Annotated Bibliography: At-Risk Students

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By using research information from multiple studies, Brawer (1996) discusses characteristics of persistent and non-persistent community college students while offering intervention strategies including orientation programs, mentoring programs, and the use of multiple strategies in the hopes of lowering the rate of attrition. Full-time status proved to be the most common characteristic shared by persisting students. Age however, showed conflicting reports. Orientation programs are the most common forms of intervention used by community colleges and when completed during the first term of study, they appear to demonstrate improvements in student performance. Peer, advisor, and faculty mentoring programs also prove to increase the success rate of community college students especially those at-risk. Multiple strategies include the use of different interventions in a combined effort to support student retention. Some examples include establishing a women’s center, freshman seminars, work-study employment, faculty development programs, student organizations, and freshman orientations. Brawer concludes that since every student has different needs, the use of multiple strategies appears to be the best application.

The students attending colleges and universities come from extremely diverse backgrounds, especially those who are labeled at-risk. The majority of instructors in our nation’s higher education institutions are white and often stick to a certain teaching style that may not be beneficial to diverse learners. Burk (2000) believes that by using storytelling in their classrooms, teachers can give students a voice and sense of ownership which will help increase student engagement. The development of communication skills and trust among classmates seems to be a result when at-risk students share their lived experiences in the classroom. Storytelling can lead to a deeper understanding of the surrounding world when used as a means of reflection. Burk believes that when students, especially those at-risk, connect their personal lives to their education many benefits can occur.


Castle (1993) writes this article focusing on the importance of institutional research on the topic of minority attrition for future human resource development. Centering mainly on African American and Hispanic students, Castle explains the problems this population faces in the higher education environment while attending predominantly white colleges and universities, as well as 2-year colleges. She states that a major problem is that colleges and universities are set up in regard to white structures. In order to alleviate these problems, institutions need to do extensive attrition research. The two major types of research include research literature which involves the use of national statistics, and action research where the institution performs internal research specific to their needs. The latter is suggested to be
necessary so that institutions can focus on their individual needs rather than
generalizations.


Chamblee, who had taught developmental reading for ten years at the time this article was written, wants readers to be aware that at-risk students have potential. She believes that it is the responsibility of teachers to find ways of getting students to reach this potential. This article centers around the idea that reading and writing are related processes and by encouraging students to connect their lives to these processes they can become successful in these fields. Chamblee developed her class based on numerous studies that have proven the importance of connecting reading and writing. Throughout the years Chamblee has noticed outstanding improvements in the quality and content of students’ work, both written and oral. By using reading and writing simultaneously, while implementing assignments that incorporate topics of students’ personal lives, reluctant readers and writers have taken more of an interest in their studies and their work has become more developed.


Since most research on first-generation college students has been focused on this group as a whole, Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco (2005) centered their study specifically on those who are ethnic minorities. Researchers have found that first-
generation college students are more likely than their peers to be at risk of college failure. Dennis et al. aimed their investigation on how motivation and environmental social supports contribute to academic outcomes of first-generation minority students. Motivation based on personal interest, curiosity, and the desire to achieve a satisfying career proved to predict college success. Expectation and motivation by family however, was not significantly related to the success of the student. In regard to support, this study suggests that support from one’s peers more strongly influences college grades and adjustment than family support.


In this study DeRoma, Bell, Zaremba, & Abee (2005) evaluate the success of the College Success Institute (CSI), a college transition program designed for incoming at risk freshmen attending a 4-year military college. The demands of college differ greatly from high school, including increased study time, longer classes, higher levels of reading, writing, and listening, and less structure. All of these characteristics are taken into account in the CSI program which involves basic college survival skills, acclimation to the college environment, introduction to support services, and morning physical fitness. The CSI program includes a 1 credit class, meeting 4 days/week for 5 weeks. This course coincides with a 3 credit hour history class. In this study, DeRoma et al. track the retention and GPA of 35 freshmen and also use a self report survey. The survey and retention rates prove to be significantly successful encouraging the use of college transitional programs.
The GPA results however do not show signs of great improvement, but this seems to be the case for all freshmen at this university, regular and at-risk.


Erikson (1998) describes the implementation and student feedback of a freshman orientation week, devoted to at-risk students. The orientation was the first part of a program, The Learning Circle (TLC), focused on the retention of at-risk students at a private open enrollment college. Although this orientation is expensive and labor intensive the benefits seem worth the cost. During the orientation week the 23 participating students lived together in dormitories and participated in different activities that helped with socialization and academic preparation. At the end of the program, feedback was collected from the students. All 23 participants felt as if they were part of a group and identified making friends. They felt they would successfully complete their first semester and believed that their study and time management skills had improved. Additional support was required of the TLC students throughout the year that included: a weekly meeting with a Learning Specialist, a weekly meeting with the director of the program, peer mentoring, and twice a week participation in an after hours tutoring center. At the end of the semester, during pre-registration, 91% of the students had registered for the next semester.

Heisserer & Parette (2002) explain how regular contact with a significant person within a student’s institution of attendance is critical in their success and retention. When dealing with at-risk students, this contact is even more important. Advisors are quite often the best at offering this personal contact within the institution which gives at-risk students a sense of belonging. Because of this, it is important that advisors are well trained and competent. Three skills that they must have for advising purposes include: communication, questioning, and referral. As well as developed skills, the way in which advising is done is also important. A particular model of advising that Heisserer & Parette have found to be most successful in dealing with students at-risk is referred to as intrusive advising. This involves facilitating informed decision-making, increasing student motivation, and ensuring the probability of academic success. Recommendations for advisors include developing a comprehensive plan targeting at risk students that involves faculty and advisor training, the development of a website devoted to at-risk students, data compilation, and longitudinal research related to retention.

Hunter, A. J., Perry, R. P., & Menec, V. H. (1996) believe that low actual success and low perceived success are determinants that label students as being at-risk. After conducting a study with 150 introductory psychology students, the use of attributional retraining appears to help develop more positive success in students. Attributional retraining refers to changing the way people think about negative
outcomes. Changing these thoughts positively affects future performance. In this study, students were read to about the evidence suggesting improved performance by changing negative perceptions. They then viewed a videotape in which seniors talked about this idea and how it improved their performance. The study showed that students experienced success both in the long and short term.


Latino students are an underrepresented population in higher education who are often classified as at-risk, due to low college completion rates. According to Martinez (2003), Latino students often do poorly in college or don’t even attend college due to low expectations held by teachers, low incomes, lack of information about educational and financial opportunities, and inappropriate advising. In this article Martinez (2003) compiles data resulting from open interviews with four Latino college graduates who participated in a TRIO Student Support Service Program. Results were gathered from the conversations held with the interviewees. From these conversations it is believed that the students’ college success was a result of the following factors. To start off with, each student had a great determination to obtain a college degree and received continuous support from their parents to attend a college or university. The participation in the TRIO program proved to be extremely valuable as well. The TRIO program helped these students by preparing them for difficult college work, offering encouraging counselors, and connecting them with other students in the program and the university as a whole.


In this article Mcelroy & Armesto (1998) describe the different types of TRIO programs while offering information on their history and participation criteria. The TRIO programs have been in effect since the mid-60’s and are available to individuals who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. This includes but is not limited to those who are disadvantaged educationally, who lack home and community resources, and those who are first-generation-college students. Some of the TRIO programs include: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Staff and Leadership Training Authority, The Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program, and Upward Bound Math/Science Program. The TRIO program that is focused on the most heavily in this article is Upward Bound. This program has been established to improve high school graduation, entrance into postsecondary education, and the completion of a degree by disadvantaged youth. Research on the success of the Upward Bound program has shown mixed results. The longer a student is in the program the better chance of success they have, but students often drop out in order to obtain employment. The implementation of highly qualified teachers, high academic standards, and employment opportunities in the program are was of improving its success.

According to Onwuegbuzie, (1995) “library anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling or emotional disposition, experienced in a library setting, which has cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral ramifications.” This can be a tremendous deterrent to college students, especially those who are already at risk. In this study 493 students were administered the Library Anxiety Scale which assesses levels of library anxiety. The data from this study shows that library anxiety is most common in students who are male, undergraduate, those whose native language was not English, who had high levels of academic achievement, who worked, who held freshman or sophomore status, and who infrequently visited the library. Although high academic achievement is not a characteristic of an at-risk student, the other predictors of library anxiety seem to fit the at-risk student profile. Onwuegbuzie concludes that it is important for institutions to make library experiences more positive for students. It is suggested that librarians and faculty collaborate to help reduce library anxiety. Also, since freshmen and sophomores are typically more prone to library anxiety, it is important to introduce these students to library instruction as early as possible, such as at freshman orientation.


The focus of this study was to determine the level of self-authorship that high-risk college students posses and to understand how these students developed self-authorship. This study also looks at the role of privilege in a student’s development of self-authorship. According to the author, self-authorship refers to “having a set of internally defined perspectives used to guide action and knowledge construction” (Pizzolato 2003). The data suggested that self-authorship developed
in students due to “provocative” experiences such as a death of a family member or
going to jail and the degree to which self-authorship emerged depended on the
severity of the experience. The amount of privilege each student had also affected
the level of self-authorship From this study it appears that students with more
“provocative” experiences and less privilege seem to develop a deeper level of self-
authorship sooner that those with higher privilege. Students with higher privilege
seemed to struggle more after they began college.

college in first-year, high-risk students. *Journal of College Student Development*,
*45*(4), 425-442.

In this follow-up study Pizzolato (2004) once again investigates self-authorship and
how it relates with coping styles, and adaptation in entering high-risk college
students. 27 students are interviewed to determine first, if they entered college with
a sense of self-authorship and secondly, to understand how students coped with
collegiate experiences, and if their adjustment to college was related to their self-
authorship. Three coping strategies were used by the interviewed students when
challenged with difficult collegiate experiences: avoidance (blaming the institution
or individuals within the institution), Self-Regulatory Coping (reflective problem
solving), or supported coping (use of social relationships to develop coping
strategies). Supportive coping proved to be the most successful form of coping
where students returned fully to their self-authorship after adapting to college.
These findings emphasize the importance of advising, mentoring, students groups,
and student interactions.
Randall, K. (2005). No average student: Community college students not your “typical” undergrads, says college of education survey. Retrieved November 16, 2006 from The University of Texas at Austin Web site:


Randall (2005) uses data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and information offered by Dr. Kay McLenney, CCSSE director, to discuss the diversity of today’s college students. Randall focuses primarily on high risk students and the challenges that they bring to the classroom. The CCSSE is a survey that provides data to community colleges throughout the nation. This survey polls almost 140,000 student at 257 community colleges in 38 states. The results of the survey can be used by administrators and faculty to determine where improvement is needed. Since this survey also provides ideas for success, positive changes can be made including more academic support, tutoring, and developmental courses. These are all resources that can be beneficial to at risk students. A wealth of information is available for administrators and faculty interested in bettering their community colleges. The website is located at:

http://www.ccsse.org/


Retrieved November 16 2006 from Stanford Graduate School of Business Web site:


Rigoglioso (2005) reports on the findings of Michael W. Kirst and Andrea Venezia through their work on the Bridge Project. Kirst and Venezia’s research
concentrated on issues affecting students attending and preparing to attend community and non-selective four year colleges. The results from the Bridge Project study lead Kirst and Venezia to believe that a high percentage of students entering these institutions are not prepared for the rigors of college level work. Results show that half of the students in this study were so poorly prepared that they were required to take remedial courses. Many become discouraged from the amount of work and end up dropping out. One answer that is suggested is the necessity of a stronger coordination between high schools and community and non-selective four year colleges. Another suggestion is for a financial aid reward allocated to students who complete college preparation courses. According to Kirst, the growing enrolment in community colleges is only going to worsen the problem.


Schwartz & Washington (2002) ask the question “Why aren’t more African American men in college?” By being able to predict the academic performance and retention of this population, interventions can be made to help students at risk of failure. In their study Schwartz & Washington discover that high school rank and high school GPA proves to be the best predictors of college success. Other variables that seem to be significant in predicting the academic performance in African American men includes attachment to the institution and the combination of high school rank and social adjustment. The results of this study appear to be similar to others on retention that are not race specific.

It has been shown that students who enroll in freshman-year experience courses tend to do better academically than their peers who do not enroll in such courses. In this study, Sidle & McReynolds (1999) try to determine the relationship between freshman-year experience course enrollment and student success and retention. By using each of the 862 participating students’ transcripts, the completion rate for the first academic year, the cumulative GPA earned, the percent of general education courses completed, and the ratio of earned credit hours were determined and analyzed. Results showed that participation in a freshman-year experience courses positively influenced students’ persistence and academic outcomes. The implementation of freshman-year experience courses also proved to be cost effective due to the amount of tuition persistent students contributed to the university.


Staats (1991), chairperson of the accounting department at Hudson Valley Community College, describes “Late Start” which is a program that has been implemented to reduce attrition in the course, Principles of Accounting 1. This particular accounting class has had a very high drop out rate encouraging the innovation of the “Late Start” program. This program lets students take the course for four weeks during which the instructor monitors the students’ attendance, difficulties, and progress. At the end of the four weeks students who are doing poorly are allowed to start over at no additional cost, giving them a second chance.
Data was collected for several years on the success of this program. Approximately one-third of students in the “Late Start” program received a C or better and more than half passed. Those who were encouraged to participate in the program but decided to stay in the regular class fared poorly. Results from the “regular” class showed that seventy percent of the students passed and thirty percent failed or dropped out.


Research has proven that mentoring can be extremely beneficial to at-risk college students. In this article Vivian (2005) describes an approach he has used that has shown to be successful. Vivian chose a number of at-risk students to participate in his study that included weekly 15-20 minute casual, conversational meetings during which students could talk as much or as little about their academics as they wanted. Focus on the workings and an understanding of how the educational system worked was a main priority of Vivian, who believes that at-risk student’s institutional misconceptions often lead to failure. A weekly email was also required of the participants to explain how things were going for them. When students asked questions Vivian would offer suggestions but would not force his ideas upon them. These meetings were limited and casual yet effective as almost all of the participants showed positive results. This article represents how small yet consistent approaches to mentoring at-risk students can often produce great successes.

Walsh (2003), a graduate student in academic advising at Kansas State University, writes a short but informative article regarding the advising of at-risk students. Walsh uses the references of researchers in the field to identify these students and offers ways of providing assistance to this population. According to Walsh, at-risk students include those who have made poor decisions affecting their academics, students who return to college after an extended period of time, those with academic or physical limitations, etc. Special advising services need to be designed around the needs of these students. Some of the suggested services include the use of peer advisors, having advisors focus on the development of self-confidence and the devotion of more personal attention, and an evaluation of the advisor’s delivery of academic services. Collaborative relationships with other resources on campus and the need for advisors to facilitate the student’s sense of belonging are important as well. Means of assistance include: orientation programs, freshmen seminars, mentoring programs, intrusive advising, early intervention, learning communities, and the use of the Student Support Services Program.


The focus of this study was to determine the attitudes held by college student-athletes about counseling and whether or not these student-athletes posses help-seeking behaviors. In this study, Watson (2005) hypothesizes that “expectations
about counseling will be a significant predictor of attitudes toward help-seeking behavior” and that “there will be statistically significant differences in attitudes toward help-seeking behavior and expectations about counseling based on athletic participation.” Data collected from the use of two assessments, the Expectations About Counseling-Brief Form (EAC-B) and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS) appeared to prove Watson’s hypothesis. Student athletes tend to be more skeptical of counseling and more resistant to help-seeking behavior. According to Watson, many student-athletes represent a special at-risk group and it is therefore important for counselors to be aware of the challenges facing these students.

Why blacks are more likely than whites to drop out of college. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 36 (Summer, 2002), p.51

In this article, the author denounces a common belief that blames affirmative action admissions for the high rate of African-American college student dropouts. A study from the Department of Education reports that there are seven main factors associated with high student dropout rates. These factors include: delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment status, self-dependent for college financing, having children or other dependents, being a single parent, lacking a high school diploma, and being employed full-time while attending college. According to the report, blacks are more likely than whites to have all seven of these risk factors. Also, the Department of Education’s study did not include the admission of a student under affirmative action as being connected to student dropouts. The seven
factors covered in this article are important to consider when researching high-risk college students.


The purpose of this follow-up study was to identify factors influencing the persistence of adult learners and their success. Adult learners are a population in higher education that are considered to be at risk due to their significantly high drop out rates. Wlodkowski, Mauldin, & Campbell, (2002) incorporate the use of an exit questionnaire and a phone interview of adult students leaving two universities, Regis University (accelerated program located in Denver) and the University of Missouri Kansas City (UMKC). Results showed that there were many reasons linked to leaving school including, lack of money, a desire for better advising, better teaching, more peer interaction, and lack of time. Based on these results recommendations include: increasing financial aid and tuition discounts, making advising a more dependable process, especially in the first year of enrollment, peer support programs, and the creation and expansion of weekend courses.

Yeh, T. L. (2002). Asian American college students who are educationally at risk. New Directions for Student Services, 97, 61-71.

Since Asian Americans are usually stereotypically thought to be in high academic standing, little research has been done in regards to the large population of Asian
American students who are at risk. Yeh (2002) writes about this particular population describing their neglect and offers ways of reducing their attrition. According to Yeh, many factors can put Asian American students at risk including, limited English proficiency, students who have immigrated, lack of previous education, poverty, obligation to family, not fitting in, and misconceptions of others due to stereotypes of successful Asian American students. Yeh provides three areas of focus for student affairs professionals: recruitment, retention, and research.

Recruitment involves the outreach of admissions counselors to Asian Americans from low-income and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Ways of retaining these students include, assistance in navigating the institution, orientations to assist with college procedures, tutorial centers, ethnic centers, student groups, and the hiring of a diverse faculty and staff. Finally, Yeh suggests the need for further research on this often overlooked student population.