



## Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

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To see the slides from the Fourm or other retention information, go to our web site at [castle.eiu.edu/~core](http://castle.eiu.edu/~core)

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## Why Retention? Why Now?

The freshman-to-sophomore retention rate is one of the factors that many constituencies employ to determine the quality of an institution. Students and parents look at IPEDS data to see if current students become successful graduates. The state of Illinois as well as the federal government use retention rates to benchmark higher education and to hold institutions accountable. So, retention data are always important to monitor and understand.

However, in the most recent years, retention of current students becomes even more important as postsecondary education faces the challenges of the economy, competition from for-profit virtual universities, and increasing competition for

the same students from community colleges.

In addition to concerns of accountability and recruitment, reputable institutions also examine retention issues because they have an ethical obligation to help students be successful. Eastern has a history of seeking to employ best practices in retention such as mandatory advising, orientation programming, a freshman experience course and programming, student support services, a large residential population, and small class sizes that facilitate faculty-student interaction.

Despite all these positive programs and services that contribute to our good retention and graduation rates, Eastern is facing enrollment challenges, so it is especially important in this

economy and with the population of traditionally aged students going down in Illinois to retain the students who choose to pursue their education at Eastern.

President William Perry has set the aspirational goal of reaching a retention rate of 85% by 2013. In order to meet this goal, all Eastern faculty and staff will need to work together on ideas, strategies, and actions to improve student success and ultimately our freshman-to-sophomore retention rate.

To help us move in this direction, Provost Blair Lord has charged CORE and all the academic affairs units with selecting projects with the "potential to improve our overall retention rate."

Eastern's current retention rate is 79% and the graduate

*(Continued on page 4)*

## CORE Corner

CORE currently has several subcommittees focusing on specific issues related to student success and retention.

The Continuing Student Project has been focusing on helping students register on time and giving them information about removing that impediment. For the past three semesters, this subcommittee has been sending emails to students who have not registered for classes within two weeks of their initial registration period.

Students are given information on talking to their advisors in order to receive their alternate pin as well as where to look to ascertain whether they have a hold and how to remove that hold. Students can reply to this email with questions and concerns and CORE members respond.

Departments are given the list of their majors who have not yet registered as well. This practice allows departments to contact those students as well.

Students who have not registered for the following semester by the time grades are given are sent a short survey via email asking whether they plan to return to the institution and why they have not yet registered. The subcommittee is monitoring these data for trends. One trend that has emerged is the number of students in financial difficulty or with other holds that prevent registration.

The Financially At-Risk

*(Continued on page 2)*



## Spotlight On . . . Residential Life

### Promoting Academic Success within the Residential Community at Eastern Illinois University

Residential Life at Eastern Illinois University works diligently at promoting the academic mission of our institution. As Jody Stone tells us, these efforts are providing meaningful results.

Residential Life began tracking grade point averages in 2001 from each residence hall and learning community (residential floor). In the Fall of 2010 the residence halls posted a 2.86 average semester grade point average, which is the highest fall semester grade point average that has been achieved.

In addition, for the first time hall staff were able to analyze the academic success of students both on and off campus by class. Students entering Eastern as freshman this past year achieved a 2.72 fall semester grade point average as compared to a 1.96 fall semester grade point average of freshman students who lived off campus.

Students who entered Eastern in the fall of 2009 (current sophomores) achieved a 2.88 fall semester grade point average compared to a 2.74 fall semester grade point average

for off-campus sophomore students.

Since a majority of our on campus population is comprised of freshmen and sophomores, Residential Life takes a very intentional approach in providing programs and residential environments that promote academic success and provide our students with the best opportunity to start out “on the right foot” in their college careers.

Residential Life also co-sponsors the Faculty Fellows Program. This program provides opportunities for

Anyone who encounters a student who is not doing well, may refer that student to the Student Success Center through the **Faculty Referral Network**. See <https://www.eiu.edu/~success/faclogin.php> to refer a student who may be exhibiting unsuccessful behaviors in your classroom or office.

## CORE Corner cont.

Subcommittee has been examining issues related to students’ ability to pay for college, including the impact of financial aid and changes at the state and federal level. This subcommittee is looking at ways to communicate such information to students and parents and to educate students about college costs and their options. This group is also looking at all types of holds that may prevent students from registering on time.

In addition to students at-risk of attrition because of financial difficulty, CORE’s efforts also target those considered to be at-risk because of other factors.

The At-Risk Subcommittee has examined ways in which students are identified as at-risk, how the University communicates with such students (e.g., midterm grades, probation/warning letters), and what factors may

predict at-risk students.

After studying several semesters of retention data, the subcommittee has established the following criteria for the at-risk student:

- First-generation students
- Minority students
- High financial need
- ACT composite and reading score below 21
- High school grade point average below 2.75
- Undeclared

A report identifying such students has been requested; this report will allow CORE to develop strategies to help these students and retain more to be successful graduates.

While Eastern has been tracking retention data and graduation rates for a long time, CORE has requested a new file of retention data to allow the committee to conduct some cross tabulations in order to

examine retention and attrition in more depth. ITS is working with the committee to provide a wealth of data against which committee members may run statistical formulas to glean additional information about students who leave the institution and those who stay.

A subcommittee focusing on non-traditional students has been formed recently. As this is a unique population of students, CORE has brought in experts from our non-traditional degree programs to examine ways to improve retention for this unique population.

CORE will be working on these projects to help improve the retention rate of Eastern’s students and ultimately, the graduation rate. We hope you will continue your interests in retention and join us in our efforts to help our students be successful.

## Spotlight On cont. . .

faculty-student engagement outside of the classroom. According to research, "Student contact with faculty members outside the classroom appears consistently to promote student persistence, educational aspirations, and degree completion" (Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. 2005).

There are currently 60 faculty members who participate in this program, and program organizers are always interested in recruiting more faculty who would like to pursue this opportunity to

mentor students outside of the classroom.

If you would like to interact with students in the residence halls, please contact Jody Stone at [jestone@eiu.edu](mailto:jestone@eiu.edu).

Studies have proven that living on campus contributes to the academic success and retention of students. Why? Classes are closer, learning communities promote peer support and interpersonal development, and on-campus living provides a sense of belonging that comes from involvement in college life which has in itself proven to increase student success.



Professor Reed Benedict, Sociology, has lunch with two students at Stevenson. Photo by Chad Franks.

## Did you know?

In AY10, Eastern's freshmen and seniors participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Thirty-six percent of our freshmen and 45% of our seniors rated their entire educational experience at Eastern as "excellent." Fifty-one percent of our freshman rated their experience as "good" compared to 48% of seniors. Only 1% of freshmen and seniors rated their experience as poor.

## Faculty: What Can You Do?

**Get to know your students:** Learning your students' names, and inviting them to share a bit about themselves early in the semester is the first step to establishing a connection.

**Allow for varying learning styles:** Try different forms of class participation to draw out the quiet, reserved, or shy students. Try such techniques as small group discussion, paired in-class exercises, and individual written reflection paragraphs.

**Grade, grade, and grade again:** We hear stories from students who haven't had any graded projects, quizzes, or exams until after midterm and have no idea how they are performing in the class. Set up your schedule so that students begin receiving feedback early in the semester. This lets them know where they stand, and what they need to do to improve, and will help you identify anyone who may be falling through the cracks. And when Midterm rolls around, submit those grades!

**Encourage Mentorship:** Upperclassmen have experienced all that the lower classmen have experienced, and lived to tell about it! Get your Student Service

organizations involved with a mentorship program, where each new major is taken under the wing of a more experienced student. It will benefit both groups and keep everyone engaged.

**Conference Time:** Whenever possible set up individual conference sessions with your students. We know this isn't always possible in large classes, but you can modify this and meet with the students in small groups. You'll know them better, and they should begin to feel more comfortable coming to you if they have a problem. If you perceive a problem, schedule a one-on-one conference as soon as possible.

**Seek Help:** There are a myriad of services on campus to help the struggling student. If you identify a need, encourage your student to seek help and/or tutoring. Your interest in the students and your willingness to help them *get* help may be just the nudge they need.

**Keep that office door open:** Set up and maintain office hours, and let students know that you are there to help them. You may need to remind them, but keep at it, especially if you perceive

that a student is struggling.

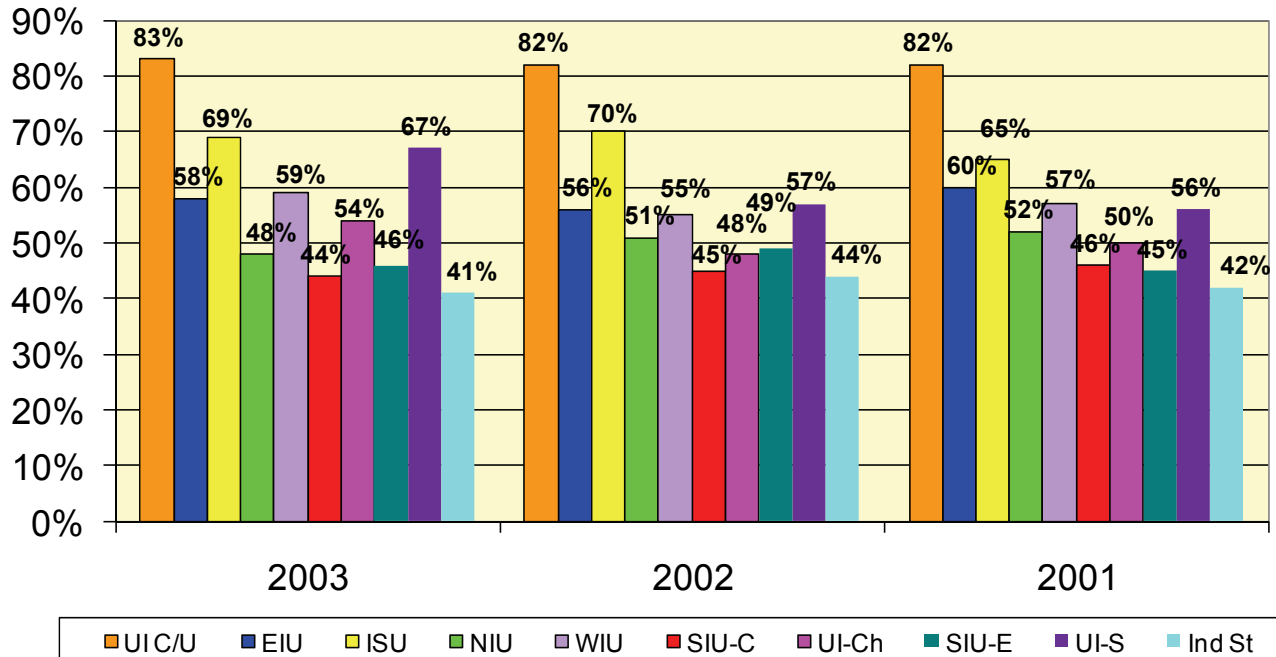
### Participate, participate, participate:

- In EIU Foundation Day. Let the new freshmen get to know what your department is like and guide them toward a major.
- In EIU's Freshmen Debut. A welcoming presence goes a long way to establishing that early relationship that will help students achieve.
- In EIU's Homecoming. Visibility at University functions shows that you care.
- In EIU's Graduate School Fair. Establish a presence to provide information and answer questions about advanced degree options.

**Encourage them to see beyond the classroom:** Discuss future career paths and options to help students connect the classroom to their career.

**Hold our students to high, yet attainable, standards.** Don't let them short change themselves. Push them to achieve, and keep them focused on their goals—a successful college career and a degree from Eastern.

## Comparative Graduation Rates



## National Benchmarks and Eastern

### Why Retention? cont. from p. 1

rate is at 58%. For a regional, master's level institution, we are above the national norms for institutions in our selectivity type. Eastern is considered a traditional selective institution based on our student averages of being in the top 50% of their graduating classes and with ACT scores ranging from 18-24. Eastern's six-year graduation rate of 58% is 14.3% above the national average for traditional selective schools, and our retention rate is 6.5% above our class.

The chart above compares Eastern's graduation rates with other Illinois public institutions as well as Indiana State University. These data show that Eastern has been third in the state behind the University of Illinois-Urbana and Illinois State University for the last three years.

However, Eastern has room for improvement in its graduation and retention rates, and reaching our higher aspiration will take a concerted effort by the whole Eastern community. What can you do to improve retention at EIU?

Selectivity Type	First to Second Year Retention	6-Year Graduation Rates
Highly Selective (Top 10%; ACT 25-30)	95%	86%
Selective (Top 25%; ACT 21-26)	81.6%	60.5%
<b>Traditional Selective (Top 50%; ACT 18-24)</b>	<b>71.5%</b>	<b>43.7%</b>
Liberal Selective (Bottom 50%; ACT 17-22)	62.4%	38.5%
Open (No %; ACT 16-21)	67.3%	36.8%
ALL Master's Granting Public	71.1%	44.4%