

## **Overview of Student Retention Theories, Strategies, and Practices at Peer Institutions**

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines programs and initiatives employed at peer institutions to improve retention rates from first year to second year, and second year to third year, as well as graduation rates. The report includes a review of national findings regarding issues and factors essential to student retention, as well as an extensive examination of 18 of the peer institutions of XYZ University.

## Introduction

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Institutions of higher education are increasingly focused on improving the retention rates of students through a variety of programs and services. **Higher retention rates of students throughout their college careers are directly correlated with their overall satisfaction with the “product” of the institution**, and serve as a measure of student growth and learning, student perceptions of value and respect on campus, and institutional effectiveness in delivering what students expect, need, and want.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, a number of institutions of higher education have developed offices, programs, or departments designed to improve retention rates through orientations or student and academic support services. Other colleges and universities have not devoted the time and financial resources to create such an office, but still boast various academic, social, and health services to encourage student success and overall happiness with their college experience.

## Methodology

The information provided in this report is drawn from a variety of sources, including scholarly research and institutional websites. The review of relevant literature and previous studies regarding student retention is drawn from a number of academic journals, as well as a national survey of retention practices. Although the survey – the ACT “What Works in Student Retention?” – examines retention statistics and practices across various types and sizes of institutions, our report focuses on those results drawn from private, four-year institutions.

Information regarding retention practices at specific colleges and universities is drawn from resources on institutional websites, including strategic planning documents, student services pages, or specific pages devoted to retention programs. Due to the secondary nature of the research, information is only provided in this report when made available to the public. Further, information regarding specific student services such as academic advising, career counseling, or psychological counseling support is only examined in this report when it is included in a unique program to increase retention rates for first year students, sophomores, or to encourage graduation rates. Beyond these programs, general services were not included in order to provide concise information for easy analysis.

A handful of peer institutions did not offer information regarding specific retention programs, or programs associated with retention strategies for specific grade levels (freshmen or sophomores) on their websites. This appeared to be the case for Santa

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<sup>1</sup> Levitz, Randi S., Lee Noel, and Beth J. Richter. “Strategic Moves for Retention Success.” *New Directions for Higher Education*. No. 118, Winter 1999.  
<http://www.jcu.edu/academic/planassess/planning/files/Planning%20articles/strategic%20retention%20success.pdf>

Clara University, Valparaiso University, Providence College, and the University of Mary Washington. While this does not prove that these institutions do not offer such services, they may require primary research to gather further information.

## Report Contents

The following report is divided into two general sections, with the first portion providing an overview of literature regarding retention practices. The first segment of this section examines general notions of effective retention services and programs, as well as provides the most significant issues affecting student attrition rates. The latter half of this section then explores the most effective specific strategies as determined through a national survey. Informative tables include the most and least effective services, as well as the overall frequency of implementation of a number of the highly effective strategies.

The second section of the report then examines the specific programs and initiatives utilized at XYZ University's peer institutions to improve retention and graduation rates. For each institution, all relevant information is provided regarding first year programs, sophomore programs, and initiatives to encourage graduation rates. The 18 examined institutions include:

- ❖ Villanova University
- ❖ Rollins College
- ❖ Creighton University
- ❖ Trinity University
- ❖ Elon University
- ❖ Stetson University
- ❖ Xavier University
- ❖ James Madison University
- ❖ Loyola University Maryland
- ❖ Bentley University
- ❖ Fairfield University
- ❖ Drake University
- ❖ The College of New Jersey
- ❖ Bradley University
- ❖ Mercer University
- ❖ John Carroll University
- ❖ Loyola Marymount University
- ❖ Mills College

## Key Findings

- ❖ Institutional approaches to improving student retention rates must address both academic and non-academic factors of student happiness and success. However, **the majority of factors proven to improve student retention are related to academic goals, academic-related skills, and academic self-confidence.** Thus, the presence of an academic advisor is essential in encouraging students in the progress and success of their academic careers.
- ❖ **The majority of examined institutions appeared to only provide services to encourage the academic and social development, and thus the likelihood of retention, of first year students.** Seventeen of the 18 examined institutions clearly advertised specialized services for freshmen,

while seven included programs for sophomore students and only two sponsored specific initiatives focused on graduation rates (See Table 1). Please keep in mind that other institutions reviewed for this project may have sophomore- and graduation-focused programs that were not advertised on institutional websites or in available documents.

- ❖ **Many of the examined peer institutions indicated that they require first year students to participate in a First Year Seminar or similar introductory course.** These courses can either focus heavily on academic preparation for future collegiate courses, or may provide students with a broad introduction to issues relevant to college students.
- ❖ **A significant number of institutions provide first year students with some form of advisor, mentor, or tutor.** Seven programs advertised faculty advising for first year students, while an additional five initiatives reviewed in this report provide a peer mentor or tutor as an academic resource. These advisors and mentors may be assigned through the First Year Seminar, through a living-learning community, or based on student academic interests.
- ❖ While each of the programs examined in the following report serves to improve retention and/or graduation rates at the individual institution, **only two programs are sponsored through an office with the stated goal of improving student retention rates.** These include the Center for Student Success and Retention at Creighton University and the Office of Student Success and Retention at Xavier University.

Table 1 on the following page provides a summary of the programs discussed in this report.

**Table 1: Frequency of Programs Designed to Improve First Year or Sophomore Retention Rates and Graduation Rates**

Institution	First Year Programs	Sophomore Programs	Graduation Programs
<i>Villanova University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “At the Half”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Graduate Happy”</li> </ul>
<i>Rollins College</i>	--	--	--
<i>Creighton University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mansera Project</li> <li>• Faculty mentoring</li> <li>• Ratio Studiorum</li> <li>• Peer Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratio Studiorum</li> </ul>	--
<i>Trinity University</i>	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sophomore College program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Year Experience</li> </ul>
<i>Elon University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fellows programs</li> <li>• Elon 101</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Stetson University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Studies</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Xavier University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority Registration Experience Program</li> <li>• Faculty Feedback Program</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>James Madison University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Involvement program</li> <li>• FYI Resource and Writing Center</li> <li>• Graduation Club</li> <li>• Academic Support Instruction</li> <li>• Academic Mentoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Year Experience</li> </ul>	--
<i>Loyola University Maryland</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alpha Program</li> <li>• Collegium</li> <li>• FE 100</li> <li>• Leadership and New Student Programs</li> <li>• Academic Advising and Mentoring</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Bentley University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Seminar</li> <li>• “First Week” program</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Fairfield University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Experience Program</li> <li>• First Year Mentor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living-learning communities</li> </ul>	--
<i>Drake University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Seminar</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>The College of New Jersey</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “First Seminar”</li> <li>• FYE LIONS 6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sophomore Year Experience</li> </ul>	--
<i>Bradley University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EHS 120</li> <li>• Academic Exploration Program</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Mercer University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer and faculty advising</li> <li>• FYS-X 101 or UNV 101</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sophomore Signature Program</li> </ul>	--
<i>John Carroll University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Seminar</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Loyola Marymount University</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year Referral and Intervention</li> <li>• First Year Housing Experience</li> <li>• The Learning Community</li> </ul>	--	--
<i>Mills College</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mills Life 101</li> <li>• Living-learning communities</li> <li>• Advising and Tutoring</li> </ul>	--	--

## Factors Affecting Student Retention

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### General Theories of Retention

In order to implement an effective student retention improvement program, an institution must first understand the factors that influence students' decisions to re-enroll each semester and continue to graduation. A 2004 ACT Policy Report states that **the success of a retention strategy hinges on its ability to address both academic and non-academic factors.** The report, entitled "The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving Student Retention," is a compilation of information from various national studies on retention practices and academic advising, as well as twenty years of data collected through the ACT's Institutional Data Questionnaire.<sup>2</sup> The following list, provided in the ACT report, explores the correlation between college retention rates and both academic and non-academic factors. The numeric value assigned to each factor is a population estimate of correlation as provided by a 2004 study on student success presented in the *Psychological Bulletin*.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2.1: Factors Related to Retention: Relative Connection**

Category	Factors	Correlation Coefficient
Factors with strong correlation to retention	Academic-related skills	.366
	Academic self-confidence	.359
	Academic goals	.340
Factors with moderate correlation to retention	Institutional commitment	.262
	Social support	.257
	High school GPA	.246
	Institutional selectivity	.238
	Socioeconomic status	.228
	Social involvement	.216
	Financial support	.188
	ACT Assessment scores	.124
	ACT Assessment scores	.124
Factors with weak correlation to retention	Achievement motivation	.066
	General self-concept	.050

Source: ACT 2004

Scholars have determined that **attrition rates between the first and second year are perhaps the strongest determinant of institutional graduation rates.** Studies found that attrition rates generally decrease by 50 percent in each subsequent year following the first year in attendance at an academic institution.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a majority of

<sup>2</sup> Lotkowski, Veronica A. et al. "The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention." ACT Policy Report. ACT 2004. [http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/college\\_retention.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/college_retention.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Robbins, Steven B., Lauer, Kristy, et. Al. "Do Psychosocial and Study Skill Factors Predict College Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* Vol. 130, No. 2, 2004. 261-288.

<sup>4</sup> Levitz, Randi S., op. cit.

colleges and universities with student retention programs **devote a significant proportion of services towards first year students in hopes of increasing graduation rates.** These programs are designed to anticipate and meet the needs of students while transitioning and adjusting to collegiate life and academics. Five general categories of issues affecting student attrition rates include:

- ❖ **Personal:** Lost, stressed, closed to new ideas and experiences, undisciplined, unmotivated, insecure, uninformed, unrealistic expectations, student-institution mismatch
- ❖ **Social:** Alienation and social isolation, subject to negative peer pressure, uninvolved in college activities, little involvement with faculty members or advisors
- ❖ **Academic:** Underprepared, underchallenged, poor study habits, does not see value in assignments and courses, low academic performance, part-time course load, lack of educational and career goals, feedback that is too little too late
- ❖ **Life issues:** Insecurity about financial circumstances, job and school time conflicts, home and family difficulties, personal problems, health problems, college not necessary to meet career goals
- ❖ **Institutional issues:** Experience the run-around; experience operational problems; experience negative attitudes in classrooms, advising centers, administrative offices; experience poor or indifferent teaching; encounter instructional equipment or technology that is out of date; academic programs not available<sup>5</sup>

### Specific Retention Strategies

Additional reports and studies have identified specific strategies for addressing these student issues and increasing retention rates. When considering the establishment of a student engagement improvement program, it is helpful to review practices and measures that have been put in place at universities with strong retention and graduation rates. In 2010, educational consultants at ACT conducted a large-scale survey addressing retention practices at colleges and universities across the United States. The survey asked respondents to provide opinions on student and institutional characteristics that are most important to retention, as well as to identify all approaches pursued by their institutions from a list of 94 common retention practices. The resulting report – “What Works in Student Retention?” – draws data from thousands of public and private institutions and serves as one of the most comprehensive resources on the topic.<sup>6</sup> The report provides valuable evidence of

<sup>5</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> All report information available at: ACT Research and Policy Issues, “What Works in Student Retention.” <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/retain.html>

program usage trends that separate campuses with high retention and graduation rates from those with poor rates.

Participants were asked to rate programs, services, academic offerings and interventions by how strongly they contribute to student retention efforts on the following five-point scale:

- ❖ 5 – major contribution to retention
- ❖ 3 – moderate contribution to retention
- ❖ 1 – little or no contribution to retention

This report will focus on data and analysis from private, four-year institutions of higher education.<sup>7</sup> According to the survey respondents, **the integration of advising with first year transition programs has the strongest effect on retention rates at private institutions, as the three practices with the highest mean contributions to retention are related to academic advising.**

**Table 2.2: Practices with Highest Mean Contributions to Retention**

Programs, Services, Curricular Offerings, Interventions	Mean Contribution
Academic Advising Center	3.93
Advising interventions with selected student populations	3.93
Increased number of academic advisors	3.87
Reading center/lab	3.86
Comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	3.84
Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	3.83
Programs for first-generation students	3.80
Early warning system	3.77
Tutoring	3.75
Pre-enrollment financial aid advising	3.74
Extended freshman orientation (credit)	3.73
Faculty mentoring	3.68

Source: ACT Report: What Works in Student Retention? Subset: Four-Year Private Universities<sup>8</sup>

The next table displays practices with the lowest mean contributions to retention. These include practices such as the use of values assessments, health and wellness programs, library orientations, and personality assessments, among others.

**Table 2.3: Practices with Lowest Mean Ratings**

Item	Mean
Enhanced/modified faculty reward system	2.88
Recognition/rewards for non-faculty academic advisors	2.88
Values assessment	2.88

<sup>7</sup> 440 private, four-year institutions were represented in the study.

<sup>8</sup> “What Works in Student Retention?: Private Four-Year Colleges and Universities Report.” ACT 2010. P. 5. <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/PrivateFour-YrColleges.pdf>



Item	Mean
Health and wellness course/program	2.86
Vocational aptitude assessment	2.83
Library orientation, workshop, and/or course	2.74
Recognition/rewards for faculty academic advisors	2.72
Personality assessment	2.67

Source: ACT Report: What Works in Student Retention? Subset: Four-Year Private Universities<sup>9</sup>

Survey respondents were further asked to note all practices conducted at their respective institution. The following tables demonstrate the mean scores of those practices with frequent, moderate, and infrequent incidence rates. As displayed in Table 2.6, there is some disconnect between the practices found to be most effective in retaining students, and those found to be most commonly employed. For instance, despite their effectiveness, reading centers/labs and programs for first-generation students are used by only 23 percent and 21 percent of private four-year institutions, respectively.

**Table 2.4: Highly Rated Practices with High Incidence Rates**

Item	Incidence Rate	Mean
Advising interventions with selected student populations	70%	3.93
Comprehensive learning assistance center/lab	58%	3.84
Early warning system	78%	3.77
Tutoring	90%	3.75
Pre-enrollment financial aid advising	84%	3.74
Freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	58%	3.67
Internships	93%	3.67
Summer orientation	67%	3.66
Required on-campus housing for freshmen	58%	3.63
Peer mentoring	58%	3.63
Programs for honor students	59%	3.62
Mid-term progress reports	81%	3.60

Source: ACT Report: What Works in Student Retention? Subset: Four-Year Private Universities<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2.5: Highly Rated Practices with Moderate Incidence Rates**

Item	Incidence Rate	Mean
Academic advising center	39%	3.93
Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	51%	3.83
Faculty mentoring	51%	3.68
Training for non-faculty academic advisors	46%	3.64
Staff mentoring	35%	3.56
Mathematics center/lab	49%	3.55

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

Item	Incidence Rate	Mean
Supplemental instruction	54%	3.51
Programs for racial/ethnic minority students	47%	3.49

Source: ACT Report: What Works in Student Retention? Subset: Four-Year Private Universities<sup>11</sup>

**Table 2.6: Highly Rated Practices with Low Incidence Rates**

Item	Incidence Rate	Mean
Reading center/lab	23%	3.86
Programs for first-generation students	21%	3.80
Extended freshman orientation (credit)	23%	3.73
Programs for other student sub-populations	3%	3.67
Center(s) that integrate academic advising with career/life planning	29%	3.60
Summer bridge program	24%	3.58
Cooperative education	23%	3.52
Degree guarantee programs	5%	3.47
Learning communities (non-residential)	15%	3.45
Freshman seminar/university 101 (non-credit)	10%	3.44
Programs for adult students	31%	3.42
Freshman interest groups	9%	3.42

Source: ACT Report: What Works in Student Retention? Subset: Four-Year Private Universities<sup>12</sup>

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate **the three practices that made the greatest contribution to retention on their campus**. Of the 94 listed practices, only seven were chosen by at least 10 percent of all respondents. The following table displays these seven practices, as well as the percent of respondents who indicated their importance.

**Table 2.7: Practices with the Greatest Contribution to Retention**

Item	Percent Selecting as Among Top Three
Early warning system	21%
Freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)	20%
Advising interventions with selected student populations	13%
Faculty mentoring	13%
Tutoring	13%
Summer orientation	12%
Internships	12%

Source: ACT Report: What Works in Student Retention? Subset: Four-Year Private Universities<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

## Examination of Retention Strategies at Peer Institutions

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After examining national data, we now proceed to a review of retention strategies and practices employed by peer institutions of XYZ University.

### Villanova University (Villanova, PA)

Villanova University offers a number of services and programs to encourage retention rates and improve the academic and social lives of students on campus. First year students at Villanova are provided the opportunity to participate in a **Learning Community, an experience focused on building community and exploring the question “Who am I?” both within and outside of the classroom.** Participating students are enrolled in The Augustine and Culture Seminar with students from their residence hall, as well as a one-credit workshop based on the theme of self-understanding and discovery. Other opportunities include events, lectures, and social activities designed to acclimate students to the campus and local community.<sup>14</sup>

After students have successfully completed their first year at Villanova and return as sophomores, they are allowed to participate in **“At The Half,” a free leadership and team building retreat.**<sup>15</sup> This three-day experience in November is designed to re-energize sophomore students while encouraging them to explore their interests and passions. The goals of the retreat include:

- ❖ **Personal Growth:** Develop a stronger self-understanding, explore your values, interests, abilities, and passions and increase your confidence.
- ❖ **Professional Growth:** Learn how your experiences in college can lead to success in your post-college professional life. Learn about the importance of, and how to find an internship, develop mentoring relationships, and study abroad.
- ❖ **Community Building:** Develop teamwork skills, share the experiences that have shaped your life at Villanova, and learn how to get the most out of your Villanova experience.
- ❖ **Leadership:** Develop time-management, organizational, conflict resolution, and communication skills.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Villanova University, “Learning Communities.”

<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/learningcommunities.html>

<sup>15</sup> Villanova University, “Student Life: At The Half.”

<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/lifeatvu/half.html>

<sup>16</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid.

The “At The Half” retreat is designed to encourage student success and personal growth. **Through building a stronger sense of community and developing a greater understanding of career interests, this program both encourages retention rates throughout students’ college careers as well as graduation rates.**

Villanova also provides a number of programs and services designed to **encourage seniors socially, professionally, and spiritually as they prepare for graduation.** On one website, seniors can access **information regarding graduation schedules and resources, career resources, and alumni connections and resources.**<sup>17</sup> Career services include mentoring and advising, resume editing, interviewing tips, assistance with graduate school applications, and biannual career fairs. These services allow students to prepare for life after graduation, thus decreasing their anxieties and ensuring they continue at Villanova to graduation.

Persistence to graduation is further encouraged through **the Office of Multicultural Affairs through the “Graduate Happy” initiative.**<sup>18</sup> This program addresses the financial and academic needs of underrepresented students by providing funding for summer internships and research projects with Villanova faculty. Through these experiences, **students are able to gain academic and career experiences otherwise not possible.** Scholarship money is provided through the Make A Difference Fund, which is available for students defined as “underrepresented” and first generation college students. Through this program, Villanova can encourage the retention and graduation of students otherwise vulnerable to dropping out.

### **Rollins College (Winter Park, FL)<sup>19</sup>**

At Rollins College, student recruitment and retention constitute one of the five main initiatives of the institution’s **Quality Enhancement Plan.** The college seeks to improve retention and graduation rates, as well as to recruit students of increasingly exceptional quality. Further, Rollins College is devoted to encouraging increased student engagement in academic pursuits.

In order to achieve these goals, Rollins adopted the strategy to **“identify, support, and develop a larger cohort of outstanding student leaders and direct their skills towards improvement of the academic and social life of the College.”**<sup>20</sup> Rollins identified three specific strategies for achieving this objective:

<sup>17</sup> Villanova University, “Student Life: VU Seniors.”

<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/lifeatvu/seniors.html>

<sup>18</sup> Villanova University, “Multicultural Affairs: Make A Difference.”

<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/multiculturalaffairs/Graduating/donation.html>

<sup>19</sup> Rollins College, “Quality Enhancement Plan: Framework.”

<http://www.rollins.edu/provost/QEP/QEPframework.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

- ❖ Incorporate peer educators into the recruitment process;
- ❖ Involve faculty in the student selection and recruitment process; and
- ❖ Promote discussion, among all campus constituencies, of the values that define Rollins as a distinctive institution.<sup>21</sup>

The improvement of academic life is encouraged through a number of programs and opportunities available to Rollins students, including **undergraduate research, community engagement, field study, study abroad, and internships**.<sup>22</sup> Undergraduate participants of the **Student-Faculty Collaborative Scholarship Program** are compensated financially for their work, while also gaining unique academic experiences and building relationships with faculty members. Students are further engaged through participation in the programs offered by the **Office of Community Engagement**, which promote service, civic engagement, and activism in the local and global community. Through participation in these various programs, students develop a sense of self and community, encouraging their growth and continued retention at Rollins.

Rollins believes these efforts can increase first year retention rates to 92 percent for the 2009-2010 academic year. Further, the Dean of Student Affairs **will conduct surveys of students withdrawing from Rollins to determine common obstacles to retention**.

### **Creighton University (Omaha, NE)<sup>23</sup>**

Creighton University boasts an average freshman retention rate of 88 percent over the past several years, far exceeding the national retention rate and ranking in the top seven percent of all colleges and universities in the United States. The University not only encourages the academic success of students, but also encourages their social, spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing through the **Center for Student Success and Retention**. This center adheres to the formula **“to thrive = to stay = to graduate,”** and provides a number of services and informational resources for current and prospective students, faculty, and parents. Available programs include:

- ❖ The Manresa Program
- ❖ The Study
- ❖ Ratio Studiorum
- ❖ Peer Education
- ❖ Welcome Week
- ❖ Alcohol and Drug Education

<sup>21</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Rollins College, “Above & Beyond.” <http://www.rollins.edu/internet/academics/abovebeyond.html>

<sup>23</sup> Creighton University, “Center for Student Success & Retention.” <http://www.creighton.edu/cssr/index.php>

The Mansera Program is a year-long course designed to **ease the transition to college by providing students with a strong, constant community** of 30-40 other students. The course, which accounts for the completion of two credit hours, allows students to gain practical skills to succeed in college as well as experience a high ropes course, an urban expedition, multi-day outdoor expeditions, community retreats, service opportunities, and weekly community night meetings. Finally, student participants are provided with a **personal mentor from the University's staff**.

“The Study,” or the academic support services office, provides students with a number of resources for achieving academic success at Creighton. **Tutoring is available for all major academic disciplines, as well as study skills and academic coaching.** Workshops regarding time management, learning styles, study skills and test management, stress management, and finals preparation are available for individual students or student organizations. The physical space of The Study offers students with six private tutoring rooms, two small group study rooms, one large seminar room, and one study lounge as an alternative to completing assignments in the library.

The Ratio Studiorum, named for the Plan of Studies pursued by early Jesuits in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, **provides freshman and sophomore students with various forms of academic advising** to succeed in their own plan of studies. Beyond traditional academic advising, the Ratio Studiorum also offers:

- ❖ “An Introduction to the Culture of Collegiate Life” : An RSP 100 level course for freshmen and transfers
- ❖ Major/Minor Exploration Fair
- ❖ “Strategies for Academic Success”: RSP 120 course
- ❖ StrengthQuest for sophomores
- ❖ Special presentations to assist freshmen and sophomores in choosing a major and determining a career path
- ❖ Opportunity for Arts and Sciences students to select a Pre-Major Advisor for their sophomore year
- ❖ Assistance by Pre-Major Advisors in the creation of a four-year academic plan

**Peer Education at Creighton (PEAC)** sponsors numerous workshops and campus-wide events promoting healthy living and responsible lifestyle choices. Peer educators are available for Creighton students seeking support for health and wellness issues, allowing students to receive help and guidance to augment their college experience. The Center for Student Success and Retention further sponsors a number of events throughout the freshman orientation week and provides various resources for parents to better understand and encourage their child's college experience.

### Trinity University (San Antonio, TX)

Trinity University is one of the few institutions of higher education to offer a **sophomore initiative with a residential component. The Sophomore College program is designed to address the developmental needs of sophomore students**, while providing an exciting living environment in the university dorms. Programming and hall events provide sophomores with information relevant to their current academic and social needs, with focus on the following categories:

- ❖ Social Connections;
- ❖ Service;
- ❖ Study Abroad;
- ❖ Social Awareness; and
- ❖ Selecting a Major.<sup>24</sup>

Programs are held both in small groups by residence hall floor, or with the entire sophomore class and relevant faculty and alumni. Through these programs, **the Sophomore College intends to improve student retention rates by creating a sense of support and community identity within the sophomore class.** Trinity University boasts that 88 percent of sophomore students report feeling a unique sense of community through this program.

Further, Trinity has designed the **Senior Year Experience program to encourage students to persist through graduation.**<sup>25</sup> Sponsored events provide an array of services and support for students in creating resumes, interviewing for potential job positions, deciding on graduate school options, and completing graduation requirements. Other events designed to engage students include a casino party, wine nights, a class ring ceremony, and other senior experience events.

Trinity University offers all traditional support services and programs for students, including career services, counseling services, and health services. Finally, the Coates University Center sponsors a variety of weekly events to foster a sense of community and provide wholesome entertainment for all students.<sup>26</sup>

### Elon University (Elon, NC)

Although Elon University does not have a large office or organization supporting student retention, various services and programs allow students to build a sense of community within the University. The Elon school newspaper, *The Pendulum*, published a 2009 article discussing two academic opportunities provided to encourage

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<sup>24</sup> Trinity University. "Sophomore College." <http://web.trinity.edu/x5986.xml>

<sup>25</sup> Trinity University. "Senior Year Experience." <http://web.trinity.edu/x5984.xml>

<sup>26</sup> Trinity University. "Coates University Center." <http://web.trinity.edu/x6303.xml>

a sense of community among first year students. According to the article, studies have demonstrated that **“students who take the same classes together and go through the same academic experiences are more likely to complete courses and stay at the school they are attending.”**<sup>27</sup> In response, Elon offers six fellows programs and a variety of freshman-oriented Elon 101 classes to create communities with similar academic pursuits. The six fellows programs include:

- ❖ Business Fellows;
- ❖ Communications Fellows;
- ❖ Elon College Fellows;
- ❖ Honors Fellows;
- ❖ Leadership Fellows; and
- ❖ Teaching Fellows

The University also believes nonacademic organizations have a strong influence on high student retention rates. A data sampling compiled by the Office of Institutional Research in 2007 discovered that **students involved in Greek life had drastically higher rates of retention than those not involved in a Greek organization.** The following table demonstrates the four-year graduation rates of Greek students, non-Greek students, and the general University population.

**Table 3.1: Retention Rates Among Greek and Non-Greek Students**

Semester Freshmen Entered	University	Greek	Non-Greek
Fall 2000	65%	89%	49%
Fall 2001	66%	87%	54%
Fall 2002	72%	86%	62%

Source: Office of Institutional Research<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the **University Multicultural Center** provides a number of programs, awards, and resources to promote student retention in minority student groups. The Academic Awareness Program encourages students to build relationships with their professors and take authority of their learning experience. Other programs include scholarship programs, Excellence Awards for Black students, and an African American Resource Room.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Elon University, “Four Years of Friendship.” *The Pendulum*. Sept. 9, 2009. <http://www.elon.edu/pendulum/Story.aspx?id=2477>

<sup>28</sup> Elon University, Office of Institutional Research. “Elon University Graduation and Retention Rates: Greek vs. Non-Greek Members.” [www.elon.edu/e-web/students/greek\\_life/gradret2007.doc](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/greek_life/gradret2007.doc)

<sup>29</sup> Elon University. “Multicultural Center: Academic Success and Retention.” [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/multicultural\\_resources/acadsuccess.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/multicultural_resources/acadsuccess.xhtml)



### Stetson University (DeLand, FL)<sup>30</sup>

Similar to numerous other institutions, Stetson University designed its **First Year Studies program to ease the transition into college** and allow first year students to develop a sense of belonging and community. **The initiative is strongly academic in nature**, providing students with resources to acclimate to the academic environment of Stetson. Programs include small group dinners with professors, course registration workshops, and a variety of services provided through the **Academic Resources Center**. The majority of first year students are also required to enroll in a First Year Seminar, designed to help students understand university expectations, transition to college-level academic work, and meet their peers.

**The First Year Studies program further sponsors social events to encourage community building**, including pre-orientation and orientation programs, as well as frequent gatherings on campus. The various services and programs provided through the First Year Studies initiative encourages student retention from the first year to the second year by creating communities and helping students understand the expectations and processes of academic life at Stetson.

### Xavier University (Cincinnati, OH)

The **Office of Student Success and Retention** at Xavier University provides a number of programs for freshman students and their parents to encourage high rates of retention at the University. The **Priority Registration Experience Program (PREP)**, a spring or summer orientation day before the start of August classes, allows incoming freshman and parents to meet with an academic advisor, select classes for the fall semester, and meet other incoming freshmen. According to the University, “PREP is a great way to start your Xavier experience and creates a true sense of belonging.”<sup>31</sup>

The Office of Student Success and Retention further offers students the opportunity to apply for **grant/scholarship money** during the school year or to pay for summer school courses. The University believes these additional funds will encourage students to pursue graduation despite financial difficulties. Finally, the **Faculty Feedback Program** ensures the success of freshman and sophomore students by requiring all faculty members teaching these students to provide input on students’ academic progress in each course. Through this program, students with difficulties are easily identified early in the semester and can be offered remedial services to improve academic performance.

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<sup>30</sup> Stetson University, “First Year Studies.” <http://www.stetson.edu/firstyear/index.php>

<sup>31</sup> Xavier University, “Student Success and Retention: Priority Registration Experience Program.” <http://www.xavier.edu/retention/Priority-Registration-Experience-Program.cfm>

Xavier University boasts the following retention and graduation rates among undergraduate students. An average retention rate of 85 percent at Xavier is impressive compared to the 80.6 percent average rate of similar institutions.<sup>32</sup> All information is available from the Retention and Graduation Statistics portion of the Office of Student Success and Retention website.

**Table 3.2: Student Retention Rates, 2007-2009**

Year	Retention Rate
2007	87%
2008	84%
2009	85%

Source: Xavier University

**Table 3.3: Four-Year Graduation Rates, 2004-2006**

Year	Four-Year Graduation Rate
2004	70%
2005	69%
2006	71%

Source: Xavier University

### **James Madison University (Harrisonburg, VA)<sup>33</sup>**

The Office of Residence Life at James Madison University sponsors the **First Year Involvement (FYI) program**, providing academic assistance, social events, and helpful resources for transitioning into college life. Students may seek academic support at the **FYI Resource and Writing Center**, which is open daily until 9:00 or 10:00pm and staffed with seven Program Advisers and six writing tutors. Program Advisers further work with Resident Advisors to coordinate academic and social events for halls, dorms, or participation in campus-wide programs.

First Year Involvement sponsors a variety of other programs, including the Graduation Club, Academic Support Instruction, the Academic Mentor Program, and the Roommate Program. **The Graduation Club is an optional five-week class** for first year students during their first semester, and addresses the following issues challenging first year students:

- ❖ Setting goals and staying motivated;
- ❖ Learning styles;
- ❖ How to effectively read textbooks;

<sup>32</sup> The university does not define “similar” institutions but states that the 80.6 percent retention rate was drawn from the ACT Institutional Data File 2010. See: Xavier University, “Student Success and Retention: Retention and Graduation Statistics.” <http://www.xavier.edu/retention/statistics.cfm>

<sup>33</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all information drawn from: James Madison University, “Office of Residence Life: Get Involved: First Year Involvement.” <http://www.jmu.edu/orl/involved/firstyear.html>

- ❖ Lecture note-taking;
- ❖ Time and stress management;
- ❖ Test-taking strategies;
- ❖ Study skills; and
- ❖ Communicating with professors.

**The Academic Support Instruction program addresses similar issues through a series of individual or group sessions** scheduled by students seeking assistance. **The Academic Mentor program** allows students to meet individually or in small groups with a mentor to plan **strategies for academic success throughout college**. Issues similar to those addressed in the Graduation Club and Academic Support Instruction are discussed between mentors and students, including setting appropriate academic goals, time management, note taking, exam preparation, and other essential academic skills. The First Year Involvement program further requires students to participate in the **Roommate Program**, a series of meetings in first year dorms designed to prepare students for living with a roommate.

The Office of Residence Life also provides the **Second Year Experience** program to ensure continued student growth and success during sophomore year. The program is sponsored through the **Career and Academic Planning office**, and provides students with information regarding:

- ❖ Career and Academic Planning office services;
- ❖ Study abroad and intern abroad opportunities;
- ❖ Academic and career goal setting;
- ❖ Creating and building a resume;
- ❖ Summer internships;
- ❖ Networking and interviewing; and
- ❖ Employer presentation and dinner etiquette.<sup>34</sup>

Through participation in this program, sophomore students are provided with the necessary tools to succeed at James Madison University. The Second Year Experience, along with the various aspects of the First Year Involvement initiative, **serve to improve student retention rates through the academic, social, and career-oriented programs ensuring student success and happiness.**

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<sup>34</sup> James Madison University, "Office of Residence Life: Get Involved: Second Year Experience."  
<http://www.jmu.edu/orl/involved/secondyear.html>

## Loyola University Maryland (Baltimore, MD)<sup>35</sup>

The Office of the Dean of First-Year Students and Academic Services provides a number of services to improve retention rates through the development of first year students. Sponsored programs include:

- ❖ Alpha
- ❖ Collegium
- ❖ FE 100
- ❖ Leadership and New Student Programs
- ❖ Academic Mentoring Team
- ❖ Core Advising Program

The Alpha programs are divided into the two separate aspects of seminars and houses. Through the **Alpha Seminars**, first year students participate in small, seminar-style classes with the University's most experienced faculty members, allowing them to **build community with their peers while developing an understanding of the academic standards of the University**. Students are further offered the opportunity to live in the **Alpha House, or living-learning communities** of first year students enrolled in the same Alpha Seminar. Students are encouraged to build community and develop an environment where "intellectual, social, and spiritual pursuits blend seamlessly." Alpha House members are further given the opportunity to share meals with faculty members and participate in community service projects and cultural activities together.

**The Collegium provides a separate opportunity to participate in a living-learning community during the first year.** Collegium students live on the same floor with classmates in two of their academic courses, allowing for collaborative learning both of the academic material and in adapting to college life. The program admits 96 first year students, and is **designed to help students feel "at home" immediately upon beginning their freshman year.** Further, students are provided the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and build relationships with faculty members through social and cultural events.

**FE 100, or the First-Year Experience Seminar,** serves as an introductory fall semester course designed to **prepare students for the challenges of residential college life.** The course addresses 11 different topics, with an introductory session during the first week. As demonstrated in the topic listing below, students participate in activities both inside and outside of the classroom as they learn about their University and build a community with their peers.

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<sup>35</sup> All information drawn from sources at: Loyola University Maryland, "Office of the Dean of First-Year Students & Academic Services: Welcome Class of 2014." <http://www.loyola.edu/academics/firstyearprograms/index.html>

- ❖ Topic 1: Introduction
- ❖ Topic 2: Social Gathering
- ❖ Topic 3: An Overview of Service Opportunities in Baltimore and Beyond
- ❖ Topic 4: Service and Justice: Key Elements of a Jesuit Education
- ❖ Topic 5: Learn, Lead, and Serve
- ❖ Topic 6: Time Management and Counseling Services
- ❖ Topic 7: Outdoor Adventure Experience
- ❖ Topic 8: Jesuit Spirituality and Education
- ❖ Topic 9: Personal Well-Being
- ❖ Topic 10: Difficult Dialogues
- ❖ Topic 11: Academic Major and Career Explorations
- ❖ Topic 12: Baltimore Excursion

**The Office of Leadership and New Student Programs** provides a variety of opportunities for students to transition into college life and pursue positions of leadership on campus. The Office sponsors conferences, workshops, and other resources designed to encourage student development. The **Academic Mentor Team is comprised of upperclass students providing academic support and advice for first year students.** Mentors assist students in selecting a major, academic success, communicating with professors, and other relevant academic issues.

First year students are further assigned a **Core Advisor from the University faculty.** These advisors guide students in selecting appropriate courses, understanding the registration process, and declaring a major, as well as **monitor the student's academic progress.** All of the previously examined programs and services are designed to improve student retention rates through encouraging the academic, social, and leadership skills of students and thus ensuring their return to Loyola University Maryland for their sophomore year.

### **Bentley University (Waltham, MA)<sup>36</sup>**

Similar to many of the other institutions of higher education examined in this report, Bentley University (formerly Bentley College) requires first year students to participate in both orientation activities and a first year seminar. During the **“First Week” program**, first year students begin Math and Expository Writing courses, attend seminars on issues affecting student life, and attend social and cultural events all before upperclass students return to campus. Through these events, students are able to **become acclimated with the campus, develop a basic understanding of the academic expectations at Bentley, and begin to build a community of peers.**

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<sup>36</sup> Bentley University, “First Year Seminar.” [http://www.bentley.edu/academic-services/Faculty/first\\_year\\_seminar.cfm](http://www.bentley.edu/academic-services/Faculty/first_year_seminar.cfm)

**The First Year Seminar**, a one-credit course instructed by both a faculty member and an upperclass student, **addresses issues relevant to first year students**. Course requirements include attendance at informational sessions, participation in small group discussions, and a cumulative journal reflecting on the students' personal development throughout the fall semester. **Students are further assigned their academic advisor through the Seminar**, and are required to meet individually to discuss their future course selections. By providing students with multiple forms of academic support and opportunities to develop a sense of community with their peers, Bentley is improving the likelihood that first year students will return for their sophomore year and persist until graduation.

### **Fairfield University (Fairfield, CT)<sup>37</sup>**

Fairfield University requires participation in **the First Year Experience Program** which focuses on “teaching Fairfield’s core Jesuit values, cultivating student self-discovery, and exploring the importance of community.” The First Year Experience includes:

- ❖ Seminar course during the fall semester;
- ❖ Designated campus events;
- ❖ First Year Mentors program; and
- ❖ Community service participation.

First Year Experience groups are selected **based on students’ residence hall locations**, allowing students to deepen relationships with their peers. The course is conducted by a **faculty or staff member and a student First Year Mentor**, both of whom serve as advisors and resources for the students throughout their transition process. Students are further required to participate in six campus events and one community service project throughout their fall semester. Although the goal of retention is not specifically mentioned, the programs and services provided through the First Year Experience encourage students academically, socially, and emotionally, thus improving their general experience at Fairfield and ensuring they will return for their sophomore year and persist to graduation.

**University sophomores may apply to live in one of five living-learning communities**, including the Creative Life Residential College, the Environmental Life Residential College, the Ignatian Residential College, the Leadership in the Ignatian Tradition Residential College, and the Service for Justice Residential College. While each of the residential colleges provides students with focus in an individual area, all five options allow students to **pursue and develop their interests while**

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<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all information taken from: Fairfield University, “First Year Experience Program.” [http://www.fairfield.edu/student/new\\_fye.html](http://www.fairfield.edu/student/new_fye.html)

**living in an environment of encouragement and curiosity.** Each college provides students with:

- ❖ An intentional living experience;
- ❖ Specialized courses;
- ❖ Integrative seminars;
- ❖ Mentoring programs;
- ❖ Retreats; and
- ❖ Related events.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, just as the First Year Experience program both encouraged students academically as well as provided a sense of shared community, so too do the sophomore residential colleges allow students to pursue their passions while building relationships and receiving guidance from faculty members. As demonstrated throughout this report, such programs and services are essential in improving student retention rates.

The following table demonstrates the retention and graduation rates of recent graduating classes at Fairfield.

**Table 3.4: Retention and Graduation Rates, 2005-2009**

Class	First-Time Full-Time Freshmen	Returned 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Returned 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Returned 4th Year	Graduated Within 4 Years
2005	831	89.9%	84.0%	81.3%	77.7%
2006	813	85.1%	82.1%	78.7%	74.9%
2007	789	90.6%	88.5%	85.7%	82.5%
2008	855	90.9%	86.4%	84.6%	79.8%
2009	940	88.9%	84.9%	83.2%	77.4%

Source: Fairfield University Office of Institutional Research<sup>39</sup>

### **Drake University (Des Moines, IA)**

Similar to many other colleges and universities reviewed in this report, Drake University requires first year students to enroll in a **First Year Seminar focused on either writing or critical thinking.** The program may improve retention rates by preparing students for the academic and social atmosphere at Drake University, thus encouraging them to continue at Drake throughout their college career. Each First Year Seminar is designed with the following goals:

- ❖ Aims to establish a **sense of community** among members;
- ❖ Encourages active participation by students in the class;

<sup>38</sup> Fairfield University, "Sophomore Residential Colleges." [http://www.fairfield.edu/ll/ll\\_residentialcolleges.html](http://www.fairfield.edu/ll/ll_residentialcolleges.html)

<sup>39</sup> Fairfield University, "About Fairfield: Institutional Research: Retention and Graduation Rates." [http://www.fairfield.edu/about/ir\\_retention.html](http://www.fairfield.edu/about/ir_retention.html)

- ❖ **Helps integrate first-year students into an academic culture;**
- ❖ Sharpens students' writing and verbal communication skills;
- ❖ Focuses on a topic, approach, or theme;
- ❖ Focuses on critical thinking and ways of knowing as well as content;
- ❖ Invites connections among several areas of study or discipline; and
- ❖ Is limited to 20 students.<sup>40</sup>

### The College of New Jersey (Ewing, NJ)

The Office of Residential Education and Housing sponsors the **First Year Experience**, which includes educational programs, community development activities, and social and cultural events. Students are required to enroll in a **“First Seminar” during the fall semester, as this course selection also determines residence hall placement.**<sup>41</sup> These living-learning communities are structured to offer programs and events which complement students' academic experiences and provide assistance in transitioning to college life and academic challenges.

**The FYE LIONS 6 program** provides six weeks of events and informative sessions designed around a relevant theme each week. The six themes include:

- ❖ Week 1: Making the Connection and Goal Setting
- ❖ Week 2: Safety and Community Conduct
- ❖ Week 3: Healthy Habits
- ❖ Week 4: Academic Action
- ❖ Week 5: Diversity and Appreciation
- ❖ Week 6: Celebrate and Get Involved<sup>42</sup>

Through the variety of activities and programs offered in the LIONS 6, students are able to **become involved in campus organizations, develop personal and academic goals, acclimate themselves to the campus and academic expectations, and build a sense of community** within their residence halls and through social events. All of these programs encourage a successful transition to college life, thus encouraging students to continue at the College and improving student retention rates.

Once students have returned after their first year, they may participate in the **Sophomore Year Experience (SYE) program, designed to encourage self-exploration and community development** among sophomore students living in College residence halls. Participating students are provided with additional programming, mentoring, and faculty advising opportunities, and are expected to complete the following checklist:

<sup>40</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Drake University, “Drake Curriculum: About FYS.” <http://www.drake.edu/dc/firstyear/>

<sup>41</sup> The College of New Jersey, “First Year Experience.” <http://www.tcnj.edu/~fye/>

<sup>42</sup> The College of New Jersey, “FYE LIONS 6 Program.” <http://www.tcnj.edu/~reslife/fye/Lions6.html>



- ❖ Identify personal goals and motivations;
- ❖ Find a mentor;
- ❖ Meet with an advisor regularly;
- ❖ Choose a major;
- ❖ Attend SYE programs;
- ❖ Join a campus activity, organization, or hall government;
- ❖ Examine personal wellness;
- ❖ Think about financial management;
- ❖ Visit Career Services;
- ❖ Explore internship opportunities;
- ❖ Strengthen study skills; and
- ❖ Develop a resume and cover letter.<sup>43</sup>

Through the completion and cultivation of these activities and decisions, students are encouraged to continue at the College and persist to graduation.

### **Bradley University (Peoria, IL)**

**The Center for Student Development and Health Services** at Bradley University provides freshman students with various courses and services to ease the transition into collegiate life and encourage their development at the University. The **EHS 120: “The University Experience”** course is designed to acclimate students to the University, provide the shared experiences and groundwork for new friendships, and allow students to discuss the challenges they face. Course topics include the appreciation of diversity, issues of human sexuality, substance abuse, time management, study skills, and campus resources for student support, as well as opportunities to perform local community service. Internal research demonstrates that participation in EHS 120 increases a student’s likelihood of continuing at Bradley until graduation.<sup>44</sup>

Further, the **Academic Exploration Program** assists students in identifying academic interests and potential career options. Participating students receive individual mentoring and advising in addition to a weekly seminar class, academic curriculum exhibits, and job shadowing opportunities.<sup>45</sup> By encouraging students in their academic pursuits and providing them with individual attention, Bradley University further ensures these students will benefit from their college experience and continue to return to Bradley each year.

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<sup>43</sup> The College of New Jersey, “Residential Education & Housing: About Us: SYE Checklist.” <http://www.tcnj.edu/~reslife/sye/about.html>

<sup>44</sup> Bradley University, “Welcome to EHS 120.” <http://www.bradley.edu/eddev/ehs120/>

<sup>45</sup> Bradley University, “Academic Exploration Program.” <http://www.bradley.edu/eddev/aep/>

### **Mercer University (Macon, GA)<sup>46</sup>**

**The Office of Academic and Advising Services** at Mercer University offers specific programs to assist both freshman and sophomore level students in achieving academic success. **The Peer Advisor program** is available to all first year students, providing an upperclass student to serve as a mentor, advisor, and resource for a variety of issues. Through building a relationship with upperclass students, first year students are more capable of understanding the lifestyle and academic expectations at Mercer, and are provided with a role model to encourage their retention.

First year students are further required to enroll in one of two seminar courses. The **FYS-X 101 course is an experiential service-learning seminar** allowing students to become aware of their local community, understand issues of poverty, develop solutions to community problems, and interact with diverse situations. Participating students spend time during their first year tutoring at a Title I funded school near the Mercer campus and raise awareness of issues affecting their local community.

Students not participating in FYS-X 101 must enroll in **UNV 101, a course designed to introduce first year students to the structure of higher education and specific Mercer policies and expectations.** Topics of conversation include the development of successful study skills, cultural diversity, critical thinking, ethics, personal relationships, health, safety and career options. Further, the faculty member instructing each section of the UNV 101 course serves as an **academic advisor** for all enrolled students, allowing students to build a personal relationship with their advisor while the advisor is able to understand the students' interests and monitor academic progress.

Services are also directed towards sophomore level students through the **Sophomore Signature Program**, providing students with information and resources on both academic and career-related assistance programs. Ensuring that upperclass students are encouraged academically, while also providing a variety of resources for career planning, is intended to improve both student retention rates and graduation rates as students succeed in their courses and are prepared for life after graduation.

### **John Carroll University (University Heights, OH)<sup>47</sup>**

Incoming students at John Carroll University are required to participate in a **First Year Seminar. Interestingly, these meetings are designed as academically rigorous courses** as opposed to promoting more introductory themes. The courses are intentionally structured with general similarities to provide a **common experience for all first year students**, and focus on developing students' abilities to

<sup>46</sup> All information available through: Mercer University, "The Office of Academic and Advising Services: For Current Students." <http://www2.mercer.edu/AAS/For+Students/default.htm>

<sup>47</sup> John Carroll University, "First Year Seminar." <http://www.jcu.edu/a&s/fys.htm>

read critically, write persuasively, and communicate clearly in a discussion-based setting. Preparing students for the challenges of higher education may improve retention rates following the first year as students are better equipped to manage their academic coursework and perform to the standards of John Carroll University.

### **Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA)<sup>48</sup>**

**The Office of First Year Experience** at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles seeks to provide all first year students with the programs and services required to thrive in collegiate life and academics. Programs include:

- ❖ Orientation events;
- ❖ First Year Class Council;
- ❖ Leadership Scholarships;
- ❖ First Year Referral and Intervention Program;
- ❖ First Year Housing Experience;
- ❖ FROSHWORK;
- ❖ First Year Retreat; and
- ❖ The Learning Community (TLC@LMU).

Orientation to the University is provided both in June and August, allowing incoming students to meet their peers and become acquainted with the campus. Building on this, the **“LMU Connect” program** occurs throughout the first two weeks of school, with social events such as open mic nights, karaoke contests, live band performances, movie nights, and barbeque dinners. Further, a **“Welcome to LA” reception** helps out-of-state students become acclimated to their new home in Los Angeles.

**The First Year Class Council** allows students seeking leadership positions to participate in designing initiatives, addressing issues, and planning events to encourage the development of the freshman class. Members of the First Year Class Council also design the Freshmen Service Project for all first year students. Student leaders may also apply for **Leadership Scholarships**, allowing them to further develop their leadership profile and involvement in the campus and local community.

**The First Year Housing Experience** includes residence halls and learning communities for first year students with a variety of interests. Two examples include the Healthy Living Learning dorm and the LEAP program for first year science majors living and participating in classes together. Students are also encouraged to participate in on-campus housing through the annual **“Hall Brawl” events**. Students from each first year dorm complete challenges such as the Knowledge Bowl,

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<sup>48</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all information taken from: Loyola Marymount University, “The Office of First Year Experience: Programs.” [http://www.lmu.edu/studentlife/First\\_Year\\_Experience/Programs.htm](http://www.lmu.edu/studentlife/First_Year_Experience/Programs.htm)

dodgeball, basketball, and flag football to earn points for their respective hall. The Office of First Year Experience further sponsors a **First Year Retreat** in September, designed to let students “getaway, play and pray” while building relationships with peers and university leaders.

**The First Year Referral and Intervention Program** provides counseling or advice to first year students within 24 hours of initial contact, establishing a support network for struggling students. Further, the **FROSHWORK** program provides job placement for first year students without federal work study. Through this initiative, students gain valuable work experience while developing leadership skills and improving their marketability to future employers.

Finally, **The Learning Community (TLC@LMU)** program is a “forward-thinking, participatory, and proactive approach to freshmen retention” designed to facilitate successful college transitions and positive academic experiences. During the summer preceding the first year, **students spend three weeks on campus experiencing a preview of college life and participating in community service projects** in the Los Angeles area. Throughout the academic year, participating first year students are **enrolled in a one-unit course**, develop a personal leadership profile, attend leadership retreats, receive individual advising, and are provided with numerous special academic and social opportunities.<sup>49</sup>

The following table demonstrates the rates of student retention at Loyola Marymount University over a six-year span, as well as the historical rates of retention for each continuing academic year.

**Table 3.5: Student Retention Rates, 2003-2008**

Entering Year	Number of Students	Returned 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Returned 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Returned 4 <sup>th</sup> Year
2003	1,333	91.9%	85.4%	83.6%
2004	1,390	89.7%	84.4%	81.7%
2005	1,345	88.0%	82.0%	79.3%
2006	1,262	86.6%	79.6%	76.2%
2007	1,267	87.4	80.0%	-
2008	1,261	88.1%	-	-
Historical Average	-	88.0%	81.9%	79.5%

Source: Loyola Marymount University: Undergraduate Freshmen Retention Rates<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Loyola Marymount University, TLC@LMU. [http://www.lmu.edu/studentlife/First\\_Year\\_Experience/TLC.htm](http://www.lmu.edu/studentlife/First_Year_Experience/TLC.htm)

<sup>50</sup> Loyola Marymount University, “Official Statistics: Undergraduate Freshmen Retention Rates.” Oct. 10, 2009. <http://www.lmu.edu/Assets/Academic+Affairs+Division/Institutional+Research/Official+Statistics+-+Freshmen+Retention.pdf>

## Mills College (Oakland, CA)<sup>51</sup>

**The First Year Experience program** at Mills College offers first year students a multitude of opportunities to become involved and develop a sense of community on campus. Aspects of the First Year Experience include:

- ❖ SO Mills;
- ❖ Mills Life 101;
- ❖ Living-Learning Communities;
- ❖ Academic Advising; and
- ❖ Tutoring Support.

**SO Mills, the four-day orientation program** for incoming students, introduces students to a myriad of services, activities, and resources at Mills. SO Mills events are designed to allow students to build new friendships and gain a greater understanding of the opportunities available to all students. **The Mills Life 101 program**, a series of informal lectures and discussions throughout the fall semester, is further **intended to inform students and develop a sense of community**. Topics range from a variety of serious and informal issues, such as life in the residence halls, getting involved on campus, and sexuality and diversity.

**All first year residential students are assigned to a living-learning community**, based either on shared interests or similar course schedules. Students in the **Academic Fusion Living-Learning Communities** participate in a course with other hall members instructed by their faculty advisor, as well as attend cultural and social events. Current Academic Fusion LLCs are based on courses in Ethnic Studies, French, History, Music, Nursing Leadership, Philosophy, and Spanish for Spanish Speakers. **The Scholars in Action Living-Learning Communities are based on shared interests instead of a specific course**. Faculty and student advisors organize networking events, visits to area businesses and spiritual communities, and other social events for participating students. Themes of the Scholars in Action LLCs include Adventure Education, Education, Leadership and Management, Leadership and Social Justice, Science, Spirituality, Sustainability, and Wellness.<sup>52</sup>

Further, **each first year student is provided with an academic advisor from the College faculty** to assist in course selection and the process of choosing a major. Advisors consult with students regarding their interests and passions, helping students discern potential career choices and providing academic support when necessary. Finally, first year students are encouraged to seek the services of the **Writing Center and Peer Tutoring Program** to develop stronger study habits or receive assistance on a specific course or project.

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<sup>51</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all information taken from: Mills College, "The Mills First Year Experience." [http://www.mills.edu/admission/undergraduate/first\\_year\\_experience.php](http://www.mills.edu/admission/undergraduate/first_year_experience.php)

<sup>52</sup> Mills College, "Living Learning Communities." [http://www.mills.edu/admission/undergraduate/living\\_learning\\_communities.php](http://www.mills.edu/admission/undergraduate/living_learning_communities.php)

## **Project Evaluation Form**

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## **Note**

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