

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# Retention Opportunities Analysis

*DeAnza College  
Cupertino, California*

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“The secret of successful retention programs is no secret at all, but a reaffirmation of some of the important foundations of higher education. There is no great secret to successful retention programs, no mystery which requires unraveling. In short, retention is no more than, but certainly no less than, successful education.”

Vincent Tinto

Syracuse University

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# Retention Opportunities Analysis

DeAnza College • Cupertino, California

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## Introduction

David Trites, senior consultant at Noel Levitz, visited DeAnza College on January 18-19, 2006 for the purpose of providing an external analysis of the college's retention-related strategies and tactics. The consultant wishes to commend DeAnza College for initiating an analysis on what the college is currently doing and might be doing to improve the quality of student life and learning, increase retention and completion rates and foster student satisfaction and success.

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“...activities that serve to generate significant improvements in the organization as a whole ultimately serve to improve student retention.”

Dr. Laurence Smith  
Mobilizing the Campus for Retention  
American College Testing Program

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Successful retention programs encompass virtually everything an institution does to improve the quality of student life and learning. Quality can be defined as that set of attributes of an educational program or service that consistently exceeds student expectations within specifically defined institutional-determined standards and/or criteria of performance. Practically speaking the evidence of effective programs is clear, namely that the route to successful retention lies in those programs that ensure from the very onset of student contact with the institution, that entering students are integrated with teaching/learning processes of the college, and acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become successful learners in that community.

- The ultimate goal of a retention effort is improved educational experiences for students, rather than retention per se.
- Improving the quality of student life and learning needs to be a continuing and important priority for DeAnza College.
- Improving retention is a complex task: retention and attrition are multi-variant phenomena and are not subject to “quick fix” strategies.
- Some attrition is inevitable and acceptable and improving retention is a complex task: retention and attrition are multi-variant phenomena and are not subject to “quick fix” strategies.

- Dropouts are expensive, and improvements in retention rates can add to the annual operating budget.
- Attrition is a problem for which there is a solution, and retention is one aspect of an enrollment management program over which an institution can exert considerable influence and control.
- Some attrition is predictable and preventable by focusing special efforts on selected target groups of students.
- Effective retention strategies focus on improving campus programs, services, attitudes, and behaviors and result in quality educational experiences for all students.
- Educational programs and services cannot compensate for the absence of competent, caring, and conscientious faculty and staff.
- Key to improving the quality of student life and learning (retention) are student-centered policies, procedures, and programs.
- Persistence depends upon the extent to which an individual has been integrated into the academic and non-academic components of the campus environment.
- Retention is a campus wide responsibility, and institutional change results only from a coordinated and collaborative effort. While retention is everybody's business, it is particularly the business of the faculty.

Finally, as consultants to colleges and universities interested in improving the quality of student life and learning (retention) in higher education, Noel-Levitz has consistently identified the following ten characteristics of successful retention initiatives:

1. Collect, compile, and analyze pertinent retention data and research.
2. Implement early identification/alert and intervention strategies.
3. Commit to both a "front-loading" and "progressive responsibility" philosophy and strategy.
4. Concentrate energies on the importance of the teaching and learning process.
5. Emphasize a deliberate strategy of student engagement and involvement.
6. Address students' affective – as well as their cognitive – needs.
7. Create programs and services based on meeting students' individual needs and differences.
8. Develop a student-centered orientation throughout the campus.
9. Monitor, on a systematic basis, student expectations and levels of satisfaction.
10. Establish an organizational structure/mechanism to address all quality of student life and learning (retention) issues.

## Goals for January 18-19, 2006 Visit

- Identify DeAnza College's strengths, weaknesses, and issues to be considered in the development of a program to improve retention.
- Provide a brief analysis of the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) and Institutional Priorities Survey (IPS).
- Present recommendations for consideration in future planning processes designed to improve the quality of student life and learning, foster student success, and increase retention and graduation rates.

The retention consultation progressed in three phases:

- Pre-visit information and data review;
- Site visit to conduct individual interviews; and
- Exit briefing and written summary report.

### Phase One: Project Launch and Pre-visit Data/Information Compilation Review

The data/information assessment included a review of institutional data, studies, publications, and materials to facilitate an understanding of current retention strategies and practices.

### Phase Two: Site Visit and Interviews/Focus Groups

During the site visit, the consultant conducted interviews with administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Following is the agenda for the visit:

#### Wednesday January 18, 2006

7:30 – 8:00 a.m.	Opening meeting with Andrew LaManque, Anne Leskinen, and Robert Griffin
8:30 – 9:00 a.m.	DASB President Anna Callahan
9:30 – 10:00 a.m.	Judy Miner
10:00 – 10:30 a.m.	Steve Sellitti, Carolyn Wilken-Greene, John Swensson, and Nancy Canter
10:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Telephone Conference with President Brian Murphy
11:00 – 12:00 p.m.	Vickie Moreno, Herminio Hernando, Shirley Kawazoe, Marion Winters, Bert Manriquez
12:00 – 12:45 p.m.	David Coleman

- 12:45 – 1:30 p.m.      Lunch
- 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.      Patrick Gannon, Al Guevara and Olivia Patlan
- 3:40 – 4:30 p.m.      Kathy Kyne, Rhoda Wang and Cindy Castillo

**Thursday, January 19, 2006**

- 9:00 – 10:30 a.m.      Exit Briefing

Questions varied by individual or group interviewed, but the purposes may generally be categorized as follows:

- Gather information about current retention strategies, processes, and programs.
- Elicit perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in an effort to clarify impressions about programs, faculty, administrators, staff, services, facilities, location, and campus environment.
- Measure clarity and strength of commitment toward efforts to improve the quality of student life and learning.

**Phase Three: Exit Briefing and Written Report**

Upon the completion of the site visit, the consultants shared preliminary observations and recommendations at an exit briefing on Thursday morning.

**Retention and Graduation Rates**

DeAnza College retention and graduation rates compare favorably with the rates of similar colleges. While the consultant did not uncover exact comparisons approximately forty two per cent of De Anza students completed a degree, certificate or 56 credits within three years compared to thirty five per cent for California Community College.

The most common higher education “benchmarks” for retention rates, annual return rates and cohort graduation rates are those defined and compiled by The American Testing Program (ACT).

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<b>Definitions: “Annual Return Rate” and “Cohort Graduation Rate”</b>	
Annual Return Rate:	The percentage of full-time, first-time freshmen enrolled at the institution the following fall.
Cohort Graduation Rate:	The percentage of full-time, first-time students who are degree seeking that graduate from the institution in three years.

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The chart below shows average retention rates of first-time, full-time students to the second year at fifty two comparable institutions (ACT, 2005).

**Retention Rates: Freshman to Sophomore Year by Type of Institution**

Degree Level/Control	N	SD*	Mean %
Two-year Public	447	16.4	51.6
Two-year Private	52	29.3	61.7
BA/BS Public	66	16.2	66.4
BA/BS Private	296	16.5	70.9

\*Standard Deviation

Source: Compiled from ACT Institutional Data File, 2005

**First to Second Year Retention Rates for Two Year Colleges by Admission Selectivity**

Admissions Selectivity	Two-Year Privates			Two-Year Publics			All Institutions		
	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**
Highly Selective	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	0	N/A
Selective	83.5	6	29.3	N/A	2	N/A	87.5	8	25.9
Traditional	73.4	14	28.9	53.9	7	17.8	66.9	21	26.9
Liberal	60.3	12	25.9	62.2	13	14.0	61.3	25	20.1
Open	47.8	20	25.8	51.0	425	16.1	50.9	445	16.6
All Institutions in Column	61.7	52	29.3	51.6	447	16.4	52.6	499	18.4

Highly Selective = ACT Score Range 27-31, SAT Score Range 1220-1380

Selective = ACT Score Range 22-27, SAT Score Range 1020-1220

Traditional = ACT Score Range 20-23, SAT Score Range 960-1070

Liberal = ACT Score Range 18-21, SAT Score Range 870-990

Open = ACT Score Range 17-21, SAT Score Range 830-950

\*\*Standard Deviation

Source: Compiled from ACT Institutional Data File, 2005

### Three Year Graduation Rates

The chart below shows average three-year graduation rates at institutions across the country (ACT, 2005).

<b>Admission Selectivity</b>		<b>Two-year Private Institutions</b>	<b>Two-year Public Institutions</b>	<b>All Institutions in row</b>
Selective	Mean	83.7	42.5	67.2
	%	3	2	5
	N	4.0	60.1	37.7
	**SD			
Traditional	Mean	41.4	36.3	39.5
	%	5	3	8
	N	38.7	4.2	29.4
	**SD			
Liberal	Mean	79.3	28.4	44.1
	%	4	9	13
	N	18.5	20.4	31.0
	**SD			
Open	Mean	52.8	27.3	28.7
	%	18	313	331
	N	26.2	18.9	20.2
	**SD			
Number of Institutions	Mean	57.5	27.5	30.0
	%	30	327	357
	N	29.0	19.1	21.8
	**SD			

\*Graduation in 3 years for associate degree; 5 years for BA/BS

\*\*Standard Deviation

Source: Compiles from ACT Institutional Data File, 2005



## Twenty-nine Best Practices in Retention

The consultant provided several of the individuals with the opportunity to add their perceptions of DeAnza College's retention practices by completing a brief survey. The summary results are presented below.

1 represents "this strategy is not used at all"

7 represents "this strategy is used in a complete, effective way"

#	Item	Mean Rating N=10
1	Track the retention of cohort groups (e.g., underprepared, undecided, honors students, athletes, commuters, residents, late admits) and develop targeted programs for those whose retention is low.	3.8
2	Conduct summer orientation programs emphasizing activities designed to build interpersonal affiliations to peers and bonds to the institution. Design and deliver orientation experiences for special groups of students (e.g., adults, transfers, internationals, athletes, selected majors, commuters, resident students).	3.8
3	Review all promotional materials to ensure that they are creating accurate pre-entry expectations of the institution. Develop well designed campus visit experiences that realistically portray the institution to prospective students. Determine if recruitment activities are targeting students who are likely to be successful at the institution.	3.7
4	Mandate and administer pre-entry assessment and placement. Require developmental courses to improve academic skills for those who need them.	2.4
5	Offer a wide array of student extracurricular activities.	5.4
6	Offer summer bridge programs for academically underprepared students.	6.1
7	Establish excellent academic support services (e.g., learning center, math lab, writing lab) and proactively assist students in using this assistance. Provide peer tutorial services. Provide Supplemental Instruction for "killer courses."	4.7
8	Implement an extended orientation course (i.e., first-year experience course).	2.1
9	Provide a credit life/career planning course. Purchase a computer guidance system (e.g., DISCOVER, SIGI PLUS) and encourage students to use these in career exploration.	5.1
10	Design high-interest residential living programs and activities. Ensure residential facilities are in good condition.	NA
11	Provide incentives, recognition, and rewards for faculty/staff involved in retention related initiatives.	2.1
12	Conduct student satisfaction surveys on a systematic basis. Use them in planning improvements.	2.1
13	Conduct exit interviews to ascertain why student are leaving and possibly resolve issues that are barriers to returning.	1.9
14	Require students on academic probation to participate in a "success" program that includes learning contracts.	4.0

#	Item	Mean Rating N=10
15	Conduct special workshops on topics of interest to students (e.g., stress/time management, substance abuse, and study skills).	3.9
16	Review availability of classes to be sure student needs are being met. Eliminate low demand courses and increase availability of high demand courses.	4.2
17	Participate in plans to improve the physical plant and facilities particularly important to students (e.g., recreation, student center, computer lab).	5.0
18	Identify students who may be dropout-prone by observing "behavioral cues" (e.g., missing classes, failing to apply for financial aid, not pre-registering, or requesting a transcript) as part of a proactive "early-alert" program. Reach out to those students to intervene and assist them. Use telecounseling to contact students experiencing difficulty or planning not to return. Communicate with students who are in good standing who fail to enroll.	2.8
19	Review all policies, procedures, syllabi, and processes to ensure that they are student-centered, learning-oriented, and student-friendly.	3.3
20	Systematically survey/interview all new students within the critical first six weeks.	1.7
21	Establish appropriate student support groups (e.g., international, minority).	4.1
22	Eliminate the "campus runaround." Provide ongoing quality service training for all frontline support staff and supervisors. Design an intake system that includes a seamless orientation, assessment, advising, and registration bill-paying process.	2.9
23	Encourage students to participate in college work/study program.	2.4
24	Establish an office devoted exclusively to the improvement of the teaching/learning process. Develop an ongoing program to help faculty understand the critical role they play in retention. Eliminate or reduce large lecture classes (or have part of the course be a small discussion section). Assist faculty in learning about and using cooperative and collaborative teaching/learning strategies.	3.2
25	Establish a Retention Committee. Appoint a retention coordinator for the institution. Develop a retention plan that sets goals, establishes strategies to attain the goals, and includes action plans to ensure achievement.	2.3
26	Develop an institutional academic advising plan that includes the components that are associated with successful delivery and organization of advising services. Provide development opportunities for advisors. Design an evaluation program that assesses the effectiveness of the institution's advising program, as well as the individual advisor. Develop or purchase a computerized degree audit system. Involve faculty in academic advising.	2.8
27	Provide an honors program to challenge the best students and to structure ease of connections.	4.2
28	Change the attitude in serving students from, "We have the services, but students don't take advantage of them," to "How can we provide proactive ways of ensuring that students are supported by the programs we offer?"	2.4
29	Frontload the best instructors and advisors.	2.0

## Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) and Institutional Priorities Survey (IPS)

Documentation of the results of the SSI and IPS appear below and the actual slides used are included in appendix A to this document. While the college has numerous strengths the majority of the conversation focused upon the areas of opportunity for improvement that were identified by both DeAnza personnel and DeAnza students. These included items associated with academic advising, concern for individual students, “run around” and registration for classes.

### SSI Strengths

Institutional strengths are identified as follows:

SSI importance scores above the median (6.24)

AND

SSI satisfaction scores in top quartile (5.20 and above)

NOTE: The NAT column designates items for which satisfaction scores were significantly higher (+) or significantly lower (-) than those of the national averages for other four-year public institutions.

Items are listed in order of IMPORTANCE.

Item #	Item	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT
18.	The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	6.72	5.54	0.86	
69.	There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	6.64	5.66	0.98	+
58.	Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	6.63	5.56	1.07	
31.	The campus is safe and secure for all students.	6.62	5.59	1.03	
70.	I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	6.62	5.64	0.98	
29.	Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	6.54	5.30	1.24	
66.	Program requirements are clear and reasonable.	6.51	5.38	1.13	
35.	Policies and procedures regarding registration and course selection are clear and well-publicized.	6.41	5.35	1.06	
42.	The equipment in the lab facilities is kept up to date.	6.41	5.20	1.21	
51.	There are convenient ways of paying my school bill.	6.39	5.64	0.75	+
43.	Class change (drop/add) policies are reasonable.	6.38	5.56	0.82	+

46.	Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	6.36	5.26	1.10	
36.	Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	6.34	5.33	1.01	-
14.	Library resources and services are adequate.	6.33	5.23	1.10	-
3.	The quality of instruction in vocational/technical programs is excellent.	6.33	5.20	1.13	-
61.	Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.	6.33	5.45	0.88	
60.	Billing policies are reasonable.	6.31	5.24	1.07	
68.	On the whole, the campus is well-maintained.	6.31	5.48	0.83	-
28.	It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.	6.25	5.36	0.89	
45.	This institution has a good reputation within the community.	6.23	5.85	0.38	+

### SSI Priorities for Action

Institutional priorities for action are identified as follows:

SSI importance scores above the median (6.24)

AND

SSI item performance gap scores in the top quartile (1.42 and above)

NOTE: The NAT column designates items for which agreement scores were significantly higher (+) or significantly lower (-) than those of the national averages for other four-year public institutions.

Items are listed in order of IMPORTANCE.

Item #	Item	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT
15.	I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	6.66	5.02	1.64	-
8.	Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient for me.	6.62	4.95	1.67	-
39.	The amount of student parking space on campus is adequate.	6.48	4.45	2.03	+
32.	My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.	6.41	4.84	1.57	-
52.	This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.	6.41	4.92	1.49	-
40.	My academic advisor is knowledgeable about the transfer requirements of other schools.	6.40	4.84	1.56	

24.	Parking lots are well-lighted and secure.	6.38	4.96	1.42	
63.	I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	6.32	4.83	1.49	-
16.	The college shows concern for students as individuals.	6.26	4.70	1.56	-
65.	Students are notified early in the term if they are doing poorly in a class.	6.24	4.51	1.73	-

## IPS Strengths

Institutional strengths are identified as follows:

IPS importance scores above the median (6.24)

AND

IPS satisfaction scores in top quartile (5.46 and above)

NOTE: The NAT column designates items for which satisfaction scores were significantly higher (+) or significantly lower (-) than those of the national averages for other four-year public institutions.

Items are listed in order of IMPORTANCE.

Item #	Item	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT
40.	Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	6.75	5.74	1.01	-
1.	Faculty care about students as individuals.	6.71	5.57	1.14	-
50.	Students are able to experience intellectual growth here.	6.71	6.21	0.50	+
31.	This institution has a good reputation within the community.	6.65	6.36	0.29	+
24.	Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	6.62	5.46	1.16	-
49.	There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	6.61	6.17	0.44	+
2.	The personnel involved in registration are helpful.	6.59	5.69	0.90	+
28.	Admissions staff are knowledgeable.	6.58	5.62	0.96	
4.	Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	6.49	5.59	0.90	
17.	The campus staff are caring and helpful.	6.48	5.56	0.92	-
46.	Program requirements are clear and reasonable.	6.48	5.57	0.91	-

## IPS Priorities for Action

Institutional priorities for action are identified as follows:

SSI importance scores above the median (6.48)

AND

SSI item performance gap scores in the top quartile (1.29 and above)

NOTE: The NAT column designates items for which agreement scores were significantly higher (+) or significantly lower (-) than those of the national averages for other four-year public institutions.

Items are listed in order of IMPORTANCE.

Item #	Item	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT
13.	The quality of instruction students receive in most classes is excellent.	6.77	5.43	1.34	-
18.	Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	6.72	5.43	1.29	
20.	The campus is safe and secure for all students.	6.72	5.37	1.35	
21.	Academic advisors are knowledgeable about program requirements.	6.70	4.93	1.77	-
7.	Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.	6.61	5.16	1.45	
3.	Academic advisors are approachable.	6.58	5.22	1.36	-
34.	Counseling staff care about students as individuals.	6.55	5.20	1.35	-
10.	Library resources and services are adequate.	6.51	4.96	1.55	-
12.	The college shows concern for students as individuals.	6.51	5.20	1.31	-
29.	The equipment in the lab facilities is kept up to date.	6.49	4.59	1.90	-
44.	Students seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	6.48	4.30	2.18	-

IPS Target Report - Strengths

Item #	Item	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT	FAC IMP	ADMIN IMP	STAFF IMP
40.	Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	6.75	5.74	1.01	-	6.75	6.73	6.73
1.	Faculty care about students as individuals.	6.71	5.57	1.14	-	6.76	6.63	6.65
50.	Students are able to experience intellectual growth here.	6.71	6.21	0.50	+	6.79	6.69	6.53
31.	This institution has a good reputation within the community.	6.65	6.36	0.29	+	6.65	6.69	6.62
24.	Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	6.62	5.46	1.16	-	6.68	6.73	6.46
49.	There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	6.61	6.17	0.44	+	6.67	6.56	6.49
2.	The personnel involved in registration are helpful.	6.59	5.69	0.90	+	6.55	6.75	6.64
28.	Admissions staff are knowledgeable.	6.58	5.62	0.96		6.55	6.75	6.60
4.	Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	6.49	5.59	0.90		6.48	6.44	6.53
17.	The campus staff are caring and helpful.	6.48	5.56	0.92	-	6.54	6.60	6.36
46.	Program requirements are clear and reasonable.	6.48	5.57	0.91	-	6.49	6.50	6.49

## IPS Target Report - Challenges

Item #	Item	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT	FAC IMP	ADMIN IMP	STAFF IMP
13.	The quality of instruction students receive in most classes is excellent.	6.77	5.43	1.34	-	6.79	6.69	6.71
18.	Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	6.72	5.43	1.29		6.78	6.81	6.53
20.	The campus is safe and secure for all students.	6.72	5.37	1.35		6.75	6.75	6.65
21.	Academic advisors are knowledgeable about program requirements.	6.70	4.93	1.77	-	6.73	6.79	6.59
7.	Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.	6.61	5.16	1.45		6.63	6.80	6.55
3.	Academic advisors are approachable.	6.58	5.22	1.36	-	6.59	6.53	6.57
34.	Counseling staff care about students as individuals.	6.55	5.20	1.35	-	6.63	6.44	6.40
10.	Library resources and services are adequate.	6.51	4.96	1.55	-	6.53	6.31	6.51
12.	The college shows concern for students as individuals.	6.51	5.20	1.31	-	6.56	6.63	6.32
29.	The equipment in the lab facilities is kept up to date.	6.49	4.59	1.90	-	6.47	6.47	6.55
44.	Students seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	6.48	4.30	2.18	-	6.49	6.50	6.47



## Observations and Recommendations

The following observations and recommendations are made based on the results of the meetings and interviews and recognized strategies to improve the quality of student life and learning that have the potential of increasing student success at DeAnza College. They are organized into five categories but are not presented in prioritized order.

### Focus on the structures/conditions that facilitate improvements in retention

1. Develop a clearly articulated retention plan using a highly participative and data informed planning process. This approach if successfully implemented will prioritize and guide DeAnza College's retention related efforts.

A thoughtful retention planning process helps set meaningful goals and identifies the most important strategies and activities necessary to achieve these goals and will broaden the discussion of student success. There are a number of benefits that can accrue from the retention planning process. A retention plan:

- Provides systematic assessment of present strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and current retention strategies.
- Results in the establishment of consensual institutional goals and priorities.  
Encourages innovative thinking and problem-solving.
- Creates awareness of obstacles that may need to be overcome.
- Coordinates and unifies staff effort.
- Ensures more effective use of existing resources and identifies the possible need for additional resources.
- Assigns responsibility and accountability and schedules work.
- Facilitates control and evaluation of activities.
- Communicates and documents efforts and the retention "game plan."
- Provides a basis for future planning.

2. Use data and information to inform and support the retention improvement process to ultimately improve fact based decision making in all improvement efforts. There is an appreciation for measurement and fact-based decision making at DeAnza College but no current plan articulating retention goals and priorities.

Prior to the retention planning session that has yet to be calendared; it will be useful to do an analysis to find retention data for as many of the following populations as possible (including others that may be appropriate for DeAnza College). Development of this data can be included in the February 15-16, 2006 visit discussions.

- Major
- First generation students

- Learning readiness
- Geographical location
- Killer courses
- Financial aid eligible
- GPA after term one
- Term to term rates
- Athletes
- Undecided students
- International students
- Ethnic origin/background

3. Encourage participation to engage the college community in a coordinated initiative.

The existing DeAnza enrollment planning task force may be provided the opportunity to assume additional responsibility for overall coordination of efforts to improve the quality of student life and learning (retention) on an ongoing basis. This existing committee would provide a structure and forum for the ongoing review and evaluating of all programs, services, policies, procedures and behaviors that affect retention. The committee should be asked to add to its current purpose the following responsibilities:

- Participate in retention planning and endorse the retention goals and select the “vital few” priority strategies to be implemented to improve the quality of life and learning at DeAnza College.
- Develop/review the annual retention plan including the assignment of strategy champions and the development and monitoring of action plans.
- Analyze, and communicate retention-related studies and research.
- Conduct periodic reviews of key program/service areas.
- Initiate a process for identifying and eliminating problems that interfere with providing quality service to students.
- Assist with the planning of appropriate faculty and staff development programs.
- Establish a communication plan designed to inform campus personnel about retention issues.
- Communicate with other pertinent campus committees on a regular basis.
- Monitor implementation of the retention plan and recommend necessary adjustments.
- Avoid duplicative efforts and serve as a clearinghouse for all retention strategies and actions.
- Appoint ad hoc or standing committees or task forces as necessary.

- Develop and disseminate collegewide, an annual quality of student life and learning (retention) report.

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“Change can either be friend or foe...It is disturbing when it is done to us, exhilarating when it is done by us.”

Rosabeth Moss Kantor

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### **Implement some immediate activities to affect retention rates**

1. The post-enrollment early alert program that is under development should be supported to the fullest extent possible and implemented (or at least piloted) as soon as possible. The list of the “student at risk” characteristics included in appendix C of this report are among those that could be tracked and for which appropriate interventions should be developed and implemented. A pre-enrollment early alert program, the Noel Levitz Retention Management System (RMS) that used a College Student Inventory (CSI) to identify attrition-proneness among approximately 200 DeAnza developmental math students before they begin classes, could be expanded to additional populations. The resulting information provided a basis for early advising sessions and helped advisors determine how to allocate their limited advising time. It must be remembered that students often make decisions to leave very early in their experience even though they may not implement those decisions until much later.
2. The college has piloted numerous innovative programs designed to improve student success for specific defined populations but failed to institutionalize some that were producing excellent results. Careful cost benefit analysis will help college personnel determine which ones should be continued and which ones are not cost efficient and ultimately could improve the retention and goal attainment for additional students.
3. Recruit-back telecounseling is a strategy that many colleges overlook even though the retention literature strongly suggests that lost enrollees are much more likely to reenroll than those who have not already attended. A systematic program that contacts previously enrolled students and attempts to address the barriers to their immediate return can contribute significantly to improving student retention and success.

### **Redesign the advising model to reduce the randomness of the current experience**

1. A review the existing advising model in order to increase connections between advisors and students to decrease variation in the advising experience should be a priority for DeAnza College (and provide training, recognition and reward for all advisors). Students who are not currently members of targeted special populations have no advisor assigned and report barriers to accessing accurate academic information (such as very long waits). All students should have an assigned advisor and interventions should be structured so they have regular planned interactions especially early in a new student’s experience. The retention literature clearly reports that colleges too often over rate the student’s ability to resist peer pressures, compartmentalize family or work pressures, develop appropriate study habits, building

relationships with faculty and asking for help. Professional and counselor advisors may become more available for this purpose when the implementation of the technology based Individual Education Planning program is deployed. A review of faculty participation may also be appropriate (in addition to vocation-technical program faculty) since vocational-technical faculty are already advising at DeAnza and this is commonly included on many campuses as a faculty responsibility.

2. The scheduling and registration process is reported by many DeAnza students as a source of dissatisfaction and it is a process that essential to their successful matriculation. Increasing class availability and improving the registration processes are salient opportunities to improve student retention at the college.

### **Strengthen transition and academic support programs**

1. Expand the Counseling 100 Strategies for Academic Success Program. This course is already well accepted by students who volunteer to take it and could be strengthened and expanded to accomplish the purposes of a more comprehensive extended orientation program. This program has already proven itself successful on campus, and there is ample evidence in the literature supporting the positive impact of freshman seminars on student retention, academic achievement, relations with faculty and staff, and increased knowledge and use of institutional support services. In fact, this retention-related strategy is the most empirically documented and widely implemented of all retention strategies and the evidence is widespread and compelling that some form of extended freshman orientation is an effective strategy for colleges and universities to enhance student success and building community. According to John Gardner:

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“The freshman seminar is a proven and effective way of enhancing freshman success. It can be the glue that holds together and solidifies all efforts to enhance freshman academic and personal success. It can provide students with vital information, promote their involvement in campus life, enhance their academic skills, stimulate their intellectual interest, and facilitate relations with peers. It is also a powerful tool for renewing faculty interest in freshman students, classroom innovation, learning techniques, curricular reform, and involvement with students outside the classroom.”

John Gardner  
*The Freshman Year Experience*  
Jossey-Bass

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2. One of the opportunities for improvement identified by both college personnel and students was “run around”. Efforts should be undertaken to provide additional observation and analysis to clearly identify the source of this widespread perception in order to improve student satisfaction and access to the services necessary to ensure their success.

3. A strengthening and expanding career exploration service in order to decrease the number of undecided students represents an opportunity to improve student retention. The college already has evidence that undecided students leave at a higher rate than those who have identified a career path so it is prudent to assume this approach will contribute to improved retention rates.

**Expand professional development opportunities to improve the quality of teaching, learning**

1. Expanding efforts to provide professional development opportunities for faculty to improve the teaching/learning process is one essential approach to improving student learning and success. While resources in this area have had to be reduced from previous allocations this is one strategy that should not be overlooked. This observation is predicated on the belief that too many retention-related strategies simply “work the edge” and are only tangential to the core of the educational process and successful retention programs. Because teaching and learning is the core of institutions of higher education efforts to improve the quality of classroom teaching can have a profound impact on retention. A growing number of studies document the linkage between effective teaching, improved learning, and increased persistence. Some cost effective ways to encourage improvement in this area include establishing opportunities for faculty to learn “good practices” from each other or by visiting colleges who have been identified as a model for effective learning approaches.

## **Closing**

This written report is an analysis with specific recommendations the consultant believes will contribute toward the improvement of the quality of life and learning at the college and ultimately to increasing student success. It is important to note that a one-day analysis only begins to understand the complexities and nuances of DeAnza College's retention programs. The consultant believes he was able to assess the current situation as a preliminary effort in an ongoing process. Any omissions or errors in interpretation are the responsibility of the consultant.

## **Next Steps**

Calendar a phone conference to determine an agenda for the February 15-16, 2006 consultation. Preliminary goals for this visit may include (1) increasing the visibility and support for the ongoing retention programming at DeAnza college, (2) developing the planning retreat agenda (3) determining the appropriate DeAnza College data that will allow participants at the planning retreat to identify a "vital few" retention strategies that will be part of a comprehensive retention plan, (4) identify preliminary subpopulations of the college's student population to be considered for quantifiable retention goals to be part of the planning process (5) to convene discussions about the feasibility of a more intrusive academic advising model and (6) to address issues related to the RMS/CSI pilot.

## **Appendix A: Exit Presentation Slides**

- At-risk Students and Early-alert Systems
- Presentation: Retention Opportunities Analysis

## **At-risk Students and Early-alert Systems**

Successful student retention initiatives include identification, monitoring/tracking, and intervention systems designed to identify, in advance of enrollment, high-risk or dropout-prone students who could benefit from institutional intervention, and to identify enrolled students experiencing academic and/or personal problems that might be ameliorated by institutional intervention. Such systems are commonly referred to as early-alert systems.

Early-alert systems are based on the following assumptions:

- Most decisions to dropout occur early in a student's interaction with an institution.
- Many dropout-prone students do not voluntarily seek out institutional support services to assist them with problems that may ultimately lead to attrition behavior.
- It is easier to anticipate a problem than to solve it.
- Faculty and staff are the best referral agents.
- Many student problems are treatable if identified early.
- Time and resources should be focused on the most dropout-prone students.
- Most students respond positively to direct contact in which potential or actual problems are identified and a resource of help is offered.
- There is evidence that such programs are successful in reducing dropout rates.

The goals for a comprehensive early-alert system are:

- To enhance institutional effectiveness and student success by proactively matching student needs with institutional resources.
- To reduce unnecessary student attrition by identifying as early as possible those students who are most dropout-prone.
- To implement a systematic student monitoring/tracking system and an ongoing retention/attrition research database.

It is recommended that the college review and modify, as necessary, their ensuing early-alert system. The following generic description of an early-alert system is intended to assist institutions in designing a system appropriate to their special needs and situation.

### **Identification of At-risk Students**

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#### **Definition of a High-risk Student**

A student who possesses one or more attributes or characteristics that traditionally have been associated institutionally with higher rates of attrition is a high-risk student.

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Using assessment or other sources of information, high-risk students should be identified prior to enrollment and appropriate prescriptive actions recommended on an individual basis. One or more of the following risk factors may qualify a student for special intervention:

- Low standardized test scores;
- Poor high school/other college records;
- Weak study skills;
- Low socioeconomic status;
- Low level of educational aspiration;
- Uncertainty about program of study/reasons for attending college;
- Physical or learning disability;
- First-generation college student;
- Late applicant;
- English as a second language;
- Lack of support system;
- Self-reported need of help;
- Rural residence;
- Out of formal education for several years;
- College not his/her first choice;
- Low predicted college grade point average (PGPA); and
- Student athlete.

### **Enrolled Students Experiencing Academic or Personal Difficulties**

Early-alert systems evaluate a student's academic progress, attendance, and behavior and provide information about problem areas to a central office where students can seek help and the office can proactively reach out to flagged students. Following are some common triggers for faculty or staff referral:

- Excessive number of absences or habitual tardiness;
- Failure on two or more tests;
- Grade point average below a "C";
- Statements about dropping out or transferring to another institution;
- Lack of socialization on campus;
- Non-involvement in student activities;
- Manifestation of adjustment problems;

- Expression of concern about grades;
- Problems with an instructor;
- Behavior that appears to be depressed or apathetic or lacks interest/motivation in becoming involved academically or socially;
- Evidence of need of assistance with study skills; and
- Expression of personal and/or family problems.

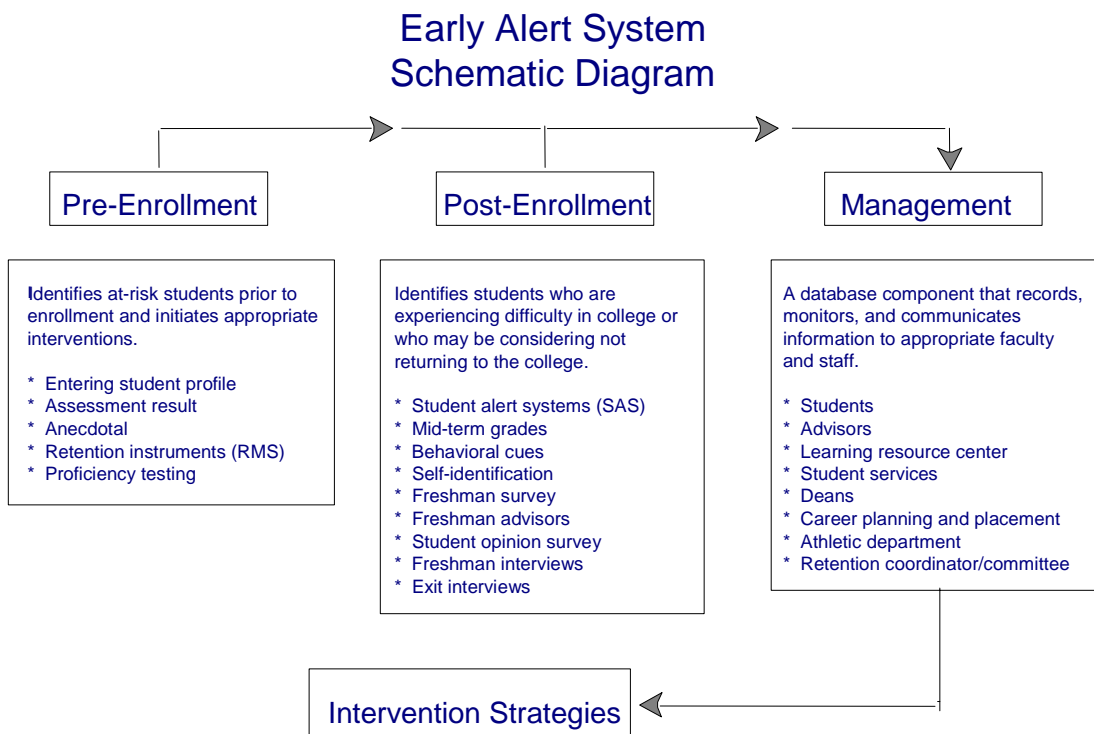
The success of a monitoring and intervention system is based on accurately identifying dropout-prone students and being able to provide immediate attention and assistance that focuses on teaching needed skills or leads to changes in student behaviors. Effective implementation requires a coordinated and cooperative effort by both instructional and student services staff into a single system that promotes student success and retention.

### Components of the Early-alert System

Early-alert systems should include the following three components:

1. Pre-enrollment subsystem;
2. Post-enrollment subsystem; and
3. Management subsystem.

Following is a brief description of each major component of the proposed system:



### **Characteristics of an Effective Retention Management System**

- User-friendliness;
- Ease of data entry;
- Development of a flexible individual student record in which data can be updated, corrected, or deleted instantly;
- Ability to create information in a variety of formats (e.g., list reports or individual reports) for ease of dissemination to individuals and offices;
- Provision for tracking the number of contacts a student has with the early-alert system;
- Ability to track the enrollment behaviors of individuals and groups of students; and
- Source of information that will assist in the ongoing planning and management of the retention program. Some examples are:
  - Profiles characterizing selected student populations (e.g., persisters versus dropouts);
  - Analysis of at-risk profiles;
  - Documentation of contacts with referral resources; and
  - Evaluation of the effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

### **Intervention Strategies**

The ultimate success of an early-alert system resides less in its ability to identify dropout-prone students correctly than in the effectiveness of specific interventions with specific students. It is not within the scope of this generic design to identify the specific character of the most appropriate interventions. These will be determined following finalization of the design, further discussion of the various strategies available, review of current strategies, and input from campus personnel and resources. However, a preliminary list might include:

- Conditional admissions;
- Freshman advising/mentoring program;
- Freshman seminar/extended orientation;
- Learning resource center;
- Peer tutoring/advising;
- Supplemental instruction;
- Career/life planning workshop/course;
- Financial aid counseling;
- Faculty friend program;
- Personal counseling;
- Special topic workshops/seminars (e.g., test-taking, financial aid, and helping undecided or exploratory students);

- Student skills workshop/course;
- Developmental/remedial courses;
- Enriched/honors courses;
- Assessment (abilities, values, and interests);
- Computerized career exploration programs;
- Drug/alcohol counseling;
- Student success center;
- Writing, reading, and mathematics labs;
- Special programs for adult learners;
- Freshman interviews;
- Summer bridge programs;
- Proactive/intrusive advising program; and
- Programs targeted for high-risk students.

### **Designing and Evaluating an Early-alert System**

The proposed early-alert system ensures that the institution is doing everything possible to identify high-risk or dropout-prone students and intervene in a timely and effective manner. In determining the final system design, it will be necessary to keep in mind the five criteria for system success proposed by George Baker in his work, *Toward Mastery Leadership: Strategies for Student Success*:

1. Simplicity;
2. Flexibility;
3. Reliability;
4. Economy; and
5. Acceptability.

It is also important to acknowledge the potential problems or obstacles to implementing a successful early-alert system. The following issues may need to be considered in the final design decisions:

- Unwillingness of faculty and staff to cooperate;
- Failure to correctly identify high-risk students and to ensure their participation in the appropriate intervention strategies;
- Failure to respect the confidentiality and privacy of students in a system highly dependent on communication and proactive intervention;
- Lack of an adequate automated system for monitoring/tracking individual students;

- Ineffectiveness of the intervention strategies; and
- Awareness of the tendency for any system to encourage unintentional stereotyping or self-fulfilling prophecies.

Ultimately, the success of the system is based on being able to accurately identify dropout-prone students and to provide immediate attention and assistance that matches student needs with institutional resources.