445 M Street NW • Washington, DC 20037

Telephone: 202-266-6400 • Facsimile: 202-266-5700 • www.educationadvisoryboard.com

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I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What are the barriers to Hispanic and first-generation student retention and graduation?
- What forms of academic and developmental support do institutions provide to increase retention and graduation rates?
- Which strategies to increase retention and graduation rates specifically target Hispanic and first-generation college students?
- How do administrators encourage Hispanic students to take advantage of available academic and developmental support programs?
- What is the impact of these strategies on retention and graduation rates of the entire student body?
- What is the impact of these strategies on retention and graduation of Hispanic and first-generation students?

Project Sources

- Advisory Board's internal and online research libraries.
www.educationadvisoryboard.com
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). <http://nces.ed.gov>.
- Contact institution web sites

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed directors of undergraduate retention initiatives at four large, public institutions.

A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Type	Approximate Enrollment (Total/ Undergraduate)	Percentage of Hispanic Students	Classification
University A	Northeast	Public	12,300 / 9,900	50%	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
University B	South	Public	44,600 / 35,900	66%	Research Universities (high research activity)
University C	South	Public	34,100 / 29,000	28%	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
University D	Pacific West	Public	20,900 / 18,500	33%	Research Universities (very high research activity)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics



II. Executive Overview

Key Observations Institutions with large Hispanic populations focus less on targeted programming and more on connecting students with services that provide academic and financial support to increase student retention. As Hispanic students comprise a majority of the student body at contact institutions, administrators approach retention of these students as an institution-wide effort rather than a targeted effort toward a single demographic.

Retention activities at most institutions begin before students arrive on campus and continue into their first years to prepare students for the rigor of college courses. Initiatives that help students develop study skills and peer groups increase student persistence to the second year. Additionally, administrators design tools that help first-generation students understand major requirements and select appropriate courses for that major early.

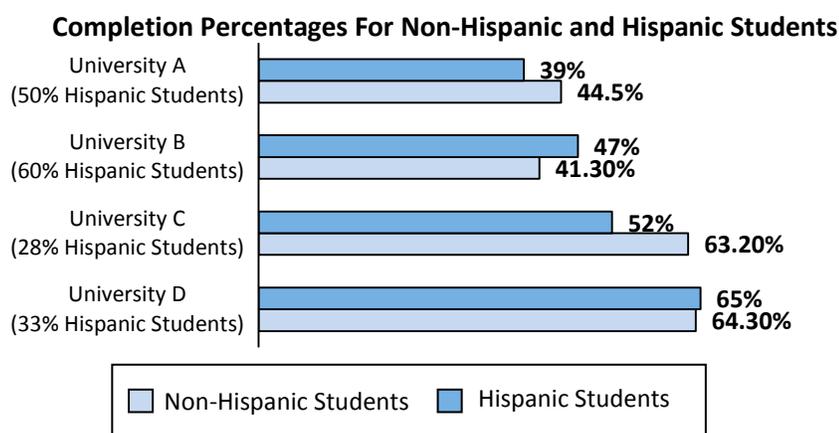
Institutions with high Hispanic populations invest in services that provide services such as mentorships, peer and focus groups, and leadership training to encourage students to accept help. Contacts observe that Hispanic students are more resistant to accepting help; for example Hispanic students prefer to work part-time rather than seeking help in the form of loans.

Administrators encourage Hispanic students to remain on campus outside of class to promote connections among students. Contacts stress that students who remain on campus during the weekends participate in more extracurricular activities, which in turn increases Hispanic student persistence and retention.

III. Overview of Student Performance

Achievement Gaps *Hispanic Students at Institutions with Low Percentages of Hispanic Students Graduate at Lower Rates*

According to the National Center of Education Statistics, all contact institutions report a maximum of 11.2 percent difference in Hispanic student completion rates and non-Hispanic student completion rates. The data below reflects the percentage of students who began their studies in 2005 and completed degrees within 150 percent of normal completion time. Contacts attribute this marginal difference in completion rates to their observation that Hispanic students' needs do not differ from non-Hispanic students' needs. For example, **University B** reports the highest percentage of Hispanic students (60 percent) among contact institutions and Hispanic students complete undergraduate studies at a higher rate than non-Hispanic Students (5.7 percentage points). In contrast, **University C** reports the lowest percentage of Hispanic students (28 percent) and Hispanic students complete at significantly lower rates than non-Hispanic student (11.2 percentage points).



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Contacts at University C note that Hispanic and first-generation men are much slower to react to negative grades and feedback from instructors than their women counterparts. Men may not seek help with enough time remaining in the semester for advisors to help students achieve the grades they desire. At University C, the Latinas Unidas and Hombros Unidos student groups target Hispanic women and men respectively to connect Hispanic students and discuss common challenges facing Hispanic students. Although the student group for women consistently generates high attendance and active discussion events, the group for men often struggles to generate sufficient attendance to hold meetings.

IV. Strategies to Increase Hispanic Student Retention

Early Intervention *Institutions with Large Hispanic Student Populations Launch Early Intervention Retention Initiatives*

Contacts at all institutions agree that academic underpreparedness and financial instability are common challenges for all students from economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, including most Hispanic and first-generation students. Institutions with large Hispanic student populations develop institution-wide efforts to increase student retention, and administrators focus retention initiatives on academic underpreparedness.

Early Intervention Retention Strategy

<p>Challenge: Students Are Unprepared for College Rigor</p>	<p>Solution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure first-year requirements to develop strong study habits • Provide early advising services • Develop peer groups to provide supplemental education
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Utilize Online Tools and Learning Communities to Increase Institution-wide Retention

The Dean for Undergraduate Education at **University B** developed a new strategic plan to address the challenge of underpreparedness titled the Graduation Success Initiative. The new plan aims to help students find the correct major, make progress towards their degree, and graduate in four years through online decision-making tools for students. At **University A**, the School/College Collaborative oversees programs that aim to increase retention among students from disadvantaged economic or education backgrounds. School/College Collaborative administrators were recently awarded over three million dollars in federal grant money for the third time to develop an early alert system that tracks and identifies at-risk students.

Strategies to Target Students Early and Encourage Skill Development

<p>Facilitate Time Management through Strict Scheduling</p>	<p>Administrators at University A implemented block scheduling for all first-year students to teach time management and effective study habits. In the first semester, all students enroll in five courses with an assigned cohort. Courses include English composition, general education courses, and a seminar that addresses the transition to college. In the second semester, students continue in two courses with their cohort, and choose three independently.</p>
<p>Demonstrate Major Options and Require Students to Declare a Major Early</p>	<p>Students who apply for admission to University B must declare a major before admission to the University. Undecided students complete a 20-minute quiz that maps their reported interests, academic background, and other characteristics to a cluster of potential majors. When students select a major, they view semester-by-semester course maps, career paths, and potential salaries. Contacts note that this appeals to first-generation college students who are often confused by the variety of options for college majors.</p>



Provide Online Tools to Aid Students in Decision Making

Administrators at University B developed an online degree auditing tool to track student performance in class and progress towards graduation and alert academic advisors and students if a student becomes at-risk for not graduating. The tool also offers course suggestions and goal setting to address poor academic performance.

Provide Peer and Instructor Support through Living Learning Communities

First year living learning communities at **University D** incorporate supplemental instruction such as dedicated tutoring and discussion sections. Additionally, the cohort model helps students develop strong peer networks and increases the likelihood that students will persist in their major and be retained for a second year.

Ongoing Support *Institutions with Low Percentages of Hispanic Students Focus Retention Initiatives on Connecting Students to Existing Services and Programming*

Contacts at **University C** note that Hispanic students are more resistant to accepting help in the form of support services. For example, if Hispanic students struggle to afford high college tuition payments, they are more likely to enroll part-time and work part-time than to take out loans, which leads to lower retention rates.

Because of the large discrepancy between Hispanic and non-Hispanic student completion rates, administrators at University C conducted surveys to determine the causes behind Hispanic students' withdrawal from the institution and the reasons other students chose to remain. Survey responses indicated that students who remained on campus participated in extra-curricular activities or on-campus jobs that fostered a sense of connection between students and the campus. In contrast, Hispanic students who withdrew from the institution participated in few or no extra-curricular activities and typically lived off-campus, indicating low levels of engagement with the institution.

Ongoing Support Retention Strategy

Challenge:
Students Do Not Use Existing Services or Participate in On-Campus Activities

Solution:

- Create peer-groups to encourage students to remain on campus
- Encourage mentorships to provide an on-going support system and educate students about existing resources

Launch Campus Identity Campaigns and Offer Informal Mentorships to Build Hispanic Students' Familiarity with Campus and Support Services

Administrators at **University C** launched a series of initiatives to build students' familiarity with the campus and connect students to mentors, peers, and advisors so that students understand whom to contact with challenges and questions.

Strategies to Encourage Students to Seek Help and Participate in On-Campus Activities at *University C*

Send Personalized Messages to Students' Families

Administrators at University C took a photo of students and their families during their move into campus housing for a summer bridge program. Administrators then mailed a copy of the photo and a note thanking parents for their involvement and support. Contacts note this correspondence increased students' and parents' feeling of connection between home and campus support systems.

Create Mental Health Campaign

A mental health campaign encourages students to speak up or inquire about a fellow student's risky or upsetting behavior. Contacts hope this campaign will encourage students to rely on one another for support and create a sense of community.

Form Common Identity through Campus Identity Campaign

Administrators surveyed students to determine the qualities and characteristics they associated with their institution. Based on students' responses, administrators developed tenants of a campus identity, which included qualities such as healthy, proud, academically successful, and responsible. Administrators incorporate these tenants as module themes for advising, mentorship, and outreach to students.

Develop Financial Literacy Workshops Led By Mentors

Administrators launched a financial literacy campaign to address student concerns regarding their ability to pay for college. Mentors use financial data to help students understand how to maximize time to graduation to minimize loan payments. Mentors encourage students to enroll in more courses rather than work part-time to decrease time to graduation and develop a stronger connection to campus.

Launch Leadership Development Workshops to Foster Community

The student affairs office at University C recently implemented both workshops and dialogue series, which address academic success and cultural issues of concern to Hispanic men. In response to low attendance, administrators changed the schedule of programming to include fewer, longer settings. The Black/Latino workshop for men now occurs once a month for three to four hours.

V. Outcomes

Assessment *Few Programs Yield Direct Gains in Retention and Graduation Rates*

Contacts struggle to demonstrate a change in graduation and retention rates from any single program or initiative. Many Hispanic and first-generation students who graduate within six years participate in advanced degree leadership program at **University D** that provides summer research opportunities, stipends, and housing for students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. However, administrators cannot determine a direct correlation between participation in the program and retention and graduation rates.

In response to stricter state funding guidelines for graduation and completion rates, administrators at **University B** targeted a new advising initiative to upper division students. Administrators identified students with enough credits to graduate in a different major than their current declared major. Advisors contacted students to discuss their proximity to

6%

Graduation Rate Increase

Administrators at University B increased graduation rates by 6% by focusing on students close to graduation.

graduation, and with student permission, advisors completed their application for graduation and change of major form. Advisors then contacted students who lacked one or two courses to graduate and overrode any enrollment holds to place students in the courses necessary to graduate the next semester.

In response to positive student feedback and increased graduation rates, advisors began contacting students who required up to an additional full year of courses to graduate. Advisors worked with students to schedule courses that led to the shortest time to graduation. As a result, in the first year of the initiative, graduation rates rose six percent, and continued to rise in the following semesters.

Measure Program Success through Student Participation

Advisors at **University D** measure the success of retention programming through student participation. Programming directed at retaining Hispanic students aims to encourage campus engagement, therefore contacts place high value on the repeated attendance at student group events and programming. For example, when creating a presentation series on available research opportunities, administrators expect few interested students to attend the first workshop. However, if students attend a second or third workshop, contacts note that they are not only likely to pursue that research opportunity, but also to bring friends to the presentation and become an advocate for that opportunity.