

Committee on Academic Affairs, Research and Student Life – Commonwealth Campus Report

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Commonwealth Campus Retention Strategies

- Retention success starts before students arrive on campus, and includes key engagements such as summer bridge and jump start programs
- New Student Orientation also provides students with the foundation of resources and programs they need to academically thrive and socially engage as they transition into Penn State
- Students also have access to expert Advising and Tutoring resources; proactive outreach is executed based on academic performance indicators
- Peer Mentoring is also deployed broadly to ensure students have access to relatable peer-level resources to help them navigate their academic journey

CWC 1st Year All-In Retention by Need Index

Retention Rate									
needindex_G	NO GPA	0.00-1.99	2.00-2.49	2.50-2.74	2.75-2.99	3.00-3.24	3.25-3.49	3.5+	Total
0	0.0%	42.9%	87.0%	80.2%	88.0%	91.8%	90.2%	92.3%	83.0%
1% - 25%	0.0%	42.6%	91.1%	82.5%	87.5%	98.2%	87.3%	94.9%	83.6%
26% - 50%	14.3%	35.4%	75.0%	77.4%	85.9%	85.2%	95.8%	90.5%	79.4%
51% - 75%	11.1%	27.7%	75.0%	87.8%	85.4%	91.7%	86.4%	91.5%	75.3%
76% +	5.3%	24.9%	74.2%	83.3%	82.7%	87.0%	88.0%	91.6%	71.4%
No FAFSA	12.5%	41.8%	84.1%	92.9%	89.2%	90.4%	92.1%	87.0%	80.6%
Total	6.0%	32.2%	79.2%	83.8%	85.8%	89.9%	89.5%	91.0%	77.3%

As presented in the background materials, much of retention and graduation is a result of pre-college characteristics. At the highest level, when the appropriate leading predictive indicators are coupled with state funding and institutional financial aid, it leads to successful outcomes. At the campus level, there are numerous interventions that are underway to focus on setting up students for academic success.

Examples of Strategies to Improve 1st to 2nd Year Retention Rates - Hazleton

- Retention Focus: Each semester, the Advising & Career Center reaches out to the academic warning students, and those at risk of an academic warning, to connect them to support and success resources
- Impact - Fall 23 to Spring 24 Retention: increased from 73% to 90%
- Specific interventions include:
 - **Student Success Academic Coaches:** partner with Academic Recovery Advisors to provide outreach and support to Academic Warning (AW) students as well as those at risk of entering AW and provide a recovery roadmap and guidance
 - **Academic Flags:** for students that are at risk of AW, advisors perform extensive outreach, including emails, letters home and phone calls to students, to connect them with resources to help them succeed.
 - **Peer Academic Coach Program:** Peer Academic Coaches assist students with completing a Learning and Study Skills Inventory assessment, then help them create action plans to improve their skills in areas such as time management, academic organization and study skills. Post program assessments indicate that the students in the program believe it was a major factor in assisting them become better students
 - **Lion Guidez:** A peer mentoring and coaching program that pairs first year students with current students to support their success. Survey results show that nearly 90% of all first-year students feel strongly that they belong at PSU and feel welcomed on campus



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Examples of Strategies to Improve 1st to 2nd Year Retention Rates - Berks



Engineering Ahead @ Penn State Berks

Engineering Ahead is a first-year student bridge program which aims to create a support system and provide academic enhancement for incoming underrepresented Engineering students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to ensure success in college

Program Components & Benefits:

- *Yearly Cohort of 20 students*
- *4 Week Summer Residential Jump Start*
- *First Year Seminar (1st Semester)*
- *STEM Persistence Seminar (2nd Semester)*
- *Build professional development and college success skills*
- *Tour corporate engineering companies*
- *Engage with current PSU engineering students & Alumni*
- *Community Service Outreach*
- *Scholarship Support*

Program Cost:

\$3,375 per student

Program Impact:

Significantly higher grades in first college math course
Significantly fewer students drop first math class
Significantly higher first year GPA
Significantly higher university retention
Overall Engineering Retention: 64%



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Commonwealth Campus “At-Risk” Populations

- Financial holds are one of the most significant barriers to academic progress
- Food and housing insecurity remain as persistent issues facing students, in-line with national data and trends
- Cross-functional teams focused on financial solutions and affordability have demonstrated positive outcomes across the commonwealth
- Campus leadership teams take an active role in providing their students access to basic needs and have relationships with community resources to amplify the impact



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Addressing “At-Risk” Populations - Abington

- The First Gen Living Learning Community, at Penn State Abington, provides special academic and social opportunities to first gen students
- This supportive environment of peers creates the opportunity for students to connect and share their diverse backgrounds and learning experiences
- They also have access to resources for academic and personal development, as well as strategies for self-advocacy and overall success
- This is a relatively new program, but early results are positive in terms of retention and the creation of an inclusive community



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Addressing “At-Risk” Populations - Harrisburg

- The **WE cARE** Food Pantry at Penn State Harrisburg seen a marked increase in demand and has enhanced their services as a result – last academic year they distributed more than 8,000 lbs. of food, up from less than 3,000 lbs. the prior year
- The Pantry provides nutritious and culturally relevant supplemental food, common household necessities, and personal hygiene supplies to allow students to focus their energy on studies, and their money on college expenses
- Students can place on order online for pickup, or stop by the pantry during normal operating hours



Addressing “At-Risk” Populations - Brandywine

- Penn State Brandywine has implemented the Chancellor’s Commission for Student Success by Design, with several action teams focused on financial solutions and affordability
- These cross functional teams enact proactive outreach using real time data driven analyses, connect students with financial resources and provide guidance to students that are navigating financial difficulties
- In the most recent 3-year period, the % of students with unpaid balances has dropped from 10% to 4%, and the total unpaid balance due has dropped from over \$900,000 down to \$200,000