Calling for Success: Online Retention Rates Get Boost From Personal Outreach

Mandy Zatynski
Writer/Editor, Education Sector
University of West Georgia

- Online students: Mix of traditional, nontraditional, first generation
- Retention rate for online courses, 2007: 68%
- By summer 2012: 92%
- (Face-to-face, on-campus courses: 91 percent)
Student Success Team

• 14-person team
• Multi-faceted: Academic advisers, mentors, and a general resource for online students
• Call students who have fallen behind
• Help them get back on track via homework help, tutoring, or connecting them to counselors

“Your professor asked us to give you a call. Are you at a computer? Let’s log in right now.”
Student Success Team

1. Student misses assignment, fails exam, doesn’t log into course
2. Instructor reports students weekly to student success team
3. Adviser calls student, connects them to resources, tutoring
4. Adviser follows up 4 days, 7 days, 14 days after initial contact
Retention in 2011-2012

1,642 (76%) at-risk students completed courses

8,714 phone calls made by advisers

4,357 at-risk incidents reported by instructors

4,357 emails sent to students
Proactive strategies

• Reach out to students who haven’t logged in to their online courses by day three
• Fall semester 2012
  – 1,071 phone calls
  – 1,126 emails
• Primary reason students hadn’t logged in? They didn’t know their password.
What else do advisers do?

• Gina Cannell
  – Works full-time in IT, mother, side business
  – On-campus tutoring out of reach
  – Failing statistics course

• Other functions:
  – Find textbooks, register for proctored exams
  – Schedule make-up work around medical leave
  – Connect students with counseling
Other results

- Summer 2012, introductory writing course
- Online retention rate: 76 percent
- Face-to-face retention rate: 60 percent

“Our on-campus classes are realizing that if we can identify these students early on, who aren’t attending well—especially with freshmen—if someone can follow up with them, that can make a difference.”

- Carrie McWhorter, English instructor, UWG
Isn’t all of this “coddling”? 

- Some students are not able to take an online course “out of the box.”
- Online courses require more self-motivation and time management than campus courses.
- Misconceptions about online coursework.
- “Procrastination is the No. 1 enemy for the online student.”
Why are supports needed?

• Marie Fetzner, Monroe Community College, surveyed online course dropouts 3 times in 10 years.

• Reasons for quitting the same:
  – They fell behind and couldn’t catch up.
  – They couldn’t balance school with work or family obligations.
How can you do it?

• Student success team expansion
  – 8 campuses within University System of Georgia
  – 14 employees, some graduate assistants
  – Completely funded through student tuition

• Instructor buy-in

• Data monitoring

• Empathy and forcefulness
Success!

- Heather McMillian, single mother, full-time school clerk
- Pursuing teaching degree
- Unsuccessful with online, for-profit (little interaction and poor response rates)

“I don't feel like I'm stuck out on a remote island somewhere trying to teach myself a subject.”
More information

• Mandy Zatynski, Education Sector
  – mzatynski@educationsector.org
  – 202.552.2854
  – Twitter @mandyzatynski

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