

AGENDA ITEM C3: DEGREE COMPLETION
BOARD RULE 400.0200.00
STUDENT RETENTION - FALL TO SPRING
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING: JULY 28, 2011

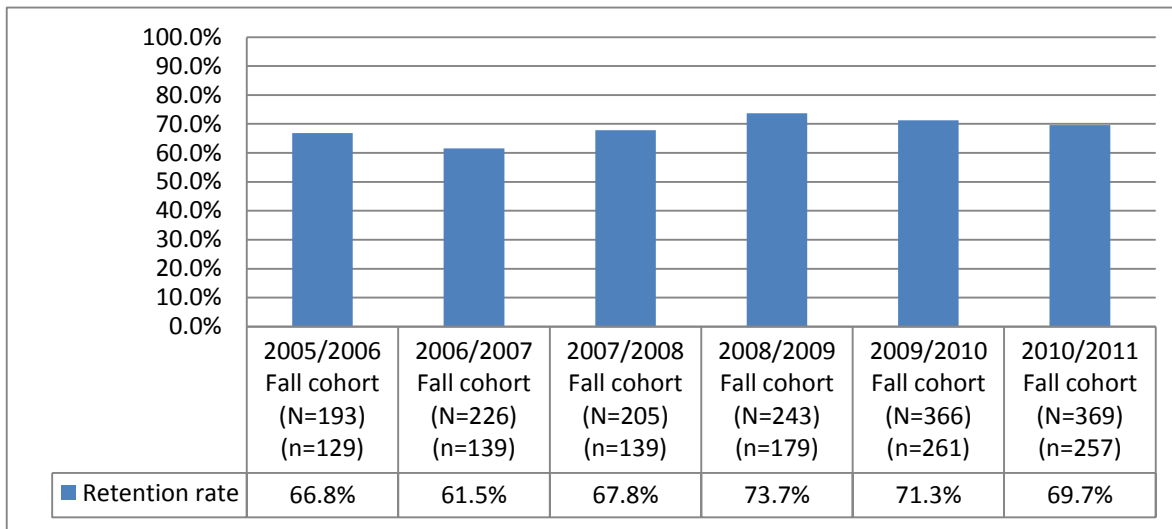
Belmont Technical College makes a strong commitment to recruit, and enroll both traditional and non-traditional students. Belmont provides academic support services and emphasizes student learning throughout technical and general studies programs to focus on student retention as one way of helping students achieve their career and educational goals. This report focuses on student retention from fall to spring quarter.

Data

The retention rate is based on tracking each fall cohort of first-time full-time degree-seeking students and reporting the number and percent of students who persist from fall quarter to spring quarter. The data in Table 1, *Fall to spring retention rate, 2005/2006 through 2010/2011* includes data for the past 6 academic years. Each vertical bar represents the percent of students in the fall cohort who were enrolled two quarters later, in spring quarter of that academic year. Below each bar are numbers indicating: the academic year; (the uppercase) “N” size, or total number of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students in the cohort; and (the lowercase) “n” size representing the number of students from the fall cohort who were enrolled during spring quarter. The retention rate is listed below the identifying academic year and is based upon the original number of students in the cohort.

As an example, the bar on the far right in Table 1 shows data for the 2010/2011 academic year. In that year, the fall cohort was comprised of 369 first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students. Of those 369 students from the fall cohort, 257 were enrolled during spring quarter. The fall-to-spring retention rate for the 2010/2011 fall cohort is 69.7%.

Table 1, *Fall to spring retention rate, 2005/2006 through 2010/2011*



The data in this table suggest that the fall-to-spring retention rate over the last six years has fluctuated between 61.5% for the fall 2006/2007 cohort and 73.7% for the fall

2008/2009 cohort. The difference between the low and the high is 12.2 percentage points. The 2010/2011 fall cohort shows a fall-to-spring retention rate of 69.7%, which is 4 percentage points below the six-year high and 8.2 percentage points above the six-year low.

The actual number of fall cohort students who enroll for spring is recorded as the “n” size. Over the last six years, the actual numbers of students in the fall cohorts who were enrolled in spring has varied between 129 in 2005/2006 and 261 in 2009/2010. It is notable that the actual number of fall cohort students enrolling for spring in 2006/2007 was half the size of the fall cohort returning for spring in 2009/2010.

Analysis

The spring 2010/2011 retention rate of 69.7% indicates that 257 of the 369 fall cohort students were still enrolled at Belmont in the spring. A great deal of attention is focused on student retention and a network of strategies have been developed and implemented throughout the College. The redesign of transitional studies and an AQIP action project are aimed at helping students achieve success in academics and persist with college-level coursework.

The Jenzabar Retention Management System (RMS) is now being activated and provides an important tool designed to identify students who are at-risk for dropping out. The RMS then has tools for notifying appropriate advisors and faculty members when students demonstrate characteristics that have been identified as potential threats to student persistence. Early alerts of academic difficulty are one way the RMS can be used to intervene when faculty members notice a student has missed classes or stopped attending altogether. Advisors monitoring the RMS can then provide assistance to students and help them stay on the pathway to success.

The First Year Experience (FYE) program includes a number of elements that were derived from nationally acknowledged best practices and strategies in higher education. A redesigned orientation program with a greater emphasis on online services has been running for more than a year. A student leadership program that includes leadership retreats and an award ceremony has been introduced and some students have been involved in helping with greeting other students, responding to questions from a reception table, and leading parts of orientation activities. Advising services now include an appointment system which helps students contact their advisors more frequently and reduces the waiting time for all students. Advisors work with students individually to develop each student’s degree completion plans. The plans can be accessed by the students from the web portal and students can see their progress toward completing a degree.

Conclusions/Recommendations

In order to continue retaining students at or above the 70% level, the college community must be proactive in creating programs and implementing retention practices for student success in the areas of first year retention, academic support programs, and teaching and learning. Based upon recommended practices in higher education, the following strategies are being implemented to create a better connection with students and increase retention.

- Stop-out letters were sent to a list of more than 275 students who had made significant progress toward a degree but had not finished that degree.

- Degree completion plans were initiated summer quarter to keep students on track for semester conversion and beyond.
- “We Miss You” campaign: Students enrolled for fall and winter terms who were not enrolled for spring term (208) were mailed a post card entitled “We Miss You.” Similar copy emailed to 184 of the 208 students. Twenty-three responses were received. Of those, 19 students indicated they were returning to Belmont or transferring to another institution by fall 2012. Another 4 students indicated they will return to Belmont at some time in the future.
- Students from fall who were not enrolled for summer 2011, but were here spring (808), were emailed a reminder that included the benefits of continuing through summer 2011.
- Program Chair letters: Letters were mailed in mid-June, to students encouraging them to enroll and emphasizing the importance of timely goal attainment.
- Transitional studies program was redesigned and placements into transitional studies classes were reviewed in order to encourage students’ persistence.
- Students were reminded of Student Success Center resources such as: individualized academic assistance workshops, academic coaching, tutoring, web-based programs, and Accuplacer preparation workshops.

Targets for improvement in the following areas for implemented strategies:

- “We Miss You” campaign: Increase student response rate to 25% for 2011/2012.
- Increase rate of retention by 10% for Dual Enrollment students who register at Belmont.
- Increase retention rate for non-traditional students by 10%.
- Retain 20% of 183 first-time full-time students Fall 2010/2011 who were identified as at-risk by the new RMS.
- Involve a greater number of students with Career Services programs to assist in their persistence and graduation.
- Engage new students taking the FYE 101 course in First Year Experience success programs.