



CSRDE Best Practices Assessment

Papers to be considered for the CSRDE Best Practices Award will address retention initiatives which coordinate and institutionalize collaborative efforts of all key players (administrators, institutional research officers, faculty, staff, and students) in the institution's retention initiatives.

Best Practices serve as models for fellow practitioners. For the Best Practices Award, we are looking for papers which provide evidence of a systematic, campus-wide approach to the institution's retention issues. Initiatives with this level of coordinated campus involvement do not occur spontaneously. Successful institution-wide retention initiatives require a significant amount of planning to develop and leadership to execute.

The papers should demonstrate that all key players were involved in the process. Additionally, because the focus of the plan is to improve the retention (success) of students, we are also looking for evidence that the institution was able to identify and incorporate retention theory and practice into their strategy.

We will also be looking for papers that model effective planning processes which are associated with meaningful outcomes. Before plans and outcomes are developed and outcomes can be claimed, there must be an identification of problems as well as baseline measures at pre-intervention conditions. Baseline measures provide information on pre-intervention conditions and serve as a support for developing particular intervention strategies. They are also useful in developing formative evaluations to monitor and demonstrate incremental progress towards the goal. Retention and graduation rates which are appropriate summative measures are more long-term outcome measures.

Our criteria:

- **Institutional Leadership and Teamwork.** The initiative demonstrates collaboration and coordination of all key players: administration, staff (including institutional research), faculty, and students. The executive leadership of the institution is clearly committed to the initiative and remained actively engaged during the process.
- **Preliminary Assessment and Problem Identification.** Evidence that appropriate information and data was gathered and analyzed to identify pre-intervention conditions. Data may consist of admissions, enrollment and retention data, student or faculty surveys, interviews, external reports, consultations with experts, etc.
- **Goal Identification.** Objectives for the initiative are clearly stated and priorities are identified. Evidence that goals of this initiative are rooted in the overall mission and objective of the institution.
- **Coordinated and Communicated Implementation Plan.** Evidence that plan is implemented through a coordinated effort rather than simultaneous silos. Timetables as well as those responsible for implementation have been identified. Routine methods of feedback and opportunities for communication were established to ensure that key players are apprised of the progress towards the goals.
- **Foundation in Theory and Literature.** Evidence that the overall initiative is grounded in theory, and supported by the literature and current practice.
- **Formative and Summative Evaluation Processes.** Evidence of systematic and thorough use of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess and evaluate whether approaches are leading

towards achievement of goals and objectives. Plan includes progress review at incremental stages of implementation (formative) as well as at completion (summative).

- **Follow Through and Outcomes.** Evidence that the initiative is being implemented (or was implemented) and is associated with meaningful outcomes. In the case of recent initiatives, one should see progress on interim objectives.
- **Culture of Continuous Improvement.** The processes for improving conditions which support student success and improved retention and graduation rates are institutionalized. This means that this initiative is not approached as a one-time project. There is evidence that the institution has incorporated this initiative into its culture. For example: There may be an institutional plan to regularly self-assess, identify or modify goals and strategies to address retention related issues. Or, the institution may have made a commitment to re-organization or resources to continue the initiative.
- **Adaptability for Use in Higher Education Institutions.** The practices described in the initiative should have broad general applicability for institutions interested in developing institution-wide retention efforts. Although some features of the plan may be specific to the circumstances at the author's institutions, the initiative is described with sufficient detail so as to provide a fellow practitioner with an understanding of the problems and conditions addressed, the key players involved, the goals and strategies developed, and the methods used to assess progress towards the goals and objectives. With this information practitioners can make a determination as to which elements of the initiative might be useful for adapting for use.