



Teaching For Success®

Quick Answers

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Q: What Are the Must-Know Student Retention Factors?

A: The Top Three Factors: Attitude, Involvement, Activity

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Do you know the top three reasons that influence a student's decision to hang tough or drop a course or program? You will if you browse the "The Community College Survey of Student Engagement" and companion website. They provide some insights into the question of what factors influence student retention. Three main factors stand out.

Extra-mile commitment

According to the students interviewed, they are most drawn to instructors who are willing to walk the extra mile for them. They relate to instructors who are positive, supportive, who function as colleagues and don't project a better-than-you teaching persona. Instructors should remember what it is like to begin to study the subject they are teaching and be willing to be mentors and teachers. Students respond to teachers who want them to succeed, care about their personal lives, and are easily accessible for help either on campus or online. Students like teachers whose doors are always open to them and provide them with extra help when needed.

Involvement

Students tend to stay in classes when they become more involved with the college through tutoring, academic advising, student groups, and special support programs to find jobs, transfer, and help with their needs to stay in school. Find out what services and organizations are active at your college or university. You never know when a spur-of-the-moment referral to one of these services or student organizations will be the key to prevent a student from leaving your class or even dropping an entire program.

Verified by my 14-years of teaching and this survey, it can be said that students tend to stay at colleges where they are made to feel that they are a part of the college and part of the academic community. The rule is that students tend to stay in programs that make them feel important, wanted, appreciated, and successful.

Active teaching and practical learning

A third factor keeping students in programs is teaching them practical, real world, expert-thinking skills in addition to theoretical knowledge. Students prefer a variety of learning activities opposed to straight lecture-style courses. (See "How to Activate Your Lectures and Presentations" *QuickCourse: Teaching For Success Member Library*) They like being active learners and learning through solving problems, and discovery activities. Instructors who embrace active and accelerated learning strategies are preferred.

Why bother with retention issues? Your job and instructor evaluations may depend on it, for one. For a more complete answer, download and breeze through a four-page Survey Highlights PDF produced by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement by going to: <http://www.ccsse.org/publications/Jan2007.pdf>

In addition, you'll find links to three video interview clips that are well worth watching at <http://www.ccsse.org/retention/retention.cfm>. In these clips you will hear students being interviewed describing excellent teachers and identifying the factors that really kept them going and attending classes.

In a nutshell, students highly value an instructor's personal interest in their learning and much prefer instructors who, quite simply put, care about them, honor them and their time. Furthermore, they respond to extra-effort instructors who go the extra mile in making learning active, personally applicable, and challenging.