



Outline

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation



OUTLINE

Introduction of the Problem

College student retention remains one of the biggest social problems in America. The costs of college dropouts constantly increase. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (2013), the economic burden of college dropouts is enormous. Dropouts have profound implications for the economic and social wellbeing of students, the risks of crime and deviance, as well as students' physical and emotional health. However, college dropouts are not the only facet of the problem. In the words of Tinto (2006), student retention is one of the most popular topics of research and discussions in higher education, mostly because the growing multicultural diversity translates into the growing diversity of students in colleges and on campuses. Consequently, American colleges seek to diversify the student population and, at the same time, provide effective incentives to retain minority students (Childs, Jones, Nugent, & Cook, 2004).

In my opinion, environmental and contextual factors play an enormous role in how motivated students are to continue their education. Nevertheless, most educational institutions are still in need for developing relevant mechanisms to promote student retention in the long run.

Literature Review

The current state of literature provides compelling evidence that student retention is one of the most serious problems facing colleges in the United States. This problem is discussed from a number of perspectives, including the risks of college dropouts and the persistent underrepresentation of minority students on campuses. The latter represents the leading thematic thread across the latest studies. Larimore and McClellan (2005) talk about Native American student retention in postsecondary education in the U.S. In

their view, Native American students are particularly susceptible to the risks of underrepresentation and/or dropouts (Larimore & McClellan, 2005). The researchers express the opinion that the problem of retention does not start with college enrollment; rather, its roots can be found in high dropout rates among high school students (Larimore & McClellan, 2005). Childs et al. (2004) continue this topic and speak about the issue of African-American student retention in nursing baccalaureate programs. “Without established retention initiatives in place, the attrition rates for students from diverse backgrounds far exceed the enrollment rates” (Childs et al., 2004, p. 129). These opinions are further supported by McClenney and Waiwaiole (2005). As a result, the problem of student retention in American colleges is framed in terms of multiculturalism and diversity, as well as the barriers to enrolling and retaining minority students in the college system.

Nevertheless, some researchers take a step away from the problem of diversity and try to explore the problem of student retention without considering its underlying cultural meanings. Tinto (2006) shares an interesting observation that contextual and environmental factors play a huge role in student retention. In other words, it is the institution that determines the extent, to which the student is motivated to stay or leave. Here, O’Keefe (2013) talks about a sense of belonging and its implications for student retention. The findings of O’Keefe (2013) go in line with the environmental and contextual perspective on student retention proposed by Tinto (2006). According to O’Keefe (2013), “the creation of a caring, supportive and welcoming environment within the university is critical in creating a sense of belonging” (p. 605). Lau (2003) also speaks about using innovative and interactive technologies to provide a more favorable environment for students. Leverett, Parker and McDonald (2007) even recommend using marketing approaches to keep students in American colleges. It is interesting to note that, for Leverett et al. (2007), the problem of student retention is also presented as the problem of minority students.

I suppose that, among the multitude of potential solutions offered by researchers, colleges still need to choose the most relevant and potentially effective ones. I also think that most colleges will have to develop recommendations according to the unique challenges facing students and making them quit their dreams of college education.

Impact of the Problem

The National Dropout Prevention Center (2013) provides detailed information on how the problem affects colleges and students. On the one hand, students who quit college education are likely to experience material and social difficulties, since a young man with a diploma earns \$10,000 more per year on average than a college dropout (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2013). On the other hand, colleges lose the money they could potentially obtain in the form of tuition. Dropouts contribute to high crime and deviance rates (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2013).

I believe that colleges should care less for their tuition losses than for the consequences of poor retention for students' social and economic wellbeing. Also, college retention should not be regarded as a matter of personal decision making. Colleges should assume greater responsibility for retaining students.

Recommended Strategies

Given that environmental factors play a crucial role in students' motivation to stay in college or quit, the best strategies should be based on the analysis of the contextual factors that do not allow students to graduate. The results of such analyses should shape the basis for the development of unique strategies to increase college student retention. As mentioned earlier, such strategies may range from the use of interactive technologies in the classroom to creating a supporting diversity environment for learning (Lau, 2003;

O'Keefe, 2013). In any case, such strategies must be tailored to the unique conditions of learning within a particular educational institution.

Personal Reflections (Field Experiences)

The results of this brief literature review suggest that contemporary researchers lack adequate knowledge of the student retention problem. Their recommendations are also too general to be universally applied across colleges in America. From the leadership perspective, the problem of student retention in American colleges emphasizes the importance of responsibility. In other words, the rates of student retention will increase, as soon as college leaders are ready to assume responsibility for creating and maintaining a favorable cultural environment for learning.

Conclusion

Student retention is a serious problem in American colleges. The economic and social costs of student dropouts are enormous. An emerging consensus is that environmental factors play a crucial role in students' decision to continue education or quit. However, it is leaders who are expected to assume responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that is favorable for learning.

