**University of Redlands**

**College of Arts & Sciences Retention Working Group**

**Findings and Recommendations**

**April 2011**

***Executive Summary***

1. Over the past eight years, our average retention rate has been 84% (confirmed) and very consistent.
2. The Working Group has identified the 1st-3rd retention “risk factors” which result in students being less likely to be retained. Some prevalent factors include:
   * Out of state students
   * Male students
   * Students who underperform academically
3. Current practices to maintain student engagement and other programs for students of concern:
   * A coordinated New Student Week (Orientation);
   * First Year Seminars with peer advisors,
   * Summer Bridge for first generation students;
   * TRAIN - leadership training for first year students (held the first week in January);
   * First Year Journeys – the week before Orientation and Outdoor Programs (OP) throughout the year to reinforce the initial bonding experience;
   * Academic Success Center – increased tutoring and “at risk” student monitoring have been implemented, especially for students on academic warning/probation.
   * An increase in diversity programming;
   * Social Mapping – how Residence hall staff can identify “possible” students with concerns and/or at risk for transferring or withdrawing;
   * Intramural Sports. The past two years, participation levels have increased from 300 to 1500 students. The student interest and demand for Intramural Sports has outgrown the management of a 10hr/wk Graduate Student position.
4. The strategic plan of the College is to increase the number of traditional undergraduates. Given current resources, we will be challenged to maintain freshmen support at current levels.
5. Tracking from Applied Policy Research, CIRP data, and the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) suggests we can identify students who could be a retention risk in the first semester and potentially intervene.

***Action Items***

To improve retention with a long-term goal of increasing our average 1st to 3rd semester retention rate to 87%, “pro-active” changes and funding need to be implemented:

1. Continue to work collaboratively with the College of Arts & Sciences Office of Admissions in identifying characteristics which are more likely to result in successful students as defined by retention and graduation (*see paragraph 2.b.).*
2. The “reactive” measures taken thus far (*see Executive Summary #3*) will only maintain the current retention efforts. Expanding the following Academic and Student Life student support/resources may lead to the 3% increase:
   1. An increase in tutoring services is needed for the math and science courses, especially when many pre-health students must take difficult chemistry and biology courses. An enhancement of $7000.00 was submitted to accommodate the increase in tutor services for the ‘current’ student population. An increase to $9000.00 is needed to accommodate the ‘larger’ number of students projected to enter in 2011-2012 academic year. An additional $2000.00 will be need if the incoming class reaches 800+.
   2. A budget of $10,000.00 for ALL First Year Seminars to participate and utilize the CPQ (see page 6 for Preliminary Data\* results). This questionnaire will also help in the development of which TYPE of student is the “best fit” for the College (see #1 above, regarding selectivity). The CPQ’s conclusions and recommendations (*see page 8*) are valid suggestions which are incorporated within this report.
   3. To accommodate the increase in Intramural Sport participation, an additional graduate student is needed. The cost is $11083.00 plus tuition remission for either the School of Education or the School of Business.
   4. An initial budget of $40,000.00 to hire 3 part-time academic scheduling advisors, thus gaining 1560 advising hours. These individuals will advise the undeclared students on LAF’s, Career/Internship related matters, engagement, etc. (26 wks x 20/hrs x $25/hr x 3 advisors = $39K). This idea will address the gaps as noted in the CPQ about advising concerns (see page 7, #5.) and assist the already overloaded Faculty (e.g., Business, Psychology, Environmental Studies, etc.).
   5. An increase of $10,000.00 for every 50 students referred to participate in the TRAIN program. With the expectation of a larger freshmen class, it is reasonable to have an additional 50 to 100 students recommended to participate in TRAIN.
   6. Over the last three years, students who’ve participated in the Summer Bridge program are averaging a four-year graduation rate of 85%. This is compared to our overall College’s rate of 61%. An enhancement request was submitted for $25,000.00 to run two sessions of Summer Bridge, which would accommodate a maximum of 66 total students (33x2). It’s estimated to cost approximately $12K per 30 students. If the Cal grant student number increases, as well as the First Generation population, then it is likely a third session would be needed. The likelihood of having a third session is impossible with the current resources and staffing.

**Additional Proactive measures not requiring immediate fiscal resources:**

1. A clearly defined and agreed upon definition (by Administration, Faculty, Staff, and Student body) of what type of “Liberal Arts College” the College of Arts & Sciences is or can be. At the moment, the consensus is that the College is a great school for the B student.
2. Degree Attainment is also a challenge facing the College. Establishing an acceptable target for four year and six year graduation rates along with the necessary actions to reach that goal should be a focus in the next year. It would be helpful to see a cost benefit analysis of what the University “saves” when students complete their degree(s) in 4 years verses 5 and 6 years. An ideal goal would be to have the 4 year percentage significantly higher than the 5 or 6 year percentage, yet the inverse is currently happening.
3. Continued work by the Registrar’ Office, Information Technology, and the College of Arts & Sciences Dean’s Office to improve the process and methods for students (and advisors) to accurately track progress toward and receive communication regarding graduation requirements.

***Background***

Retention is a federally defined and widely reported statistic used as one definition of college success. The Federally-defined statistics is the number of entering fall first-time full-time (FTFT) freshmen who return to the same college or university the next fall calculated as a percentage of the total fall first-time full-time entering freshmen. The statistic is most often called the first to third semester retention rate.

In fall 2009, the percentage of first-time full-time entering freshmen who entered the College in fall 2008 and returned for their third semester was significantly lower than our historical rates. Please note, though, that while the percentage was 3.4% lower than the prior year’s rate, the number of students who did not return was only 15 more than the number of fall 2007 first-time full-time entering freshmen who did not return for fall 2008.

In fall 2010, the percentage of first-time full-time freshmen who returned for their third semester was much higher than fall 2009 and slightly higher than any rate in the last ten years. Once again, the 5.43% increase over the fall 2008’s student retention rate represented a difference of 30 students. *See Table 1 for the last five years first to third semester retention.*

***Table 1 First-Time Full-Time Entering Freshmen First to Third Semester Retention***



At the direction of the President, in fall 2010 the College Retention Working Group was formed under the leadership of Bethann Corey and Fred Rabinowitz. The Working Group members are Jim Bentley, Paul Driscoll, Patricia Hall, Lillian Larsen, Leela MadhavaRau, Jeff Martinez, Wendy McEwen, Ruben Robles, David Schrum, Art Svenson, and Lisa VanMeeteren. This team was asked to examine retention efforts college-wide (CAS) and provide recommendations to the University Cabinet and Board regarding retention rate goals and activities.

The Working Group has met bi-weekly for the last several months, focusing on quantitative factors and qualitative characteristics of the students who were not retained as well as those who were successfully retained. One specific topic has been what should be the College’s retention goal. To determine this, the Working Group looked at internal historical data and information, benchmarked the College against competitor institutions, and carefully reviewed current on-going initiatives impacting retention.

***Historical Data and Information Analysis***

After reviewing demographic, geographic, financial data, and exit interview survey responses from the last five years, the Working Group identified some characteristics which seem to be more predictive in increasing a student’s risk for attrition. These characteristics include – but are not limited to – being from out of state, being male, and struggling academically during their freshmen year. Comparatively, some characteristics which seem to be more predictive in increasing the potential for retention include – but are not limited to – receiving a Cal Grant award, participating in the Summer Bridge Program, participating in the First Year Journeys pre-orientation week trips, participating in the TRAIN leadership retreat prior to the beginning of second semester, increased academic engagement, and participating as a member of an athletic program. The Working Group also consulted Applied Policy Research and reviewed their probability information regarding retention. (S*ee Appendix A for tables containing year over year comparisons of retention.)* Using this data analysis, the Working Group could not identify any specific characteristics, which could consistently be used as a single significant factor for predicting attrition.

The Working Group has also talked about identifying the characteristics during the admissions process which contribute to successful retention and graduation rates. However, because the number of students who enroll is approximately 30% of the admitted students, it is difficult to shape our entering freshmen class using the current processes and goals.

As a final internal data point, the first to third semester retention rates for the last eight years have been consistently between 83% and 86% except for the Fall 2008 81% retention rate. From a statistical perspective, this is considered extremely consistent in terms of variability. It is important to remember that with an FTFT entering freshmen class of 600 students, a difference in one percentage point for retention is only six students. Even at the low of 81% retention, we only lost 15 more students than the previous year.

***Competitor Benchmarking***

As part of the discussion regarding what is an achievable and sustainable retention goal, the Working Group benchmarked the College’s rates against other institutions. We decided to benchmark our rates against institutions that are our competitors for freshmen applicants. Please note that this group isn’t necessarily a defined peer group, but represents those schools to which students who are admitted to the College as freshmen attend instead. For these competitor schools, a retention rate of about 84% puts us near the median of this group. *See Table 2 for these rates.*

**Table 2: Admissions Group Retention Rates**



*Source: National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) data retrieved March 23rd, 2011 for most recently available years.*

***Ongoing Initiatives***

The College has several initiatives that are currently focused on improving retention. Individually, many of the efforts are successful with their targeted populations. Combined, the Working Group feels that these initiatives are contributing significantly to our current retention success and should be continued. However, with the number of incoming freshmen expected to increase for fall 2011 (650 projected), additional resources will be needed in order to maintain or improve upon the 84% retention average.

**First Year Seminar High Risk Identification Pilot (College Persistence Questionnaire, CPQ)**

This initiative was conducted as a pilot Collaborative Retention Program between the College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s office and Student Life in 2010-2011. Twelve of the forty First Year Seminar classes participated and 163 students completed surveys. The student responses were reviewed and used by the academic advisors and Student Life to identify students who may be at a higher risk for attrition. Of the 163 students surveyed, 72 (44%) were identified as high risk. ***Preliminary Data (Action Items 2.b)*** shows that 46 of the 72 students received some manner of intervention. Intervention ranged from meeting with the Advisor (to discuss the survey results) to direct referrals to a number of campus resources. In April, the Check-In Team (CIT) runs a high risk student report that is comprised of a list of students who do not: 1. Turn in their FASFA, 2. Register for fall courses, 3. Secure housing with Student Life. Of the 46 students who received an intervention, 8 students were on CIT list and were also identified as High Risk by the CPQ. In other words, we’ve identified 8 students who will “more-likely-than-not” withdraw from the University. The remaining 38 students showed positive signs of returning in Sept. 2011. The CPQ also clearly identified 3 of the 4 students who have withdrawn from school. Lastly, of the remaining 91 students which the CPQ did not identify as being “high risk”, 12 students were on the CIT list. Two of the 12 students have withdrawn and it is possible that two additional students will too. The remaining 8 students show positive signs of returning.

We will know better in the fall of 2011about the predictive value of this Institutional Commitment intervention. If this initiative were to be fully implemented for fall 2011, the cost would be approximately $10,000. A proposal for an enhancement to support this initiative is currently being considered (see summary below).

**The College Persistence Questionnaire: University of Redlands “Institutional Commitment” Report Executive Summary from** **fall 2010 Freshman Sample**

The most powerful form of intervention takes place in one-on-one sessions with students who have been identified to be at-risk. The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) Advisors’ Portal provides school personnel with a tool for making these encounters helpful, effective, and fruitful in raising retention rates. It identifies individual students who are most at-risk and supplies an in-depth analysis

of the problems each one is experiencing. Testimonials of advisors and counselors who have used it are uniformly and overwhelmingly positive in describing its value in their sessions with individual students.

This Institutional Commitment Report provides a perspective that supplements the one-on-one approach just mentioned. By analyzing the aggregate responses of many students at University of Redlands, patterns and trends emerge that clarify which factors are most important among large groups of students. This perspective presents the opportunity to develop or improve upon large-scale intervention programs which will have maximum effect on retention because they focus on persistence-linked qualities.

Previous research has established that the Institutional Commitment (IC) scale of the CPQ is a strong predictor of whether students will persist. In the absence of re-enrollment data (1st to 3rd retention for said group), the IC scores are the focus of this report and are used to estimate the reasons why students may decide to stay or leave. The specific goals of this investigation were to: a) determine if the CPQ predicts IC, b) identify those factors most strongly associated with IC, and c) offer guidelines for improving retention at the University of Redlands.

**To accomplish these ends, a series of multiple regressions were performed upon the IC scores of 163 Redlands students who took the CPQ during the fall of 2010. The primary findings were:**

1. Regressions of IC scores upon the 61 CPQ items were statistically significant, explaining 63% of the variance. Thus, CPQ items are a valid and potentially useful predictor of IC.
2. Some modest though statistically significant correlations were found between students’ backgrounds and their institutional commitment. Institutional commitment tends to be higher among (a) women, and those who selected the institution because (b) it provides the academic programs the student desired, or (c) it has a good reputation. Although the relationships between these variables and IC were not strong, they provide some useful information in planning student recruitment strategies. Additionally, the relationships identify groups of students who, needy of higher IC, might benefit from additional services.
3. Items composing the Student Experiences Form of the CPQ were much better IC predictors than variables associated with the students’ backgrounds. This finding indicates that students’ post-matriculation interactions with the academic and social environments at Redlands have a profound impact on their commitment to the institution.
4. The best predictors of IC were students’ scores on Academic and Social Integration, Degree Commitment, Advising Effectiveness, and Scholastic Conscientiousness.
5. A number of scales have indirect as well as direct effects on IC. Results suggest that advising is of particular importance. The data is consistent with the premise that effective advising promotes academic and social integration, which in turn increase IC. Favorable advising also appears to have benefits beyond its role in IC in that it was associated with increased levels of academic motivation and academic efficacy.

**Based on these results, we offer the following conclusions and recommendations:**

1. Redlands will be successful in improving IC and subsequent retention to the extent that it augments students’ Academic and Social Integration, Degree Commitment, and Scholastic Conscientiousness. These four variables should be central to Redlands’ retention efforts.
2. Quality advising will play a critical role in reducing attrition. This finding is not unique to Redlands. It is one of the most well- established outcomes in the literature.
3. If programmatic changes are implemented, then an evaluation system should be devised to assess the effectiveness of these interventions and to make necessary refinements.
4. A limitation of these conclusions and recommendations is that they are based on IC scores rather than actual enrollment. An investigation analogous to this one should be conducted once it can be determined which of the sampled students return in the fall of 2011.
5. There are many empirically validated programs for improving retention in the scientific literature. Which of these programs should be incorporated into the attrition-reducing efforts at Redlands depends upon the resources of the institution. Development of retention programs should be guided by the scientific literature and knowledge of the resources that Redlands can commit to improving retention.

**Student Life and Admissions Efforts for Out Of State Students**

Student Life uses the characteristic of being from out of state as a risk factor for attrition. The Housing Office tries to decrease this potential risk by matching students (e.g., as roommates or within the same Residence Hall) with other students from their region. Student Life also works very hard to provide a variety of weekend activities to target those students who remain on campus, especially the out of state students who do not have a car. These include frequent Bulldog Bus activities (e.g., Dodger, Angels, Chargers, Kings, Lion King, etc.) and Non-alcoholic Dawgs-til-Dawn campus events, which are held every other Friday night. It was noted that out of state students who did not visit campus were a higher retention risk. The Office of Admissions emphasizes the importance of visiting campus prior to enrolling. It is recommended that efforts increase to encourage out of state students to visit campus before coming to the University. There appears to be more of a “buy in” and reality orientation to those who have visited the campus prior to enrolling.

***Conclusion***

The Retention Working Group feels the current retention efforts are effective, particularly considering the diverse population the College admits. A retention rate of 84% is an achievable goal. If the College wants to commit to increasing the first to third retention rate, the Action Items outlined on page 2 needs to be implemented.

***Recommended Next Steps***

One positive outcome of the Retention Working Groups efforts has been the identification of opportunities for improvement in College Graduation Rates. While the Working Group has been asked to focus on retention, there is a significant opportunity for improving our four year and six year graduation rates with relatively little additional effort. The Working Group would like to propose that as their focus for the 2011-2012 year.

***APPENDIX A***

***Selected Comparative Data Tables for Retention and Attrition of First Time Full Time Entering Freshmen***



*Source: Data Tables from Institutional Research as of Fall 2010 Census*



*Source: Data Tables from Institutional Research as of Fall 2010 Census*



*Source: Data Tables from Institutional Research as of Fall 2010 Census*



*Source: Retention Data File Fall 02 through Fall 09*



*\*Includes those self-identified as Multi Ethnic*

*Source: Retention Data File Fall 02 through Fall 09*