METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

OF DENVER

STUDENT RETENTION GUIDE

How Faculty Can Help Students Succeed in Reaching Graduation

This guide will help you:
- *Articulate and identify ways to apply best practices for retention when working with students.*
- *Locate and interpret data on retention and graduation rates.*
- *Apply best practices for retention to departmental policy decision-making.*
- *Identify university services, programs and initiatives that can help you and your department support student succes and retention.*

What exactly is retention?

What exactly are we doing when we "retain" students? These are terms that may mean something to us intuitively, but there are also specific definitions in place for this specific concept.

A retention rate is a measurement from one semester to another semester, as a percentage calculated by taking the headcount of students who re-registered for the second academic period divided by the headcount of students registered in the first academic period. Put otherwise, who's coming back? While this definition is agnostic regarding the span of time between the first and second academic period such that we can speak of semester-to-semester retention or year-to-year retention, a frequent rate that is appealed to is the "fall-to-fall retention rate."

Why should faculty care about it?

Each year, about one-third of MSU Denver's undergraduate students are not retained to the following year. This amounts to approximately 5,000 students in every fall-to-fall span. For students, this means they have either dropped out or transfered, and not continued at MSU Denver. For our university, this means we have not retained these students. The impact of students not retaining are deeply personal and also have a significant impact on the lives of faculty and everyone who works for MSU Denver.

While there are many efforts to address this issue made at the university level, faculty can also play an important role in supporting persistence to graduation. As we connect with our students on a regular basis, we have the opportunity to see each of their strengths and challenges, and tend to know more about their particular life circumstances and their hopes and dreams. These are perspectives that university efforts don't always have.

Within this guide, faculty can learn about small changes they can make that will help their students succeed in their classes and beyond – all the way to graduation.

How to use this guide

This guide is meant to be a prompt for learning and reflection. It can be used in any way that you or your department might find to be helpful. It can be used by individuals (for example, as you are planning their upcoming semester's classes), or it can be used by groups (either with colleagues working through the exercises together or by working on the exercises individually and then gathering to discuss responses).

This guide includes suggestions for activities/discussions that can be completed in different time intervals. For example, if you only have five minutes, choose one objective and read that individual page. If you have 15 minutes, engage conversation with a colleague on a reflection question. Or, if you have 30 minutes, plan out an action step, either for yourself or with a colleague. Some of these reflections should occur weekly, others monthly or even annually. The time frames will vary within each department.

Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates
for All Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Students at MSU Denver
Source: EDW, Retention Ten Year Trends Report, Fall terms. Excludes non-degree students and students who did not return due to graduation.
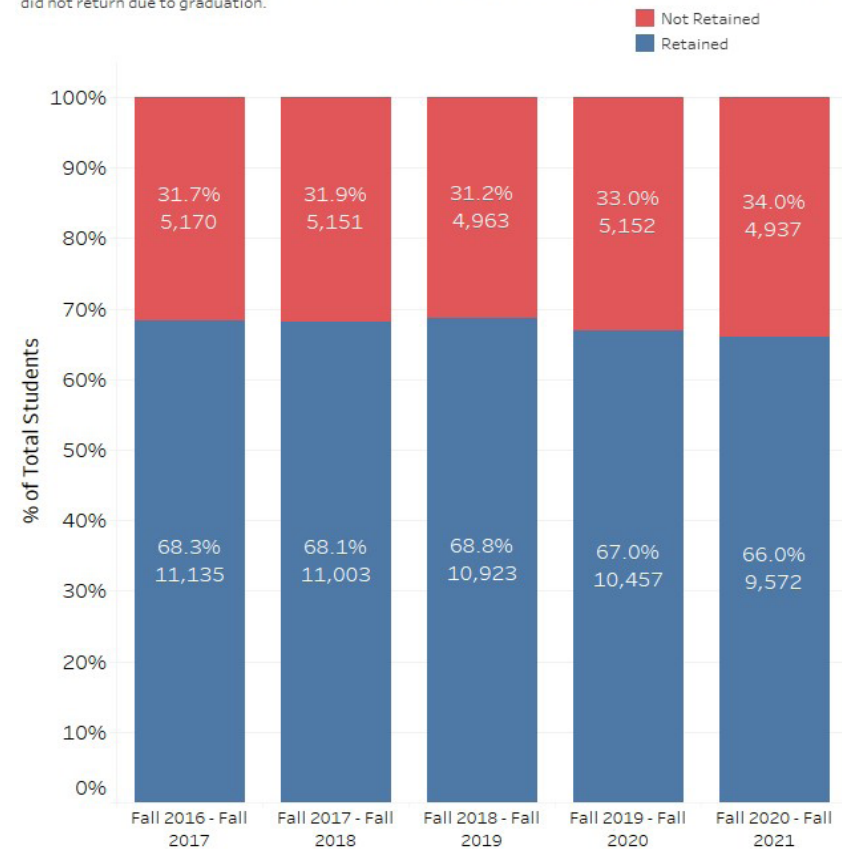
Articulate and Identify Ways to Apply Best Practices for Retention When Working With Students

Introduction
This section will focus on the kinds of practices you as a faculty member can engage in when you interact with students to promote student retention.

Some examples of high impact practices for student retention are:
- Connect alumni with current students beginning with freshmen non-majors.
- Foster connections among students, and between students and instructors with learning and connecting activities
- Connect students with campus resources (Health Center, Counseling Center, Tutoring Center, Writing Center, C2Hub, etc. - more info included on subsequent pages)
- Reduce student costs by using Open Educational Resources (OER) whenever possible *(more information below)*
- Offer assignments/experiences to promote degree progress & career planning
- Use writing-intensive assignments (be careful not to overdo this practice)
- Assign collaborative assignments and projects where the "rules" of student collaboration/contribution are clear
- Offer opportunities for undergraduate research and research presentation
- Promote diversity/global learning, service learning, hands-on community-based learning and internships

Using Open Educational Resources
By using **Open Educational Resources (OER)**, you can supplement your teaching without costing the student more. OERs are licensed to allow free use and modification, most often through Creative Commons licenses. They save students money and are available for students to keep indefinitely (no rentals or limited time period access). They can also inspire classroom innovation for faculty.

Additional information about OER can be found here:
https://www.msudenver.edu/open-educational-resources/

REFLECTION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES:
- When I look at our University, College or Department through the eyes of a student who is thinking about leaving the University, what would I see?

- When I look at our university, college or department through the eyes of an affiliate faculty, tenure track faculty, staff and/or work-study student, what would I see?

- With the goal of student success and retention in mind, what are the first, second and ongoing steps that need to be taken in my leadership?

- With everything else, how can I keep these steps moving? Who or what could help me?

- What are your major learning goals for your students, and how do your course materials help support that learning?

- Has the cost barrier for materials (textbooks, online homework systems, etc.) changed the way you teach?

- What would your ideal class learning materials look like?

- How do you want students to engage with your learning materials?

Describe How to Locate and Interpret Data on Retention and Graduation Rates Among MSU Denver Students

Introduction
One of the findings in a survey that was administered to faculty in Spring 2019 was that while faculty members were largely in favor of the idea that they should be involved in efforts to promote student retention, very few faculty members were aware of what the University's student retention rate is, and even fewer knew of the retention rate for students in their own department. Promoting student retention is done in many ways, and one of those ways is through understanding the data generated on this topic.

It's important to not only understand what retention and student persistence is, but know how it relates to your own programs, departments, colleges or University. To help you make better informed decisions when it comes to retention and student persistence, consider investigating the data and information that's available to you:

- Find and explore the data on the Office of Institutional Research website: *https://www.msudenver.edu/institutional-research*
- Access University data through the Enterprise Data Warehouse: *https://www.msudenver.edu/enterprise-data-warehouse/*
- Access data by appeal to reports generated by the Business Intelligence Unit: *https://www.msudenver.edu/business-intelligence/*

Suggested Activities for Exploring Student Retention Trends:
- Identify if there are differences in retention for your department by: race/ethnicity, gender, transfer student status, full- vs. part-time students, etc.
  - Consider investigating the Institutional Research Student Profiles and EDW Retention Dashboard to see all the ways that retention data is considered at the university.
  - Keep in mind that we're here talking specifically about students. As such, try to find out what your retention rate is, but also be mindful of what this amounts to in terms of overall numbers of students who were retained and those who were not.

- Summarize current retention trends for the university and your department
  - Has the retention rate at your department been stable over time? Has there been change over time?
  - How do these trends mesh with your experiences with majors within your department? Have you noticed symptoms of these trends (positive or negative) in any of your interactions with students?

- Talk with your department Chair about what percent of your students have been graduating within six years from the time they began
  - One of the primary goals of retaining students is to get students to their academic goal, which is usually graduation. In addition to investigating how many students are coming back, how many students are going on to receive degree that they're seeking?

- Having played with this data and investigated some trends, take a moment to evaluate retention trends to identify opportunities or problems that you can address in your teaching practices and/or department policies.

Additional things to think about:
What about students in my class? What are my data options here? When students can register for classes, how can I know whether students in my sections are registered? Check out CAESS's "Who's Registered" app here: *https://www.msudenver.edu/business-intelligence/caessapp/*

Apply Best Practices for Retention to Departmental Policy Decision-Making

Introduction
Every area on campus implements policies that allow work to be done in the educational enterprise. Academic departments are no exception. However, contrary to intention, policies are often institutionalized that actually present barriers to student success. As part of our faculty work in increasing retention, we must review our departmental policies and procedures in order to ensure that we are applying best practices for removing obstacles from our students' paths.

There are various obstacles that make accessibility an issue for students of color, students with learning disabilities, first-generation students, women, LGBTQ students, etc. There are demographic groups that may struggle with unintentionally exclusive policies and practices.

Here are some examples of policies that may exist in departments but that may prevent progress toward completion and graduation:
- Attendance policies
- Late work policies
- Extra credit policies
- Requiring an internship
- Expensive textbooks
- Permissions needed to declare majors or minors
- Permissions needed to lift holds

How can we remedy this?
- Know your department's data. For example, data on retention, graduation, enrollment statistics, DFW rates, etc. will be key to understanding what changes, if any, need to be made in your department's policy.
- Have a departmental discussion around what values your faculty team wants to bring to the table. Is equity a major focus? How about access? How do you define academic standards?
- Meet as a department to review current policies. Flag any that have been problematic to students in the past or that don't line up with your department's values.
- Ask if similar outcomes could be achieved with different policies (UDL).
- Decide as a team whether to change, revise or abandon existing policies.
- Decide whether new policies need to be proactively implemented.

Collaborate with three key stakeholders during this process: students, affiliate faculty and Student Affairs professionals.
- Students will provide valuable insights around what might work well and what might be difficult.
- Affiliate faculty may be able to offer insight coincident to their own experience.
- Student Affairs professionals can help with the writing of academic department policies that will intersect with other support services available across campus.

Benchmarks for success
- Work with your department Chair to set a schedule for policy review.
- Decide upon the scope of your project, taking into account faculty workload, external circumstances, etc. For example, it might not be a good idea to revamp all policies during the pandemic, but it may be doable to review policies relating to one specific area like registration.
- Identify a timeline for the revision or elimination of ineffective policies, and the implementation of retention-friendly policies.
- Design an instrument to use for effective data gathering.
- Produce internal and external reports on outcomes. Compare to past reports, if possible.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES:
- How often does your department review policy?

- Do you have common issues that need a policy?

- Are there policies that need to be reconsidered?

- Are there policies that we've been doing that have unintended consequences that we might want to consider?

- How do we evaluate our policies' impacts?

Identify University Services, Programs and Initiatives That Can Help You and Your Department Support Student Success and Retention

As faculty members, we spend most of our days working with students, fellow-faculty members and department staff. Some of us also spend time working with administration, but often this is under the realm of academic issues. This scope of our typical work makes it easy to forget that there is an entire arm of the university beyond academic affairs.

Student Affairs is a branch of the University consisting of 200+ full-time staff members spanning the Classroom the Career (C2) Hub, Enrollment Management, and Student Engagement and Wellness. These staff members are dedicated to ensuring the success of the whole student; mentally, physically and emotionally both in the classroom and out.

You can read more about the scope and goals of student affairs on their website: https://www.msudenver.edu/student-affairs/
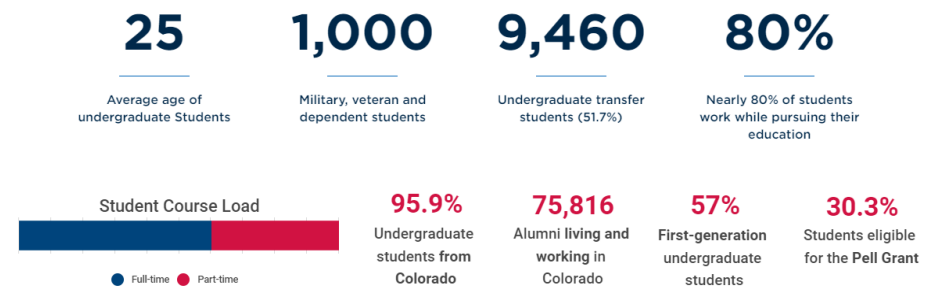
Each student is unique, but **there are some common issues that our students tend to struggle with**. Understanding what these issues are and how to get help for them can help us ensure that every student has the chance to succeed. Some of those common issues are listed to the right with a more specific breakdown of how to help listed out on the next page.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES:

• Faculty members are highly skilled at teaching and coaching students to succeed in courses. But sometimes there are challenges that feel beyond what they are equipped to handle. What are some issues that you see holding students back that you don't feel able to address?

• Which resource(s) on this list would you like to connect your students to most, or what is most beneficial for them to know about?

• Thinking about the classes you are teaching, how specifically could you connect your students with various resources?

Student Profile

Below is a snapshot of the MSU Denver student population. It's important to note that a large portion of our students struggle in-and-out of the classroom. Approximately 30% of our students were Pell Eligible in 2019, meaning they display exceptional financial need. In addition, 57% identify as a first-generation college student, meaning they more than likely come from a family with little or no experience navigating the academic, financial and cultural barriers to higher education.

25	**1,000**	**9,460**	**80%**
Average age of undergraduate Students	Military, veteran and dependent students	Undergraduate transfer students (51.7%)	Nearly 80% of students work while pursuing their education

Student Course Load

● Full-time ● Part-time

95.9%	**75,816**	**57%**	**30.3%**
Undergraduate students from **Colorado**	Alumni **living and working** in Colorado	**First-generation** undergraduate students	Students eligible for the **Pell Grant**

Sense of Belonging, Leadership and Community

Two theorists that stand out in their explanation of student retention related to sense of belonging, leadership and community are Alexander Astin and Vincent Tinto.

• Astin's theory of involvement suggests that students must have a positive affinity to their college experience. They gain positive perceptions about their institution through involvement in student orgs, undergraduate research, fraternity & sorority life, identity-based programming and other connections to faculty, staff and peers.

• Similarly, Tinto's work on student departure suggests that social involvements and integration are a significant factor in retention. Students who are connected to faculty, staff, peers, and are involved in extracurriculars are engaged in the campus community and therefore, are more likely to be retained.

On the next page you'll find a sampling of services that MSU Denver offers in order to help students find their sense of belonging, leadership opportunities and community connections. You can also browse the Don't Cancel That Class (www.msudenver.edu/student-affairs/dont-cancel-that-class/) opportunities to bring resources to your classroom.

Student Affairs provides tailored support to help students succeed; this ranges from support for students who are struggling (to get them up to "baseline") to support for students who are doing fine but could be pushed to excel further, and all the way to students who are excelling and can use 'enrichment opportunities' to reach an even higher level of success. **Common issues that MSU Denver students face and resources to help them** are listed below. If you recognize a need that is not supported on this list, please let Student Affairs know. You can reach out to the **Dean of Students** at **deanofstudents@msudenver.edu** for help with finding solutions.

Academically, a student…	Resource
needs help studying, has test anxiety or generally does well in school but is struggling with your class	Tutoring Center, Academic Skills Workshops, Counseling Center
is struggling with writing	Writing Center, RIDES Program, Immigrant Services Program
is not turning in assignments, replying to messages or participating	CARE Referral
is struggling with time (due to duties outside of school or time management)	General academic skills tutoring
is struggling due to health-related issues	Access Center, Health Center at Auraria, Counseling Center, Student Care Center
needs a customized major	Individualized Degree Program (IDP)

Financially, a student…	Resource
has a balance due hold	Office of the Bursar, Payment Plans Options
says they can't afford to pay for school next term	Financial Aid: FAFSA/CASFA support, scholarship applications, income appeals, SAP appeals, help reading financial aid offer
had employment impacted by Covid-19 or something else	Scholarship Support & Retention (COSI, Reisher Scholarship, DSF, Dream.US, etc.), Student Care Center

Career-wise, a student…	Resource
is unsure about major or direction, doesn't know options for career paths or what majors are available	Exploratory Advising, Academic Advisors, Peer Mentoring, Alternative Break Program, Career Assessment
doesn't know what job path to take	Exploratory Advising, Alternative Break Program
is about to graduate but is unsure what steps to take now	Career Readiness, Grad School in C2, Office of Graduate Studies
needs real-life work experience	Career Readiness, Service Learning, Career Link, Earn and Learn, Job Search Resources, Student Employment, CMEI

Socially, a student…	Resource
• wants to be involved • hasn't made connections on campus • is quiet in class and seems to leave immediately when class is done • shares they are feeling lonely and haven't met anyone that can relate to them	**Identity Based Groups:** Epic Scholars, CAMP, LGBTQ Student Resource Center, Immigrant Services, First Generation Initiatives, Gender Institute for Teaching and Advocacy, Veteran and Military Services, CMEI, Counseling Center **Mentoring type programs:** Brother 2 Brother, Sister Circles, Peer Mentoring, TRIO Student Support Services, Transfer Peer Mentoring, Health Scholars **Student Organizations** in CMEI
demonstrates leadership qualities and can do more/needs a challenge	C2 Hub, Undergraduate Research, Honors Program, Urban Leadership Program, TSAC, Journey Through our Heritage

A student needs help with…	Resource
severe lack of motivation	Dean of Students, Student Care Center
mental health	Counseling Center, Access Center, Health Center at Auraria, Student Care Center
sexual assault	Health Center at Auraria, Phoenix Center at Auraria, Student Care Center
housing and/or food insecurity	Student Care Center, Roadrunner Food Pantry, SNAP, Housing
immigration	Immigrant Services
finances	Financial Aid, Student Emergency Fund, DREAMer Emergency Fund, Local/State/Federal Resources
individual/group conflict	Dean of Students, Student Conflict Resolution Services
identity crises (coming out, conversations about race/identity, etc.)	LGBTQ Student Resource Center, Epic Scholars, Immigrant Services, CESA, CMEI, Veteran and Military Student Services, GITA, First-Generation Initiatives, JTOH, Equity Peer Leaders, Counseling Center

Additional Resources

Objective 1:

George Kuh's seminal AAC&U report (2008) on High-Impact Educational Practices, Georgia State MSU Denver applications summary

Links to resources:

https://www.msudenver.edu/undergraduate-studies/high-impact-teaching-practices/

https://success.gsu.edu/approach/

Clinton, V., & Khan, S. (2019). Efficacy of Open Textbook Adoption on Learning Performance and Course Withdrawal Rates: A Meta-Analysis: AERA Open, 5(3), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419872212

Colvard, N. B., Watson, C. E., & Park, H. (2018). The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Metrics. International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 30(2), 15.

Nusbaum, A. T., Cuttler, C., & Swindell, S. (2020). Open Educational Resources as a Tool for Educational Equity: Evidence From an Introductory Psychology Class. Frontiers in Education, 4. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00152

Objective 2:

CAESS Web application: https://www.msudenver.edu/business-intelligence/caessapp/

IPEDS data: https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/

Objective 3:

See this site on accessible syllabi from the Autism Training: https://www.accessiblesyllabus.com/about-us/

UDL sites

Objective 4:

Student Affairs website: https://www.msudenver.edu/student-affairs/

Classroom to Career (C2) Hub website: https://www.msudenver.edu/classroom-to-career-hub/

Enrollment Management website: https://www.msudenver.edu/enrollment-management/

Student Engagement and Wellness Website: https://www.msudenver.edu/studentengagementandwellness/

Dean of Students Website: https://www.msudenver.edu/dean-of-students/

Individualized Degree Program: https://www.msudenver.edu/individualized-degrees/

Early Bird Articles from CAESS

Supporting first-gen students through the hidden curriculum (Jan. 20, 2021): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_012121_SupportStudentsHiddenCurriculum.pdf*

Five minutes can mean a continuous road to success for your students (Dec. 2, 2020): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_120220_FiveMinRoadToSuccess.pdf*

Here's how faculty can support spring registration efforts (Oct. 21, 2020): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_102120_FacultySupportRegistration.pdf*

Coaching students for career success (Oct. 7, 2020): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_100720_CoachingCareerSuccess.pdf*

Advice on advising from an expert (Sept. 23, 2020): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_092320_AdvisingAdvice.pdf*

Simple tips for helping students succeed (Sept. 9, 2020): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_090220_BestPractices.pdf*

Fostering student/faculty relationships in online learning (Aug. 18, 2020): *https://www.msudenver.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EB_081820_FosteringRelationships.pdf*

CAESS 2019 - 2021 Committee Co-Chairs:

Kristen (Kristy) Lyons, Associate Professor in Department of Psychological Sciences

Sean Petranovich, Ph.D., Director of Data & Analytics

Committee Members:

Zsuzsa Balogh, Ph.D., Professor and Associate Chair in Department of Engineering and Engineering Technology

Samantha Borrego, Coordinator for First Generation Initiatives

Cynthia Dormer, Ph.D., RDN, Professor in Department of Nutrition

Rebecca Gorman, Professor and Chair in Department of English

Jeff Hammond, Associate Professor in Department of Journalism and Media Production

Lunden MacDonald, Ph.D., Professor of Spanish in Department of Modern Languages

Amanda McClure, Communication and Social Media Manager for Student Affairs

Soj Sirivanchai, M.S., Retention and Success Advisor

Greg Sullivan, Director of the Access Center